

**CLOSE-UP**  
BUSINESS INTERVIEW

During the decade of the '70s, Cherie Sohnen-Moe was a self-proclaimed "beach bum." Perfectly happy to recline on the beaches of California and make a living as a free-lance massage therapist, she virtually stumbled into the world of consulting and marketing. Hanging out, talking to other sun worshippers, massaging and studying the phenomenon of "re-birthing," Sohnen-Moe was more concerned with the workings of the human mind and body than having an employer or making lots of money. Growing up in a self-employed family definitely had its effect on her. She never wanted to work for anyone and has "always hated bureaucracy."



What began as an effort to market her massage talents has grown into a private consulting business — Sohnen-Moe Associates — and a book. Now in its eighth printing with 42,000 copies in print to date, *Business Mastery* is required for classes in over 100 schools (the majority being massage and body work classes) across the United States, Canada and Australia and is a culmination of years of record keeping, note taking, and experience. Targeted at healing arts professionals but implemented by business people in all fields, Sohnen-Moe's book is dubbed on its cover "A Business Planning Guide for Creating a Fulfilling, Thriving Business and Keeping It Successful."

A native Tucsonan, Sohnen-Moe spent several years in California's San Fernando Valley. Shortly before graduating from UCLA she began her first consulting job. She advised and raised all the funds needed for two people who wanted to open a health [center], only to find all her efforts were in vain. The two backed out of the deal, much to her disappointment.

"But when one door closes, another one opens," she says. "Right away people began calling me to work on and massage their bodies, and I began making more money. At the time there was no such thing as being 'licensed' in massage like there is today. Some workshops were available but they offered certification with just 120 hours of massage time. I completed one of those courses and got my little certificate but it certainly wasn't like the programs offered now," says Sohnen-Moe.

She continued to frequent the beaches but soon decided she wanted more, and learned the hard way how to market herself. Since no undergraduate marketing degree program existed at UCLA at the time, she simply began to read a lot. Books on marketing piled up in her house and she began doing informal interviews to find her target market.

"I learned about target marketing by mistake," she recalls. "I realized how important it is not to have all your eggs in one basket." Sohnen-Moe discovered that there's more than one type of customer out there for any business. It was then that she discovered the value behind combining demographics and psychographics to find her ideal customer base. "You need to know your customers' hobbies, what magazines they read, how much money they spend dining out, what they buy, etc. Just because a person can afford your product or service doesn't mean they want it," she says.

Once she tapped into *how* to market herself, her massage business grew. But soon Sohnen-Moe began spending more time teaching others how to market themselves and how to work smarter, not harder.

She and her husband Jim (currently an engineer for Burr-Brown Corp.) left California and moved back to Tucson in 1983 and opened

Sohnen-Moe Associates. The business experienced a 20 percent increase until she began writing *Business Mastery*. Profits declined while she worked full time for six months on the book.

When *Business Mastery* finally was published, business began to pick up. During the first printing of the second edition, Sohnen-Moe Associates experienced a 15 percent growth per year. In 1993, the business sent out a surge of profiles and media kits to 1,000 colleges nationwide, and 100 school in Canada, England and Australia. As a consequence, 1994 brought more success than this ex-beach bum had ever imagined — a 78 percent increase during the book's fifth year of publication.

When asked why she geared the book toward healing arts schools and massage professionals, Sohnen-Moe responds with an unequivocal voice of reason. "I took a population I knew well. The book is infused with the language and examples of the healing arts for that reason. But I will write a general marketing book someday."

All of her book orders come to her home office where she stockpiles boxes upon boxes of books. She, her husband and one helper fill the orders.

Sohnen-Moe's success clearly comes not only from a love of her work but also from her ability to market herself and her business from a number of channels. She sends out hoards of press kits, speaks publicly on a regular basis and frequently conducts seminars. In the [spring of '95], she spent six weeks in Australia conducting her highly regarded seminars. These include discussions about everything from effective marketing strategies to client education to diversification and employment interviewing skills.

Sohnen-Moe enjoys consulting small businesses rather than large corporations. "What's nice about working with small businesses is that if we make a decision, it is implemented that day, unlike large corporations which can take months before even looking at a proposed change," she says.

One of her favorite local clients is the owner of Fit To Be Tried, a clothing boutique. Sohnen-Moe recalls their first meeting. "She came to me in the midst of a bankruptcy and now she is doing very well. She's my ideal client. We still meet two to three times a year. We both like the fact that I am her sounding board and invisible partner." The business has improved dramatically and is now grossing \$250,000 a year.

For the last five years, the majority of Sohnen-Moe's clients have been out of town but she is dedicated to Tucson's small businesses and continues to serve as a consultant for various local clients. She is also committed to herself and her husband of 14 years. They receive a massage every week and exercise together as frequently as they can. Her true passion is still the art of massage and she feels that "if people in this world were touched in a healthy, non-sexual way every day, we would not have nearly as much violence as we do."

Despite her success, Sohnen-Moe has not lost her perspective. "Money is not my game. I wouldn't be doing this if it were. But it just happens that I am doing quite well. I believe that the most important thing is that you really love what you're doing. But just that isn't enough. You have to get out there and let people know that you're doing what you love.