

# The Commonplace Coffeehouse & Roastery

*Indiana County's Original Microroaster*



**Clients:** T.J. Fairchild  
**Business:** Commonplace Coffeehouse & Roastery

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**Industry:** Retail Service & Wholesale Sales  
**Date Established:** 2003  
**Year Assisted:** 2007  
**SBDC Assistance:** Market Research and Planning

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## Background

What do you do when you decide to not pursue the usual career path for your field of study? T. J. Fairchild faced that question after obtaining a master's degree in philosophy while his wife had obtained a degree in social work. Other than their degrees, T. J. and his wife had experience working in coffee shops to support themselves through school.

From that experience, T. J. learned about coffee as much as he learned about Thomas Aquinas, Plato and Descartes. He especially learned that coffee beans fresh from roasting to brewing, yielded better coffee – fuller, richer, deeper aroma and taste. T.J. conceived of a coffee shop that would roast its own coffee beans to ensure the freshest, highest quality coffee.

A friend suggested Indiana, PA as fertile ground to launch a coffee shop. In March 2003, he and his wife relocated from North Carolina to Indiana, PA and opened the Commonplace Coffeehouse & Roastery.

## The Assistance

T. J. approached the SBDC in spring 2007. Though he recently launched a wholesale business, he saw other growth opportunities, such as expanding his retail service through new locations and products. He also believed the current, original coffee shop had not maximized its customer and profit potential.

Besides advising him, we engaged IUP's Small Business Institute to mobilize a team of students and faculty to conduct online and field research to provide an informed foundation for helping T.J. make strategic decisions and identify opportunities.

Specifically, the SBDC, utilizing the SBI team, helped by:

- Conducting market research of current and potential customers to use in developing new products; product mixes, particularly pricing; and valued added services or benefits.
- Conducting competitor research.
- Developing a marketing advertising plan, including designing special promotions.
- Evaluating the business's web site and suggesting improvements to aid in promoting his coffee related businesses and connecting and building relationships with customers.
- Researching possible expansion options in wholesale and retail sales, including new locations.
- Investigating a new channel for customers, specifically university students, to discover the coffee shop and make purchases.
- Analyzing the costs and pricing of the wholesale business to identify the maximum per unit expenditure for staffing that would still yield a reasonable profit margin.

## Results

T.J. has expanded his retail service business, opening two new coffee shop locations. The original coffee shop location has also increased its sales, and the wholesale business is a strong contributor to overall profits. Such success has created new jobs in Indiana, PA and Pittsburgh (one of the new coffee shop locations is in the Squirrel Hill section of Pittsburgh). It has also given T. J. the confidence to explore more opportunities to increase profits and expand, such as new product lines and businesses.