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Entrepreneurship 101: Starting a Business in Fairfax County

One of the many challenges with starting a new business is finding out what you don't know. One resource that stands out for me is the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA). A quick word about the FCEDA. According to the [FCEDA web site](#), it's mission is to:

... promote Fairfax County, Virginia, as a world-class center of commerce and trade and the technology hub of the east coast.

The FCEDA offers a half-day seminar entitled, [Entrepreneurship 101: Starting a Business in Fairfax County](#), which is an introduction to starting a business in Fairfax County. I attended the October 7, 2008 presentation and found it to be a very valuable resource for anyone who's started a small business recently or is thinking about starting a small business.

There were about 25 people who attended the seminar. One of the highlights for me was the opportunity to network with others who, like me, had taken the plunge and started a small business. Karen Smaw, the FCEDA staff person who hosted the seminar, asked us to introduce ourselves and tell the group one unique fact about one of the other attendees sitting next to us. It never ceases to amaze me how many different ways people make a living. In the room there were people who had started (or were thinking about starting) businesses that included:

- Hypnotherapy
- Fitness and physical rehab consulting
- Travel management
- Tax preparation
- Antique gunsmith
- IT consulting
- Import/export of herbs and spices.

Once the introductions were finished, the rest of the seminar was divided into three parts. The first part was led by Karen Smaw and dealt with the variety of resources available through FCEDA (or other organizations) to small businesses. She started with a brief overview about the mission and structure of the FCEDA. Next she gave us various facts and figures about Fairfax County. Last, she talked about a six-step process for starting a new business. The six steps are:

1. Determine your Legal Structure
2. Select a Location
3. Apply for a Business License
4. File for a Certificate of Occupancy or a Home Occupancy Permit
5. Register your Trade Name

6. Register your Company with D&B.

While you could find most, if not all, of this information on the web, it was helpful to see it all in one place. In addition, people asked several detailed questions about the process, which was also very helpful to hear and discuss.

A woman from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) led the second part of the seminar. She went through a series of slides about the various resources that were available to small business owners through the SBA. The information she provided was useful, but her presentation consisted mostly of reading the Powerpoint slides and there wasn't much group interaction.

The final part of the seminar was led by a woman from the Virginia Department of Business Assistance. She covered a couple slides about the services offered through the VA DBA. The state, uh I mean commonwealth, of Virginia offers some interesting programs to encourage the creation of new jobs in the state. A program that caught my interest was the [Virginia Jobs Investment Program](#) which provides financial incentives for small business to create new full-time jobs in Virginia.

Immediately after the seminar, I applied for a D&B number. A few days after the seminar, I went to the Fairfax County Government Center and applied for both a Home Occupancy Permit and a Business/Professional/Occupational License (BPOL). I'll cover those experiences in separate blog posts at a later date.

Overall, I learned a number of things by attending the Entrepreneurship 101 seminar offered by the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority and I recommend it to anyone living in/around Fairfax County who's interested in starting a new business. There's a lot of information that's provided and it's a great way to network with others who are doing the same thing.

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