Lessons in Creative Reuse: The Idea Store

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What is creative reuse?

It’s the process of applying a thoughtful perspective, innovation, and a bit of elbow grease to materials that might be considered of little or no value, resulting in unexpected artworks, crafts, and functional items.
The Idea Store’s Mission

2010: **The I.D.E.A. Store** simultaneously supports and advances education, the arts, and natural resource conservation in our community while generating revenue for the Champaign-Urbana Schools Foundation.

2019: **The Idea Store** is a nonprofit organization that fosters creativity, education, environmental stewardship, and community through reuse.

In my words: The Idea Store is a non-profit creative reuse marketplace that accepts items and materials (from households, businesses and industry) that otherwise might be recycled or landfilled, diverting them for reuse in education, the arts, and more.
The People:
- Donators
- Shoppers
- Donors
- Volunteers
- Other non-profit organizations
The Stuff: Accepted Items
Unconventional / Commercial Displays
Staff and volunteer roles

- Receivers
- Recycler/Hauler
- Sorters
- Stockers
- Cashiers
- Educators
- Special sales organizers
- ED/Manager
- Board of Directors
Environmental Stewardship

• Fill a local niche
• Materials diversion from the waste stream
• Daily reducing, reusing and recycling
• Building partnerships
Challenges

• Sheer volume of donations
• Continued growth, resulting expenses
• Receipt of true waste
• Maintaining staffing
• Stabilizing after each expansion
• Covid-19
Great outcomes!

- Generosity
- Community reuse sector support and cooperation
- Even more dedicated supporters
- Timing
- Increased accessibility

So, how did we get here?
Successful Start-up Process

• See and confirm a need
• Recognize the potential
• Research
• Seek guidance from a successful role model
• Community buy-in and collaboration
• Committed, excited volunteers
Great Giveaway Events

Testing, testing....
They LOVED this!
Going Public

• Trial events
• Identify mentors, supporters
• Consult business pros
• Find a partner if you have to
• Educate target audience
• Start small, scale up
Our new home: Lincoln Square Mall, Urbana
Growth: Physical space

- Opened September 30, 2010 after 4 years of preparation 2,000 sq ft
- 2 expansions: in 2011, warehouse, classroom, cold storage 5,000 sq ft
  in 2016, “FoundRe” classroom/events 800 sq ft

2018-19
Move to Urbana: 8,700 square feet
Flipped storage & store percentage
Growth: Volunteers & Paid Staff

• Opening 2010
  20 volunteers + 2 paid staff

• In 2018, pre-move
  60 volunteers + 7 paid staff

• In 2019, new location
  60 volunteers + 10 paid staff
  more group helpers: 30 per week
Volunteer Stewards and Generalists
Fiscal Growth

- In first five years, earned thousands of dollars for CUSF
- “It’s My I.D.E.A.” grants to CU public school teachers
- As expected, success led to increased staff and space costs
- Transitions through 2018-19
- September 2019: Gross sales increased 31% over September 2018
- Gross sales in 2019 were $237,000
Other creative reuse center models

• Represent their missions
• Reflect their communities’ economic sectors and demographics
• Independent, SCRAP chain model, or municipal
• Members only, open to teachers only, open to all
• Free materials, or sold by piece or by-the-pound

Northampton, Mass.
http://www.northamptonma.gov/751/Solid-Waste

Hammond, Indiana    ReUz Station
www.lcswmd.com/i-want-to/what-is-the-reuz-room/
ReUz Station in Hammond, IN

Scrap Exchange, Durham, NC
Published 2012, a good general reference
Lessons

• Support or start a creative reuse venture
• Educate with respect and a clear message
• Recognize and promote the value of reusables
• Build good relationships
• Earn your way to fiscal stability
• Help people do the right thing

For more information:  www.the-idea-store.org