

Express Gift Baskets Grows to Meet Demand

Karen Murphy's business vision has come a long way from the days when she made up gift baskets in her home laundry room in Kelowna.

The year was 1997, and Murphy had no idea that it would be that new economic driver - the Internet - that would end up helping her push Express Gift Baskets far beyond BC's border. She put a tremendous amount of effort towards building her website, expressgiftbaskets.net, which has proven to be a lucrative extension of her business.

"After six years in business, between 50 to 65 per cent of our sales are now coming from the Internet," she said. "That's huge dollars! Last Christmas we were sending baskets all across Canada, and almost all of those Internet orders came out of the United States."

Murphy said American corporations use gift baskets far more than their Canadian counterparts. When they hit the search engines and learn there's a company based in Canada that can ship to their northern neighbours without the hassle of export duties, Murphy gets the call.

"There's no question that for our business plan this year, we're focusing on website sales," she said.

Murphy's business had humble beginnings. She thought she would simply make beautiful baskets for Kelowna businesses to send to their clients. But within 12 months, business was brisker than she imagined. She came to the Women's Enterprise Centre for a start-up loan, and moved her office away from the laundry detergent.

But, once again, Murphy's business outgrew her vision. In early 2002, she returned once more to Women's Enterprise Centre, this time for an expansion loan, to move the business to a new 2,100 square foot office and warehouse.

Now in their tenth year of business, Murphy has officially paid off her loans and moved her company to an 8,000 square foot commercial building that she recently purchased with two other partners. And to celebrate the success of her business, what has Murphy decided to do? Add a new division to her company called Cookie Express. Fresh baked gourmet cookies in decorative tins and gift boxes are now available by overnight delivery in all Canadian cities.

After 10 years of experience in business, Murphy has some advice for up and coming entrepreneurs. "Be passionate, love what you do and stick to your plan. If you have these three elements, you can make your business work," says Murphy.

Women's Enterprise Centre serves women across the province from its offices in Kelowna, Victoria, and Vancouver. For more information call 1-800-643-7014 or visit www.womensenterprise.ca.