

# SMALL BUSINESS NEWS



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

Summer 2023



---

4-5

**On the cover:** Pizza shop owners open brick and mortar with financial help from the Center

3

Add 'word of mouth' to your marketing plan & hear your customers rave

6-7

My business is growing, now what? Get tips from our business development specialist.

---



# Housing loans available

Little to no credit history or low credit score? We may be able to help.

The Center for Rural Affairs believes in building sustainable communities. To serve more diverse community members, we are often more flexible than traditional lenders.



\$5,000 to \$100,000

## Information and terms:

- Term: Up to 15 years and will be amortized over up to 30 years
- Down payment: We do not require applicants to provide a down payment on property to be purchased. However, applicants who provide a down payment may be eligible for discounted interest rate
- Use of funds: Purchase of home, owner occupied rehabilitation or renovation, emergency repair to a property.

For more information, visit [cfra.org/homeloans](http://cfra.org/homeloans), call 402.687.2100, or email [loans@cfra.org](mailto:loans@cfra.org).



CENTER for RURAL AFFAIRS

145 MAIN STREET, PO BOX 136, LYONS, NE 68038

Small Business News is available both in print and electronically.

The Center for Rural Affairs is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Editing and design by Rhea Landholm and Kylie Kai.  
Printed at Enterprise Publishing, Blair, Nebraska.

Address corrections:  
Call 402.687.2100 or email [info@cfra.org](mailto:info@cfra.org)

On the cover: Cristina Hernandez and Jonathan Galina of Chilangos Mexican Pizza in South Sioux City  
| Photo by Kylie Kai

# Add 'word of mouth' to your marketing plan

By Juliet Wright. Jessie Eby contributed to this article.



Have you ever raved to your friends and family about an experience you had with a business? Or have you ever been swayed to try a new business due to a friend's recommendation? If so, you've participated in one of the oldest forms of advertising: word of mouth marketing.

Word of mouth marketing has always played a pivotal role in marketing for businesses, especially in smaller rural communities where word travels fast. With the dawn of social media, customer reviews (negative and positive alike) are amplified and can reach a much larger audience. Now more than ever, it's important to consider how word of mouth marketing plays into your marketing plan.

## ▶ **Trusted Advertising**

When we get a suggestion from a trusted friend or family member, it carries more weight than paid advertising. Why? Because we know that person isn't being paid to sell us something, they're simply sharing a recommendation. Word of mouth marketing is powerful because it means your current customers are vouching for your products or services, which brings a certain level of authenticity to potential customers. When clients experience something truly amazing, they become your biggest advocates, sharing positive reviews with others and helping to grow your business in a meaningful way.

On the flip side, word of mouth marketing can have potentially disastrous effects if your business isn't meeting your customer's expectations. A negative review will travel faster than a positive one and could be hard to reverse. Think about it—if your friend receives

terrible service at a restaurant and the food is only mediocre, how likely are you to make a reservation there?

## ▶ **Is word of mouth marketing important for my business?**

If you're reading this and you own a business, it's safe to assume that word of mouth marketing is important for your business. Word of mouth marketing can make or break any business, but it's essential in industries where customer relationships are crucial and customer service is part of the experience. Most businesses have at least a certain degree of customer service to them, but if your business doesn't focus on selling a tangible product and you rely on repeat customers, you probably fall into this camp.

## ▶ **How can I leverage word of mouth marketing?**

The tricky thing about word of mouth marketing is that you can't control it—which, in essence, is why it's so impactful to your potential customers. Instead, your main focus should be on what you can control: the customer experience. Strive to provide a great product and an outstanding experience for your patrons. People love to talk and share the things they're passionate about, so give them something great to talk about. What would you want your customers to tell their friends about your business? Consider how you can give them an experience you would want them to share with their friends.

Read more at [cfra.org/blog](http://cfra.org/blog). For marketing assistance for your business, contact our staff at [wbc@cfra.org](mailto:wbc@cfra.org) or 402.870.1521. 📧

Business Resource





**Cristina Hernandez and Jonathan Galina opened a storefront for Chilangos Mexican Pizza in South Sioux City, Nebraska, with help from the Center for Rural Affairs, including Veronica Spindola, Latino Loan Specialist, pictured. | Photos by Kylie Kai**

# Restaurant owner serves Nebraskans and Iowans an authentic taste of Mexico City

By Liz Stewart

With a dream to open a business and the drive to contribute financially to her household, Cristina Hernandez began cooking food to sell out of her home, starting with the recipes she knew best and learning new ones along the way.

Cristina's dishes became popular and started selling enough that she and her husband considered opening their own business with a storefront. Eventually, they were able to make that dream a reality, and on April 1, 2020, Cristina and her family opened Chilangos Mexican Pizza in South Sioux City, Nebraska.

Their location is small and initially did not have a complete kitchen or commercial kitchen hood. They did not have the resources to buy the correct equipment, and a six-month delay in opening left Cristina feeling defeated. She asked other business owners for the best place to find assistance and was told to trust the Center for Rural Affairs.

"My family has always been business-oriented, so we knew we could do it," said Cristina. "But, we weren't sure what path to take at first. Thanks to the Center's guidance we could open our restaurant."

In 2021, with financial assistance from the Center, she was able to buy the necessary kitchen equipment to operate the business.

Veronica Spindola, Latino loan specialist with the Center, worked with Cristina on the loan process.

"Cristina is an impressive woman—she is a hard worker and she's passionate about what she does," said Veronica. "I love her creativity, not only to build an amazing and attractive menu but also to create a business space that is welcoming. You can feel the good vibes as soon as you enter her restaurant. Her entrepreneurial spirit and good business practices are going to take her a long way on her business path."



Cristina also received one-on-one business coaching from Veronica.

“She reminds me that I can do this, and to keep working hard,” said Cristina. “Sometimes it’s not just the guidance that helps, it’s the motivation to keep going. Having somebody believe in me and support me really encouraged me and gave me confidence. The Center truly has helped me establish my business.”

Cristina and her husband, along with five full-time and three part-time employees, run the day-to-day operations at Chilangos Mexican Pizza. They focus on providing an authentic Mexican food experience.

The menu includes chilaquiles, stuffed peppers, tortas, gorditas, huaraches, hamburgers, and more made to order with fresh ingredients. Their pizzas are also made fresh and prepared with Mexican ingredients like chorizo or asada.

Cristina says customers may not find pizzas like hers anywhere else.

“My husband is from Mexico City and those who have been able to visit Mexico City or those who are from Mexico City know the gastronomy there is very broad,” she said. “He took me there so I could experience it, because he wanted something that reminded him of home.”

That trip solidified their decision to open something locally that would be as authentic as possible.

“I have always liked the kitchen, and ever since I was 15 years old I’ve been working in restaurants, so I am familiar with managing a restaurant,” Cristina said. “So, we combined our gifts and dreams in gastronomy.”

Along with authenticity, the business owners pride themselves on going above and beyond for their customers.

“If a customer comes in and asks for something we will try our best to meet that need—we’ll say no if we have to, but we’re always looking for ways to make it a yes,” said Cristina. “I tell my employees they don’t work just for me, they also work for our customers because they are the ones who pay. I just sign the checks, but at the end of the day it’s the customers who they’re serving. As a result, they see it as an opportunity to treat others well.”

Eventually, Cristina would like to open another restaurant or expand her current business, and she always has the Center in mind to call on for help.

“Working with the Center has been great,” she said. “Every time I have an issue or a problem, I call and ask questions. The Center doesn’t just offer financial help, it’s so much more. You can learn from their resources and classes, and you also have a connection with people who encourage you to do your best every day.”

*Need financing for equipment or repairs for your business? Contact your regional loan specialist. Find yours on pages 10 and 11. 📍*



# Grow with your business

By Brissa Borjas-Esparza, business development specialist. Jessie Eby contributed to this article.

Nobody sets out with the goal of staying small when they start their business. In fact, growth is the driving motivation behind most of the decisions that are made in a business. It's easy to come up with ideas about how to grow, but what should you do once your efforts begin to pay off?

## My business is growing, now what?

The life of a business owner is a little bit like a rollercoaster. You work so hard to get your business off the ground, slowly climbing little by little. Your growth is a little bit like the speed and momentum you build up as you drop off the first peak. It can help propel you through the next curves and loops if you have a plan in place to leverage that momentum. Here are a few things to consider as you move forward.

### Understand your audience

No matter what you do, it's important to keep your audience at the heart of your decisions. From marketing to operations, your goal should be to serve your customers well. Knowing your audience can help you make informed decisions regarding your product offerings, business operations, and marketing strategy. You can find key demographic information by analyzing data from multiple sources. Pay attention to your customers' buying preferences or service contracts. This can drive decisions that affect revenue such as product offerings, market share, and regional expansion.

### Focus on leads

Leads are important, even as your business begins to grow. Securing leads both organically and through marketing efforts boosts brand awareness and increases your sales.

Word of mouth marketing will likely begin to play a role in your business as you gain momentum, but it's important to continue to generate and follow up on your leads. This ensures a steady stream of business, even during the leaner cycles of your business.



### Create a vision

Visualizing a path for growth makes expansion a smoother process. Set goals that support growth and share them throughout your company. It's important to get your team on the same page about your growth goals and the steps you'll take to get there. We go further faster when we go together.

## Refer to your business plan

We've mentioned the importance of referring to your business plan before. When your business begins to grow, it's important to go back to your business plan to determine if any changes need to be made to accommodate your new growth. Here are a few questions to consider as you look back at your business plan.

- Planning: Are the resources you started with still sufficient?
- Projections: Is your growth on track with the timeline you initially set? Are your sales projections still on track?
- Lending: Does your business need additional funds to support your growth?
- Staffing: Are you sufficiently staffed?

to handle business at your current level? Is it time to consider hiring employees?

- **Capital:** Do you have enough money to sustain operations at this pace? What plans do you need to make to account for future growth?
- **Cash flow:** Is your current method of cash flow management working?

If your business needs additional funds, or if you have questions on capital and growth, reach out to our loan specialists. We can help with one-on-one coaching and may even be able to help financially. Find your loan specialist on pages 10 and 11.

## Plan for future growth

The best indicator for future success is taking an honest look at your past performance. What went well? What could have been improved? Looking back can help identify new strategies for growth.

## Our best advice for business owners

Being a business owner isn't easy. Here are a few of our best tips from the trenches.

## Build a support network

Being a business owner can be isolating. Having a network of like-minded people to bounce ideas off of, work through struggles with, and go to for support/offer support can help. The Center for Rural Affairs' Women's Business Center hosts networking events in select communities in Nebraska. You can also meet others at business groups within your community, such as chambers of commerce and community clubs.



Do you need personal, one-on-one business assistance? Our business specialists and consultants can work with you virtually or in-person on business planning, financial goals, and more. Request an appointment by emailing [wbc@cfra.org](mailto:wbc@cfra.org).

## Be specific with your business goals

Big goals are great, but if you can break them down into smaller, more granular goals, it makes them more realistic. Making regular progress and celebrating small wins along the way will help keep you on track toward your big goals.

## Delegate when possible

You don't have to do it all. Figure out what your strengths are and find others to fill in the rest. We all do best when we can focus on our strengths and rely on others to carry the weight in the areas where we don't excel.

## Find your best niche and stick to it

Your target audience doesn't expect you to be their ultimate problem solver. They come to you for a very specific service; focus on doing that well.

## Don't quit your day job immediately

It's easy to get swept away with excitement when your business begins to grow. Stick it out at your day job a little while longer. When you're ready to make your business your primary source of income, do so with a solid plan for your financial success.

Remember, growing pains are inevitable. As growth prompts change, things are bound to be uncomfortable at times. Keep moving forward and don't get discouraged. 📩



# Our loan products

Apply at [cfra.org/loans](https://cfra.org/loans)

## ✓ Small Business Loan

Up to \$250,000 for working capital, equipment, inventory, and real estate.

## ✓ Express Loan

For borrowers with credit needs less than \$20,000. Fewer documents and faster decision.

## ✓ Housing Loan

Mortgage loans between \$5,000 and \$100,000 are available for purchase of home, owner-occupied rehabilitation or renovation, or emergency repair to a property.

## ✓ Meat Processing Loan

Loans between \$50,000 and \$5 million are available for expansion of existing business, start-up of new business, real estate purchase, new construction, facilities update or expansion, equipment purchase, energy efficiency upgrades to facilities and equipment, purchase of an existing business, or working capital.

# Business development services

## Business counseling

Business development specialists are available for consultations on business troubleshooting, cash flow and budget, loan packaging, and more.

## Loan specialists

We have a statewide network of loan specialists ready and willing to help you along your small business journey. Find your specialist on pages 10 and 11.

## Start-up checklist

You have a great idea for a new small business. Congratulations! That's the first step. But, you need to do a few other things to turn that idea into a business. We offer an online checklist with actions to get you started. Visit [cfra.org/business-start-checklist](https://cfra.org/business-start-checklist).

## Events and networking

We host various workshops and networking opportunities focused on emergency preparedness, marketing, business plans, social media, specific industries, and more. To stay up to date, visit [cfra.org/events](https://cfra.org/events).



Funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. All SBA funded programs are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. The Center for Rural Affairs is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## Entrepreneur of the Year Award



### Bambino's Daycare

**About the award:** The Entrepreneur Award recognizes entrepreneurs who have received Center services and achieved remarkable success in business while demonstrating the values of innovation, community leadership, and social responsibility.

**Awardee information:** Reyna Sibrian, her sister Blanca González, and their mother, Joaquina Rojas, exemplify the entrepreneurial spirit that is crucial in rural Nebraska. Entrepreneurship builds robust local economies, creates jobs, and increases incomes.

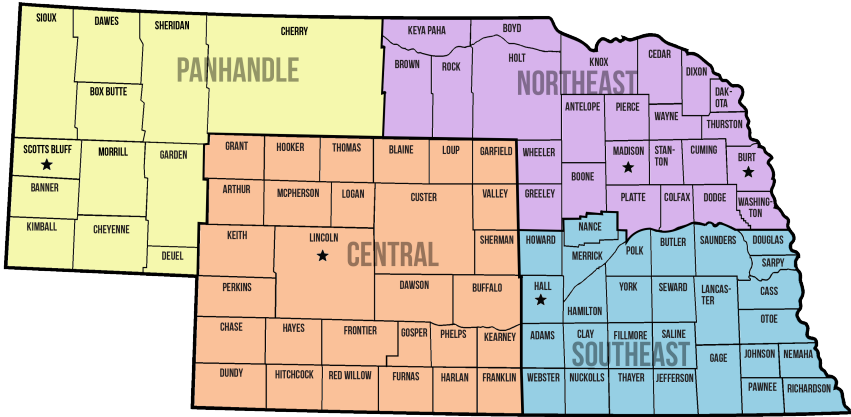
With hopes of providing a home-like environment and a bilingual curriculum for children from infants through fifth grade, Reyna, Blanca, and Joaquina opened Bambino's Daycare in South Sioux City in February 2019.

With a small business loan and coaching from the Center for Rural Affairs, the three women were able to purchase the building where they run part of their day care. Veronica Spindola, Latino loan specialist, helped them with the loan process, and they received funding in late 2018.

In addition, Reyna has attended business and advertising workshops and got one-on-one business counseling through the Center.

Award Spotlight

# Find your lender



## Directors

### Lending Services Director:

Kim Preston  
 145 Main St., PO Box 136, Lyons, NE 68038  
 Phone: 402.687.2100 x 1008  
 Fax: 402.687.2200  
 kimp@cfra.org

### Women's Business Center Director:

Jessica Campos  
*Habla español*  
 3180 W Hwy 34, Room 200  
 PO Box 294, Grand Island, NE 68802  
 Phone: 402.870.1521  
 Fax: 402.687.2200  
 jessicac@cfra.org

## Loan Specialists

### Panhandle Region:

Nicci Chitwood, Loan Specialist  
 615 S Beltline Hwy West, Suite 1  
 Scottsbluff, NE 69361  
 Phone: 308.631.0157  
 nicholec@cfra.org

### Northeast Region:

Lori Schrader, Senior Loan Specialist  
 PO Box 332  
 Norfolk, NE 68072  
 Phone: 402.870.7070  
 loris@cfra.org

### Central Region:

Becky Parker, Loan Specialist  
 PO Box 1761  
 North Platte, NE 69103  
 Phone: 308.534.3508  
 beckyp@cfra.org

### Southeast Region:

Garrett Seagren, Lending Assistant  
 145 Main St., PO Box 136  
 Lyons, NE 68038  
 Phone: 402.580.1007  
 garretts@cfra.org



## Latino Loan Specialists (statewide availability)

---

Griselda Rendon  
**Habla español**  
3180 W Hwy 34, Room 200  
Grand Island, NE 68801  
Phone: 308.850.4820  
griseldar@cfra.org

Veronica Spindola  
**Habla español**  
PO Box 343  
Columbus, NE 68602  
Phone: 402.942.1113  
veronicas@cfra.org

## Business Development Specialist (statewide availability)

---

Brissa Borjas Esparza  
**Habla español**  
3180 W Hwy 34, Room 200  
Grand Island, NE 68801  
Phone: 402.870.2749  
brissabe@cfra.org

## Questions and loan application process

---



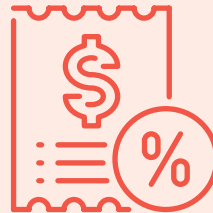
..... [cfra.org/loans](http://cfra.org/loans)



..... 402.687.2100



..... [loans@cfra.org](mailto:loans@cfra.org)



SERVICE MAP



Join in the conversation. Our loan specialists are on Facebook.



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

145 MAIN STREET, PO BOX 136  
LYONS, NE 68038