

OC METRO BUSINESS

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THE RECESSION SURVIVAL KIT

**SMALL BUSINESSES
THROUGHOUT O.C.
ARE STRUGGLING WITH
CASH FLOW, CREDIT
AND DWINDLING
CONSUMER SPENDING.
BUT IN THE MIDDLE
OF IT ALL ARE INNOVATORS
WHO HAVE FIGURED
OUT **HOW TO BETTER
THE BOTTOM LINE.****

OCMETROBUSINESS.COM
\$1,000
AS CARD
AWAY
ONLINE

ONLINE MARKETING TO WOMEN



**EMBRACE YOUR
COMPETITION
TO GET AHEAD.**

Nikki Gutshall and Kailynn Bowling, co-founders of chicblvd.com, credit their success to thinking outside the box, hard work and creating liaisons with their competitors. The Irvine-based team started chicblvd.com as an online magazine in 2005. Since then, it has blossomed into two other divisions: chicbuds.com, featuring the pair's own line of crystal-studded ear buds for use with iPods, and chicexecs.com, which offers public relations and networking for other entrepreneurs seeking assistance with their businesses.

"We were young and trendy Martha Stewarts, and there was really nothing that fit our style out there for us," says Gutshall. With years of management, advertising and marketing work behind them, relationship-building and cross-promoting had become second nature for Gutshall and Bowling. So, it's no surprise their business continues to grow as "the girlfriend's guide for the road of life," despite the unstable economy. It offers affordable products, services and tips women want and can use.

"It took us about a year to figure out what we wanted in our Web site," Gutshall says. "And we didn't have any money. We initially sold boots on eBay to pay for our Web developer."

After months of brainstorming, the women realized that although they led different lifestyles, they had similar needs and interests. "We created a site that contained a lot of what women were looking for," she says.

The site has a Diary of a Mom-To-Be and Diary of a Bride-To-Be, where readers can sign up for updates to the diaries. "We call it reality Internet," Gutshall says. "We took a personal approach, where women could connect with other women in similar phases of their lives."

As their success grew, the women found themselves helping other businesses. That led to chicexecs.com, which now has 40 clients. "We created (chicexecs.com) ... to help other companies to grow by sharing our marketing and public relations knowledge," Gutshall says. "We don't consider other businesses as competitors."

For other companies looking to grow, the founders offer this advice: Don't emulate another business – find your own

niche; spend money to make money; and don't be afraid of competition – create partnerships instead. Gutshall adds, "And we're big advocates of following your own dream." **OCMB**

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU USED THE SUCCESS OF OTHER ENTREPRENEURS AS A MODEL TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS? GO TO OCMETROBUSINESS.COM AND CLICK ON FEEDBACK.

*Linda Melone is
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