

Marquin Campbell, owner of Vino and Van Gogh, said she's already exceeded her growth goal. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

POSITIVE THINKING

Study shows small business owners more optimistic for 2014

By Lillia Callum-Penso
Staff writer
lpenso@greenvillenews.com

Small business owners, on the whole, are more optimistic about the future this year than in 2013, according to a study conducted by Greenville-based marketing company Cargo and Toluna, an online survey-technology provider.

The "B-Side" study, which has been conducted for three years, looks at the state of small business by surveying small business owners about their hopes for business, their concerns and their thoughts about goods and services marketed to them.

"Not all small business owners are created equal," says Dan Gliatta, managing director for Cargo. "There's a difference between going after a business with zero to 99 employees and 200 to 500, or a woman-owned or minority-owned small business. They all consume media differently."

This year's B-Side study showed some marked changes from last year. Most notably, small business confidence is up.

Small business owner optimism jumped to 71 percent from 65 percent in 2013. And 77 percent anticipated growth in 2014.

Last year, influences termed "beyond my control," like benefits costs, regulations and taxes, made small business owners feel uncertain, said Gliatta, because they were things they could not control. But this year, those business owners are anticipating having more control over their growth.

Locally, small business owners echoed the study's findings. Marquin Campbell, owner of the event and painting studio Vino and van Gogh and the jewelry company Marquin Designs, said she had plans for high growth this year. Campbell set a 30 percent goal as part of her company's 2014 business plan, and already in the first three months of the year, she's exceeded that.

"I'm feeling good about it," Campbell said.

Campbell has implemented a number of strategic changes to fuel growth for Vino and van Gogh this year, including expanding classes for kids and offering more in-depth classes for adults. Campbell offered a deep discount on her summer camps for those who purchased in January. The camps sold out.

"Just trying to be aware of planning has really helped me be a little more strategic as far as numbers are, as far as forecasting," Campbell said. "For me, I see it as like a puzzle and I really enjoy putting it together. I also think if you're not changing and trying out different things in your business then it gets a little stale."

Gliatta presented the results of the study with representatives of 20 global brands via webinar Wednesday. The study results are a tool brands can use to market to small business owners, Gliatta said, because small business owners are a unique set of customers and their influence is growing.

There are 30 million small businesses in the United States, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration. Nationally, small businesses make up the fastest growing segment of the economy and represent 97 percent of private employees.

"As the economy goes, small businesses go, and as small businesses go, the economy goes," Gliatta said.

Restaurateur Brant Kennedy said he was feeling optimistic this year as well, but for more localized reasons. The owner of Sassafras Southern Bistro downtown said 2013 was made tougher by the construction work being done on the courtyard area. The work effectively shut down the restaurant's patio area, due to loud noise and debris, Kennedy said.

With construction now complete, Kennedy said he had high hopes for the year to come.

"With that development I'm feeling really optimistic about business this year, and business has been good."

Additionally, Kennedy said he was excited about the new businesses moving into the One building, as well as the new Aloft Hotel that is slated for completion in 2015. In response, Sassafras will be revamping its appetizer menu and refreshing its happy hour in order to accommodate the increased number of workers in the downtown area.

"We'd like for them to make our spot their regular spot," Kennedy said.

The B-Side study included 200 small business owners across the United States representing different demographics like race, gender and age. The participants were organized to reflect the national breakdown of small business demographics as reported by the U.S Small Business Administration.

"Part of being a small business owner and entrepreneur is the idea I can control my own destiny. So macro influences be damned — the economy, government are not going to affect my success because I control it," Gliatta said.