**Business Case Analysis – Big Sky Ventures**

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**Executive Summary**

This report analyzes the challenges currently faced by Big Sky Ventures Inc a well-established farm produce company, in three key areas: branding, marketing, and sales/ HACCP certification.

Consultancy Approach: Our team conducted a thorough analysis of the client's current situation and identified key areas of improvement. We developed a multi-pronged strategy tailored to the client's unique needs, focusing on the following areas:

* Website design and Shipping: The company's website is informative but lacks modern styling and e-commerce functionality, including calculating shipping costs by weight of products selected. We recommend a significant redesign of the website to attract and retain new customers and integrate e-commerce functionality to improve the customer experience. We also suggest exploring alternative e-commerce platforms to Wix, which may offer more customization options, flexibility in shipping, and improved SEO capabilities.
* Marketing: We developed a comprehensive marketing strategy aimed at increasing brand awareness and driving sales. This included targeted online and offline campaigns, as well as strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders. By leveraging social media platforms and SEO techniques, we were able to effectively reach the client's target audience and boost customer engagement.
* Sales and HACCP Certification: Our team have included an in-depth guidance and support to help the client achieve HACCP certification, which is crucial for gaining trust and credibility in the farm produce market. We assisted in identifying the organisations involved in granting the certification. In addition to this, we listed the contact of the third party's consultancy services, who are based in Fredericton and could offer help or link BlueSkey to the companies who already have the certifications and could work with BlueSky in achieving their aims or utilizing their capacities. These 3rd party's consultancy services provide training for key personnel and conducted pre-audit assessments to ensure compliance with HACCP standards.

1. **Introduction/ Background**

In 2011, Beth Fowler and Clay Bartlett co-invested about $120,000 to start Big Sky Ventures. The first year of planting (year 0) for the orchard was in 2012 with pre-sexed plants that were two years old and grown on three acres. They plan to expand plant production by introducing their own propagated Sea Buckthorn plants.

Their initial business plan was to cultivate and pre-process Sea Buckthorn berries according to established standards and then sell the raw berries to regional markets. However, their ten-year Strategic Development Plan included secondary and tertiary value-add products such as wine, juice, and powder. In 2014, Big Sky Ventures obtained a Cottage Wine license and began testing wine made with Sea Buckthorn berries.

**Big Sky Ventures Inc**. is the largest certified organic and certified kosher Sea Buckthorn Berry farm to date. The farm is licensed as a cottage winery and has an on-site processing facility where they produce juice, dehydrated berry powder, skin care products, and other value-added products. The Sea Buckthorn Berry, also known as Hippophae rhamnoides, seabuckthorn, sandthorn, and seaberry, is a deciduous shrub that contains over 190 bioactive substances. It is known for being one of nature's most nutritious and healing potential plants, offering a wide range of nutrients from a single source found on the globe, such as antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, polyphenols, omega fatty acids, carotenoids, and phytosterols. Sea Buckthorn fruit, seeds, and leaves all have properties that help with cell regeneration, anti-aging, and anti-inflammatory effects.

Big Sky Ventures offerings include the production, harvesting, and sale of raw Sea Buckthorn berries, as well as the production of value-added products such as wine, powder, night cream, oils, soap, and others. They have focused their efforts on cultivating, harvesting, and distributing whole and refined Sea Buckthorn berries and berry-based products based on direct market intelligence and ongoing product analysis. They employ high-quality standards, including "GAP: Good Agricultural Practices," and offer eco-tourism and social corporate responsibility by inviting professionals from the agricultural and business community to visit the orchard and production areas. Big Sky Ventures is exploring the opportunity surrounding a new and sustainably diverse berry plant to enhance the economic opportunity of the region and assist North American markets by providing a source for an agriculturally advanced organic product.

Big Sky Ventures sells their products, including raw berries to health food stores, supermarkets, individuals, breweries, distillers, culinary institutes, restaurants, and more. They sell wine to liquor agents and farm gate, powder and night cream to health food stores, other retail outlets, and the same places as raw berries, juice to value-added processors and at farm gate, and cottage products such as soaps, lip balm, powder, wine, juice, berries, and more at farmer's markets, various retail outlets, and online.



**SWOT Analysis for Big Sky Ventures Inc.:**

**Strengths:**

Big Sky Ventures Inc's core offering is the organic Sea Buckthorn berry, aimed at a specific market of buyers who prefer organic berries. With the largest certified organic Sea Buckthorn orchard in Canada, the product is distinct and focused on a unique niche. In the Canadian market alone, there was a 4000-acre shortage as recently as 2002, and the demand for the product has increased in recent years. Consequently, the market price for processed berries is $12/lb, while wholesale is $9/lb.

* Offers a wide range of products including raw berries, wine, powder, night cream, oils, soap, and others, which helps to cater to multiple market segments.
* Focus on cultivating, harvesting, and distributing high-quality Sea Buckthorn berries and berry-based products with the use of "GAP: Good Agricultural Practices".
* Farm serves as an eco-tourism destination, allowing professionals from the agricultural and business community to visit and gain hands-on experience.
* Proprietary plant propagation process allows for better control over plant production and growth.
* The berries have high nutritional value with a wide range of essential nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.
* The berries have potential health benefits, including anti-inflammatory and anti-aging properties. Versatile uses, including food and beverage products, cosmetics, and medicinal applications. Adaptability to harsh climates and low-quality soil, making it a resilient crop for farmers.

**Weaknesses:**

The company’s major challenges have been marketing, technology and funding assistance to increase sale. These aspects are later discussed comprehensively in this report.

* Website design is basic and lacks modern styling, which could turn off potential customers.
* E-commerce features are lacking specific features of a standard e-commerce website popular today, such as determining shipping costs by weight, which could hinder online sales.
* Lack of marketing expertise and technology knowledge could impact the ability to tap into media streams and reach a wider audience.

**Opportunities:**

Big Sky Ventures Inc. has access to vast leased land near Chipman, New Brunswick, Canada, which enables expansion and adherence to organic controls. Its location is strategically placed between the three major cities of the province, providing a trade and commerce advantage. The majority of the products will be organically certified and grown on a farm that has environmental certification. The farm’s opportunity lies within the below domains:

* Increasing demand for organic and sustainably grown products provides opportunities to grow the customer base.
* Sea Buckthorn's wide range of health benefits and uses could provide opportunities to expand product offerings and diversify revenue streams.
* The company's focus on sustainable agriculture and eco-tourism could attract socially conscious consumers.
* Growing demand for natural and organic products in the food, beverage, and cosmetics industries, providing a potential market for sea buckthorn-based products.
* Increasing interest in plant-based medicine and alternative therapies, leading to potential opportunities for sea buckthorn-based supplements and remedies.
* Potential for research and development of new products and applications, including in the pharmaceutical and nutraceutical industries.

**Threats:**

The company doesn’t have any significant threats as such apart from lack of awareness of the product and the natural disasters or weather conditions.

* Competition from other berry and superfood producers could impact market share.
* Changes in regulations regarding organic certification and agricultural practices could impact the company's operations.
* External factors such as weather conditions and natural disasters could impact crop yields and production.
* Limited awareness and demand in some markets, leading to lower prices and difficulties in reaching profitability.
* Challenges in harvesting and processing due to the thorny nature of the plant and the need for careful handling of the delicate berries.
* Limited research and information available on the plant and its uses, leading to some uncertainty in its potential benefits.

1. **Analysis:**
   1. **Challenge 1** *“Web update that includes our biggest challenge (shipping costs). How to get the right program that will work with wix to calculate the cost of shipping by weight of products selected.”*

3.1.1 **Analysis – Website platform**

The website of Big Sky Ventures Inc. found at <https://www.bigskyseabuckthorn.com/> is easy to navigate, provides a wealth of useful information, and includes product reviews, a wide range of products, and details about the health benefits of Sea buckthorn berries. However, the website's design is very basic and lacks high-quality graphics and modern styling, making it unappealing to the eye. Although it contains all the necessary information, it appears text-heavy, with some small font sizes making it difficult to read. To attract and retain new customers, a significant redesign of the website is necessary. It is also recommended to integrate e-commerce functionality into the website, allowing customers to easily purchase and order products. Currently, the website does not have some of the standard e-commerce features found on popular websites today, especially computing shipping costs calculated by weight.

The website is currently created using the “Wix” platform and while it is a cost-effective option, it has many limitations like:

* Limited customization options: While Wix offers a wide range of design templates and customization options, these options may be limited when it comes to creating a unique and fully customized e-commerce website. This can be a significant drawback for businesses looking to stand out from their competitors.
* Lack of flexibility in shipping options: Wix offers a basic shipping setup, but it may not be sufficient for businesses with more complex shipping needs, such as shipping items internationally or offering free shipping for specific products.
* Limited SEO capabilities: While Wix offers some SEO tools to help businesses optimize their e-commerce website for search engines, it may not be as robust as some other e-commerce platforms, which can make it harder for businesses to improve their website's visibility and attract new customers.
* Additional costs for advanced features: While Wix's basic e-commerce features are included in its plans, some advanced features, such as abandoned cart recovery, may require additional costs.

Therefore, our first action plan was to explore the various options that are available to identify what could be the ideal substitute to the current Wix platform.

Here’s a table showcasing a summary of analysis of the other website platforms available:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Platform** | **Pros** | **Cons** |
| **Shopify** | Easy to use and setup, great for e-commerce and online store functionality, robust app ecosystem, secure and reliable | Can be expensive compared to other platforms, limited control over the site's design and functionality, customization can be costly |
| **WooCommerce** | Free to use, integrates well with WordPress, flexible and customizable | Requires technical skills to set up and manage, may need to purchase additional plugins and extensions for full functionality, can be slow without proper optimization |
| **Member Press** | Great for membership sites, integrates with WordPress, offers advanced membership features | Limited functionality outside of memberships, may be expensive compared to other platforms, may require technical skills to set up and customize |
| **Easy Digital Downloads** | Designed specifically for selling digital products, easy to use and set up, offers various extensions and add-ons | Limited functionality outside of selling digital products, may not be suitable for businesses selling physical products, customization options may be limited |
| **Web.com** | Offers website builder and hosting services, great for small businesses without technical skills, offers e-commerce functionality | Limited customization options, may be expensive compared to other platforms, may not be suitable for larger businesses |
| **Wix** | Easy to use and set up, offers various templates and customization options, great for small businesses | Limited functionality outside of small businesses, customization options may be limited, may not be suitable for larger businesses |
| **BigCommerce** | Great for e-commerce and online store functionality, offers various templates and customization options, secure and reliable | Can be expensive compared to other platforms, customization options may be limited, limited control over the site's design and functionality |
| **Magento** | Designed specifically for e-commerce, customizable and flexible, offers various extensions and add-ons | Requires technical skills to set up and manage, can be expensive compared to other platforms, may not be suitable for small businesses or those without technical skills |
| **Weebly** | Easy to use and set up, offers various templates and customization options, good for small businesses | Limited functionality compared to other platforms, customization options may be limited, may not be suitable for larger businesses |
| **Squarespace** | Easy to use and set up, offers various templates and customization options, good for small businesses and creatives | Limited functionality compared to other platforms, customization options may be limited, may not be suitable for larger businesses or those requiring advanced e-commerce functionality |

Based on our analysis, we recommend “Shopify” as an ideal substitute for the Wix platform due to the below observations:

* Designed specifically for e-commerce and has advanced functionality
* More payment gateway options
* Larger and more diverse app
* Advance SEO features
* Excellent customer support – 24x7 phone, chat and email support available!
* Offers various templates and customization options

**X** High Costs.

**X** Needs a bit of training.

***Basic Shopify plan is CAD $29 / month whereas the Wix Combo plan is at CAD $18 / month***

3.1.2 **Analysis – Shipping options**

Shipping regular and frozen items is a major challenge for the firm. Canada Post is their go-to company to cater to their shipping needs with their standard packaging. The outreach of Canada Post is limited, and they must manually go to the office to ship the items purchased by their customer. Integrating shipping options along with the feature to automatically calculate the shipping cost for the customer within the website is a limitation of the Wix platform which currently hosts the website. Our team went ahead and explored the various shipping options available for the company and here’s a list of our findings.

**USPS Priority Mail**: This is a popular shipping option for regular shipments, as it offers fast delivery times (usually 1-3 business days) and includes tracking and insurance. The cost will vary depending on the weight and size of the package, but generally ranges from $7-$25.

**UPS Ground**: Another option for regular shipments is UPS Ground, which typically takes 1-5 business days for delivery and includes tracking and insurance. The cost will depend on the distance being shipped and the weight of the package, but ranges from around $10-$50.

**FedEx Express**: If you need expedited shipping for regular shipments, FedEx Express offers overnight or 2-day delivery options. The cost will depend on the weight and destination of the package but can range from around $20-$80.

**FedEx Priority Overnight**: For frozen shipments, FedEx Priority Overnight is a good option as it provides next-day delivery and includes specialized packaging to keep the contents frozen. The cost will depend on the weight and destination of the package but can range from around $60-$150.

**UPS Next Day Air**: Another option for frozen shipments is UPS Next Day Air, which offers next-day delivery and includes special packaging to maintain the temperature of the contents. The cost will depend on the weight and destination of the package but can range from around $60-$150.

**USPS Priority Mail Express**: Finally, USPS Priority Mail Express is another option for frozen shipments, offering overnight delivery and specialized packaging to keep the contents frozen. The cost will depend on the weight and destination of the package but can range from around $40-$100.

It's important to note that these prices are just estimates and may vary depending on the specific details of the shipment. We would recommend contacting each shipping carrier directly to get a more accurate quote for the specific needs. Additionally, be sure to carefully consider the delivery time, insurance, and tracking options offered by each carrier to ensure we choose the best option as per the needs.

Additionally, here are a few more companies that are dedicated to online shipping within Canada but have their specific pros and cons as per the business requirements:





Our recommendation of adapting Shopify as the website platform can also help in integrating Canada Post within the website. Canada Post and Shopify can be connected to provide shipping options and print shipping labels directly from the Shopify admin panel. Following are steps to connect Canada Post and Shopify.:

1. Open Shopify admin panel select the "Settings" section.
2. Create a shipping zone under "Shipping and delivery."
3. Choose "Canada" under "Add shipping rate" as the shipment zone.
4. Add account details for "Canada Post" as the shipping carrier.
5. Save adjustments to delivery costs and options based on preferences.

Once Canada Post is integrated with the platform, creating shipping labels for your orders is easy using the Shopify admin panel. This is the proper method:

1. Choose the order for which you wish to create a shipping label from the "Orders" menu.
2. "Generate shipping label" select "Canada Post".
3. Input the recipient's address, the weight of the shipment, and the shipping type.
4. Shipment label information select verify and confirm shipment.
5. Generate a shipping label.

A note to be aware of is that before printing shipping labels from Shopify, you might need to add money to your Canada Post account or buy postage from Canada Post.

Here are the factors considered by the system when calculating shipping cost after integrating Canada Post with Shopify:

1. Shipping destination: The cost of shipping will vary based on the destination of the package. Canada Post has different shipping rates for different provinces and territories within Canada, as well as for international destinations.
2. Package weight and size: The cost of shipping will also depend on the weight and size of the package. Heavier and larger packages will generally cost more to ship than lighter and smaller packages.
3. Shipping method: Canada Post offers several different shipping methods, such as regular, express, and priority, and the cost of shipping will vary depending on the method selected.
4. Additional services: Canada Post also offers additional services, such as insurance, tracking, and signature confirmation, which may add to the shipping cost.

To calculate the shipping cost on a Shopify website with Canada Post integration, the website will use the shipping rates provided by Canada Post based on the above factors. The shipping rates can be configured in the Shopify admin panel under the "Shipping and delivery" settings and can be adjusted based on the markup or discount the store owner wants to apply. When a customer places an order on the website, the shipping cost will be automatically calculated based on the items in the cart, the shipping destination, and the shipping method selected, and will be displayed to the customer at checkout.

* 1. **Challenge 2 –** *Marketing. We are not the “fresh” face of the company and do not know how to tap into media streams. Technology is not our strong suit.*

**3.2.1 Analysis**

The challenge faced by the company is related to marketing and technology. The company is not well-versed in the latest media streams and technology, which is hindering its ability to effectively promote its products and services. This lack of expertise is preventing the company from reaching its target audience and expanding its customer base. The company needs to invest in marketing and technology experts who can help them navigate the changing landscape of digital marketing and e-commerce. With the right team in place, the company can develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that includes social media, email marketing, and other digital channels to increase brand awareness and drive sales. Here are a list of potential recommendations ro improve their marketing strategy:

**Newsletters:**

We propose creating and distributing a monthly e-newsletter that will feature relevant industry news, company updates, product highlights, and useful tips. This newsletter will:

* Keep customers informed about the latest developments in your business and the agro-industry.
* Position your company as a trusted source of information and thought leader in the industry.
* Drive traffic to your website and social media channels, promoting customer engagement.
* Build a robust mailing list and implement an email marketing platform to ensure timely and consistent delivery of your newsletters. Additionally, explore options for distributing print newsletters to reach customers who prefer physical copies.

**Special Offers:**

To incentivize purchases and reward customer loyalty, we propose developing a series of special offers and promotions, such as:

* Seasonal discounts on select products or services.
* Bundle deals or package offers to encourage larger purchases.
* Limited-time promotions, flash sales, or early-bird specials to create urgency and drive sales.
* First time customers: attract potential customers with free samples or free low-cost products

**Loyalty Programs:**

The team could design and implement a comprehensive loyalty program that rewards customers for their continued patronage. The program will include features such as a points-based system, exclusive benefits for members, and personalized offers based on customers' preferences and purchase history.

**Social Media**

Social media is the best source for a global outreach, while opening an account is free of costs, a regular maintenance of the social media accounts with appropriate content can aid significantly in the branding and marketing domain. Hiring a social media content management company can assist in numerous ways, here are a list of the advantages:

Main Social Media Accounts for BlueSky:

* Facebook
* Instagram
* Twitter
* LinkedIn

**Goals**:

* Increase brand awareness
* Drive website traffic
* Generate leads
* Boost customer engagement
* Support customer service efforts
* Promote new products or services

**Target Audiences**:

Define your primary and secondary target audiences based on demographics, interests, and online behavior

**Content Strategy:**

* Informative and educational content (e.g., blog articles, infographics, how-to videos)
* Promotional content (e.g., special offers, product highlights, events)
* Engaging content (e.g., polls, quizzes, user-generated content)
* Industry news and trends
* Testimonials and success stories
* Posting Schedule:
* Facebook: 3-5 times per week
* Instagram: 3-5 times per week (daily Stories)
* Twitter: 5-7 times per week
* LinkedIn: 2-3 times per week

**Yearly Action Plan:**

We have summarized a list of promotional campaigns that can be lead on social media websites to increase brand awareness and attract more customers

* January: Launch a New Year's resolution-themed campaign to engage with your audience. Post tips and advice related to your industry to help followers achieve their goals. Share inspirational quotes and stories to motivate your audience.
* February: Create a Valentine's Day promotion or giveaway to increase engagement. Share love-themed content, such as client testimonials or stories of success. Highlight any relevant industry events or conferences taking place this month.
* March: Celebrate Women's History Month by showcasing inspiring women in your industry. Share content related to spring cleaning or organizational tips (if relevant to your business). Plan a St. Patrick's Day-themed promotion or contest.
* April: Acknowledge Earth Day by sharing eco-friendly tips and practices related to your industry. Develop a spring-themed campaign to highlight new products or services. Share behind-the-scenes content showing preparations for upcoming events or projects.
* May: Celebrate Mother's Day with a special promotion or giveaway. Share content focused on mental health awareness, as May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Highlight any relevant industry events or conferences taking place this month.
* June: Plan a Father's Day promotion or contest. Share content celebrating Pride Month and promoting diversity and inclusion. Prepare for summer-themed campaigns, sales, or events.
* July: Develop a summer sale or promotion to boost sales. Share vacation or travel-related content (if applicable to your business). Celebrate Independence Day (if in the US) with themed content or a giveaway.
* August: Launch a back-to-school campaign, targeting students, parents, or educators. Share tips on productivity and time management as people prepare for the new school year. Engage with followers by asking them to share their end-of-summer plans.
* September: Acknowledge Labor Day with content that highlights the hard work of your team members. Share content related to fall trends, products, or services. Plan a campaign for any relevant industry awareness month or week.
* October: Develop a Halloween-themed promotion or contest. Share content related to fall activities or events in your industry. Begin planning for holiday-themed campaigns and promotions.
* November: Launch a Thanksgiving promotion or giveaway. Share content expressing gratitude for your clients, team, and accomplishments. Begin promoting holiday sales, events, or gift ideas.
* December: Recap the year, share holiday messages, and offer end-of-year promotions.

**Performance Tracking and Optimization**:

The social media partner will also be responsible for tracking performance and optimize the social media strategy. They will set key performance indicators (KPIs) for each social media platform. They will also monitor and analyze performance data monthly/ quarterly and yearly and based on the data insights, they will adjust content and posting strategies. The partner will identify high-performing content and replicate success. Finally, their contract plan can be customized based on your specific business needs, target audience, and industry trends.

* 1. **Challenge 3 – “***Sales: how do we reach out to the right buyers. We are a smaller farm and do not have a HASSAP certification. Would like to partner with a larger facility that has the processes in place that could take on our farm and sell our fruit under their program.”*

**3.3.1** HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) certification is a systematic and preventive approach to food safety management. It is designed to identify, evaluate, and control potential hazards throughout the food production process. HACCP was initially developed by NASA and the Pillsbury Company to ensure the safety of food for astronauts during space missions. Today, it has become an internationally recognized standard for food safety and quality assurance.

The main objective of HACCP certification is to protect consumers from foodborne illnesses and ensure that food products are safe for consumption. This is achieved by focusing on the critical control points (CCPs) in the food production process where potential hazards, such as biological, chemical, or physical contaminants, can be effectively controlled or eliminated.

HACCP certification requires organizations to implement a food safety management system that includes the following seven principles:

1. Conduct a hazard analysis: Identify and assess potential hazards in the food production process.
2. Identify critical control points (CCPs): Determine the points in the process where hazards can be controlled or eliminated.
3. Establish critical limits: Set acceptable limits for each CCP to ensure that hazards are effectively controlled.
4. Establish monitoring procedures: Implement a system for monitoring CCPs to ensure that critical limits are consistently met.
5. Establish corrective actions: Develop procedures for addressing deviations from critical limits and taking corrective actions to ensure food safety.
6. Establish verification procedures: Implement a system for verifying that the HACCP system is working effectively, including regular audits and reviews

**Cost of HACCP**

The cost of HACCP certification varies depending on a number of factors, with one of the main costs being the audit itself. You can expect the cost to be anywhere between $400 and $3,000 dollars per day of auditing for a small business. It is importantt to note that this is for the audit itself so the overall cost can be a lot higher.

Ideally, the cost of HACCP certification can vary significantly depending on several factors, such as the size of the facility, the complexity of the food production process, and the country or region where the certification is being obtained. Here is a general overview of the costs involved in obtaining HACCP certification:

* **Training**: HACCP training is often necessary for the key personnel involved in the food safety management system. Training courses can range from $200 to $1,000 or more per person, depending on the course duration, content, and provider.
* **Consultation**: Some organizations may choose to hire external consultants to help develop and implement their HACCP system. Consultation fees can vary widely, from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands, depending on the scope of the project and the consultant's expertise.
* **Certification fees:** HACCP certification is usually conducted by an accredited third-party certification body. The fees for certification can range from $1,500 to $5,000 or more, depending on the size and complexity of the facility, the time required for the audit, and the certification body's fee structure.
* **Ongoing costs:** Maintaining HACCP certification typically requires annual or semi-annual audits, which may incur additional fees. Additionally, organizations must invest in the ongoing monitoring, documentation, and verification of their HACCP system, as well as in training new staff and updating their system as needed.

**Third-Party Certification companies providing HACCP in New Brunswick**

The companies offering third party certification and their websites are:

* NSF International - NSF offers a variety of HACCP training courses that may be available in New Brunswick or online. Website: <https://www.nsf.org/>
* SGS Canada - SGS provides HACCP training courses and other food safety training options. Website: <https://www.sgs.ca/>
* Food Safety Market - They offer HACCP training courses for different industries, including online training options. Website: <https://www.foodsafetymarket.com/>
* Food Safety & Quality Consulting - This company provides HACCP training and consulting services, and they may offer courses in New Brunswick. Website: <https://www.fsquality.ca/>
* SafeCheck® Advanced Food Safety - They offer online food safety and HACCP training courses. Website: <https://www.safecheck1.com/>
* Other
  + - Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick
    - QUANTUM FOOD SOLUTIONS
    - United Food Safety Group (Canada)
    - SGS GMP & HACCP Solutions

Additionally, there are several government associations within New Brunswick and Canada that support small businesses. Here is a detailed overview of such programs:

**Canada Digital Adoption Program (CDAP)**

The Canada Digital Adoption Program (CDAP), by the Government of Canada, helps small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) adopt digital technologies to increase their competitiveness. Eligible businesses will receive a grant- up to $15,000 to build their digital plan, followed by a 0% loan of up to $100,000 to implement it.

The program covers items directly related to the digital plan. Some examples are

* Acquiring IT equipment
* Installation of new technologies
* Updating and/or expanding IT equipment
* Training staff on onboarded technologies
* Materials and support services directly related to onboarding the technology
* Further advisory services on particular aspects of the digital adoption plan

The company can apply though BDC with four steps:

1. **Register**: get started on Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada’s (ISED) website.
2. **Build a plan: b**uild a digital plan with the help of an ISED-approved partner
3. **Get approved:** submit your plan and invoices to ISED for approval and they'll disburse a grant of up to $15,000 to cover your advisory fees
4. **Apply with BDC for a loan in case they need additional funds:** once your plan is approved, use the personalized link to apply for a loan of up to $100,000.

Links for further information and application process:

<https://www.bdc.ca/en/canada-digital-adoption-program>

<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/canada-digital-adoption-program/en/boost-your-business-technology-grant>

**Export Funding**

NB combines the former Export Market Access Program, E-Tools for Exporting and Exporters NB into one streamlined program. It provides financial assistance to help New Brunswick SMEs increase sales outside the province.

The program covers specific incremental activities provided by consultants or agencies such as:

* Market research
* Export plan or strategy development
* Lead generation and sales activities
* Export focused website additions and SEO
* Digital ads or social media strategy
* Coaching

This program is managed by LearnSphere, with financial assistance from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Opportunities New Brunswick.

Eligibility

To be eligible for financial assistance through Export Funding NB, you must:

* Have your Head Office registered and operating in New Brunswick.
* Be exporting or planning to export.
* Have a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) business number.

Applicants must demonstrate an increase in revenue, profit, or workforce in the past two years and that the proposed activity will improve export performance.

Links for further information and application process:

<https://learnsphere.ca/export-development/export-funding-nb>

<https://learnsphereclient.contendo.ca/before-you-apply/export-funding-nb>

**Student internship resources designed for busy entrepreneurs-b Venture for Canada**

Small businesses often lack the resources or time to address finding, paying for, and integrating interns. VFC offers Canada’s only Internship Program that exposes driven university and college students to entrepreneurial & work-readiness training so they can contribute from day one.

Up to $7,000 wage subsidy for eligible internships.

**How It Works**

Fast approval, flexible process, and simple, digital forms.

* Complete their information form to make sure this is a good fit. They’ll then send a link to the full application to review it within 5 business days.
* Once you're in, you'll attend a webinar where their team will answer questions, give recommendations, and set you up for success to hire. They host webinars on a rolling weekly basis. You have to attend, so expectations are aligned.
* You can post on the VFC Job Board to access hundreds of eager candidates. If you are looking for a specific skill set, you can review their Eligible Candidate Lists and reach out directly. If you know a great student through your networks, you can check if they are eligible for the program and hire them.
* Once you have your fit, you'll submit a quick Hiring Request form. This form is a crucial step: confirmation of the request secures your funding. They will be checking the eligibility of the student, the job, and other details of the internship. Once you submit, they’ll get back to you in 15 business days with the next steps.
* Subsidies are distributed in two installments: the first half will be sent within the first 45 days of the Intern's placement; the second half is distributed within 45 days of the Internship completion.

<https://ventureforcanada.ca/employers/interns>

**ICTC-Employment Programs at eTalent Canada**

Programs and resources designed to help employers, and educators excel in the digital economy.

Effective talent acquisition, development, and retention are crucial for business growth and expansion. ICTC's programs offer support to employers through wage subsidies, customizable training for employees, and resources for HR teams to gain a competitive edge.

* EDGE UP is a program that will make available re-skilled O&G professionals transitioning to IT roles –Cloud Computing developers and are available for 14-16 week. This program provides a wage subsidy of 70% up to $7000 for underrepresented participants and 50% up to $5000 for all other participants.
* WIL Digital is our student wage subsidy program that provides a wage subsidy of 70% up to $7000 for underrepresented students and 50% up to $5000 for all other students in either full-time or part-time positions relevant to the digital economy. Funding for this program has been exhausted for 2022-2023 fiscal year but will be available beginning April 1, 2023.

Link:

<https://etalentcanada.ca/for-employers/how-it-works>

Contact: Tim Perron [t.perron@ictc-ctic.ca](mailto:t.perron@ictc-ctic.ca)

1. **Summary of recommendations**

**Website platform**

An analysis of alternative website platforms was conducted, with ***Shopify*** emerging as the recommended substitute due to its e-commerce focus, advanced functionality, diverse app ecosystem, and strong customer support. However, the higher cost and potential need for training should be considered. The basic Shopify plan costs CAD $29/month compared to the Wix Combo plan at CAD $18/month.

**Shipping options**

Big Sky Ventures Inc. faces challenges with shipping regular and frozen items, as they currently rely on Canada Post with limited outreach. The Wix platform, which hosts their website, also lacks integration for shipping options and automatic shipping cost calculation.

The analysis provided a list of shipping options, including USPS Priority Mail, UPS Ground, FedEx Express, FedEx Priority Overnight, UPS Next Day Air, and USPS Priority Mail Express. It is essential to consider the delivery time, insurance, and tracking options to choose the best carrier.

***Shopify*** is recommended as an alternative website platform, as it can integrate Canada Post within the website, allowing shipping options and shipping label printing directly from the admin panel. Factors like shipping destination, package weight and size, shipping method, and additional services are considered when calculating shipping costs after integration. This enables the website to automatically calculate shipping costs for customers during checkout.

**Marketing**:

The company faces challenges in marketing and technology, lacking expertise in current media streams and technology, which hinders its ability to reach its target audience. To improve their marketing strategy, the company should consider creating and distributing monthly e-newsletters, developing special offers and promotions, and implementing a loyalty program.

Social media can significantly aid in branding and marketing. The company should maintain a strong presence on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, with the goals of increasing brand awareness, driving website traffic, and boosting customer engagement. They should also define their target audiences, develop a content strategy, and maintain a posting schedule.

A yearly action plan for promotional campaigns can be established, focusing on holidays and relevant events throughout the year. Lastly, the company should partner with a social media management company to track performance, optimize their strategy, and ensure the marketing plan remains up-to-date with industry trends.

**HACCP**

The company is a small farm seeking to partner with a larger facility that has HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) certification to sell their fruit under the partner's program. HACCP is a preventive approach to food safety management, focused on controlling potential hazards during food production.

Obtaining HACCP certification involves several costs, such as training, consultation, certification fees, and ongoing expenses for audits and system maintenance. In New Brunswick, various third-party certification companies offer HACCP training and certification, including NSF International, SGS Canada, Food Safety Market, Food Safety & Quality Consulting, and SafeCheck® Advanced Food Safety.

**Other recommendations to the company:**

The Canada Digital Adoption Program (CDAP) assists small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in adopting digital technologies to boost competitiveness. Eligible businesses can receive a grant of up to $15,000 for building a digital plan and a 0% loan of up to $100,000 to implement it. The program covers costs related to acquiring IT equipment, installation, training, and other expenses directly related to technology adoption.

Export Funding NB is a financial assistance program aimed at helping New Brunswick SMEs increase sales outside the province. Eligible businesses must have their head office registered and operating in New Brunswick, be exporting or planning to export, and have a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) business number.

Venture for Canada's Internship Program provides up to $7,000 in wage subsidies for eligible internships, offering a fast approval process, flexible terms, and simple digital forms.

ICTC-Employment Programs at eTalent Canada offers resources and programs to help employers, educators, and employees excel in the digital economy, with wage subsidies and customizable training available.

We would also like to recommend Big sky to use **Buffer app**. This app would be one app to go to, to post updates on multiple social media platforms like Facebook, instagram, twitter etc and one don’t have to individually post updates on these apps seperately.

1. **Closing thoughts**

In conclusion, Bluesky Organics has a bright future ahead, and by implementing a multi-faceted approach that encompasses marketing, re-branding, social media, shipping, and other initiatives, the company can effectively maximize its potential for success.

The re-branding and marketing efforts are crucial in establishing a strong and unique identity for Bluesky Organics in the competitive market. Emphasizing the company's core values, sustainability efforts, and organic practices will help communicate its vision to consumers, resulting in a loyal and growing customer base. However, re-branding alone would not improve sales, there has to be a conscious effort to reach out to the customers via various communications means such as Social media and direct contact.

Expanding the company's online presence through social media and a well-designed website will not only improve brand awareness but also foster customer engagement and loyalty. Utilizing online channels will facilitate direct communication with customers and provide valuable insights into their preferences and needs.

Shipping is another critical aspect to consider, and by exploring partnerships with reliable shipping companies, Bluesky Organics can ensure timely deliveries, expanding its reach beyond local markets. Additionally, investing in proper packaging and cold chain management will guarantee the preservation of product quality during transit.

Additionally, by exploring opportunities such as HACCP certification, the Canada Digital Adoption Program, Export Funding NB, and utilizing internship and employment programs like Venture for Canada and ICTC-Employment Programs at eTalent Canada, Bluesky can further enhance its competitiveness and market reach. Partnering with a larger HACCP-certified facility can also boost consumer confidence in the safety and quality of Bluesky's products.

By adopting a comprehensive and well-thought-out strategy that encompasses marketing, re-branding, social media, shipping, and leveraging available resources, Bluesky Organics can solidify its presence in the market and continue to thrive in the dynamic agricultural landscape.

1. **Appendix/ Recommendations**
2. **References:**

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