

Starting a Business in South Carolina: Use the SC Business One-Stop

I get a lot of calls from people who want to start a small business. Starting a business is a terribly confusing activity.

There are so many things to think about, many of the terms are confusing, and much of the advice you receive from friends and family is confusing, and worse, conflicting.

For instance, one of the first choices one must make is whether or not to incorporate the business. So you ask one knowledgeable friend, and they tell you that you should incorporate as an S Corporation.

They will go on to list several reasons why you should do this, and it sounds good.

So you ask another knowledgeable friend, who says not to incorporate as an S Corp, but to do it as an LLC. And they've got good reasons, which also sound good!

Now what do you do? You've got conflicting advice, all of which sounds plausible, and all of it from people whose judgment you trust.

The incorporation decision is just one of many, many confusing and worrisome questions.

The name and logo of the business is also a key question that consumes much time and effort. Like incorporation, your business identity is a key decision. And of course, it's *your* identity as well!

Help With Licenses, Permits, and Registrations

Securing the necessary licenses, permits, and registrations is yet another area that causes much frustration and worry.

Here is some good news for the harried and confused new business owner. The SC Small Business Development Centers have established a web-based seminar that cuts through much of the red tape, confusion, and time.

South Carolina is among the first in the nation to utilize a website with this scope.

It combines resources from the Departments of Revenue, Commerce, Labor, Health and Environmental Control, The Secretary of State's Office, the SC Budget and Control Board, and the Employment Security Commission.

This program is only one year old, and has received numerous awards and national recognition.

Known as SCBOS (for SC Business One-Stop), the website is designed with the SOHO (Small Office/Home Office) entrepreneur.

The services are many and varied. For instance, you can file for your SC Unemployment Insurance tax number online.

DHEC (Department of Health & Environmental Control) and ABC (Alcoholic Beverage Commission) are now offering services through SCBOS.

The web-based program will walk you through the entire process of registering a new business, obtaining appropriate licenses, and paying required fees.

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According to the website, SCBOS will ask the appropriate questions, collect data, facilitates payment, submits applications, communicates with the various State Agencies, provide receipts for payments, and makes available to users copies of licenses, permits, and registrations.

In essence, a "one-stop shop." SCBOS means SC Business One Stop.

Since May 2005, over 5,000 businesses have been formed through SCBOS, and those businesses represent all of South Carolina's 46 counties, 46 states, and 3 different countries.

The SCBOS website estimates SCBOS has saved businesses 52.5 man-years at an estimated value of \$1.6 million.

SCBOS also quotes a 2000 survey that found an average of 47 hours was required to establish a new business. That's probably an accurate number, by the way.

I remember the many hours I consumed when I established my business, and I know from our practice that many people have had similar experiences.

Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)

South Carolina maintains 4 Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), and one of them is right here in our own backyard at Winthrop University.

You can reach the Winthrop SBDC at <http://cba.winthrop.edu/sbdc>.

This site also includes 2 documents handy for many startup businesses: Business Setup Starting Guide, and Business Plan Outline and Client Loan Application.

The other three centers, incidentally, are located at Clemson, SC State, and at USC.

Another very handy website is the central SCBOS site, which naturally is www.scbos.com.

This site has a wealth of information, including online registrations for various tax ID numbers, Secretary of State filings, and various legal and professional codes.

It also provides facilities for lesser-known activities such as Antifreeze Registration, The Board of Pyrotechnic Safety, and Athletic Agents.

Choosing Your Company's Name

Here's one other fun site: The SC Secretary of State website. Their address is www.scsos.com, and they've got a must-visit link in the second paragraph of the home page.

The first paragraph talks about—what else—the SCBOS.

The second paragraph offers searches for Corporation names. Key in the first part of your dream company name, and see what happens.

You'll get many insights into what other people are doing, and you'll also find out whether someone else has already taken "your" name.

Hope these tips make your business startup more productive and more enjoyable!

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