

Making the Right Connections

A HUSBAND AND WIFE TEAM LOOK TO TRADE SHOWS AND CORPORATE CONTACTS TO SUCCEED IN DETROIT'S TOUGH ECONOMY.

By Jennifer Washington

WHAT THEY DID BEFORE: Benny Dotan had previously owned a limousine company in New York for nine years before moving to Michigan and meeting his future wife, Julie. Meanwhile, Julie was exploring a number of job opportunities after college and decided to become a corporate travel agent.

WHY THEY GOT INTO THE BUSINESS: "This was an industry that my husband already knew, so we decided to try and start something similar to his old company, but better," Julie Dotan says.

START-UP COSTS AND METHODS: During the first year, the Dotans financed a new, fully loaded Lincoln Town Car, and a year later, bought a used Cadillac. After experiencing an influx of business, the company grew to 10 cars after two and a half years.

BEST MARKETING STRATEGIES: Referrals and trade show contacts have been some of the greatest sources of work, she says. "All of a sudden, we started gaining affiliates and the work people sent us is what kept us in business."

BIGGEST MISTAKES: "Sharing an office space with my husband," Dotan laughs. "You each need your own space. That's the problem when you're a husband and wife team." Considering what the couple now knows about the benefits of industry trade shows, they also consider not attending them sooner as one of their biggest mistakes. Another issue was financing vehicles for five years instead of three, which turned out not to be as economical as they thought it would be.

BIGGEST SUCCESSES: Using Julie's corporate travel experience, the company landed its first large, corporate account. "We grew really, really fast because of my corporate travel experience and my connections in the corporate travel world," she says. "We also survived the economy crash and pulled ourselves out of it because of our affiliates and the relationships we built at the trade shows."

UNIQUE APPROACHES TO CUSTOMER SERVICE: "We treat every client like a VIP. You never know who's on the other line, and you never know who's in the car," she says. "We provide water, and candy, and newspapers, but we don't differentiate from one client to the next."

ADVICE TO OPERATORS: Communication between companies and the relationships that you build are extremely important. "If it weren't for the trade shows, we would be out of business," she says.

FUTURE PLANS: Continuing to build affiliate relations and growing account-wise, not fleet-wise, are goals for the company. The Dotans also plan on incorporating GPS tracking into their fleet in the near future. **LET**



WE TREAT EVERY CLIENT LIKE A VIP. YOU NEVER KNOW WHO'S ON THE OTHER LINE, AND YOU NEVER KNOW WHO'S IN THE CAR.



FAST FACTS



J & B Executive Transportation, Inc.

NAME:
J & B Executive Transportation, Inc.
LOCATION:
Troy, Mich.
FOUNDED:
1998
MAIN SERVICE REGION:
Detroit area
FLEET SIZE:
8 vehicles
TYPE OF VEHICLES:
sedans, SUVs, crossover vehicles, passenger vans, luxury vans
EMPLOYEES:
five part-time drivers
ANNUAL REVENUES:
\$500,000
OWNERS:
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