

Academic BRASS

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Academic Business Library Helps Spread Economic Development

The Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN) was established to encourage small business start-ups in economically impoverished west Alabama. It has been in existence since 2001. This partnership at the University of Alabama involves the Small Business Development Center, the Center for Business and Economic Research and the Angelo Bruno Business Library. AERN provides a unique opportunity for the area of West Alabama known as the Black Belt which derives its name from the rich, black, clay soil commonly found in Alabama and Mississippi. This area has been designated among the poorest regions of the United States.

Site partners are nonprofit agencies whose mission it is to stimulate economic development in this rural area. They include chambers of commerce, industrial development authorities, and regional councils of government. There are currently nine members of the AERN in the nine county focus-area of West Alabama. The AERN has been funded through local, state, regional and federal grants. The sites have received computers, books and other necessary resources to provide specialized information to users who are interested in starting a small business.

The role of the Bruno Business Library at the University of Alabama (<http://brunolib.cba.ua.edu/>) has been to make periodic site visits to these nine partners, to lead workshops presenting resources available, and to answer business-related questions. The AERN also maintains a web site (<http://aern.cba.ua.edu/>) that offers helpful links on a large variety of business topics. The interested constituents of the Black Belt are free to contact the business librarians in a variety of ways, including via our email template, "Ask a Business Librarian."

The personnel of each partner site is trained by the business librarians on a periodic basis in order to provide a certain level of support to those who approach these centers and seek information regarding the establishment of small businesses. We cover sources that include: startup information, business plans, bookkeeping aids, research databases, and, of course, funding sources, the most often asked and most difficult to acquire information. The business librarians also make periodic visits to these sites to share this same information with the

individual entrepreneurs themselves. It is important to meet them face to face because it adds the human touch as well as providing a sense of encouragement to the budding entrepreneurs.

The AERN partnership has spawned a number of success stories to this date. Our emphasis is on quality and not on quantity as it is well known that over half of small business start-ups do not survive past four years. The successful business start-ups have spanned the range from the traditional restaurant to the cutting edge business of Internet service provider. Provided below are just some of the resources that have been placed at the site locations for user reference.

Selected AERN Print Sources

Business Plans Handbooks. (Series) Detroit, MI: Gale Research, Inc.

This source is very popular simply because it details the plans of actual businesses. The plans cover the most important aspects of getting a business started, including: executive summary, marketing, background and purpose, financial data, organization and management, ownership, overall strategic direction and more.

Small Business Sourcebook. (Annual) Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale.

This is a two-volume annotated guide to more than 25,650 listings of Internet and print sources of information designed to facilitate the start up, development, and growth of specific small businesses. It also has over 27,650 similar listings on general small business topics.

101 Best Businesses to Start. New York: Broadway Books.

This source has a great introduction that details what it takes to be an entrepreneur. The introduction is candid and insightful and gives great guidance to starting a business. The businesses included range from the traditional food industry sector to such areas as ecotourism. Each profile includes a "business description, guidelines for start-up and operating costs, profit projections, working strategies and staffing needs, plus real life stories that highlight both the challenges and the rewards of starting a business-as well as secrets for success." (Cover)

National Trade and Professional Associations of the United States. Washington D.C.: Columbia Books, Inc.

This directory lists over 7,400 trade associations, professional societies, labor unions, and similar national groups. These associations are essential to any business start-up and can provide enormous amount of informational support and guidance. This is the place to start the task of networking.

How to Write a Business Plan. Berkley, CA. Nolo Press.

Includes forms and sample plans. This book helps one to avoid mistakes by showing one how to make financial projections. It is a useful guide for financing a business start-up or expansion.

Selected AERN Electronic Resources

The AERN relies heavily upon the Alabama Virtual Library (AVL). The AVL is a collection of over \$4 million worth of databases subsidized by the state for use by all Alabama citizens. Two such databases in the business collection are EBSCO's Business Source Premier (BSP) and Thomson Gale's Business & Company Resource Center (BCRC). BSP is used to find full-text articles in thousands of business publications. It, along with BCRC, is used to locate a wide range of company and industry information.

Please send us a note with any comments or helpful suggestions. We appreciate your interest and encourage similar economic development partnerships in your area, because, as the saying goes, "a rising tide lifts all ships."