

Case study: SolScapes LLC

A provider of vegetation management, line clearance, and storm and disaster recovery services to power companies, SolScapes LLC entered Louisiana's statewide Economic Gardening program in late 2013 and went through a second round in spring 2016. SolScapes' CEO Iviana Stewart credits the program, hosted by Louisiana Economic Development, for helping her double annual revenue in 2016 and add 17 new jobs.

One of Stewart's goals was to be more strategic about future growth. In response, Economic Gardening specialists on the National Strategic Research Team (NSRT) provided Stewart with a number of deliverables that included:

- A market analysis of target industries across the country — as well as a deeper dive into prospective customers at utility companies in Louisiana and Arkansas.
- An overview of six top competitors with a focus on understanding their marketing strategies, contracts and market turf.
- A list of electrical cooperatives and pipeline companies in nearby Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi to target for prospective customers. The research included data on revenues and projected growth as well as contact information.
- Relevant industry associations that could lead to prospective customers. “For example, the National Rural Electrical Cooperative has a wealth of information, data and events dedicated to cooperatives,” said Wanda McDavid, an NSRT member who specializes in market research.
- Website analysis, which included suggestions on how to improve SolScapes' visibility in search-engine rankings.
- Information about using social media more effectively, including LinkedIn's Sales Navigator and Lead Builder tools.



SolScapes CEO Iviana Stewart says Economic Gardening has dramatically changed how she operates her business.

As part of the digital marketing research, NSRT member David Brim also identified “online watering holes” for power companies. “These are places where key prospects spend time online,” he explained. “They can be great places to keep up with industry trends, uncover pain points and nurture relationships with potential customers.”

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Stewart says Economic Gardening has dramatically changed her business. “Getting the leads was helpful, and I went after them first because it was low-hanging fruit,” she said. “Yet after the second round, I began to leverage the information about online marketing and was able to use all the data together as one big tool.”

Among changes, Stewart invested in a major redesign of her website. In addition to being mobile-friendly, the revamped website better describes SolScapes’ expertise and who it serves. “As a result, we’re no longer getting phone calls we don’t need, such as from consumers who want a tree in their yard cut down,” she said. “Now the right kind of commercial companies are calling us.”

Stewart has also been using Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. “It’s helped strengthen our rapport with existing customers, and we’re becoming more visible,” she said. In fact, within the fourth quarter of 2016 Stewart received unsolicited calls from 10 out-of-state power companies, asking her to submit proposals. “This has never happened before,” said Stewart, who has relied on time-intensive cold calling to drum up new business. As a result of these inquiries, SolScapes won four new contracts for powerline maintenance and is on all 10 companies’ lists for potential storm recovery work.

SolScapes ended 2016 with more than \$4 million in revenue, up from \$2 million in 2015 and Stewart attributes the increases largely to Economic Gardening. She also added 17 new employees within a six-month period.

“Entrepreneurs tend to think we know everything — and we don’t,” Stewart said. “You have to continually learn, and that’s what Economic Gardening did for me. Each team member was providing me with new information — and teaching me how to dive in and analyze it so I could grow the company.”

“I am so grateful,” Stewart added. “I want to go through a third round of Economic Gardening. I’m addicted to it.”



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.