

# BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS

BY CLAIRE HE



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Ever heard of the Cereal City, or Eaten Kellogg cereal for breakfast in the morning? Living in my hometown of Battle Creek Michigan, population 50,000, I've noticed that nothing ever happens here. What used to be uneventful in my life changed in the summer of 2007. What started out as one last trip before school started led me to a most promising friendship with a future business partner. In less than a year she became one of my closest friends and my fellow entrepreneur. Cindy Huynh and I did everything together: DECA International, IIEE, Generation E, GVSU, and even dropped out of our AP CAL exam together. It was a month before Valentine's Day when we approached a plan to gain profit on Cupid's holiday.

We started by listing the basic fundamental ideas behind our business. Our main objective was to be innovative, ethical, profitable, and most importantly - a business with a cause. The well-being of our environment is very important to me; thus I made sure our product was eco-friendly. We also considered ourselves abolitionists. Although slavery is illegal, it still exists today and the numbers are growing. We were staggered to find that there are at least 2 million children who are sex slaves worldwide. Not only does this happen in the third world countries, it also within our own nation. Together, we donated 10% of our revenue to "NOT FOR SALE". This organization ensures facilities to rehabilitate and rescue the forgotten children. With this vision in mind, together we formed FLC Wooden Roses. FLC stood for four leaf

clover, symbolizing the luck we wanted in accomplishing our purpose.

It took us one week to find the perfect product to fit our vision. Our choice, the wooden rose, has a high profit margin (96%) with it being inexpensive, durable, eco-friendly, and memorable. Our roses are made from birch wood. They are made by gluing scrap wood shavings together. We took the risk of ordering 2,500 roses, but it was all worth it. In four days we sold 80% of them. After contacting our local Lakeview Square Mall, they agreed to have us sell our items there. We were able to set up in the center of the mall with their generous help (They reduced the normal rental fee by 75%). Effective marketing played a large role in the selling of our roses. Instead of using traditional fliers, we relied mostly on promotion by word of mouth. Many of our customers came to us wondering if the roses were real or not, and brought with them family and friends. Eventually, the entire mall knew about our existence by the end of our first day selling.

What happens too often is corporate thinkers become so involved with making more money that they forget about consumer satisfaction. Consumers are the golden key to each entrepreneur's success. If we reach out to them, they will be the ones who come back time after time, and bring their family and friends. We understood that customer service is critical in creating stability in a business. So, instead of selling roses by the stem, we personalized these roses to their satisfaction. We customized each sale by offering unique scents and wrapping.

Although we had cut our profit by adding this service, all of our customers felt special. What little was spent was worth all the happy smiles we created. Our attention to our customers' specific needs was the secret of our success.

In our four days of trial business at the mall, we hit revenue of \$2000, and broke even in the first 3 hours of operation. Running a business is not easy and not always successful. It was hard enough to be on top of our school work and operating a business. Many of our extra-curricular activities had to be canceled and we even had to distance ourselves from our other friends because of the lack of time. It was all worth it though. We gained a lot of valuable experience and met many new people. I would not have had it any other way.

Our hard work paid off in May when we were given the chance to attend the IIEE and Generation E conference, where we presented our business plan in front of professional business people. We swept up several of its prizes including first place in the Generation E and named as the entrepreneurs of the year.

We found endless inspiration all around us. Fred Deluca started Subway at the age of 17; John Rockefeller built the largest oil refinery at the age of 25; Fred Smith started FedEx at the age of 27. They were all young when they became billionaires, and it all started with an innovative idea. I am 18- still young, and I will strive to be even more than what they were. I am not dreamer; I am a realist. In the future, I hope my vision will be followed and improved upon by students everywhere. □

