

BootCamp Graduates were asked: "What is the biggest business advantage you have being a Destination Business?"
Here are some of their answers.

I have found that one of the biggest advantages my business has over my competitors from taking the Destination Bootcamp classes is the power to reach outside of the local economy and pull customers from outside my typical selling area. The steps I have learned from the program have made me think bigger and stronger and not afraid to reach higher!

Genia Vineyard, Owner
Simply Creative, Wheatland, WY

Being a Destination Business has taught me so many things. But I think the biggest and most important to me and made the biggest impact is this Jon taught me how to view my Shop, not as an owner, not as a manager, not as an employee, but to view it as a customer sees it. Each day I come in the back, yet before opening, I walk my shop from front to back, making notes of things needing attention. I also go out front to see what are customers going to see? I make sure everything is clean, straight and in place. I go to my checkout counter and stand as a customer and see what they will see. Is it tidy? Clean?

Yes, I have learned so much but I think viewing my business as shoppers will is top of my list in importance. I truly believe it has helped me stand out in the crowd.

Melinda Vitale Shaw, Owner
MeLinda's Fine Gifts, Picayune MS

I feel that I have a unique advantage because I attended two BootCamps as both a small business owner and an Economic Development Director. Therefore, I have seen advantages in both my personal small business, and advantages for my community as a whole.

First, my small B&B is located in a town of under 300, deep in the Heartland, far from major highways. However, with your help, I was able to differentiate it as a small-town getaway, an oasis on the prairie. We stay booked in the winter with hunters and in the summer with those traveling through Kansas that want a small-town experience. Now, because it is only two rooms....and we are turning away more people than we can take...we are building a second B&B that will be even easier to keep booked....The Boujee Bins! The only B&B built from 4 recycled grain bins, sitting right next door to the local Farmer's Cooperative – where people can watch grain harvest up close and personal, while staying in this fun lodging option. It has already been approved as a Kansas Agritourism Business and although it isn't even completed yet – it's already booked solid from November until February of 2023. Without Destination BootCamp/Destination Creation...I am certain this never would've happened.

This is even bigger. After Destination BootCamp I began to be very intentional about sharing information about our community – with targeted publications. I also began offering to speak at events that would have previously scared the hell out of me. And it worked! Remember when you came to visit us and it happened to be when the journalist from USA Today was doing her story? That was huge for us. Then, during the early days of COVID we shared our story about how Dr. Kristie Clark and I worked to manufacture nasal swabs for testing in the State of Kansas. Then, just last year, the story about me adding CRO (Chief Remover of Obstacles) to my business card was picked up and shared widely on the Associated Press....which ended up with an invitation to be on Dane Carlson's Econ Dev Podcast. I didn't write any of these stories...wonderful people wrote them for me and shared them – for which I'm very grateful. But I honestly believe it all stemmed from Destination BootCamp and learning to tell our story better.

Lea Ann E. Seiler, Director
Hodgeman County Economic Development, Jetmore, KS

When I think about all I learned at BootCamp, it brings a smile to my face and a sense of relief in that I KNOW how to work my business. The biggest advantage I have over other businesses is the confidence to use my own creativity! This encouragement from Jon propelled me into a level of success I never knew possible. I am not afraid to try new things and I evaluate frequently as to whether or not new ideas are working. It is quite alright if something doesn't work; just try again.

Laura Martin, Owner
Sew Loved Quilt Shop, Elkhart, KS

The transformation I had at Destination BootCamp was something I don't think I ever would have ventured to do on my own. Despite being in business for well over 25 years, I had never had the need to advertise as my client base had all been word of mouth. But the need to do something better with my store front, with the encouragement of the BootCamp class lead to Monsters on Main.

Without using your strategies learned, I don't think I would have been able to make the progress I have made. From store layout and presentation, to attracting customers and reaching people I know I would not have been in touch with otherwise. Taking the small baby steps we learned, figuring out what might be the cheapest thing to change / add which will have the highest impact. To the balance over time to make the big changes that will enable me to reach a wider audience. Knowing when to have the courage to let an employee go. All the things we learned about how to make a successful destination business and allow me to have a family life have been invaluable.

Every business, especially small business should go through the class. But most of all I feel the BootCamp put me in a mindset that allows me to know and show the world that I am unique.

Don't be fooled - the BootCamp class doesn't make your life a vacation, running a business is something that you have to stay on top of all the time. But Destination BootCamp made the whole thing more manageable and my business more successful.

Nitia Musico
Monsters on Main, Denison, TX

I left the Destination BootCamp class with a set of goals ranked from easy to accomplish to time-consuming but worthwhile. I have been working on this list for two years. In the first month of coming back we made many small changes -- merchandising, using press releases and freshening the entrance to our shop. A medium ranked goal was to get free publicity by writing for industry publications and because of that my teaching engagements have grown beyond Michigan.

My most challenging goal was to upgrade my webstore to a more professional level. Through the help of a Main Street grant, I am pleased to say that our webstore is in Beta testing and will open later this week. The results show in my bottom line. Our sales have increased every year since attending Destination BootCamp.

Jon shared tips and successes from other destination businesses. I gained confidence by hearing these stories because they made me feel like I was on the right track and I was worthy of success. Jon told me I was an artist, and I believed him. He told us mid-westerners typically shy away from self-promotion. I decided to change that for me and my store. This course not only cleaned out the cobwebs, it motivated me to do better. In our area, which is rich with yarn stores, I have now been in business the longest--22 years. Other shop owners often come to me for advice -- a visible sign of respect and success.

Thinking like a destination business makes a difference in your marketing and your reach. Over Covid, our trade association was dissolved and opportunities for shop owner education at national conferences dried up. Having just attended BootCamp, I was well prepared to survive the ensuing business challenges -- a definite advantage.

Thanks again for the kick in the seat of the pants!

Joan Sheridan, Owner
Heritage Spinning & Weaving, Lake Orion, MI

When I use the tools learned at BootCamp, the biggest advantage I have is knowing that even though I am a hamster, the wheel does not control me! I've learned that my Unique Position 'is' my business. It's the template for every decision we make and has given clarity and focus to training staff, purchasing and advertising.

I've reached out to other hamsters that I met at BootCamp to discuss ideas or broaden my perspective with their 'get off the wheel' tactics when considering changes.

... Thanks for being a part of BELLA turning 25 this year!

Beverly Calder, Owner
BELLA Main Street Markets, Baker City and La Grande, OR

You gave me not only the courage to trust my instincts and take on projects that completely changed my business and has made it successful, you provided me with the insight/tools to reign in the overwhelming daily tasks and get off that wheel! To stay on track, to go back to the basics when I am afraid, stumped or lost as to what to do to fix whatever issue.

Every day I ask myself, am I doing the jobs I pay someone else to do? Am I micromanaging instead of trusting my employees? Am I moving forward with the plan or becoming stagnant? Am I pivoting or complaining when crises occur?

I see it everyday: The businesses that are becoming stagnant, or declining or closing...they are lost. They know something is wrong, but do not have the tools or the knowledge of how to solve the crises they are experiencing. Sometimes they come to me asking what I see, what should they do, how can they fix this...

I always recommend taking your course. It's an investment in their business and in their lives. I have to be honest, if I did not have the Economic Development Council pushing for me to take your course, I believe I would have just walked away from my business. It has taken 3 years, but I now really enjoy the challenges, the business itself and have now reached a level of success that I truly never thought possible in 3 years and 9 months! I have surpassed my original goals by leaps and bounds!

The tools and enthusiasm that the BootCamp course provided changed my attitude, outlook and let me know that all business owners feel exactly like I do! I'm not the only one that feels overwhelmed, that tries to do it all instead of trusting my employees to do their job, so that I can do mine!

Cyndi Johnson, Owner
The Market, Flatonia, TX

Thank you for teaching an experienced, life-long auto mechanic and a retired teacher how to run a small business in the service industry. When we chose to become a Destination Business with your guidance, it was the most valuable life lesson we could ever have imagined. We continue to feel empowered with the skills and strategies we learned at Destination Boot Camp to continue building the foundation for our automotive service and repair business.

*The biggest business advantage for us is summed up in our unique positioning statement: **Schwartz Auto Service LLC is the only ASE Certified Master Mechanic automotive repair facility with 120+ years of family farming roots in Southwest Kansas serving our neighbors with integrity and American pride since 2000.***

We needed to know our "WHY," and then our vision became so clear at Destination Boot Camp. We are blessed to continue the legacy begun by our grandparents and parents, and we are honored to serve others. You mentored us to take our 20 year-old business and transform it into a 21st century Destination Business -- we are forever grateful.

Wayne and Kelly Schwartz, Owners
Schwartz Auto Service LLC, Jetmore, KS

Thanks to Jon and Destination BootCamp, our team can clearly articulate what makes our business stand out from the crowd!

It's not easy to define, and soooo worth it. Having our 'unique positioning statement' means we're able to cut through the general marketing noise and get customers, both new and existing, to pause and say 'wait, what? I've gotta know more!'

Thanks for the push Jon!

Erin Pirro
Morehouse Farm, Enfield, CN

When the world started falling apart and shutting down in March of 2020, I watched so many retailers stop dead in their tracks. Their social media posts would reflect as such, "The governor has shut us down, hopefully we can make it through this". I read this sad statement post after post after post. And thought to myself "Ohhhhh no, not happening here".

Circa 2006 I said out loud for all the world to hear that "failure was not an option". I said it then and I said it again in 2020. As the "non essential" retail world came to a screeching halt in March of 2020, this gal packed up her supplies, anything needed and took her candle production home. I had a website, I had social media and I was going to use the tools & creativity I possessed.

At one point my landlord even told me if we needed to talk about delaying rent payments we could. I quickly told him "That won't be necessary". What he did not know was that I had tools, and mad skills. I had been through so many other obstacles I was not letting this one take me down.

At that moment in March of 2020, I heard Jon's question spinning in my head "What makes you different from anyone else?" My reaction to this situation and how I portrayed my business's longevity was what was going to prove how I was different. And what made Hoosier Candle Company different was that we had endured so many ups and downs in 20 years of business. We have watched trends come and go. We have watched world tragedies affect business, and through it all we are still standing. And I realized at that moment we had all eyes on this: How we reacted to this pandemic was going to determine if we thrived or survived.

In 2020 when businesses were depending on help from SBA loans and community grants we were seeing a record year with a 40% increase.

When we finally reopened and started seeing customers face to face, we were met with the burning question "Are you going to be ok?" And with a smile hidden behind my mask I said "We're having the best year ever".

By thriving through the pandemic, we put our business in a position that was new to us. Customers were spreading the word at rapid speeds. We saw so many new faces that would say "Linda Jones told us how well you did throughout this so we came to shop". 2020 ended with record numbers. Our community (and beyond) supported us unlike any other year in our nearly 20 years.

While I'd like to pinpoint just one thing that makes us stand out, it really is so many things. All of those things combined create the bits and pieces of the collective knowledge learned while sitting in a conference classroom in 2009 while participating in the Destination BootCamp.

And 2020 proved that I not only was listening at that BootCamp, but demonstrating in a crisis what I was taught.

Thank you so much for so many years of ideas and creativity. You have been such a blessing to our business.

Traci Bratton
Hoosier Candle Company