Ronnie Roberts – Recyclable Records- Concord, NC

**Tell about your background.**

Like most people that lived in Concord I worked in a hosiery mill and then I decided to get into music. I sold tapes on the side as a hobby and made good money doing it.

**What industry are you in?**

We specialize in used cds, records and tapes.

**What was your motivation to start a business?**

I always thought about starting my own business. Then I found out that one of the guys in the company that I worked in at the time was embezzling 401k money. It was at that point that I decided to do my own thing. I had done well making money for everyone else and it was time to start making money for me.

**What about your business keeps you up at night?**

You are not guaranteed a paycheck so you have to find ways to keep customers coming in. The internet has changed the business. Flyers and newspaper ads don’t do as well so we have to use craigslist. In this economy it’s very tough to make a profit.

**Who is your target market and how do you reach them?**

Anyone who loves music. The main demographic that comes into my store is ages 18-40. There has been a resurgence in 80s music so I get a lot of requests for music from that era. Everyone is retro 80s. A couple of years ago everyone was retro 70s. I think games like guitar hero and dj hero has fueled the resurgence. A 5 year old kid came in with his mother looking for Skid Row. I was thinking “How does this kid know who Skid Row is?” He heard the song while playing the guitar hero. The games are making kids curious about these artists and that brings them into my store.

**How long did it take you to break even?**

I started in 1998 and we broke even within a year. The economy hit us hard and it’s tough to be profitable. This year has been especially tough. I started working a day job during the week to make ends meet. I work in the store on the weekends and some evenings. Because I own everything in the store I’m able to remain open. At this point it feels more like an expensive hobby, but I’m optimistic that things will turn around.

**What is your strategic advantage?**

Most of my competitors in this area are the big box stores. There is no one else in the area that does what we are doing. There are other stores in Charlotte that do what we do, but we are located far enough away that they don’t affect us. Many of the collectors will shop at all of the stores in the area.

**What are you passionate about?**

I love music. This is something that I have been passionate about since I was a kid. It’s not something where I expect to make a million dollars. You gotta be passionate about what you are doing. I’m also passionate about being my own boss. I worked jobs that paid well in the past, but I was miserable. I like to have money don’t get me wrong, but I love to do this. I also get to meet some interesting characters working in the store and you learn a lot.

**How do you balance the business with your job and personal life?**

I’m always trying to find things for the store. When I go on vacation or out of town I look for yard sales and thrift stores to find something that will be good for the store. My trips and work are combined. It’s a seven day a week job for me. I could only do this because I love it. If I’m leaving town I try to find a Goodwill along the way. You never know if someone will drop off a record collection that I can get for a good deal and maybe sell for a good deal.

Aside from loving what you do is there any other advice you have for aspiring business owners? Yeah you gotta take risks. If you’re afraid then you’ll never get anything done. You gotta jump feet first and just go with it. It can be scary not knowing where your check is going to come from, but if you love what you do you can make it work.