

Case Study: The Porch Swing

Among the first participants in the Kansas Economic Gardening Network, Mary Kueny was asked if she would have paid for the services that the network provided at no cost. “In a heartbeat!” says Kueny, owner of The Porch Swing, an Internet retailer with a bricks-and-mortar store in Marysville, Kan. “Every bit of information I received from the research team was very valuable.”

Kueny worked with the research team in mid-2010. Within a year, her sales had shot up 40 percent and marketing costs dropped nearly 60 percent. In 2011 annual sales exceeded \$1 million for the first time and have continued to grow at about 40 percent.

“We had been fumbling with our Internet marketing, and the research team really helped us get it under control,” says Kueny. This was particularly important because the Internet generates 99 percent of Kueny’s total sales, and she spends between \$15,000 and \$18,000 a month on advertising.”

Some examples of the team’s assistance included:

- Determining the best key words to buy from Google, Yahoo and Facebook — and their seasonality. For example, “gardening accessories” is good word for Kueny in the fall and winter but not in the summer.
- Refining her budget to support high-performing key words.
- Organizing website merchandise more effectively.
- Helping her understand how conversions work — and making changes to correct some tracking problems.

“In addition to suggesting changes, they also validated what I was doing right, which takes away a lot of nervousness and stress inherent in running your own business,” Kueny adds.

The team also provided highly detailed information on Kueny’s customer demographics, down to their age, marital status, education and income. “I suspected a large share of our sales were going to the East Coast, but didn’t know to what extent,” Kueny says. “When I saw the geographic map of my customers, the East Coast was almost saturated. Knowing that really helped focus our ad buy.”

When Kueny initially applied for the program, she requested help with her retail store and securing more space for it and her warehouse. “The research team told me they thought I’d get better value if they focused on my website, which disappointed me at first — but were they ever right!”

Indeed, with increased profits from her Internet sales, Kueny was able to buy a larger building for her store and warehouse in 2011, followed by a second building in 2012. What’s more, she has expanded her staff from 6 to 13 employees.

Other changes? “They made me take my business more seriously,” Kueny adds, explaining that she had launched her business in 1996, but kept her job in advertising sales at a local radio station. As her business grew, Kueny reduced her hours at the station, but eight months after her engagement with Network Kansas, she quit so she could focus on The Porch Swing. “The research team made me realize the potential of my business,” she stresses. “This wouldn’t have happened if not for them.”