

Delivering ‘Solutions’ for Bloomington Businesses

Chris Gipson has his hands full running Cutco Cutlery®'s Bloomington operations – and he's relishing every minute.

His successful endeavor is housed in The Solution Lab, a 1,300-square-foot facility that provides low-cost workspaces to entrepreneurs on a short-term basis. It debuted in February.

Tenants range from a home care agency and call center focused on energy deregulation to a software programming company and a CPA firm.

"One of the things we felt really strongly about when we opened is that we didn't want this to be limited to certain types of companies," asserts operations director Troy Phelps. "Bloomington is good at helping life sciences and tech companies, but if you weren't one, you were kind of left in the cold. We're opening it up to anyone who's interested."

Businesses pay nominal membership fees in exchange for amenities such as paid utilities; unlimited printing, scanning and copying services; high-speed Internet capabilities; and individual toll-free telephone numbers and postal addresses.

In addition, they can utilize two types of workspaces: dedicated (consisting of private offices, designated desks and a conference room) and collaborative (featuring plush loveseats and local artwork).

"It's kind of a one-stop shop," Phelps explains. "The thought process is that you have everything you need here to make your business a success and (you have) access to people in all different stages of their company start-up development."

Wondering how to develop a marketing plan? Stop by the Indiana Small Business Development Center office for free advice. Need a break? Head to the on-site gym and enjoy a complimentary workout. Entrepreneurs also can grab a quick bite to eat in the kitchen or brainstorm in a room dubbed the "think tank."



Home sweet home

Gipson joined New York-based Vector Marketing Corporation (which promotes in-home sales of Cutco Cutlery) in 2009 while attending Indiana University. Since then, he's been climbing the ranks and is now senior branch manager.

Gipson is in charge of company interviewing, training and hiring in Bloomington and the surrounding areas. Currently, he manages approximately 40 sales representatives.

At first, he wasn't sure if The Solution Lab's unconventional set-up would be the right fit, but its menu of services and the "high caliber" of would-be peers won him over.

"It didn't look like the other Vector offices," he recalls. "(But) I came in and absolutely fell in love with the place. There were so many amenities that aren't included in other offices that I would have had to pay extra for."

Another benefit is the opportunity to collaborate with fellow entrepreneurs. "I think that's something I never would have had anywhere else," he contends. "I would have been in my own office with no one else around."

"The sense of camaraderie makes it really cool – and the lack of barriers," Phelps chimes in. "No one is territorial. It's energizing to watch that, to see collaboration among people who normally would never interact."



Chris Gipson, senior branch manager at Vector Marketing Corporation, motivates his sales team during a weekly training session.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Troy Phelps, The Solution Lab, at www.bloomingtonoffice.com

Chris Gipson, Vector Marketing Corporation, at www.vectormarketing.com