



## **Customer Profile: Zenaviv**

Zenaviv is an organization that promotes the artistic abilities of the autistic community by selling their art to corporate and other clients. Founder Harish Bikmal was inspired by his own autistic child, who had a unique talent and passion for painting. Bikmal asked himself, “How can we help others and bring them the transformation his son experienced?”, and the concept of Zenaviv was born.

The name Zenaviv is derived from the Japanese word “zen” meaning enlightenment, and the Latin word “viva” spelling in reverse, meaning spring, or colors of spring. As the name suggests, the organization seeks to showcase the inspiring works of art as well as foster diversity and inclusion. Beginning as a part time passion project in 2015, the company has since expanded into a successful, full-time operation with such clients as Freddie Mac, Jefferson Hotel, and the Four Seasons Hotel, who decorate their offices with these works of art.

### **The Challenge**

Like many organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the company. Corporate clients were no longer investing in decorating their office spaces, as discretionary budgets were slashed and offices remained vacant due to stay-at-home orders.

Bikmal immediately worked to pivot his business away from strictly office décor. The company launched a consumer-oriented product line, digitizing the art and creating blow-ups, puzzles and prints. The puzzles are sold via Amazon.

The company also sought financial relief to help support them through the pandemic. Zenaviv’s business model is structured as a for-profit, social business in Virginia in which the company gives 66% of profits to the artists and puts the remaining 34% back in the company to help it grow. The company is currently run by volunteer parents.

Bikmal applied for the Loudoun Business Interruption Fund and was looking for other funding options and to allow the company to continue to move forward under their current business model. He was referred to the Loudoun SBDC and visited the web site to schedule a consultation.

### **Working with the Loudoun SBDC**

Bikmal’s first call with the Loudoun SBDC was with Subodh Nayar, Loudoun SBDC business advisor. “My expectation was that he would suggest loan options. He did that - but went way beyond that to help identify ways to support my business.”

In addition to discussing loan options, such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Nayar pointed him towards the Halcyon Incubator, an incubator program for social entrepreneurs to help transform ideas into scalable and sustainable ventures.

Nayar also suggested a business analysis. According to Bikmal, “We examined my business with a methodical, surgical approach. It went up the value chain to look at every aspect of my business.” That included a test of his web site, to look for improvements.



Nayar also brought in other subject matter experts at the Loudoun SBDC, including Mary Joynt and Tom Solitario. Joynt supported Bikmal as they looked at the company's digital selling presence, including social media and Google. Solitario helped provide insight into possible business development opportunities, including expanding into airports.

Nayar also took advantage of some of the programming available through the Loudoun SBDC, including 1 Million Cups. As a presenter, he found it extremely valuable to get feedback on his business from other local entrepreneurs. "I got some great ideas," he says. "I would go back again!"

### **The Results**

As businesses begin to re-open, customers have started reaching out again, reigniting the flagship B2B business. The pivot towards the B2C business was also successful, and Bikmal is looking at other opportunities to expand the product line and looking at working with other business verticals, such as hospitals.

Bikmal attributes much of the continued momentum to his work with the Loudoun SBDC. "The Loudoun SBDC is a hidden gem," he says. "It is filled with people who want you to succeed. The information is cutting edge, and the value is immense. In our case, the guidance and advise could be life-changing for many artists and their families."

With the help and support of the Loudoun SBDC and specifically advisor Sudodh Nayar, Zenaviv has also been selected as a Halcyon 2021 Opportunity Intensive Fellow. "I am so thankful to Subodh for letting me know of the program, helping me prepare my applications, and ultimately make it!"