



BOC Network Women's Business Center

Small Business Highlight:

Via Nativa at www.vianativa.com



Inspired by Latin America's rich hand-crafting traditions and its enormous diversity of Indigenous, African and Spanish influences, Vanesa Natale and Alessandra Plasa founded Via Nativa in early 2007, after traveling extensively throughout Latin America. During their travels, the two were struck by the beautiful works of art being handcrafted in local communities. The pair then decided to share their passion for Latin America's creativity and cultural richness with the rest of the world.

Via Nativa is a socially conscious label that celebrates ethically produced, artisan crafted, fine design accessories made in Latin America. Through a culturally sensitive approach to design and development, Via Nativa fosters partnerships with skilled artisans to support disappearing craft traditions and to create employment for artisan communities who face obstacles in their economic survival.

Today Via Nativa helps promote fine and functional artisanal products, that often take countless hours and a lifetime of experience to achieve. Via Nativa sources its products directly from independent artisans, community based collectives and organizations, enabling the craftspeople responsible for production to earn a sustainable living while preserving their traditional lifestyle. Environmentally sustainable production practices are followed whenever possible and artisans are encouraged to select raw materials and harvest them sustainably.

In the beginning of 2007 Alessandra and Vanesa were referred to the BOC Women's Business Center by WBC client Beebe Okoye, owner of Kiva Café (prior WBC success story). Alessandra and Vanesa started a relationship with WBC staff members Liliana Blanco and Monica Guevara, who assisted to solidify their business model and develop a marketing plan. Both partners started to come in and meet with WBC staff, for several hours every two weeks for the last year.

With the help of Monica Guevara, WBC counselor, Via Nativa worked on their business infrastructure, setting up an accounting system in Quickbooks. Via Nativa then worked closely with Liliana Blanco to develop operation procedures that lay out job responsibilities and roles, and expectations around decision making and communications. Ms. Blanco also helped Via Nativa create a comprehensive marketing plan that clearly outlined goals and objectives for each week – assigned to each business owner. Marketing materials were also developed by Via Nativa to help reach out to media, potential wholesale clients and retail clients.

Via Nativa and WBC staff worked rigorously to define Via Nativa's business model, marketing strategies and public relations activities. Through a year of business coaching and counseling – Via Nativa was prepared to take on the 2008 Holiday season with a new air of confidence and diligence. The marketing and planning efforts of the last year culminated in an extremely successful year for Via Nativa, with an increase in sales of over 200% in 2008. Via Nativa was

also highlighted in several on-line e-commerce and women's websites, such as the hugely popular Daily Candy. Via Nativa is a socially conscious, women owned home based business, that is continuing to grow with the support of the BOC Network Women's Business Center.

Please visit www.vianativa.com to view their online shop.