

Assistance Opportunities for the Sustainable Entrepreneur

Ryne Johnson

The ChicoProject, LLC

California State University, Chico

Background—The *Mad Hatter*

- Professional experience—20 years of business development, corporate/project finance and government relations/regulatory compliance
- The ChicoProject, LLC—founded in 2001 to assist entrepreneurs with the development of development of businesses and the commercialization of intellectual property
- Business Incubator Programs—Unique CDBG funded economic development program established in 2004 in Butte County and in 2008 in Orland to provide hands-on assistance with the development of viable businesses and business concepts
- The Chico State Center for Entrepreneurship—established in 2004/05 to provide experiential learning opportunities for students and to develop cooperative R&D projects at the university

The ChicoProject

- TCP has seen a significant increase in the level and quality of product and business development interest among entrepreneurs in the recycleable, renewable and sustainable space
 - In the past 2 years, TCP has assisted 11 entrepreneurs/companies with the development of “green” projects—approximately 20% of our new client base
 - Products include reusable shopping bags, biofuels/renewal energy, refashioned clothing, recycled building materials, reusable drinking containers, salvaged timber, human powered transportation, rice straw repurposing, ag/green waste conversion, soil amendments
- Northern California is a global hot bed for sustainable technologies—outstanding networking opportunities



Critical Hurdles

Even positive change comes at a price—prepare to be a “pioneer”

- Disruptive technology displaces incumbents—prepare for competition, institutional obstacles and repeated rejection
 - “Doing good” is not good enough—know your market, technology and have a sound entrance strategy
- If financing/capital raising is required, apply the “Rule of 3”
 - 3 times longer, harder and riskier/more expensive
 - Seek out “enlightened” investors—avoid attempts to convert traditionalists
 - Do your feasibility research and present your arguments in an overwhelmingly convincing fashion
- Look for early adopters/partners to help demonstrate viability



General Assistance Through the Business Incubator Program

The BiP provides entrepreneurs with professional, hands-on assistance in the following areas:

- Business strategy—business planning, feasibility, market research
- Marketing—product/business identification and branding, collateral creation, web development, packaging design
- Sales assistance—strategy development, representative identification, distribution agreement negotiations, direct sales
- Finance—financial reporting, loan documentation, equity raising preparation and representation
- IT—software development, systems planning and integration



Business Incubator Program

Assisting the true “garage” entrepreneur—some of the greatest ideas come from everyday people who simply look at things differently

- In the past 2 years, nearly 40% of products/companies we have worked with have come from people’s kitchens, closets, gardens and junk piles
- Focus on product development first—then become a business ‘student’
- Commit yourself to becoming an “agent of change”—your business will depend on it
- Assemble a “launch team” with specified roles and goals

BUTTE COUNTY



Center for Entrepreneurship

- Primary mission: Education
- Four areas of focus:
 1. Venture Creation—core component
 2. Family Businesses
 3. Social Entrepreneurship
 4. Regional Economic Development Integration
- Each area offers inter-linking/synergistic qualities
- Focus on positioning the College where it can have the greatest success and economic impact
 - Technology extension and assembly
 - Applied research
- What makes the CFE truly unique is our \$500,000+ Accelerator Fund for project that promote student learning



Recent Sustainable Technology Research

- Biodiesel production
 - College of Engineering—WesPAC Champions for biodiesel reactor
 - Locally available “feed stock” which is “food chain safe”
 - Rice bran
- Preliminary feasibility study findings
 - The California rice industry could support a substantial, possibly all of its diesel driven production activities on self-produced biodiesel from rice bran—b20 or higher
 - The bi-product—glycerin—could be converted into fertilizer or herbicides that may be useable within the industry
- Currently preparing to move to second phase of study with rice industry leaders to produce field trial



Center for Entrepreneurship

- In the coming year, the CFE will seek out and evaluate potential projects—involving sustainable technology and otherwise—in which to participate/invest
 - The CFE is especially interested in projects emanating from Chico State's northern service region
- The CFE can serve as a one-stop point of access for development resources at Chico State for very attractive projects
- The CFE will look to access other university partner companies/organizations to add value and market potential to regionally initiated technology
- The CFE will also mobilize students to support development activities for high quality projects



Conclusion

- The opportunities in sustainable products and renewable energy are beginning to explode in the north state
- There are many highly effective services available to entrepreneurs to help develop business concepts and viable products
- The leaders of tomorrow in sustainable technologies may simply look like concerned, committed individuals today
- Take the first step and connect with a catalyst who can help you push your idea forward to success!

Contact Information

- The ChicoProject:

Tel: (530) 342-8277 www.thechicoproject.com

- Butte County and Orland Business Incubator Program:

Tri County Economic Development Corporation

Tel: (530) 893- 8732 www.bcbip.org

- The Chico State Center for Entrepreneurship:

Tel: (530) 570-5233 www.csuchico.edu/cob