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Making Your Way in the World Today Takes Everything You've Got

SOHO HERO Helps You Succeed

Customers who shop there say it's like *Cheers* without the alcohol.

That's because SOHO HERO owners Janet and Russell Brannen understand that the number of Americans who telecommute or operate small businesses out of their homes is growing—and this segment of the U.S. economy is desperate to find ways to work more efficiently and effectively. They understand that people like Tom Willis, Southeast regional sales manager of an 85-year-old plumbing supply company based in Dallas, needs a local company he can trust to deliver on its promises.

Whether that means creating and printing large format posters or banners, designing business cards or company logos, binding training manuals or shipping packages, SOHO HERO is up to the task—and the staff there is willing to go the extra mile, adding a personal touch and level of service you won't find at your local shipping store. After all, says Janet, the concept behind SOHO HERO is to be “an extension of all the small businesses and operations out here” in West Cobb County

(And They're Always Glad You Came)

As far as Willis is concerned, SOHO HERO meets his needs. “The staff knows me by name and gets me in and out very quickly—and my packages always get where they're going.” That's the bottom line for Willis, because his success depends on his ability to get packages out to clients in a timely manner.

By recognizing the fact that today's home-based business owners and employees truly are “heroes” because they have to

by Laurie Entrekin



SOHO HERO: What does it mean?

SOHO stands for Small Office Home Office; the Hero represents the customer.



What's the story behind the icon?

The little man in the green bubble is named Ody, a modern-day warrior based on Odysseus, the favored human of the gods in Greek mythology. Ody represents the challenge we face in today's society—that to succeed, we must fight with our minds.

coordinate all aspects of their business, SOHO HERO focuses first and foremost on the service aspect of being a business service center.

At the West Cobb County location, the Brannens even built a conference room with wireless Internet and access to a pre-paid copy machine that can be used by mailbox renters 24 hours a day. "You can call up and reserve the conference room and come meet your clients here," Russell says. "This adds a whole new dimension to our professional business atmosphere. What you have here that you don't have at the big box retailers is customer intimacy."

More than a Shipping Store

Though shipping is a big part of Brannen's current business, the SOHO HERO business model, based on the tagline "Create. Print. Ship. Achieve," centers primarily on printing services.

Chris Kouloukas, founder of the SOHO HERO franchise, says, "When we did our research to find our brand, all of our prospective customers had this one thing in common: they wanted more meaningful results with less individual effort. The thing that we found that was most precious to everyone was time."

Many small office/home office business owners, Kouloukas found, needed agency-quality collateral and design services as well as some counseling and guidance. "A lot of times, customers don't know what they need. We try to understand what they want to achieve and work backwards to help them," says Kouloukas. "We work with a studio that creates agency-type design at a modest hourly rate. No one else in a retail setting that I know of can do this."

In its first two months of business, the Brannens' SOHO HERO team designed a happy birthday banner for a 21-year-old, a submarine sandwich promotional banner for Publix and signs for a Brookstone homeowner's meeting. "It's really

unlimited what we can do," Janet says. "If the customer can envision it, we can help them. We want this to be a creative place. Bring us your ideas on a napkin and we will bring them to life."

"Success Breeds Success"

For the Brannens, SOHO HERO isn't just another small business they've invested in. For one thing, it's a way for the family to finally serve the Marietta/Kennesaw area and give back to the Cobb County community they've been members of since 1986. For another, it's a living inheritance for their three children, Jared, 22, Jenna, 20 and Jamie, 17. The Brannens have made their son, a rising senior and economics major at Kennesaw State University, the president of SOHO HERO.

"It's like this," says Russell, who, together with Janet, decided to cash in an IRA to buy the company, "I taught my children how to ride a bike. Now I want to teach them how to run a business. Success breeds success. My wife and I said to ourselves, 'Let's get involved with them now, springboard them into the future while we're still here.'"

Apparently, the Brannens have the right idea. Jared says he's learned more about the practical side of business at SOHO HERO in two months than he's learned at KSU in three years. "School taught me about the ebb and flow of money, but helping customers is the greatest experience I've had in my life. Working with my dad—I'd say he's been a good leader, shown me the way, that it takes drive and ambition to be successful. You can't be in it just for the profit."

"The same thing happened to me," says Russell knowingly, looking at his son with fatherly pride. "School teaches you the fundamentals and nomenclature of business, but nothing about the real world. Experience is the best teacher."

SOHO HERO is located in the West Cobb Marketplace at 2500 Dallas Highway in Marietta, next to Publix at the intersection of Barrett Parkway and Dallas Highway. Hours of operation are 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday. Call 770-590-8511 or visit www.wcobb.sohohero.biz.



Brother and sister Jared and Jamie Brannen are enjoying working at SOHO HERO and learning how to run a business.



Jenna Brannen works with a client on a print project.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK TUSZYNSKI