

Case study: Homeco and R&J Insulation Inc.

Co-owner of Homeco Insulation and R&J Insulation Inc., Donna Gulden entered the Hennepin-Carver-Anoka-Ramsey-Scott (HCARS) Economic Gardening Program in late 2013, where she worked with the National Strategic Research Team (NSRT). Based in Blaine, Minnesota, the sister companies provide insulation services (R&J is a nonunion shop while Homeco is union). “The information was valuable for both companies,” says Gulden.

Among key deliverables, the NSRT provided research on potential new customers and markets.

Although based in Minnesota, Homeco and R&J have done some work in North Dakota, Iowa and Wisconsin, and Gulden wanted to increase her companies’ presence in those states, especially Wisconsin. “The research helped determine which prospects best fit our target profile for different services,” Gulden says. “For example, drywall and concrete contractors may have the insulation work on large projects, so we have to approach them versus general contractors.”

In addition to helping identify and qualify new prospects, the researchers provided information on industry trends, which helped Gulden make the decision to expand into the air barrier business — a move that generated \$600,000 of new business in 2014.

The NSRT also analyzed Gulden’s websites. “The team was a huge help and gave suggestions for making it easier to navigate and performing better in search-engine rankings,” says Gulden.

After finishing the Economic Gardening engagement, Gulden invested in a complete overhaul of the websites, changing everything from photos and content to transferring the platform to WordPress. “Now I can easily make changes and blog,” says Gulden. “I’m really proud of what our installers are doing. It’s great to post pictures of projects on the websites to tout their work.”

Since the website redesign, Gulden has seen a significant uptick in traffic, especially on a page at the R&J website where visitors can request quotes. “We used to get one request every six months, and now we’re getting them on a regular basis,” Gulden says. “In fact, one homeowner said she contacted us because she liked our website.”

In addition to working with the NSRT, the HCARS Economic Gardening Program enabled Gulden to participate in a monthly PeerSpectives roundtable with leaders from other second-stage companies. “I really liked the format of the roundtables, and the sessions were tremendously helpful,” she says. “I’m not very extroverted, and this really helped me establish a network. Everyone is in the same boat.”



Donna Gulden, co-owner of Homeco and R&J Insulation in Blaine, Minnesota.

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Although Gulden says it's hard to quantify the direct impact of her Economic Gardening engagement, she credits the program for helping to boost annual revenue for her two companies from \$7 million to \$8 million and creating eight new full-time positions.

“I've never been involved in anything like this before,” Gulden adds. “Economic Gardening gives you a wealth of information. It can help you improve not just your processes, sales and bottom line, but also your relationship with employees. If you're going to spend time away from your business, you want to make sure it pays off.”

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