# Case study Portland Freelancers' Café: Amy and Steve's Business Idea* 

In 2003, Amy Chan and Steve Lee formed a partnership to start an Internet café in Portland, Oregon. For many years, Amy and Steve had worked as freelance writers. They enjoyed bringing their laptops to local coffeehouses to complete their writing projects. Having an endless supply of good strong coffee at their disposal helped them to stay focused on their work.

Over time, they began to daydream about owning their own café. Although Portland already had many great coffee shops, Amy and Steve felt that none of them catered well to freelancers like themselves. More and more, people in Portland seemed to be doing their work in informal settings. Everywhere they turned, twenty- and thirty-somethings were sipping lattes while conducting business deals on cell phones. Amy and Steve sometimes wondered if anyone worked in a traditional office anymore.

## We Can Do Better

As much as they enjoyed Portland's café culture, they felt that a fatal flaw compromised each of their favorite coffee spots. One was too loud. Another had uncomfortable chairs and tables that weren't well suited for laptop users. Their particular favorite, The Magic Bean, only had three
 many laptops could be plugged in at one time. Just a handful of the coffee shops in downtown Portland offered high-speed Internet access at that time.

Amy and Steve felt that they could do a better job of running a café that catered to the needs of freelancers. They made a list of everything they would want in a café, and then asked their freelance friends for additional feedback. The two partners resolved that, in their café, customers would be able to enjoy high-speed Internet access; laser printers; a soundproof, quiet room; and comfortable, up-to-date work stations. To attract their target market, Amy and Steve decided to name their business the Portland Freelancers' Café.

## Deluxe Purchases

They spent $\$ 10,000$ up front installing superfast T1 Internet lines. They imported a $\$ 7,000$,

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(Ryan McVay/Photodisc)
top-of-the-line espresso machine from Italy. To make the café look sleek and modern, all of the furniture was custom-designed for the space, as were the curved metallic ceiling and wall panels. Installing the soundproof interior room was more costly than they had anticipated. Their equipment costs totaled $\$ 25,000$. At $\$ 500$ per month, they had negotiated a good deal on their rent, so they figured that they could afford to splurge on these other features.

## Financing

The cafés start-up investment totaled $\$ 100,000$. This included a $\$ 10,000$ cash reserve. Amy and Steve contributed a combined $\$ 20,000$ from their personal savings. Steve's brother invested another $\$ 20,000$, in exchange for a 20 percent equity stake. Amy's mother wrote a check for $\$ 10,000$, which she gave to the partners as a gift. Also, Amy and Steve received a $\$ 50,000$ loan from Amy's uncle. The partners agreed to pay back the loan with interest at an annual rate of 12 percent.

| Funding Source | Equity | Deht | Gift |
| :--- | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| Personal <br> Savings | $\$ 20,000$ <br> (80\% equity) |  |  |
| Steve's Brother | $\$ 20,000$ <br> $(20 \%$ equity) |  |  |
| Amy's Uncle |  | $\$ 50,000$ <br> (@12\% interest) |  |
| Amy's Mother | $\$ 40,000$ |  | $\$ 10,000$ |
| Subtotal | $\$ 100,000$ |  | $\$ 10,000$ |
| Total Start-Up <br> Investment |  |  |  |

## Computer Glitch

Because so much money was needed for start up, Amy and Steve tried to cut costs by hiring a local high school student, who agreed to work 100 hours per month for an hourly wage of $\$ 10$. It soon became apparent to frustrated customers, however, that none of the staff, including Amy and Steve, knew how to solve the technical problems customers encountered with the computers and printers. Amy and Steve tried to find a permanent technical-support person, but computer experts were in high demand at the time, and the partners felt that they couldn't afford to pay a competitive salary.

## Business Troubles Brew

Before starting their business, Amy and Steve assumed that revenue would come from two primary sources, food and beverage sales and computer/Internet services. Together they had calculated two economics-of-one-unit analyses, one for each of the two sources.

## Amy and Steve's EOU

The partners originally assumed that the average customer would spend $\$ 6$ at the café and that $\$ 2$ of this revenue would be generated by food and beverage sales. The remaining $\$ 4$ would come from the sale of computer and Internet services. They believed that the business could be very successful if they did well selling computer services. After all, they could charge customers $\$ 4$ for an hour of service that would only cost them 45 cents to provide. In comparison, food and beverage sales would not be nearly as profitable. For every $\$ 2$ of lattes and muffins sold, they would pay $\$ 1$ in direct costs.

Amy and Steve built a 5 percent manager's commission into their EOU, even though they did not yet have the funds to hire a manager. They wanted to account for this cost because they did plan to hire a manager at some point in the future, and the commission would be a real cost of doing business. It was time for Amy and Steve to examine both revenue streams together.

## In Hot Water

When the Portland Freelancers' Café first opened, Amy and Steve were encouraged by how busy things seemed. The café was buzzing with customers and they received some positive reviews in the local papers. They expected to lose money at first, but figured that, in a few months' time, the business would become profitable. After three months, they had a major shock when they realized that this was not happening. What went wrong?

| EOU for Food and Beverage Sales |  |
| :---: | :---: |
| Average Sale per Customer |  |
| - Food/Beverage Sales | \$2.00 |
| Variable Costs per Unit COGS per Unit <br> - Food/Beverage Costs TOTAL COGS per Unit | $\frac{1.00}{\$ 1.00}$ |
| EOU for Food and Beveraye Sales |  |
| Other Variable Costs per Unit Manager's Commission @ 5\% | 0.10 |
| Total Variable Cost per Unit | \$1.10 |
| Contribution Margin per Unit | \$0.90 |
| E0U for Computeylnternet Services |  |
| Average Sale per Customer <br> - Computer Services | \$4.00 |
| Variable Costs per Unit COGS per Unit <br> - Paper, Toner TOTAL COGS per Unit | $\frac{0.25}{\$ 0.25}$ |
| Other Variable Costs per Unit Manager's Commission @ 5\% | 0.20 |
| Total Variable Cost per Unit | \$0.45 |
| Contribution Margin per Unit | \$3.55 |

## Changes in the Environment

Initially, Amy and Steve's customers willingly paid $\$ 4$ an hour to use the computers and highspeed Internet connection. However, soon after the grand opening, wireless Internet service became available throughout the Portland area. Within two months, the cafés customers no longer wanted to pay to go online. They put pressure on Amy and Steve to become a wireless hot spot. This meant that Amy and Steve would have to foot the bill of providing free Internet service.

The partners carried out some research and learned that it would cost $\$ 300$ to purchase the basic equipment for wireless Internet connectivity, plus an additional $\$ 30$ per month in service fees. They had counted on charging their customers for Internet access and now it looked like they would have to pick up the tab. They wondered how they could pay for this unexpected cost and also make up the lost revenue. On the other hand, they feared that the Portland Freelancers' Café would not be able to compete unless they adapted to changes in the market.

| EOU: Average Sale per Gustomer |  |
| :--- | :---: |
| Average Sale per Customer |  |
| - Computer Services | $\$ 4.00$ |
| - Food and Beverage Sales | $\$ 2.00$ |
| Variable Costs per Unit |  |
| COGS per Unit | $\$ 0.25$ |
| - Paper, Toner | $\underline{1.00}$ |
| - Food/Beverage Costs | $\$ 1.25$ |
| TOTAL COGS per Unit |  |
| Other Variable Costs per Unit | $\$ 0.20$ |
| Manager's Commission-Computer Services @ 5\% | $\underline{0.10}$ |
| Manager's Commission-Food and Beverage @ 5\% | $\underline{\$ 0.30}$ |
| TOTAL Commission Costs | $\underline{\$ 1.55}$ |
| Total Variable Cost per Unit | $\$ 3.20$ |
| Contribution Margin per Unit |  |

## Amy and Steve's EOU Revisited

Three months after they opened the café, Amy and Steve discovered that their monthly unit sales of computer services had been cut by more than half. In their first month, they had sold 1,500 units, but by month three they were only averaging 600. They worried that this number would only continue to decline.

The café was holding steady with its food and beverage sales-in fact, the monthly units sold had climbed steadily from 4,500 units in month one to 5,000 in month three. Customers were enjoying the café's free wireless service. This feature created a situation where people would stay longer and order more coffee. But even with increased sales of cappuccino, the overall finances of the operation were not improving. In looking at their economics-of-oneunit analysis of food and beverage sales, the partners could see that their gross profit per unit for food and beverage sales was only 90 cents. Even if they sold 5,000 food and beverage units per month, they would still only be earning $\$ 4,500$ in gross profit. In the scheme of things, this was not very much money-not nearly enough to cover the monthly fixed costs of $\$ 8,332$.

## An Uncertain Future

One year into their venture, Amy and Steve began to seriously doubt their decision to start the Portland Freelancers' Café. In hindsight, they realized that they knew a lot about being customers but running a state-of-the-art coffee shop was a lot harder than they had imagined.

By the end of the year, the Portland Freelancers Café was on the verge of going out of business. Take a look at the cafés financial statements in Exhibits 8-14 through 8-17 and then analyze why this happened.

## Case Study Analysis

1. Evaluate the economics-of-one-unit analysis that Amy and Steve conducted and then answer the following:
a. Amy and Steve assumed that, for every $\$ 6$ in sales, $\$ 4$ would come from selling computer-related services. Calculate what percentage of their total sales revenue per unit this $\$ 4$ represents.
b. For every $\$ 2$ in food and beverage sales, Amy and Steve assumed that their COGS per unit would be $\$ 1$. Calculate the markup percentage.
c. For every $\$ 4$ in computer services sales. Amy and Steve assumed that their COGS per unit would be 25 cents. Calculate the markup percentage.
2. List three things that Amy and Steve should have considered doing to adapt to the changes in the environment after their customers no longer wanted to pay for Internet services and expected the café to provide free wireless connection.
3. Evaluate Amy and Steve's income statement for their first month of operation:
a. Is the café operating at a profit or a loss?
b. How many units above or below breakeven were sold?
4. Amy and Steve decided to take on a $\$ 50,000$ loan to finance their start-up investment. Each month they are paying $\$ 1,469$ in interest charges. Look at their total monthly fixed costs. What percentage of their total monthly fixed costs does this $\$ 1,469$ represent?
5. What is the debt-to-equity ratio of the Portland Freelancers' Café?
6. Look at each section of the cafés cash flow statement. Based on what you see, write a memo highlighting three reasons why this business is not succeeding.
7. Review the cafés balance sheet. Explain why the net value of the café's property and equipment has decreased from $\$ 80,000$ in month one to $\$ 64,000$ by year's end.

| Start-Up Investment |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Start-Up Costs |  |  |  |
| Soundproof Room |  | \$15,000 |  |
| Espresso Machine |  | 7,000 |  |
| High-Speed Internet Access Setup |  | 10,000 |  |
| Workstations |  | 20,000 |  |
| Supplies/Equipment |  | 25,000 |  |
| Furniture |  | 8,000 |  |
| Fixtures |  | 5,000 |  |
| Cash Reserves |  | 10,000 |  |
| Total Start-Up Investments |  | \$100,000 |  |
| Economics of One Unit (EOU) |  |  |  |
| Unit of Sale: Computer/Internet Services (average per customer) |  |  |  |
| Average Sale Total (Revenue) |  |  | \$4.00 |
| Less COGS |  |  |  |
| Computer time |  |  |  |
| Printer materials | 0.25 |  |  |
| Total COGS | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 |
| Gross Profit |  |  | \$3.75 |
| Less Other Variable Costs |  |  |  |
| Commission $5 \%$ to manager | 0.20 |  |  |
| Total Other Variable Costs | 0.20 | 0.20 | 0.20 |
| Total Variable Costs (COGS + Other VC) |  | 0.45 |  |
| Contribution Margin |  |  | \$3.55 |
| Economics of One Unit (EOU) |  |  |  |
| Unit of Sale: Food and Beverage Sales (average per customer) |  |  |  |
| Average Sale Total (Revenue) |  |  | \$2.00 |
| Less COGS |  |  |  |
| Food | 0.80 |  |  |
| Beverage | 0.20 |  |  |
| Total COGS | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Gross Profit |  |  | \$1.00 |
| Less Other Variable Costs |  |  |  |
| Commission $5 \%$ to manager | 0.10 |  |  |
| Total Other Variable Costs | 0.10 | 0.10 | 0.10 |
| Total Variable Costs (COGS + Other VC) |  | 1.10 |  |
| Contribution Margin |  |  | \$0.90 |


| The Portland Freelancers Café <br> INCOME STATEMENT <br> for the Year Ending 12/31/2011 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Year |
| No. Units Sold-Computer Services |  | 1,500 | 1,000 | 600 | 550 | 550 | 500 | 500 | 450 | 450 | 450 | 400 | 400 | 7,350 |
| No. Units Sold-Food and Beverage |  | 4,500 | 4,750 | 5,000 | 5,100 | 5,200 | 5,300 | 5,400 | 5,500 | 5,600 | 5,700 | 5,800 | 6,000 | 63,850 |
| Revenue |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Computer Service Fees |  | \$ 6,000 | \$ 4,000 | \$ 2,400 | \$ 2,200 | \$ 2,200 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 1,800 | \$ 1,800 | \$ 1,800 | \$ 1,600 | \$ 1,600 | \$ 29,400 |
| Food and Beverage Sales |  | 9,000 | 9,500 | 10,000 | 10,200 | 10,400 | 10,600 | 10,800 | 11,000 | 11,200 | 11,400 | 11,600 | 12,000 | 127,700 |
| Total Revenue |  | \$15,000 | \$13,500 | \$12,400 | \$12,400 | \$12,600 | \$12,600 | \$12,800 | \$12,800 | \$13,000 | \$13,200 | \$13,200 | \$13,600 | \$157,100 |
| Less COGS |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Printer Mat's (paper, ink) |  | 375 | 250 | 150 | 138 | 138 | 125 | 125 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 100 | 100 | 1,838 |
| Food |  | 3,600 | 3,800 | 4,000 | 4,080 | 4,160 | 4,240 | 4,320 | 4,400 | 4,480 | 4,560 | 4,640 | 4,800 | 51,080 |
| Beverages |  | 900 | 950 | 1,000 | 1,020 | 1,040 | 1,060 | 1,080 | 1,100 | 1,120 | 1,140 | 1,160 | 1,200 | 12,770 |
| Total COGS |  | \$4,875 | \$ 5,000 | \$5,150 | \$ 5,238 | \$5,338 | \$ 5,425 | \$5,525 | \$ 5,613 | \$ 5,713 | \$ 5,813 | \$ 5,900 | \$ 6,100 | \$65,688 |
| Gross Profit |  | \$10,125 | \$8,500 | \$7,250 | \$7,163 | \$ 7,263 | \$ 7,175 | \$ 7,275 | \$7,188 | \$ 7,288 | \$7,388 | \$7,300 | \$7,500 | \$ 91,413 |
| Less Other Variable Costs |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Commission, Computer | (5\%) | 300 | 200 | 120 | 110 | 110 | 100 | 100 | 90 | 90 | 90 | 80 | 80 | 1,470 |
| Commission, Food/Bev. | (5\%) | 450 | 475 | 500 | 510 | 520 | 530 | 540 | 550 | 560 | 570 | 580 | 600 | 6,385 |
| Total Other Variable Costs |  | \$ 750 | \$ 675 | \$ 620 | \$ 620 | \$ 630 | \$ 630 | \$ 640 | \$ 640 | \$ 650 | \$ 660 | \$ 660 | \$ 680 | \$ 7,855 |
| Total Var. Costs (COGS + Other VC) |  | 5,625 | 5,675 | 5,770 | 5,858 | 5,968 | 6,055 | 6,165 | 6,253 | 6,363 | 6,473 | 6,560 | 6,780 | 73,543 |
| Contribution Margin* |  | \$9,375 | \$7,825 | \$6,630 | \$6,543 | \$6,633 | \$6,545 | \$ 6,635 | \$ 6.548 | \$6,638 | \$ 6,728 | \$6,640 | \$ 6,820 | \$ 83,558 |

* Remember: Revenue - COGS $=$ Gross Profit - Other Variable Costs $=$ Contribution Margin.
(continued)
Exhibit 8-15 (Continued)

| The Portland Freelancers Café INCOME STATEMENT for the Year Ending 12/31/2011 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Year |
| Less Fixed Costs (USAIIRD) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Utilities |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Electricity |  | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 150 | 1,800 |
| Gas |  | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 3,000 |
| Water |  | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 1,200 |
| Telephone |  | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 900 |
| High-Speed Internet |  | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 425 | 5,100 |
| Wireless Internet Service |  | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 360 |
| Total Utilities |  | \$1,030 | \$1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 1,030 | \$ 12,360 |
| Salaries |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Amy \& Steve Salary |  | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 12,000 |
| Tech Support (Part time) |  | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1.000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 12,000 |
| Total Salaries |  | \$2,000 | \$2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 24,000 |
| Advertising |  | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 12,000 |
| Insurance |  | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 6,000 |
| Interest |  | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 1,469 | 17,628 |
| Rent |  | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 12,000 |
| Depreciation |  | 1,333 | $\underline{1,333}$ | $\underline{1,333}$ | $\underline{1,333}$ | 1,333 | $\underline{1,333}$ | $\underline{1,333}$ | $\underline{1,333}$ | 1,333 | 1,333 | 1,333 | 1,333 | 15,996 |
| Total Fixed Costs |  | \$8,332 | \$8,332 | \$ 8,332 | \$8,332 | \$8,332 | \$8,332 | \$8,332 | \$ 8,332 | \$ 8,332 | \$8,332 | \$ 8,332 | \$ 8,332 | \$ 99,984 |
| Pre-Tax Profit |  | \$1,043 | (\$507) | (\$1,702) | (\$1,790) | (\$1,700) | (\$1787) | (\$1,697) | (\$1,785) | (\$1,695) | $(\$ 1,605)$ | (\$1,692) | (\$1,512) | (\$16,427) |
| Taxes | (20\%) | 209 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Net Profit |  | \$ 834 | (\$507) | ( $\$ 1.702$ ) | (\$1,790) | ( $\$ 1,700$ ) | (\$1.787) | (\$1,697) | (\$1,785) | (\$1,695) | (\$1,605) | (\$1,692) | (\$1.512) | (\$16,427) |


(continued)
Exhibit 8-16 (Continued)


Exhibit 8-17 Balance Sheet

| Portland Freelancers Café BALANCE SHEET <br> for the Year Ending 12/31/2003 |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Opening | Closing |
| ASSETS |  |  |
| Current Assets: |  |  |
| Cash | \$110,000 | \$20,474 |
| Accounts Receivable | 0 | 0 |
| Total Current Assets | \$110,000 | \$20,474 |
| Fixed Assets (Property and Equipment): |  |  |
| Soundproof Room | \$ 15,000 | \$15,000 |
| Espresso Machine | 2,000 | 2,000 |
| Workstations | 30,000 | 30,000 |
| Supplies/Equipment | 25,000 | 25,000 |
| Furniture | 3,000 | 3,000 |
| Fixtures | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| Total Property and Equipment | \$80,000 | \$80,000 |
| Less Accumulated Depreciation | \$ 0 | \$15,996 |
| Total Property and Equipment (Net) | \$80,000 | \$64,004 |
| Total Assets | \$190,000 | \$84,478 |
| LIABILITIES AND OWNER'S EQUITY |  |  |
| Current Liabilities: |  |  |
| Accounts Payable | \$ 0 | \$ 0 |
| Total Current Liabilities | \$ 0 | \$ 0 |
| Long-Term Liability (Uncle's Loan) | \$ 50,000 | \$32,377 |
| Total Liabilities | \$ 50,000 | \$32,377 |
| Owner's Equity | \$140,000 | \$52,101 |
| Amy | 40\% | 40\% |
| Steve | 40\% | 40\% |
| Steve's Brother | 20\% | 20\% |
| Total Liabilities and Owner's Equity | \$190,000 | \$84,478 |


[^0]:    *Note: This is a fictional case.

