

## **Showcase USA: Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities Curriculum Targets Entrepreneurs**

**Carol Thayer**

Increasing numbers of people are searching for opportunities to become their own bosses or to work more independently. According to repeated surveys, nearly one-third of American workers would prefer to earn their livelihoods at home. For those considering it now, they are definitely in the right place at the right time.

How can someone turn an idea into a successful business enterprise? Businesses succeed because they

- have a clear sense of purpose,
- create and stick to strong core values,
- target the right group of customers,
- organize business for maximum flexibility and learning,
- are responsive to their customers,
- know how to build strong and enduring business relationships, and
- plan and prepare for business operations.[\[2\]](#)

**Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities** is a comprehensive curriculum designed to be used with individuals preparing to start a home-based or micro business. It was developed in response to needs expressed by Extension faculty for a teaching curriculum to address issues at a basic or beginning business level.

The curriculum was written by nationally recognized Cooperative Extension Service experts in the area of small business development, representing fifteen different land-grant universities. The Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) National Home-Based and Micro Business Design Team provided the leadership for the project. This team is a part of the Communities in Economic Transition national initiative. The Southern Rural Development Center edited and coordinated publication of the curriculum.

The two-volume curriculum is divided into the following sections and chapters.

### **Part I: Sharpen Your Entrepreneurial Skills**

- Assessing Self-Employment for Success
- Spotting Opportunities Among Scams
- Balancing Work and Family
- Developing Time-Management Tactics
- Minding Your Business Manners

### **Part II: Get Down to Business**

- Writing a Business Plan
- Setting the Right Price
- Choosing the Best Business Structure
- Adhering to Regulatory Requirements
- Purchasing Inventory
- Deciding on a Distribution Channel
- Selling Secrets
- Gaining the Customer Satisfaction Edge

### **Part III: Plan As You Expand**

- Targeting New Markets
- Keeping Tabs on Cash
- Recruiting, Training, and Motivating Employees
- Employing the PC to Perform Work
- Communicating Electronically
- Insuring Against Catastrophes

### **Part IV: Boost the Bottom Line**

- Calculating Financial Ratios

### Getting Your Just Deductions Searching for Capital

Each of the 22 chapters follows a basic format consisting of a teaching guide, narrative, hand-outs, and transparency masters. Also included is a disk containing a computer-generated graphic slide presentation of the transparencies.

**Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities** can be used in a variety of ways including the following:

- a reference tool for educators and entrepreneurs,
- a single topic shortcourse or presentation,
- a multi-topic, multi-session workshop,
- a comprehensive course, and
- other creative ways to meet specific educational needs.

The curriculum was first introduced in the spring of 1998 at a training in Petersburg, Virginia, hosted by the Virginia State University Extension Service. Mississippi State University Extension Service featured the curriculum as part of a rural business development project with the Mississippi Agribusiness Institute in May 1998. A tri-state training involving educators from Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio was held in Boone County, Kentucky in October 1998.

An Extension Educator in Virginia uses the **Ca\$hing In On Business Opportunities** curriculum as she works with a local micro-business development program. Participants in the program attend a 16-hour training course as a prerequisite to approval for revolving loan funds. The Extension educator is one of seven professionals teaching the course.

As a result of the training in Mississippi, coalitions of small-business development advisory groups have met in five locations to plan training opportunities in general business, marketing, and management skills for local small businesses/entrepreneurs. A "Small Business Development Month," including bi-weekly educational opportunities for entrepreneurs, was held in October 1998 in one Mississippi county. In addition, a one-day Bed and Breakfast Conference was organized in response to local interest. The conference was broadcast via satellite to multiple sites across the state.

The **Ca\$hing in on Business Opportunities** curriculum, publication #210, is available for purchase for \$150 from the Southern Rural Development Center. Orders must be prepaid, but purchase orders are accepted. The curriculum is currently being updated, and an updated version will be available in the fall of 1999. Pre-orders for the updated version are encouraged. Call the Southern Rural Development Center at (662) 325-3207[3] or e-mail [sandyp@srcd.msstate.edu](mailto:sandyp@srcd.msstate.edu) for additional information.

**Notes:**

1. Edwards, Paul & Sarah. 1990. *Working From Home*. New York: St. Martin's Press. [Return to text.](#)
2. Wold, David, Dennis Sargent, and Martha Sargent. 1997. *NxLevel Guide For Business Start-Ups*. Western Entrepreneurial Network, University of Colorado at Denver. [Return to text.](#)
3. The area code has been changed to 662. However, some areas of the country may have trouble dialing in the new area code at this time. Therefore, if area code 662 does not work, try the previous area code of 601. [Return to text.](#)

**Author**

Carol Thayer, a Small-Scale Entrepreneurship Specialist with the University of Nebraska and Chair of the National Home-Based and Micro Business Design Team.

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