

# California Small Business Development Centers

SUCCESS STORY # 178

*Small Business  
Success  
Is Our Business*

## Platypus Tours Limited: Winery Touring Business Grows in Recession

### Platypus Tours Limited

Don Rickard

Napa, California

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### BACKGROUND

This business was opened in August 2004 with a 5 year plan to reach \$1.2 million in revenue. To date, there has been good growth but the company has not reached the projection for the current period. The owner, Don Rickard, has an extensive background in the restaurant business and has been able to employ 7 people including the owner.

Tours, which feature primarily smaller wineries, typically last around 6 hours. Each driver is familiar with about 40 wineries the company frequents and design the daily tour based upon inquiries regarding tastes and interests of the passengers that day.

Don began working with the Napa Valley College SBDC in the summer of 2007 and has continued to grow the business and thrive in a difficult economic environment.

### CHALLENGES

Growing pains the client was experiencing included not having standard operating procedures in place, sufficient staffing levels, and necessary training. Communications with customers and employees needed refining and expansion.

There was a disconnect between the services provided on the tours to customers and what the company's marketing team was telling customers to expect from their tour experience. Don needed standardized procedures for activities such as cash handling and matching payments to manifests. The business had safety issues with vehicles, maintenance, drivers, training, DOT, and TIPS.

### ACTIONS

Business Advisor Ray Kimball worked with the business and completed an initial needs assessment in 2008 and has continued to work

with Don since. He provided an outline to analyze costs for a new location, discussed types of loans available and time lines. Sales rose even with a 15 percent price increase, the company purchased additional vehicles for fleet and was able to obtain financing for one. A plan for future growth was also created.

### RESULTS

In 2010, sales increased to \$1,999,200, an increase of \$899,200. Don received a loan of \$50,000 to purchase new equipment and a total of 18 jobs were added, bringing the total number of jobs in the company to 35.



**"(MY SBDC ADVISOR) PROVIDED ME WITH PERSPECTIVES AND STRATEGIES THAT I USED TO SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OF PLATYPUS TOURS AND HELPED ME TO ACCOMPLISH MY GOALS FOR GROWING MY BUSINESS AND THRIVING."**



(SBDC Photo/  
Tue Nam Ton)