

Sandlot Sports – Michigan SBDC Client Spotlight Story – April 2017

2008

**Opened First
Location**

3

Locations

28+

**Employees and
Growing**

2017

**Honored as a Best
Small Business and
the Main Street USA
Recipient**

Initial Situation

After growing their screen printing business from a two-person shop to a business with four locations and close to 30 employees, co-owners Ryan Dost and Adam McCauley needed help in learning how to step away from the business and empower their employees to handle the day-to-day operations. With the business growing at a fast pace, the pair needed to focus their time working 'on' the business instead of working 'in' the business, which they had become accustomed to for the past seven years.

How the SBDC Helped

Ryan and Adam contacted the Michigan SBDC in 2015 for assistance in developing a strategic plan for growth and making improvements to the organization's culture. The pair worked with a Michigan SBDC consultant to perform a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) analysis. They also received support with creating effective policies and procedures, and with making a connection in Canada to learn how to sell their products at a sports-related event across the border.

Success

Within the first 18 months of working with the Michigan SBDC, they upgraded equipment, added six jobs, and increased sales. Their sales volume grew 8.6% from 2014 to 2015 and 10.6% from 2015 to 2016. In 2016, the team at Sandlot Sports exceeded \$2 million in sales.

Their success has been recognized by the community and their peers as well. Ryan was named one of the Ruby Award recipients for the Great Lakes Bay Region in 2016, an award sponsored by 1st State Bank, WNEM TV-5, and Great Lakes Bay Business Magazine. In 2017, Sandlot Sports was recognized as a dual honoree at the Michigan Celebrates Small Business as the recipient of the Best Small Business award for the Michigan SBDC Great Lakes Bay Region and the Main Street USA award for the Michigan SBDC's statewide network.

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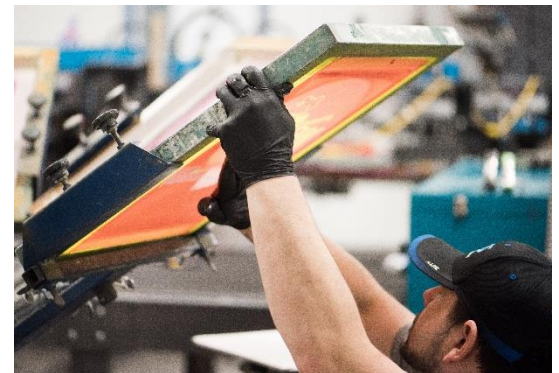
Overview of Story

In 2007, Ryan Dost and Adam McCauley came together to start a screen printing business. They drafted a business plan and approached several banks for a small business loan. They were denied. So, they went back to their day jobs. A year later they gave it another shot. This time they started smaller, invested their personal savings, obtained financial support from family, and started pounding the pavement for work. In June 2008, the pair officially launched Sandlot Sports, LLC, a custom apparel decoration company specializing in screen printing, embroidery, and specialty decorating of apparel and promotional products.



Of course, as with any startup, in the beginning it required more hours than available in the day with minimal return on investment. Soon, though, business was picking up and a year after opening they relocated to a larger facility. Between 2011 and 2013 the business was growing at a fast pace, which allowed them to purchase two existing shops, add 10 employees, and grow from one location to four. In 2014, they purchased an 18,000-square foot building with support from the Michigan Certified Development Corporation (MCDC) and an SBA loan. The loan covered the purchase of the building, new equipment, and necessary renovations. The following year the building opened as the company's headquarters and production facility. That same year they merged two of the smaller locations. With all this growth and success, the pair struggled with transitioning from running the business as a two-person startup to a growing company with close to two dozen employees. One of the greatest challenges was learning how to step away from working 'in' the business to working 'on' the business, and pushing employees forward.

As the business was growing, Ryan and Adam, always found ways to invest in the company with advanced technology, the addition of new equipment, or empowering their staff with new training opportunities. They were always seeking out industry experts to help them become better leaders and a more efficient company. This desire for improvement led them to the Michigan SBDC.



Ryan and Adam began working with the Michigan SBDC in 2015. Quickly they discovered what they thought needed to be changed was in fact the opposite of what really needed to happen. Through a Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) facilitated by a Michigan SBDC consultant they learned the employees were happy with the culture of the company but yearned for greater responsibility and empowerment. The employees wanted to be leaders in their respective areas of the business. From there the pair worked with the consultant to lay out a strategic plan for growth, enhanced the existing policies and procedures, developed an employee handbook and job descriptions, created a management team, and instilled the use of best practices. They also had a Search

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Engine Optimization (SEO) analysis done by the Michigan SBDC, which provided recommendations for improving the company's website. The next challenge they will work on with their Michigan SBDC consultant is to understand and breakthrough the logistics of selling their products at an event in Canada.

"Before working with the Michigan SBDC, we were answering all the questions that came up in a normal workday, from as simple as 'can I have vacation time' to questions about jobs in production," shared Ryan. "Now we have a leadership team in place that includes a Production Manager and Sales Manager, which allows us to focus our attention on the business itself."

Adam added, "Now we're in a better position to empower our employees and let them manage the day-to-day operations of the business. It's a great feeling!"

Ryan and Adam shared that they plan to continue growing the business, adding new products and services, expanding their market reach, and exploring options for an online store.

The pair also passed along some advice for other entrepreneurs.

Ryan said, "There's no handbook on how to be a business owner, you've got to ask for help. We'd be further ahead if we would have reached out to the Michigan SBDC sooner."

Adam added, "Ask questions, don't be afraid to say you don't know something, and always keep learning."

For more information on Sandlot Sports, visit www.sandlotsports301.com.

Locations

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