Tippecanoe County Public Library Small Business Breakfast Series:
Introducing Library Resources and Services to the Business Community

by
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The Tippecanoe County Public Library (TCPL) has been conducting business breakfasts since 1995. The purposes are two-fold: (1) to publicize and promote the use of TCPL's business collection and pertinent business databases, and (2) to support the library's mission to be "a leader in information resources in Tippecanoe County" by providing free guidance for those interested in starting or developing a small business.

The breakfasts last one hour and are held monthly on Tuesday mornings at 8:00 a.m. A continental breakfast of juice, coffee, and sweet rolls is provided. Press releases and public service announcements are sent at least one week in advance of the first program in the series to the appropriate press agencies. A flyer is developed and is placed in the Reference Department. I arrive by 7:00 a.m. to set up for the 8:00 a.m. breakfast. Coffee is served immediately.

Several modifications were made to the business breakfast's original 1995 format, and by 1997, the series had evolved to include the following programs:

Introduction To The TCPL Business Collection
Small Business Development Center
Legal Aspects Of Small Businesses
Business Plans
Business Reference Sources On The Internet

We now invite outside specialists in commercial law and banking to speak on their areas of expertise instead of using TCPL staff, however TCPL employees conduct the programs "Introduction to the TCPL Business Collection" and "Business Reference Sources on the Internet." Programs that had poor attendance in 1995 and 1996 were eliminated from the 1997 schedule.

Introduction to the Business Collection

The "Introduction to the Business Collection" includes discussion of major business reference sources available at TCPL such as the *Thomas Register*, *Hoover's Master List*, the *Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide*, and others. It also includes discussion, demonstration, and hands-on practice with several business-related databases including the *IAC BusinessFile*, *Compact Disclosure*, and *American Business Disk*. The *IAC BusinessFile* includes access to business articles and company and industry reports. *Compact Disclosure* provides detailed financial information on larger, publicly traded companies that file with the SEC. *American Business Disk* includes over ten million businesses and gives directory-type information such as addresses and phone numbers. It also includes information on company size, credit rating, and SIC codes.

Small Business Development Center

The director of the local Small Business Development Center (SBDC) speaks about how contact with the SBDC can benefit the local business owner. She mentions SBDC educational programs available, and discusses typical pitfalls that business owners might encounter and how to avoid them.

Legal Aspects of Small Business

A local attorney specializing in business law discusses legal issues relating to small businesses. His primary focus is on forms of business ownership, such as what corporate entity to select and why. Forms discussed include general partnerships, limited partnerships, limited liability partnerships, sole proprietorships, "S" corporations, "C" (regular) corporations, and limited liability companies.

Business Plans

A local bank representative who is responsible for evaluating commercial loans shares his expertise. Items covered include the purpose of a business plan (company description; finance, including past financial statements; three-to-ten year projections; break-even analysis; capital spending plans; personal financial statements; description of key personnel and their resumes; and a description of outside consultants such as CPA's and attorneys). Also discussed are how to choose professionals such as attorneys and bankers, and indexing the plan.

Business Reference Sources on the Internet

In 1996 there were two presentations on this program. A Webpage designer from a local computer firm was recruited to speak about what a business presence on the Internet might consist of and what one should consider when going online (page organization, marketing strategy, and updating material). I discussed pertinent Webpages on business topics and how to evaluate the usefulness of business information found on the Internet.

The series has been successful, and we have made significant improvements to it each year. We average about ten people per session, and many of these people choose to attend the entire series. Presenters have been willing to offer these programs without charging a fee, either as a public service, or because it provides them with more exposure for their company and a chance to network.