



FEATURED ADVICE

Visions of a bright future won't fall from the sky between emails, meetings and projects. Rather, business leaders need to find enough brain space away from day-to-day tasks and to imagine possibilities. **Gina Seamans, president, Colorado chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, A31**

STRATEGIES

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

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SPOTLIGHT

Marks covers water woes

There is a worldwide water crisis — including in the United States, Denver author Susan Marks says in her new book, "Aqua Shock: The Water Crisis in America" (Bloomberg Press, 226 pages, \$16.47 at www.Amazon.com).

The Earth's surface is about 70 percent water. The big problem is that only 1 percent of that is fresh water we can use — and that's decreasing due to pollution, climate problems and over-consumption.

Marks suggests that solving water issues will be among the biggest generators of jobs and businesses in the near future, as technology and other innovations that conserve drinking water hit the market.

"I don't have a personal agenda ... as long as they [readers] realize something's happening, and we need to pay attention," says Marks, a veteran journalist who spent a dozen years at The Denver Post.

While Marks doesn't suggest solutions in the book, she does highlight examples of what people are doing nationally, and includes suggestions from related organizations.

For example, the Michigan Environmental Services Division has a list of ideas to help business owners decrease their contribution to water contamination. The suggestions include installing a catch basin in loading areas, replacing toxic operational supplies and raw materials, and storing raw materials and wastes under protected cover.

Individuals can also take steps to reduce contamination, Marks says. For example, washing a car outdoors leads to water contaminated with grease or road pollutants running into streams and sewers. Going to a car wash is a better alternative, she said, because less water is used, and often the runoff is controlled.

— Yesenia Robles



Susan Marks



KATHLEEN LAVINE | BUSINESS JOURNAL

Shannon Cumberland, above, president of Rosy Rings, watches as Operations Manager Anna Norris pours wax into candle molds. At right, Cumberland displays some of the finished candles.

Candle-maker meets her burning need to succeed

BY YESENIA ROBLES
DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Rosy Rings' new line of winter products is anything but ordinary.

Handmade botanical candles and 100 percent pure soy wax candles make up the majority of the new products.

"Our line is very unique," said Shannon Cumberland, 40, owner of the Denver company. "With botanical candles, there's not a lot of competition. They're so labor-intensive."

Cumberland found her niche by turning a hobby of making candles into a national wholesale company that's resisting tough economic times.

Some of her candles carry unique scents, such as that of a sugar cookie. The botanical candles — which illuminate an outer layer of real herbs and flowers in the wax — are among the most labor-intensive, taking two or three days to complete. They also account for more than 60 percent of sales.

DETAILS

Rosy Rings
Owner: Shannon Cumberland
Phone: 303-297-1951
Website: www.rosyrings.com
Address: 4477 Garfield St., Denver, Colo. 80216
Employees: 12-21 depending on season

The new winter botanical candles are inspired by pale seasonal colors and nature, using twigs and berries. Her Sweet Bay candle depicts a bird sitting atop a twig.

The soy candles also have become increasingly popular in the last few years, Cumberland said, as more people seek all-natural products.

"I like to take a little bit of outside and put it inside," she said. "It's so beautiful."

Cumberland started Rosy Rings about 15 years ago, working with some friends out of her kitchen and basement.

After working as a waitress and bike messenger, Cumberland decided to turn her candle-making hobby into a business. To fund her start, she applied for multiple credit cards and maxed out all of them.

Cumberland then applied to enter two trade shows the first year, hoping to find retailers to sell her product, and was surprised to get into both.

"I thought I'll sell \$100,000 and net \$50,000," Cumberland said. "But that year, I sold \$250,000 and my net was \$6,000."

Cumberland had no college degree and no business experience, but still decided to continue. In 1998, she incorporated Rosy Rings.

"I remember a few times thinking I'm never going to do this," she said. "But I didn't have a choice. It was either succeed or I was going to have to declare personal bankruptcy."



Rapid growth caused low profits the first year, she said. That year, she went from no employees to five, and twice moved the company into larger facilities. In total, she's had five locations, outgrowing some in as little as four months. The company now occupies a 15,000-square-foot warehouse, in which it produces about 250,000 candles each year.

Rosy Rings' revenue hit \$2.2 million in 2008, and is projected to drop to \$2 million for 2009. Still, some competitors expect revenue to fall between 20 percent and 30 percent this year. Nationally, Rosy Rings has about 1,500 retailers; approximately 150 of those are local. One of them is Paper Talk in Denver.

Debbie Bodian, owner of Paper Talk, started selling Rosy Rings products four years ago after finding them through a gift show. The candles sell well, mostly as gifts.

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CANDLES: Business gets fired up after lessons learned

CONTINUED FROM A27

"They're my candle of choice," Bodian said. "Their fragrance is unique, the look and size. They burn really nicely, so you get your money's worth."

Cumberland cites that uniqueness for her company's success.

'I really think, as a manufacturer, if you're not doing something that's setting you apart, then don't bother.'

Shannon Cumberland
owner, Rosy Rings

look at what you could be cutting back on, and there's always big opportunities there."

She also says she has learned from some mistakes.

In her first year, one of her sales representatives from California became a mentor, even loaning her \$50,000 to pay back at her discretion. Cumberland looks back at how foolishly she said she spent it.

"I bought office furniture, and not luxurious, but it was a waste," she said. "We're a wholesaler. We didn't really need it. Now

"I really think, as a manufacturer, if you're not doing something that's setting you apart, then don't bother," she said.

Cumberland also keeps overhead low, and now sees economic challenges as opportunities.

"The first reaction is to panic," she said. "But it's really an opportunity because you go back and



Rosy Rings operations manager Anna Norris wraps candles in cellophane. The company produces around 250,000 candles a year.

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I wish I had just used milk crates."

She was able to pay back the money but still regrets a lost opportunity.

She said now that she's found success, she wants to help others. In 2008, Rosy Rings donated about 15 percent of profits to nonprofit organizations, including Wild

B.I.R.D., the Max Fund and The Elephant Sanctuary, in addition to working with groups like Developmental Pathways, which provides work for the disabled.

This year, Rosy Rings will donate 10 percent of all Sweet Bay candle profits to Wild B.I.R.D., which helps rehabilitate

non-domesticated birds.

"We give a lot of money to a lot of people," Cumberland said. "To us, that's part of the reason you're a business. When you're doing well, you can share."

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