

Innovative Marketing Solutions, LLC
Hathaway, MT

The Small Business Administration's

2004

"Montana Main Street Business of the Year"



Mandi Luce-Heinle (on left)
President of Distribution Division

Sarah Ann Hamlen
President of Sales Management Division

Innovative Marketing Solutions, LLC of Hathaway, Montana was named 2004 Montana Main Street Business of the Year by the Montana District Office of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

Innovative Marketing Solutions (IMS) is the brainchild of Mandi Luce-Heinle of Hathaway. Mandi is President of the Distribution Division of IMS and is a graduate of Montana State University Northern in Havre.

She became interested in selling Montana food products when her family ranch became part owner in a boxed beef company, Big Sky Beef. She worked as the wholesale sales manager for Big Sky Beef. During that time, she developed a strong network of grocery and restaurant contacts throughout Montana who were interested in carrying products manufactured in the state.

So it was only natural that when Big Sky Beef bought her out, she would launch a business to help Montana companies with developing marketing plans and making contacts within the grocery and restaurant industries.

Shortly after forming the company, Mandi recognized a demand for a distribution company that would work with Montana companies to take products to market and to ensure consistent service of grocery locations. IMS is fulfilling that demand by striving to offer a cost-effective sales and distribution services to small Montana-based businesses.

Throughout her three years with IMS, Mandi has developed strong relationships with stores, and food manufacturers throughout the state, and as a result, sales more than tripled. In April 2003, Mandi recognized that the future growth and development of IMS couldn't be constrained by her own personal time and management resources. Therefore, she identified a need to add additional management to the company and offered a partnership in IMS to Sarah Hamlen. Sarah is now President of the IMS Sales Management Division. Following graduation in Business Marketing and Management from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota, native Montanan, Sarah Hamlen, kicked off her career with Cargill, Inc. and returned to Montana in 2000 as the senior marketing officer for the Montana Department of Agriculture. In this position she became known to many Montana food-processing companies and also met Luce-Heinle.

She later worked for Ripple Marketing in Bozeman specializing in business planning and feasibility studies for small businesses. Her experience has helped her to assist Montana food manufacturers in identifying their promotion budgets, scheduling appropriate promotions with grocery stores and to work with Luce-Heinle in managing the growth and expansion of IMS.

In the spring of 2003 Mandi Luce-Heinle sought assistance from Colstrip Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Director, David Anderson, to assist with the expansion of the Company. Anderson was able to assist IMS with its planned growth and utilized Southeastern Montana Development Corporation's Revolving Loan Fund for part of the expansion funding. As of the fall of 2004 IMS is exceeding growth projections and has added several new employees to the Company.

SBDC Director, Anderson, nominated Innovative Marketing Solutions, LLC for SBA's 2004 Main Street Business of the Year.