



TOWN OF SYLVAN LAKE
**HOME BASED
BUSINESS
VISITATION PROGRAM &
SURVEY 2015**
FINAL REPORT
December 2015

From May - December of 2015, Sylvan Lake's Economic Development Officer conducted a Home Based Business Survey through a contractor who visited home-based businesses in targeted sectors to identify their needs, concerns, issues and opportunities. This is to enable them to potentially move into a storefront or business incubator. A customized survey was developed for these business visits. After these business visits were completed, the data was tabulated and will be utilized to determine next steps.

Home visits and online questionnaires were used to gather this information. A total of 80 questionnaires were completed, and 47 surveys were sent by email.

This report presents the findings of the Home Based Business Survey. The key findings are as follows:

Profile of Businesses

- 64% of business owners surveyed conducted their business from home, using the home as a base, with much of the work completed outside the home. The remaining 36% of business owners conducted their business mainly from home.
- 37% of home based business owners have been operating their current business for 1-5 years. Another 38% of business owners have been in operation 10 years or more.
- 65% of businesses have full time employees, and 35% have part time employees. These employees may or may not be paid.
- 13% of owners work less than 10 hours, 25% of home based business owners work between 35 and 50 hours, 21% work between 51 and 75 hours, and 7% work more than 75 hours per week.
- 53% are considered a Class A home occupation, 33% are a Class B home occupation, with 4% falling into the Class C home occupation. (Please see definition on last page)
- 49% business owners surveyed reported their home based business is their primary source of income.
- 57% of home based businesses are a sole proprietorship and 31% are incorporated.
- 8% of these businesses are members of the Sylvan Lake Chamber of Commerce

Advertising Methods

- 92% of home based businesses advertise by word of mouth and networking. 35% use Social Media Marketing, and another 30% rely on the Sylvan Lake Directory.

Information Technology

- Less than half (40%) of home based businesses, have a business website.
- The two prevailing uses of business internet use for the home based business owners surveyed are:
 - E-mail (86%)
 - Research (73%)
- Less than half (46%) of business owners surveyed have a Facebook Business page.
- 75% of businesses have have no online trade or sales.

Growth & Development

- 72% of business felt that Sylvan Lake was a good or excellent place to do business.
- When asked what are the top 3 reasons for locating or keeping your business in Sylvan Lake, 93% stated the proximity to home, 76% the quality of life, and 35% are long time residents that are invested in the community.
- Of the following statements relating to business growth, the top three most selected statements were:
 - My market in mainly in the local area or region (81%)
 - My business has grown significantly since starting (65%)
 - I prefer to stay small so I can work from home (55%)
- Three main issues which were of greatest importance for home based businesses and its operations are 52% Cash flow, 40% customer relations , 27% competing with the non licensed businesses in their sector.
- Finance (cash flow, interest rates, economy) 48%, and time constraints 46% are the issues that home based businesses have to growing or developing their businesses
- 90% stated that their reputation gave them competitive advantages, followed closely by their quality of work 87%.
- 31% of business owners plan on increasing the size of their business in the next 3 years, and of those businesses 54% would look for commercial space within Sylvan Lake to a larger location, and 47% of these businesses are looking in the highway commercial part of town.

- One third of the Home based businesses that were looking to expand would/could lease space for less than \$10/sq. ft. Another one third preferred to own their own space. The anticipated problems were affordability of space 60%, and financing 48%.
- 46% of the businesses plan to acquire more skills in order to expand their business in the next 5 years and 40% plan to continue to develop at the same rate.
- In the past 12 months, 27% of business owners have done some general advertising (eg. Yellow Pages). 22% have completed cash flow projections. Over half of the businesses surveyed (55%) do not have a current business plan.
- 68% of business owners 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' when asked if they currently have access to all the support they need.
- 50% 'agreed' that they'd like to find ways to improve or grow their business.
- 46% 'agreed' they would be interested in participating in a home based business network or association, with 64% who felt that it wasn't needed.
- Business advice/ mentors and financial advice/ assistance 50% were the two main types of support respondents would like to see provided to home based businesses. This was followed closely by marketing advice/ assistance (49%) and business workshops/ seminars (47%).

Training

Four in ten (38%) home based business owners have attended a training course on owning or operating a business.

57% of business owners would be interested in taking a training course, if it was available, convenient and affordable.

62% of home based business owners are interested in undertaking a training course 'Social Networking & Your Business'. There was also an interest in both 'Sustainable Business Practices' and the need for "Financial Information" 53%.

Survey Observations

Most business owners are content with their status quo. They feel they don't need to advertise, as they are as busy as they want to be, through word of mouth advertising. They choose to work from home, because that is where they want to be. If they are looking to expand, they realize the cost demands that will be required, and they are hesitant to do so with the current economic uncertainty.

One of the concerns expressed is the frustration with the unlicensed businesses that they compete with and the lack of business enforcement. These businesses struggle to see the benefit of being a licensed business, when there is no consequence for not being licensed.

50% of the trades, would prefer to not be lumped into the home based businesses category. Without increasing the license fee, they would like to have to have a contractor license option. This would help set them apart in a different category with specific needs.

Most business owners could not recall having done a Real Property Report for their home based business. Those that had, felt that the process was contentious, and not needed, with many of the business fitting into the category of a Class A home occupation.

One piece of feedback is with the perceived inconsistency of enforcement of the sign bylaws, and the need to educate business owners of these bylaws. Many of the home based businesses were unaware that a Class B & C home occupation were permitted to have signage.

Additional Information: 190 Licensed Home Based Businesses.

5 Refused to participate

7 Moved or were no longer in operation

19 Unable to contact due to inaccurate information, and unable to find the correct contact info online or approaching the home.

47 Emailed the survey to complete online.

80 Completed the survey via home visit.

The remaining 32 were contacted on 3 separate occasions with no response.

Definition of Home Based Business Class A, B & C Home Occupation:

Class A Home occupation - operated from within the dwelling and does not use any outdoor part of the parcel, does not store any materials outside the dwelling, does not employ any person on site who is not a permanent resident, does not require additional parking stalls, does not have associated vehicle visits to the premises, does not display any signage

Class B Home occupation - same as A with the exception that it does not cause more than a total of 6 visits a day to the dwelling and provides one parking stall in addition to the stalls required for the dwelling. May have signage.

Class C Home occupation - operated from the dwelling or an accessory building, does not store materials outside, not have more than 2 employees, who are not permanent residents of the dwelling, provides one parking stall for visitor, and one parking stall for each employee, not cause a level of additional traffic, may have signage. Has a time limit of 3 year.