

Sweet Success

How a Florida Entrepreneur Cooked Up a Rich Web-based Business Selling Chocolate

Gourmet chocolatier Alejandra Bigai nearly had a meltdown. After operating her modest confectionery from a small Miami kitchen for four years, business suddenly began to boom. "In one day in 2005, I got six orders," the Venezuelan-born owner of Romanicos Chocolate (www.romanicoschocolate.com), recalls. "I thought

price and occasion, and is highlighted by four-color, mouthwatering photographs. Suggestions include the \$200 French Basket, which includes 24 truffles, an assortment of chocolate bars, and a 750-milliliter bottle of Moët & Chandon champagne. The \$12 Piccolo Box includes nine assorted chocolates.



I was going to collapse." It was the biggest one-day volume she had received since she had begun selling over the Web in 2002. Part of it was the shock, and part of it was exhaustion: Bigai was making, packaging, and shipping the high-end treats herself.

That was no small task. Making her chocolate by hand took the better part of a week. Also, given Miami's southerly location, Bigai had to take time to place the finished product in specially insulated shipping boxes and ice packs. As orders poured in, Bigai knew she needed to get help or end up like Lucy Ricardo on the chocolate factory line.

She added two ingredients to the mix: more workers—Romanicos Chocolate now has five full-time employees and five seasonal workers—and a California-based e-commerce host, called NetSuite. "I now have control over every client's order," she says. "I put in the order number, and with a link to FedEx, I can tell the customer exactly where the order is."

There is also more to order, thanks to an online catalog that suggests gifts based on

The Web site also lets corporate customers upload their business logos to be emblazoned on gift boxes.

Together, the Web site features—and the outstanding chocolate—have greatly enhanced the visibility of Romanicos Chocolate, catching the eye of feature writers from the Food Network, CNN, and other cable TV and Internet outlets. Now, orders come in dozens at a time, with single orders from corporate clients and brides-to-be often totaling more than 50 boxes. They also come from around the world—most recently from Poland and South Korea—and in big waves—Valentine's Day is the most hectic day, and December is the busiest month, generating 40 percent of the year's orders.

Bigai's sweet success has given rise to a second job: checking the weather. "I never thought I'd be looking at The Weather Channel this much," she says. "I have the weather for every major U.S. city bookmarked on my computer." After all, Bigai wants the chocolate to melt in your mouth, not in the mail. ■

Managing Your Move

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Charlene Lau, Elnhurst, NY
D.L. Marker, Uniontown, PA
Diane Ralston, St Pete Beach, FL
James Goldberg, Washington, DC
Tammy DeGregorio DMD, Pittsburgh, PA

Congratulations to all the winners. Put your seat backs and tables in their upright positions, and enjoy your flight!

Spring 2007 Volume 1 No. 8

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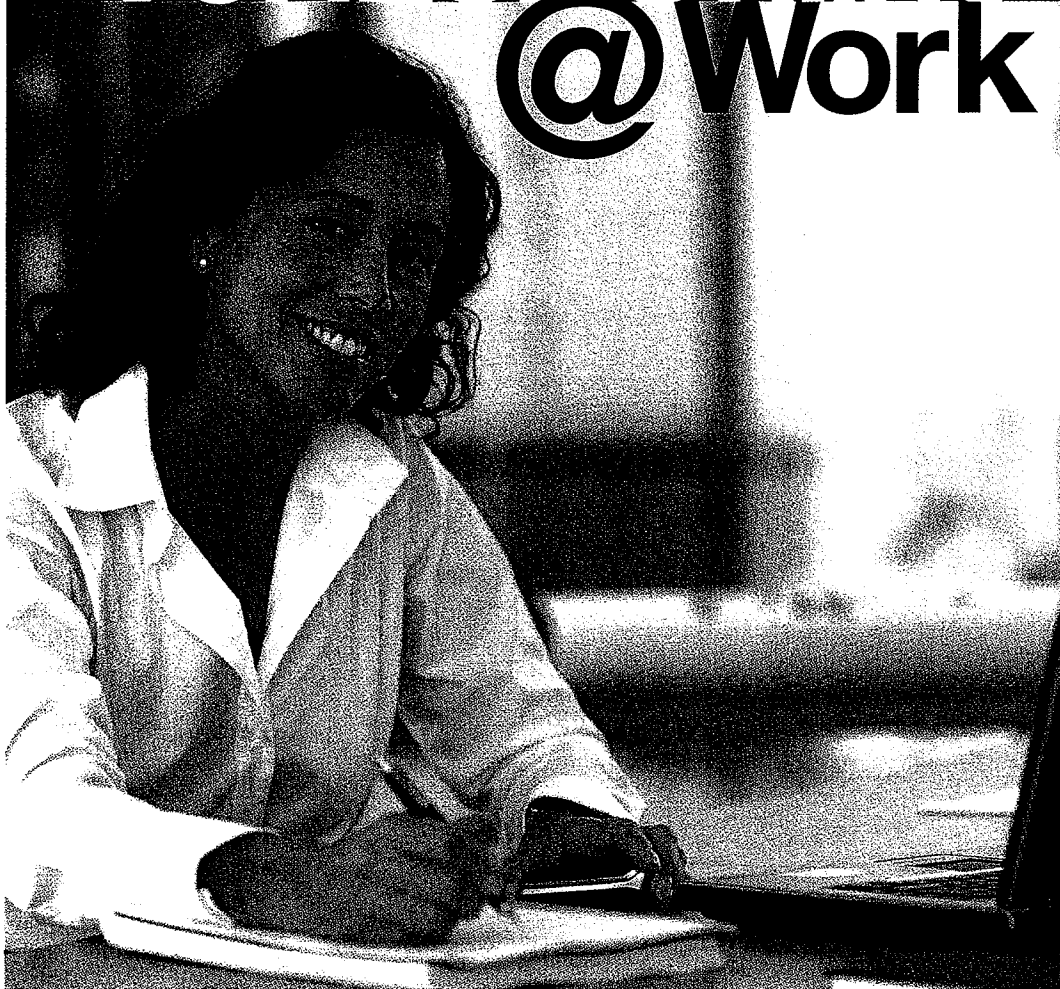
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Small-Business Resource Guide

Advice on Taxes, Tech, Insurance & More

Verizon understands what you need to make your small business a success. So, in addition to a best-in-class lineup of wireless, voice, data and Internet services, we offer you this concise Small-Business Resource Guide. The information, culled from numerous small-business sources, covers a wide variety of business needs. We understand, of course, that your needs as a small-business owner are nearly limitless and could never be fully addressed in one listing. So, we invite you to visit our Web site, business.verizon.net, then click on either 'Industry Topics' or 'Run Your Business' for more information.

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