

REACT – RECOVERY – RESILIENCE

SBDC IOWA CLIENTS SHARE THEIR COVID-19 JOURNEY

SHOP WHERE I LIVE

Cherie Edilson, Founder & Owner



How did you come up with the idea for Shop Where I Live?

In early 2017 my husband and I were both small business owners. I created handmade products and sold them online through my website and Amazon, and locally at farmers' markets and a few retail outlets. Robert was a freelance web developer, as well as working full-time in marketing for a tech company.

I participated as a vendor at a local Christmas market, but due to a snowfall the night before, there was hardly any traffic. Everyone who participated in the market was disappointed, as there is a loss of time, inventory and market fees. Many market vendors and crafters have no other means outside of one day fairs to earn income from their craft. Furthermore, many of the vendors at the market had amazing products, but you wouldn't know that they or their business existed, unless you had attended a craft market in the area.

After the market we thought there has to be another way to help these businesses. So, with his web design skills and my knowledge of selling online and as a local market vendor, we aimed to combine the two online to create a local online marketplace to help other handmade artisans and service providers overcome their barriers, and sell online. Robert used his website development and marketing experience to build the website. I worked with vendors to teach them how to sell online and to market them to the local community.

After a year of building and tweaking the original site Cedar Rapids Marketplace, we joined the Iowa Startup Accelerator to expand the idea with an intent for a more national base, and rebranded the marketplace as [ShopWhereILive.com](https://www.shopwherelive.com). The project took further shape, drawing the attention of new businesses and community partners such as local chambers of commerce, main street organizations, and other economic development groups. So far we've worked with 14 different communities in 5 states, and 23 different site partners.

How did the SBDC help you with your business?

I was fortunate to meet Scott Swenson, the Kirkwood SBDC Regional Director, on day one of the Iowa Startup Accelerator. He quickly became an advisor and mentor to me and our business, providing SBDC resources to work with local experts, helping us write (and rewrite) business plans and our business model canvas, asking the tough questions when needed, and also being our biggest cheerleader when we hit new milestones. His experience, guidance, and connections have been invaluable, and I hadn't realized that this type of support existed through the SBDC prior to meeting Scott.

I've also worked with several of the other SBDC Directors throughout Iowa in one way or another. Jay Wickham, Northeast Iowa SBDC Regional Director, has been a constant source of knowledge with his experience scaling startups. Jenica Johnson from Mid Iowa was a part of a panel of experts helping us to shape our new business model as we applied for POCR funding. And many of the other SBDC Directors also provided connections or gave feedback through our monthly newsletters.

I'm grateful for the resources that the SBDC has provided to us, and thankful the program exists for Iowa's businesses and startups.

How has COVID-19 impacted your business? Have you pivoted your operations? How are you helping others through this time?

COVID-19 has impacted our business and has caused a lot of growth in the last month and a half. Many communities and businesses realized that all of their revenue was in their retail brick and mortar and local event promotions, and had not invested at all into selling online. When the retail stores are forced to close and events are cancelled, the only thing left to do is to sell online.

Our tagline for Shop Where I Live is "Where Main Street Meets The Internet", and I think having a resource that could help put their community online, as well as help their businesses make sales was something that many chambers of commerce (main streets, etc.) realized they needed to be doing for their member businesses. It's been nice that many business owners that had been hesitant to sell online are now realizing the importance of diversifying how they sell and starting to blend in-store and online sales together.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, we've offered a free shop on our platform for businesses that want to list a gift card to help create additional cash flow. We've had a number of businesses utilize this and then even go on to list more products after they saw it working for them.

Find Shop Where I Live at www.shopwhereilive.com or on social media @shopwhereilive.



America's SBDC Iowa has professionally certified consultants that are available to provide confidential, no-cost consulting to help affected businesses understand available disaster assistance and relief programs, determine eligibility, prepare loan applications, as well as navigate other challenges. Request counseling at: www.iowasbdc.org.