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Mom Uses Small Heads for Small Business

Owner also taps free consulting service for more efficient operation

Pleasanton - Maybe if she had a boy, Cindy Twomey's small business would be non-existent. Twomey, 28, is the founder and president of No Slippy Hair Clippy, a firm that manufactures non-slip hair clips for little girls. Twomey, who got the idea for the product after enduring her own problems with hair clips and subsequent slips on her young daughter's hair, runs the business from her home in Pleasanton.

A single mom who was on welfare after moving home to Pleasanton to support her own ailing mother, Twomey started No Slippy Hair Clippy in September 2000. She attended the SBA-supported Women's Initiative program in Oakland to learn about entrepreneurship and received a \$5,000 microloan from the Oakland Business Development Corporation to help purchase initial product supply items.

CEO Twomey also acts as bookkeeper, marketing and sales representative for her company. And with sales of her product reaching 12 stores in the Bay Area, she's added two more persons to her payroll to help with production of the unique designer hair clips. Twomey's firm has generated about \$10,000 gross revenue in the past two quarters and sells about 800 units per month. Her objective is to reach \$200,000 in gross revenue this year.

Twomey credits SBA for telling her about a new program that's helping small businesses like hers with information technology and management assistance.

SBA's San Francisco district office and local Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) are the driving forces behind the Small Business Technology Advisory Program (TAP), a free service that provides technology consulting for small businesses located in San Francisco, the East Bay and Napa down to San Jose and Santa Cruz.

During an initial test period last fall, No Slippy Hair Clippy was one of TAP's first clients. TAP's director, Andrea Peiro, says information technology can be of substantial assistance in helping Twomey reach her goals by reducing the time required to manage operations, allowing effective outsourcing of the production process, and by improving the effectiveness of business development and sales activities.

After reviewing Twomey's company, Peiro and his team suggested a new unified messaging system to process new and recurring orders to allow customers to order online, via e-mail, by phone or fax through one single access point. TAP also recommended a simple but elegant Website to display an online catalogue with basic order-taking features, and suggested that Twomey purchase a laptop computer paired with a handheld device to manage contacts and appointments.

"TAP provided me with awesome help," says Twomey, who has since implemented some of their recommendations. "I thought it would take months to help set up a Website but now I have one that's already up and running. I feel more organized and efficient."

Peiro lists four key parts of the program to bring effective information technology to small businesses: technology awareness, technology audits, technology consulting and technology implementation support. Potential clients include business that make no use of information technology – a small restaurant or a "mom and pop" corner grocery – to small service businesses such as retail outlets, small construction firms or manufacturing outfits that may have never felt the need to change the way they do business.

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