



Be Inspired! Events and Event Planning (BIE)

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*Thompson Rivers University A
Marketing Case Study*

TRU OPEN LEARNING



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Introduction

Julie John's business—Be Inspired! Events and Event Planning (BIE)—provides a wealth of information for this case study on marketing of Indigenous businesses. As an accomplished entrepreneur, Julie shared the marketing issues and challenges she experienced starting and operating her business from Chase, BC. In this case study, we will explore topics such as target markets, competitors, marketing channels, Indigenous business ownership, entrepreneurship, marketing support, and social media marketing.

Exploring and showcasing Indigenous local culture has been a focus for Thompson Rivers University (TRU) for years. Accordingly, we strive to include Indigenous content into our business courses, which this case study supports by exploring issues experienced by Indigenous businesses. As a significant and important niche business in British Columbia and in Canada, Indigenous business ownership is growing and flourishing. The following case outlines the current situation for BIE, setting the scene for students to assess marketing opportunities, justify marketing recommendations, and rationalize strategic marketing approaches.

Teachers Resources

Course Fit

A lot of information is shared by the business owner in this case study. Students will analyze this information and conduct research into topics such as Indigenous businesses, unique marketing challenges faced, approaches to create brand identities and competitive advantages, services offered, pricing, marketing affiliates as well as marketing opportunities, and relationship building. Students will suggest marketing strategies that can overcome challenges from the past and keep BIE successful. By analyzing this case, students will be exposed to the following marketing topics

- Marketing Strategy
- Marketing Research
- Competitive Advantage
- Distribution
- Brand Identity
- Indigenous Business
- Strategic Alliances
- Affiliate Marketing
- Social Media Marketing
- Positioning
- Consumer Behaviour
- Decision-Making Processes
- Marketing Communication

A wide range of business courses can benefit from the information presented and discussed here. Analysis can be part of any advanced marketing course, whether graduate or undergraduate, assuming students have had exposure to basic

marketing courses as well as specific marketing topics such as marketing strategy, marketing research, and consumer behaviour.

Suggestions for Use

The information in this case is suitable for specific assignment questions in multiple marketing areas. Instructors using this case may provide students with their own questions, based on the topic of their courses and the content they have covered before providing this case. Below are some suggestions on the topics that can be covered through an analysis of this case.

Consumer Behaviour:

- Apply decision-making concepts to BIE's potential customers
- Determine steps an organization would go through when hiring BIE
- Apply attitude models to this situation and the B2B target audience
- Apply concepts of cultural values and reference groups to this case
- Identify cultural influences on the behaviour of BIE's B2B customers
- Identify trends in corporate bookings of experiences and team building events
- Research how to affect the experiences and behaviours of event participants

E-Commerce:

- Research the objectives and components of an improved website
- Determine a priority list of expenditures, and justify by estimating the effect on the business
- Research opportunities to tie into other e-commerce operations based on target market
- Identify alternative uses and goals for the website given the target market and product
- Outline how to increase traffic to the website

Advertising:

- Recommend appropriate online advertising for BIE given target market and business size
- Design an advertising plan and budget for social media ads (e.g., Facebook, Google)
- Identify suitable print publications for advertising
- Evaluate research on the effectiveness of radio advertising for local businesses
- Investigate additional service directories that could be beneficial for BIE
- Determine advertising channels that best support word-of-mouth marketing

Services Marketing:

- Determine trends in services marketing
- Identify networks and cooperations BIE could join to attract business
- Evaluate additional services to be offered to the

company's B2B customers

- Determine appropriate channels for marketing to customers outside of the local area
- Identify the benefits BIE can communicate to potential customers
- Research extensions of the services provided
- Compare and assess BIE's product with other event planners

Teaching Notes

Below, please find some select marketing ideas that students can be prompted to identify and research, especially if the case is used in a classroom setting:

- Using the website to create a brand and brand expectations in the B2B target market
- Including references to past events, popular speakers, or well-received themes
- Establishing a "members only" area on the website that connects past participants
- Analyzing the benefits of various media, such as websites, podcasts, email, and so on
- Connecting with companies outside of the local area, and marketing the local knowledge of a special Indigenous environment
- Establishing ties with tourism attractions in the area that can be incorporated into the event planning
- Specialize in a certain type of event, such as team-building involving Indigenous concepts and culture
- Including outdoor activities into corporate events
- Creating a very unique and limited "give away" for BIE-branded events

Sample Instructions for Students

Considering the information given in this case study, your task is to apply marketing concepts to recommend a marketing strategy and approach for Be Inspired! The goal is to research options that are available to BIE, to explain suggestions and recommendations, and to justify your chosen marketing approach. Research into trends, B2B markets, and cultural developments should be integrated. The emphasis is on justifying your choices by utilizing your knowledge of marketing theories and concepts, as well as supporting your choices with academic sources.

Time frame: 2 years

Budget: CA\$ 3,000 per year

Components: Marketing channels, marketing messages, timing/schedule, brand personality, target audience

The goal is to increase exposure and contracts for Be Inspired! while also growing the brand. Establishing a reputation for quality events, integrity, and authenticity is more important for the owner than quick growth. Your analysis should apply marketing and consumer behaviour concepts, keeping in mind the limited human resources currently available; if applicable, expenditures for additional staff have to be justified. Students should also focus on suggestions that create customer loyalty and form long-term relationships for Be Inspired!

All recommendations should be based on a detailed analysis of the target markets and services provided. Key performance metrics should be recommended and justified. Benefits and challenges for any suggestions and recommendations need to be clearly stated. Students are expected to research marketing concepts, assess brand positioning, analyze competitors, research trends and local/national politics, and justify any service strategy modifications. Recommendations should integrate multiple marketing channels with a combination of

mass communications—such as advertising or promotions—as well as personal communications—such as direct marketing or word-of-mouth referrals.

1. Overview of the Business

Owner and Operator

Julie John owns and operates Be Inspired! Events and Event Planning. Julie is from the Little Shuswap Lake Indian Band, part of the Secwépemc Nation. Before starting her own business, Julie worked for the Secwépemc Health Caucus as an event planner and later went to school at TRU for event planning.

Watch Video Clip 1 – Rewards ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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<https://beinspired.pressbooks.tru.ca/?p=24>

As an Indigenous business owner, her work benefits from her cultural knowledge and awareness, as well as the established connections through family, relatives, and her local First Nations community. She credits her work at the Secwépemc Health Caucus among her most valuable learning experiences.

Most of my learning was done during my job at the Secwépemc Health Caucus, when I actually got put into that position and role of an event planner, and I remember when I started that job [...], and at that time

I was thinking I'm not an event planner. I don't know how to plan events.



Figure 1 – Contributed. This image may be subject to copyright and doesn't fall under the CC licensing of this OER.

A coworker had seen her organize community events and had full confidence in her skills as an event planner. At the time, Julie was also doing regular fundraisers for her son's participation in hockey, making sure fees and travel expenses were paid for. Without really knowing it, she had developed event planning skills and felt more and more confident doing this as a job. Nevertheless, she calls it "a huge learning curve on that job," also realizing that networks and connections are critical.

Besides the work experience, her academic background influenced her to get the "business part" in order, to understand processes, and to learn how to run a business. It

taught her the confidence that she could start her own business organizing events.

The biggest education is just life experience, more than anything.

Her studies resulted in accomplishing the following:

- Events and Convention Management Diploma (TRU)
- Bachelor of Tourism Management, Major in Entrepreneurship, Minor in Marketing (TRU)
- Executive Master of Business Administration in Indigenous Business and Leadership (SFU)

History

Julie John came up with the idea and business plan for Be Inspired! while working on the Events and Convention Management Diploma at TRU. During her studies, BIE was still a side business, with a job here and there, providing extra income when needed. While studying for her Bachelor of Tourism Management, she actually operated a gift store, with the event planning still on the side. After finishing the EMBA at Simon Fraser University (SFU), the event planning business started to pick up; she got more and more contracts, and it turned into a full-time position.

She still stays in contact with other students from her studies, mostly with the Indigenous group at SFU. She calls on them to discuss ideas or share events, getting the word out. That degree also made the biggest difference in her learning, since the education was based on Indigenous experiences and with a context she can relate to. Currently, she uses that network at SFU more than the TRU network.

Going to school with students from across Canada,

and hearing about what they were doing and the levels they're at, [...] was so inspiring to me, to want to learn more, or to want to stay connected.

Julie's office is in Chase, BC, close to the lake and Quaaout Lodge. She has been operating this business since 2013. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Julie hired a part-time employee who helped with the event planning workload, sometimes planning up to four events at the same time. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these events were cancelled, and the part-time employee had to be terminated. At the time of the interview in March, 2021, Julie started to pick up some contracts here and there as the light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel was starting to be visible. Those contracts were mostly based on word-of-mouth referrals and came from organizations and companies she had worked with before.

The name for her business, Be Inspired!, originated from her previous job and her experience of invited speakers inspiring, uplifting, and empowering event participants. Julie appreciated that "inspired" feeling after a motivating talk, wanting to learn more and do better. Julie wanted to put on her own events that would be inspirational and rewarding.

2. Event Planning Services

Originally, Julie thought she would be organizing mostly her own events, inviting guest speakers and selling tickets. However, the contracts from other organizations started to roll in and increased through word-of-mouth referrals. This put her idea of creating her own events on the backburner; the plans still exist, but the contract business keeps her busy. In addition, she now provides mentoring work, offering sessions with individuals who would like to learn more about action planning.

As part of a contract for event planning, Julie takes care of all aspects of the event—such as accommodations, speakers, catering, marketing materials, and so on—providing peace of mind for her clients. She uses her network to invite people and groups, connecting the event to the local communities. She is flexible to include what the organizers require.

I have been requested to do weddings, and, I'm like, no way! I would not touch a wedding. So, my passion is more for the conferences, the meetings. I can do trade shows—anyevent—anything but a wedding.

She has worked on family retreats, staff retreats, large conferences, smaller meetings, grassroots events, and more. She has planned the Squilax Pow Wow as well as other pow wows and festivals. She has brought in comedy shows for the community and kids' magician shows. At her previous job at the Health Caucus, the events she planned were often limited to particular First Nation members, instead of being open to everyone, mostly because there were restrictions on the funds used for the event. That means that large events, such as talks

by Dr. Martin Brokenleg or Dr. Gabor Maté, were restricted to a particular audience, an aspect that Julie did not like. Her own events are all-inclusive, open to anybody who can benefit from them. Julie's events eventually included Dr. Maté, sessions for female entrepreneurs, and motivational speakers "who could uplift and inspire our people."

When companies organize their own events, they often run into staff or skill limitations. Hiring BIE means they do not have to worry or stress about it and can spend their time elsewhere. The fear is gone, and outsourcing it to BIE provides a huge relief. Julie reviews what these organizations want, considers the budget available, and determines how to fit it all into their financial plan.

Watch Video Clip 2 – No Stress ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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<https://beinspired.pressbooks.tru.ca/?p=27>

Julie has organized events of all sizes. A 3-day outdoor Secwépemc gathering a few years ago, for example, attracted 600 people. With no running water and no infrastructure, participants camped on the empty land, and a lot of services were improvised. It was a challenge, but Julie succeeded in coordinating a big group of people to make it happen.



Figure 2 – Source: <https://www.juliejohn.ca/>. This image may be subject to copyright and doesn't fall under the CC licensing of this OER.

The subcontractors, such as caterers, are preferably Indigenous businesses as well, as Julie likes to support other Indigenous entrepreneurs. If difficulties arise, Julie is quick to think of solutions and will not let that threaten the event. Quick thinking and problem solving are critical, as are backup plans and constant movement and adjustment.

In addition to planning events, Julie has facilitated action planning sessions as well as debt planning with a few clients. She is helping these clients overcome their fear of even looking at their credit report and understanding how they can approach debt situations. This work led to one of her goals for the future, to facilitate workshops around money and to help Indigenous entrepreneurs with the financial side of their businesses while sharing her own story.

Watch Video Clip 3 – Workshops ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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After operating out of her current small office for a long time, Julie has plans to move into a storefront location in Chase, BC. The space is currently being renovated by family members, including bringing in Indigenous art work. Besides office space for her event planning business, this location will also host My Sisters Closet, a professional clothing assistance program, and a small Indigenous entrepreneur co-op space. Julie is creating an Indigenous Entrepreneur Hub where entrepreneurs can come in and do their research using the space and the computers.



Figure 3 – Source: <https://www.juliejohn.ca/>. This image may be subject to copyright and doesn't fall under the CC licensing of this OER.

While Chase has cafes and restaurants, there aren't really any suitable spaces for small business owners to hang out and use the WiFi to conduct their business; a gap that Julie plans to fill with her hub. There will also be a meeting/conference room that can be rented out or used by the entrepreneurs, and her logo will appear big and bold in the window!

I know with Indigenous people, they feel more comfortable if it's an Indigenous person they're talking to, especially around vulnerable ideas and thoughts. It's different than going to a non-

Indigenous person and sharing. So, having that cultural space, and to feel the culture when you walk in, that's one of my hopes, is that I can build a space where you walk in and you know it's an Indigenous business, an organization.

Julie is always attentive and open to further her learning as every contract and every event provide a learning opportunity.

Watch Video Clip 4 – Learning ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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While her services are intangible, Julie tries to include items that event participants can take home. For example, she included sage pouches at a [TRU event that she planned and hosted](#). As with the suppliers she uses for the event planning, she also selects Indigenous gifts and authentic, meaningful keepsakes for her event items.

3. Cultural Components

Julie makes sure that her events are authentic and support Indigenous communities, being open and welcoming to all. She also includes important aspects of the Indigenous culture into her events. For example, there is always a prayer included at the beginning of an event. An elder, Chief, or Council member will provide a welcome. It is important to her to embrace and support the Secwépemc protocol into her Indigenous events where she focuses mostly on the Secwépemc heritage and traditions.

To see a recorded performance of Julie talking about being an Indigenous female entrepreneur, please watch [this video on Vimeo](#), uploaded by Raven Institute (2019).

4. Customers

The main customer base for BIE are organizations, specifically Indigenous organizations such as local bands. Examples include the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council (SNTC) or bands within the Secwépemc Lakes area. Sometimes non-Indigenous customers contact her, such as TRU or the Village of Chase, since they are looking for the connection to Indigenous communities and people. That is clearly Julie's strength and skillset.

These organizations typically do not have the staff available to put time and energy into planning an event, and when it is added to an employee's workload, it often does not receive the care and attention that it needs. BIE's customers range from local bands with 50 employees to universities such as TRU with hundreds of employees. Her reach is focused on Southern BC and, more specifically, the Interior of BC (e.g., Kamloops, Salmon Arm). Through networking and meeting people, out-of-area customers might contract her services, such as an organization in Vancouver planning an online event.

Julie notices that the Indigenous organizations that are her customers are looking to focus on connection, on family, and on learning. It is important to Julie and these customers that event participants feel welcomed and feel comfortable participating. The bridging of the gap between people of Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds is dear to Julie's heart, and even the connection between bands.

The Village of Chase here, it's surrounded by three local bands. So, if our band has an event, no one from Chase non-Indigenous will go to the event or vice versa, and it's very separate. And even working with the local bands here, they have the same funding, but they're doing all three separate events because

they're divided by the funding. I always encourage them, "Why don't you connect with the other two bands and make a bigger event?" But because funding, there's some restrictions there.

Julie stated that BIE gets the most business from, what she calls, the "Moccasin Telegram," or word-of-mouth referrals between Indigenous people and companies. Sometimes people she worked with years ago, who have since moved on to other positions or organizations, will contact her about their next event. In addition, the organizations she plans the events for often promote her during that event, such as announcing on stage that the event was done by Julie John from Be Inspired! While Julie is still getting used to being publicly acknowledged, putting a face to the business and putting herself out there more will definitely help her business.

I am the worst at self promoting, but I'm learning to get better.

5. Competitors

Competing with other event planners is not something that causes Julie concerns. She states that her uniqueness is established by being an Indigenous owner and operator, and her connections to the Indigenous community and to the Nation solidify this distinction. Especially when the customers are non-Indigenous organizations, they value her insights, her experience, and her connections to her community.

It has happened that Indigenous community members offered event planning services on an individual level, especially when “expressions of interest” were published by larger organizations, but these individuals typically do not carry insurance and are not registered, and that is something the organizations require due to their policies and rules.

Because of her unique experience and skills, and her professional business setup, there are no direct competitors in her local area. A secondary level of competition might be organizations that have the funds and human resources to put on their own events; they are typically well-executed. Sometimes Julie notices details of these well-planned events that she would have liked to provide and organize, but she also sees this as a learning opportunity. It gives her ideas for new items or speakers to bring to her local area.

6. Pricing

Establishing prices for event planning services is an interesting exercise for the business owner. When Julie first started the business, she did not have the experience nor confidence to honestly value her services. Especially for Indigenous female entrepreneurs, a bad habit is often to offer services for free.

Oh, you don't have to pay me. I'll do it for free.

Without prior knowledge or a history of education with regards to money, determining prices was a scary necessity. There is always the fear that one charges too much, even though Julie mostly had the opposite experience where she named a price and customers readily agreed. She learned over time that she didn't charge enough. Valuing her time, her skills, and knowledge is still a challenge for her today, but she is getting better at it. This includes feeling confident about her academic background benefiting the business.

Through education, Julie developed a “formula” and created her price list from there. Even rate increases, such as a recent rise after the losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, are typically readily accepted by new and past customers. Promotions to claim being “affordable” or less than other event planners are not necessary or advisable for her business. Julie is still not 100% confident with the price discussions and sometimes fears potential customers would complain about the prices being too high, but “they are more than happy to pay what I’m asking,” and negotiations are not required.

It's just the stories that I make up in my own head!

Another benefit and reason that prices are readily accepted is the fact that her business is registered and insured, while

other providers and individuals in her area are not. That means that qualifications that are often laid out in “expressions of interest” sought by organizations can often only be fulfilled by her because of her insurance.

With regards to rebates or deviations from her regular rate, Julie has a particular approach.

Watch Video Clip 5 – Rates ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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7. Marketing Approaches

Current and Past Marketing Activities



Figure 4 – Source: <https://www.juliejohn.ca/>. This image may be subject to copyright and doesn't fall under the CC licensing of this OER.

Word of Mouth

By far the most effective marketing for BIE is word-of-mouth referrals. Given the local area Julie is working in and the unique nature of her services and background, that is not surprising. Before the COVID-19 pandemic halted most events, BIE was maxed out in terms of customers that Julie could accept. Currently, at the back end of the pandemic, contracts are

starting to be offered to Julie again, and through word-of-mouth referrals, organizations she's worked with in the past are starting to get in touch. She reaches out to former customers regularly, and when they mention events "down the road," she makes sure to check in again and to follow up.

Social Media

To actively encourage new contracts, BIE uses social media, mostly Facebook and some posts on Instagram and LinkedIn. Other options, such as TikTok, at this point do not line up with BIE's typical customer base. Julie was fortunate to be trained in the design of posters and other marketing materials; a skill she treasures and uses often.

Watch Video Clip 6 – Designing ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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She is thankful that this mentor in her previous job exposed her to creating marketing pieces, which showed her that she was passionate about this and instilled the confidence to create such work. For the most part, Julie designs brochures, posters, and other marketing materials for the events she plans herself. While that might not qualify as "professional" graphic design, it works for her customers and the community events she organizes, resulting in many positive comments.

BIE encourages word-of-mouth referrals and sharing of

details about the company that are communicated through social media or email. No incentives are needed for her content to be shared, but Julie has tried to hold contests to increase the interest. This could sound like, “Post and share, and win a gift card.”

Website

In the past, Julie has found that spending a lot of time to learn how to build a website, to research technology and so on, was not worth her time. So, she contracts a freelancer to help with the website design and appearance, ensuring her website is current and consistent, while Julie provides all the content.

I tried building a website, and it was so frustrating. Doing all the research, and all my time, and just at the end, feeling so frustrated and not wanting to touch it, even though I took a class on website development, but to learn it in class and then go on your own and do it, it's a whole different story. I really like the hands-on learning, not from a textbook.

The contracted marketing help BIE hired is the sole proprietor of a small business that was recommended to Julie through her network. She has been happy with the work done by this woman, which ensures that not only the website is well-designed but also that her social media presence is active and current. This is in contrast to Julie's attempt to do it all herself, similar to her trying to do all the accounting herself and now finally hiring a bookkeeper.

Watch Video Clip 7 – Social Media ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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In the end, she admits, she should be doing what she is good at, what she is passionate about, and let other experts do what they do best. That avoids getting frustrated learning about other areas of business, such as the science and timing of marketing that goes beyond designing a poster, which she can do well.

For Facebook promotions, Julie would use free software to choose a template and create a social media post based on the content she wants to publish. Mostly, she uses pictures and converts them into compatible formats, though she admits that she is not familiar with the details and technology of advanced web content creation. Typical posts share information about her business or upcoming event details, and these are not targeted towards a specific audience but are instead open to all of BIE's followers. These posts also often get shared around the community and increase her exposure and word-of-mouth grassroots reach.

Paid Advertising

In addition, BIE has used paid ads on social media (e.g., Facebook) to promote events such as a fundraising golf tournament in the summer of 2021. These ads were targeted to reach the right audience. The statistics, such as how many people saw the ad, were tracked, which is something Julie does not do for her regular Facebook posts.

On Facebook, you see when most of the people are online—if it's in the morning or afternoon—and you can track how many people viewed your post and whatnot, but I don't usually go into that detail when I post, but that's something I should start tracking. There's a lot of work when you get into marketing online, and that's why you hire somebody.

Julie has done some radio spots for some of her other initiatives, but it is an expensive marketing tool. Overall, BIE sets a marketing budget that is communicated to the marketing person who is being used for the website and paid advertising. Often, that person suggests paid advertisement opportunities after doing the research, and Julie has agreed to lower cost options (e.g., a 5-day ad run for \$16). Anything that goes beyond the budget given will be discussed, and if the benefits and revenue potential are clear, it will be implemented.

Media Release

While she has not done any other paid advertising for BIE, she did use a media release for her Leading Indigenous Female Entrepreneurs project, known as the [L.I.F.E Foundation](#), as well as for [My Sisters Closet Clothing Program](#). Initially fearful about the unknown medium and response, she was thrilled to learn that some newspapers picked it up, and she even got interviewed by CBC.

That's another big learning curve that I have learned in businesses. Even through fear, and you're scared, just do it anyways, and that's the only way you're gonna learn [...], and if I allowed fear to stop me from putting out a media release, even though I didn't know how, I

would have never done that and gotten the attention that it deserves for that program.

Email

BIE also maintains a large email list, including past clients, registrants for past events, and potential customers like local organizations. The emails try to reach out to anybody who would be interested in a certain event. BIE actively uses this list to promote and stay in touch.

Newsletter

Another part of the L.I.F.E. project, the [Secwepemc L.I.F.E. Online Newsletter](#) is a free online newsletter run through the BIE website.

Personal Connections

Julie admits that she lacked confidence when she started building BIE. Reaching out and communicating with potential or actual customers did not come naturally back then, and she much preferred to work behind the scenes. She would attend networking events and be excited about the opportunity but also terrified at the same time. This contributed to the business being a side business and part-time job for a long time. Back then, she didn't have the skill to pick up the phone and call someone and talk about her business or set up a meeting. She has since learned that making personal connections is critical, whether it is face to face or by video calls online.

I always thought all these people are all smarter than me or I don't belong here, but doing my Master of Education and meeting all the other students when we first started that class, and everybody had that fear of "I don't think I belong here," but at the end, in going through our Masters, we became such good friends, and everybody has fears.

Marketing Challenges

One of the challenges for BIE is that there is no concrete plan for marketing each month. Something might come up, and a poster is needed; another month, the time required is much less. Julie appreciates the expertise and help of the marketing person she hired, but even that requires time on her part.

Watch Video Clip 8 – Time Needed for Marketing
([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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Determining a budget and spending funds on marketing is a challenge for any small business. There are always other priorities, and expertise in deciding where the most benefit is gained from marketing expenditures is also in short supply. Julie is careful to operate within her means and not spend or promise money that may not be available.

With marketing for a solopreneur, a lot of people stay

away because radio is expensive, TV is expensive, and even putting an ad in the newspaper, or wherever, is expensive. Unless you are a bigger organization or a business who can afford that, for solopreneurs, you usually don't have dollars to put in a marketing plan. So, I'm fortunate the lady I'm working with works within my budget and does phenomenal work.

With business picking up again and BIE hoping to become as busy as before the COVID-19 pandemic, Julie is not opposed to spending more on marketing, especially if she can start organizing her own events. With a goal to sell out these events, she would most definitely increase the budget for paid advertising and marketing.

A consistent presence is important; Julie has seen too many gifted artists disappear because they can no longer afford a website or phone line. Being available and easy to contact is also part of marketing, and BIE makes sure customers do not have to fill out a web form and wait for days for an answer. She is always available over the phone and also responds to emails quickly, even just to say she will write more later.

Her marketing challenges are not influenced by her competitors, but instead they are influenced by her own personal experience in dealing with businesses. She knows what she likes and doesn't like, and she is not afraid to try something, then assess, and either continue or discard.

Marketing Opportunities

BIE often collects feedback from the event participants, even though ultimately that is up to the client to decide on. Sometimes, this is done via paper form, often promoting the chance to win a prize. It encourages participants to share their

thoughts before leaving the event. Online tools such as Survey Monkey have also been used, at the client's discretion. So far, BIE has not used the overall feedback from event participants for marketing but has collected testimonials from clients and participants who have sent personal messages to BIE.

From the website:

HEAR WHAT OTHERS HAVE TO SAY

Julie John of Be Inspired Events provided excellent support to us in organizing the 2019 BC Studies Conference at Thompson Rivers University. We were very grateful for her help in designing the program and the promotional material, and appreciated her professionalism and her attention to detail in arranging various conference events. She helped to make the conference special in many ways, including by personally preparing over 100 sage pouches as gifts for attendees. We would definitely recommend Julie to others who are in need of event planning and assistance – you won't be disappointed!

— TINA BLOCK (Associate Professor, History) &
BRENDA SMITH (Open Education Librarian) CO-
CHAIRS, 2019 BC STUDIES CONFERENCE

The feedback forms for the clients include any questions that the client wants to ask the participants. BIE's own feedback forms focus on whether participants enjoyed the event, what suggestions they have, and how BIE's services can become better.

Through social media and people just commenting and stuff, I get feedback that way, but nothing targeted where I put anything out on social media asking for feedback.

Julie John is part of the BC Native Women's Association and quite a few other groups that support Indigenous female entrepreneurs on the provincial and national level. In addition, she joined the Chase Chamber of Commerce and is still on the email list for the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce, though no longer a member. She is working with the Chase Chamber of Commerce, trying to include more Indigenous businesses in their directory and also to clarify the benefits of joining the chamber. Discussions are also starting with the Little Shuswap Lake Indian Band to share profiles of band members' entrepreneurial business ventures on their website, with links and a dedicated space online. This will assist in promoting the businesses for free.

There are other organizations that are suitable for small businesses to become members. At conferences and meetings, opportunities for joining these are often presented. It was an eye opener for Julie to learn that small business is often defined as 50+ employees, which is a far cry from her "solopreneur" operation. Accordingly, fees for these organizations are often way too high for a solopreneur.

As an example, the BC Indigenous Business and Investment Council offers memberships and certifies a business as an Indigenous business, which includes many benefits, but the fee is about \$300 per year. An expense such as this is not a priority for BIE, especially since BIE's work is so local, even though the networking opportunities would be beneficial. Workshops and events provided by the council can be joined as a non-member as well, which BIE has done.

I really love attending workshops and events—anything to do with Indigenous

entrepreneurship—andmeeting people that way, networking that way, and being at an event that I truly want to be at and that inspires me. I think I would rather spend my money on that than a membership.

Being creative with the marketing approach, even if the business doesn't have a large budget, is key for entrepreneurs. Thinking outside of the box and spending the money that is available most effectively is critical. BIE isn't afraid to get creative, use marketing that doesn't cost money, ask for deals, use its networks, and include its own resources.

Another dream and future opportunity to promote BIE lies in facilitating BIE's own workshops. Specially, Julie has read and learned a lot about a healthy relationship with money, which she would like to pass on to others. Her upbringing and habits acquired from her environment favoured spending and not making money, so developing this healthy approach to making and saving money has been a steep learning curve that Julie would like to include in her own workshops.

Watch Video Clip 9 – Money ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



A video element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can watch it online here:

<https://beinspired.pressbooks.tru.ca/?p=33>

Julie also recently finished a film making class on how to make a documentary. With this addition to her skillset, she would like to video interview Indigenous female entrepreneurs, professionally edit and publish that film, and create a resource and a following. She also loves listening to podcasts and would like to create a podcast channel that interviews Indigenous

female entrepreneurs who share their challenges, successes, and stories about their businesses.

BIE has not focused on reviewing and comparing statistics and metrics on a regular basis, such as views and shares within social media. If something gets a lot of traffic and shares, Julie might notice but does not use that information further.

An advocate for dreaming big, Julie would love to invite well-known motivational speakers and get to that level of event planning. Hosting an event that is attended by thousands of people, bringing in guests such as Buffy Sainte-Marie, or bringing an international speaker to her area—these are dreams that could become reality in the future. With an increase in contracts, and if the budget allows, Julie would also hire an assistant to help her with the smaller tasks so that she can stay focused on the bigger picture.

8. Resources and Credits

Resources

Information included in this case study was collected during a personal interview with Be Inspired! Events and Event Planning's owner, Julie John. All quotes listed in this case study are from the video interview with Julie.

John, J. (2021, March 10). Personal interview.

References

Raven Institute. (2019, June 20). *Julie John* [Video]. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/343382881>

Credits

Julie John, MBA, Owner, Be Inspired! Events and Event Planning

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