

## Case study: Bite Me! Inc.

*Deborah Tuggle operates two all-natural, organic cookie companies based in Lakewood, Washington: Friday's Cookies, a gourmet line, and Bite Me! Inc., which provides baked shortbread cookies and frozen dough balls for baking. In July 2016 Tuggle entered Washington's statewide Economic Gardening program, which enabled her to work with the National Center for Economic Gardening's National Strategic Research Team (NSRT), a cadre of experts in market research, geographic information systems (GIS) and digital marketing.*

One of Tuggle's goals was to expand and diversify her customer base, dominated at the time by a local grocery chain that bought private-label cookies rather than her branded product. In response, the Economic Gardening specialists provided deliverables in three primary areas:



Deborah Tuggle, CEO of Bite Me! Inc. and Friday's Cookies in Lakewood, Washington

- *High-quality sales leads* — NSRT member Wayne Kocina built a profile of Tuggle's major client by analyzing socioeconomic and psychological demographics of the grocery's customers, who turned out to be a more affluent group of consumers than previously thought. Then, leveraging GIS tools, Kocina identified geographic regions around the United States where those affluent consumers could be found, along with retailers that cater to those consumers. In addition to heat maps, Kocina produced a list of 253 groceries Tuggle could target. The list included detailed information about each prospect, including store revenue, credit score, website address, names of individual contacts, along with phone numbers and email addresses.
- *Industry trends and intelligence* — NSRT member Wanda McDavid researched the upscale specialty gourmet market to look for expansion areas, such as meal delivery kits, as well as segments interested in organic products. McDavid also identified and analyzed key competitors Tuggle could use for benchmarking and best practices, such as how they position themselves in the market, how active they were on social media and what sort of charitable and community partnerships they participate in.
- *Digital marketing* — NSRT member Collin Bunch conducted an SEO analysis of Tuggle's website, looking for ways to improve Bite Me!'s digital presence, with a particular focus on B2B development. In addition, he investigated ways to leverage social media to get product into more retail stores — and connect with end consumers.

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Another insight from the team led Tuggle to hire a food broker to help with prospecting. Within nine months of completing her Economic Gardening engagement, Tuggle was making significant progress on expanding her client base, including the addition of 327 Safeway stores. To keep up with growing orders, Tuggle added 12 new jobs, including a production manager, bringing her staff headcount to 37. Revenue in 2017 is expected to be about \$1.8 million — up from \$1.6 million in 2016 — and reach more than \$4 million in 2018.

Tuggle gave her Economic Gardening engagement a hearty thumbs-up. “The information I have in my hands is priceless,” she says. “It something I can still use 10 years from now.”

The competitive analysis was inspirational as well as informative. “The list included companies I didn’t know existed, and one of them was doing \$35 million in annual revenue,” she explains. “That gives me something to work toward. If they can do it, why can’t I?”

Other takeaways included a greater appreciation for the power of social media, and Tuggle is trying to recruit employees with digital marketing expertise.

Beyond the data, Tuggle says the Economic Gardening experience gave her greater confidence as a business owner. “Being in business can be very lonely,” she says. “But my Economic Gardening team understood where I was coming from. Once I felt safe with them, the flood gates opened.”

“This is unlike any other business assistance I’ve received before,” Tuggle adds. “There are a lot of programs that have good intentions, but don’t really materialize into anything. Yet with Economic Gardening, you get results.”



*The National Center for Economic Gardening is a partnership between the Edward Lowe Foundation and Chris Gibbons. NCEG helps state and regional organizations establish Economic Gardening networks, delivers Economic Gardening services and maintains national standards in training and certification. To learn more, visit [www.edwardlowe.org](http://www.edwardlowe.org).*