

Business Clinics

SNAPSHOT: CREATING MARKETPLACES TO CONNECT PROFESSIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SGBS.

Background

Starting and growing a business in Sierra Leone is challenging. Budding entrepreneurs and business owners face many obstacles, including limited access to capital, talent, and professional services. Additionally, many professional service providers, including marketing and finance professionals, do not actively target the small and growing businesses (SGBs) market in Sierra Leone. These firms have yet to develop services fit for this sector.

Until recently, many new and growing businesses also did not have a place they could go to receive guidance and support. To help address some of these constraints, SOBA's Business Innovation Hub (BI Hub) launched a bi-monthly business clinic.

Overview: Business Clinics

The Business Clinic is a collaborative space that provides free "check-ups" to any business owner or entrepreneur that need business training, expert advice, or mentorship. The clinic also connects professional service providers with entrepreneurs to better understand their needs and create service offerings fit for them.

Each Business Clinic focuses on a different subject to ensure businesses have an opportunity to participate in a session targeting their particular gap. Additional consultants are on-hand to provide one-on-one guidance for that week's topic as well.

Business Clinics take place every other Tuesday with 25-30 attendees. The BI Hub's primary role is to provide the meeting space, invite the mentors, and encourage dialogue between the participants and the service providers.

The Impact to date

Since inception the Business Clinic has helped hundreds of entrepreneurs.

Total number of participants:

113 businesses have attended a business clinic and have had

the opportunity to meet 12 different service providers across seven clinics.

Total number of business relationships from clinics:

25% of participants have reported finding service providers that have or plan to utilize through the clinics. This compares to less than 5% rate for iLab participants who have not attended a clinic.

Business Clinic Topics to Date

Inaugural Clinic: Decoding the Value of Brand Development:

On 3 April, 2017 Mustapha Katta, Marketing Specialist at Skytech Media delivered a workshop on the value of branding.

Understanding Human Resources – The Sierra Leone Context:

On 18 April, 2017 HR experts Violet Asgill and Marilyn Umatta in collaboration with Craft HR Limited and the Freetown Business School educated the workshop on how to 'get HR right'.

Using Data to Grow Your Business: On 2 May, 2017 James Torvaney facilitated this clinic emphasising lean strategies to analyse your business data.



Boosting Your Sales Using Social Media: On 16 May, 2017 Asad Neveed, co-founder of Zoom, taught the clinic to use social media to create brand awareness, increase sales, provide customer support and measure success.

Smart Recruitment Tools and Techniques: On 30 May, 2017 Andra Marin, an independent HR consultant with over 10 years of experience in global recruitment & headhunting, instructed attendees to attract top talent on a small recruitment budget.

How to Use Public Relations to Tell Your Brand Story: On 13 June, 2017 Ajara Bomah, marketing and communications Manager at Elixer Marketing & Media led a program to show how to use public relations to present your brand and increase sales.

Maximise Your Online Brand Presence - Design a Website in 10 Easy Steps: On 27 June, 2017 Tessa Engelbrecht and Sia Chakadna from Wikonet will guide attendees to creating brand awareness through a quality website.

Access to Finance: On July 8, 2017 Hawanatou Rahman led a discussion on different sources of finance for new businesses.

Bookkeeping: On July 22, 2017 Mohamad Jalloh of SaaS Consulting led a short course on best bookkeeping practice – a much-needed business support service in Sierra Leone.

Takeaways

The BI Hub team took an iterative approach to developing the Business Clinics platform. In the first version of the Clinics, we invited entrepreneurs we had previously worked with to come meet us during “open office hours” on Mondays. We provided entrepreneurs with advice to any challenges they faced during that week.

We then invited professional service providers to take over this role for us, to create a more sustainable, market-based relationship. In a next version, we invited professional service providers to deliver a one-hour workshop to make

the platform more attractive for entrepreneurs and attract a larger crowd. The workshop was then still followed by one-on-one sessions between consultants and entrepreneurs.

Later, we added an “SGB offer” into the concept, where we encouraged the professional service provider to develop a service attractive to the SGB crowd to further stimulate business relationships. We found that consistency worked very well, by keeping the Clinics on the same day at the same time it became very easy to attract a crowd of entrepreneurs.

Participants really valued the practical topics of the workshops and the interaction between the trainer and the audience.

How to Run a Business Clinic

1. Identify a cohort of capable professional service agencies.
2. Identify SGBs that have existing businesses to qualify potential leads for professional service providers.
3. Allow service providers to do a short training to demonstrate their offering.
4. Require service provider to offer an introductory offer targeting SGBs to accelerate business connections.
5. Monitor feedback and results from participants and consultants to increase adoption of new practices and conversion to clients for service providers.



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