

## Chico consultant helps small businesses survive social media jungle

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CHICO -- It may not be the straw that breaks the back, but for a business, staying on top of social media can be an agonizing struggle.

That's why there's a growing niche for companies like Social High Rise that are hired to take care of the process.

Newly founded in Chico, Social High Rise has earned two injections of local angel investments.

Company founder Mark Sorenson of Chico is just starting the company, although it's not his first encounter with operating a business or handling social media.

But what is ground-breaking is this company's double-win of local private money.

It's been a learning curve for Sorenson, who worked for several businesses while attending Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, and then working in the Bay Area.

He's launched his own businesses, successfully putting himself in front of investors to gain venture capital.

He's parted ways with top executives, learning a partnership can be more stressful than a marriage. He's found quick growth can be worse than a business failure, and he's had one of those too.

All the experiences have given Sorenson a grounded vista on what it takes to be in business, according to local mentors.

It was by luck that Sorenson was on Twitter and encountered Christian Friedland, head of [Build.com](#), the multimillion-dollar online home-improvement company based in Chico.

Friedland was actually looking for someone in real estate, but as the two talked, he convinced Sorenson to return to Chico, where he had attended Chico High School.

Friedland put him in front of a small group of angel investors.

"I love that he's so passionate about building an entrepreneurial ecosystem," said Sorenson, who is not related to the Chico City Councilor of the same name but different spelling.

The angel group heard out Sorenson's ideas for Social High Rise, grilling him over difficult issues and asking for more details on paper.

The process also gave him a partner, Andrew March — a former investment banker who became his financial right hand — as well as \$40,000 that went for start-up and operational costs. There is one employee.

Then, Sorenson landed \$10,000 from nonprofits 3CORE and North Valley Community Foundation, in their

first round of angel funding for local entrepreneurs.

The goal of the fund "is to bootstrap the business to get it to a certain scale where investors are more willing to invest," according to 3CORE executive director Marc Nemanic.

What impressed Nemanic was that Sorenson's business "offers a smart way to manage the perception of a business in the market."

3CORE's review team included a variety of backgrounds, some new to the process of business investment, but who were asking the right questions, he noted.

"We liked what we saw, but we wanted more information, like a business plan, with more strategy and pricing approach, Nemanic said.

They also appreciated that Sorenson wasn't a novice in business or fundraising.

After a second round of conversations, a letter of intent to make the grant was issued. The money does not have to be repaid.

"Clearly he has earned his stripes. He's not a newbie, and he's very confident," Nemanic said.

Through [www.socialhighrise.com](http://www.socialhighrise.com), small businesses can choose different levels of social media services, ranging from \$250 to \$400 a month. There's no long-term contract. Earlier this month, the business established an office in downtown Chico, at 242 Broadway, Ste. 10.

Sorenson points out that the effect of a single action or comment in social media can have an instant impact on a business — both positive and negative.

The company manages a business' presence in social media, from Facebook and Twitter to Google+Local, Foursquare, TripAdvisor and others.

It creates a strategy for businesses, and responds to customer reviews and comments.

The website says, "You can be as involved as you'd like, while we do the time-consuming heavy lifting."

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