



Success | Capital Access | Leadership for Entrepreneurs

Powered by CalOSBA



SCALE + Made in California Case Study: Willits Manufacturer Artefex Triples Revenue and Builds a National Reputation by Blending Tenacity with SCALE Support

Prepared by Michael Martinez, Information Officer for CalOSBA,
and Megan Burch, Small Business Marketing Manager for CalOSBA





Working with the California Office of the Small Business Advocate (CalOSBA) SCALE partners the Mendocino SBDC and the West Business Development Center, Artefex tripled its gross revenue in two years, secured the capital to expand operations, and earned recognition as one of the top 100 small businesses in the country. The Willits manufacturer is now certified as a Made in California business and will serve on the program's advisory committee.

Willits, CA - Anton O'Hanlon grew up in the art materials industry. His family started and still operates Natural Pigments, a Willits company built around preserving classical pigments and historic painting techniques. Working alongside his parents taught Anton early that protecting a work of art takes more than just the right brush or technique. It takes an archival foundation. In 2014, he and his family founded Artefex in Willits, built on the conviction that artwork deserves a rigid, American-made foundation that shields it from moisture, warping, and environmental decay so it can endure for centuries. The question he has now asked thousands of artists and collectors is simple... How long do you want your artwork to last?

The company was originally launched as a business-to-business distributor, supplying paint pigments, canvases, and other art materials to more than 70 retail stores nationwide. As large retailers and e-commerce giants such as Walmart and Amazon reshaped the marketplace, Anton, then just 21 years old, saw an opportunity in the opposite direction. Rather than competing on price, he focused on quality, craftsmanship, and the needs of artists who value protecting their art and legacy for generations. Within three years he transitioned Artefex from wholesale distribution to a direct-to-consumer business built around its own art panels. Artefex grew one artist at a time, building a loyal customer base through product quality, personalized service and custom engraving on its aluminum-backed canvas panels.

Reaching a Turning Point

Growth came slowly, and much of it rested on Anton alone. For the company's first eight years he handled nearly every part of the business himself, making panels, shipping orders, and answering customer calls. When he purchased his parents' ownership interest in 2024 and took on responsibility for leading the company through its next phase, he recognized that the approach that had built Artefex was beginning to limit it. Scaling would require stronger systems for managing customer relationships, tracking performance, and streamlining operations. Most importantly, it would require him to grow as a leader.

He first turned to two successful business owners in his family, who helped him develop foundational discipline and leadership skills. That experience showed him the value of mentorship and led him to the West Business Development Center, which houses both the Mendocino SBDC and the Women's Business Center.



Technical Assistance for California Small Businesses

Once Anton made contact, what followed was a whole team effort. Julia Siderakis was his first point of contact, and he went on to work with advisors including Baqi Kopelman, Wendy Luttrell, Kimberly Vuitell, and Paul Bozzo. Rather than doing the work for him, they took the time to understand his business and helped him build the infrastructure and develop the tools to execute his own vision.

This support included:

- Capital Access: Introductions to funding opportunities and lenders, leading to an EDFC loan, a line of credit, and additional financing to expand operations
- Business Planning: Guidance on breaking complex business challenges into manageable action steps as the company moved from sole operator to a growing team
- Technology Adoption: Practical introductions to AI tools and specific applications within the business, with assignments between sessions and accountability follow-ups
- E-Commerce and Digital Marketing: Support through a full build-out of the Artefex website, including product pages and tools that improved customer experience and business visibility
- Leadership Development: Ongoing access to trainings, events, and a bench of advisors to consult as new challenges arose

"Working with the SBDC has been a game changer for Artefex. Through my advisors, I was introduced to funding opportunities, lenders, and business resources that helped accelerate our growth. Those connections led to an EDFC loan, a line of credit, and other financing that gave us the capital we needed to expand operations and invest in the future of the business."



Service Highlight: A Team of Advisors Focused on Your Company Success

"My advice to business owners is reach out and don't give up if the first resource you get is not what you needed. In my experience the SBDC has so many advisors that choosing just one might be overwhelming. My approach is that every advisor teaches me something that is not just useful today but might be useful as I grow and scale. Having a group of advisors to reflect with and call on if a new challenge arises has been the single biggest game changer for my business."

Building the Systems

"One of the most impactful aspects of working with the SBDC was the guidance I received from my advisor, Baqi Kopelman. He helped me break down complex business challenges into manageable action steps and encouraged me to think differently about how technology could support growth," Anton said. "Baqi regularly introduced me to new AI tools and practical ways to apply them within my business. Rather than simply providing advice, he gave me specific assignments to work on between meetings and held me accountable by following up on our progress during subsequent sessions. This hands-on approach helped me implement new systems, improve efficiency, and make better business decisions."

Those systems became the backbone of the company's growth. After hiring several web developers through Fiverr without finding the right fit, Anton found a partner who understood his vision. What began as a redesigned landing page grew into a comprehensive build-out of the Artefex website, including product pages and tools that improved the customer experience, streamlined operations, and gave him better visibility into business performance. Anton credits those improvements as one of the biggest contributors to the company's recent success.



Artefex: Now a Nationally Recognized California Manufacturer

"Since beginning work with the SBDC in 2024, we've tripled our gross revenue, growing from approximately \$200,000 to \$600,000 in annual sales, with projections to reach \$1 million this year," Anton said. "Beyond the numbers, the biggest impact has been the mindset shift. Every advisor I've worked with has challenged me to think bigger, move beyond fear, and focus on long-term growth."

Anton said his only regret is that he did not reach out for support sooner.



"The SBDC has reinforced the importance of continuous learning, mentorship, and building relationships with other business leaders. I continue to attend training and events because I believe that as a business owner, growth never stops. The support, guidance, and encouragement I've received have been instrumental in helping Artefex reach the next level."

That growth has drawn attention beyond California. In 2026, Artefex was named to the CO-100, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's annual list of the 100 best and brightest small and mid-sized businesses in America, selected from more than 12,000 applicants. Artefex was recognized in the Tech Innovators category, which honors businesses that have scaled operations, enhanced customer experience, or transformed their offerings through technology.



Artefex has also been certified as a Made in California business and will serve on the program's advisory committee, becoming the first business in the art and art supplies category to carry the designation.

Today, Artefex continues to manufacture its panels in Willits, serving artists across the world while contributing to the local economy in rural Mendocino County. Its fastest growth has come in public art, partnering with municipalities, nonprofits, and public arts organizations to protect cultural legacy for generations.





Making SCALE Work for You

"Anton's story shows what happens when a business owner takes full advantage of what SCALE has to offer," said Clair Whitmer, Deputy Director of CalOSBA. "The Mendocino SBDC and the West Business Development Center gave him a bench of advisors rather than a single point of contact, and he used that support to rebuild his operations, access capital, and triple his revenue. The U.S. Chamber recognized Artefex as a Tech Innovator, and that is exactly what this partnership produced, a rural manufacturer using new tools to compete nationally and internationally. He is now carrying that forward as a Made in California certified licensee and a member of the program's advisory committee, helping shape how the state supports manufacturers."

More on the Made in California Program

The Made in California Program is designed to develop and promote the Made in California label, encourage consumer product awareness, and foster purchases of high-quality products made in the state. It supports California-based manufacturers across the state's diverse manufacturing categories, which include artwork and handmade goods. Learn more at madeincalifornia.ca.gov.

Contact Artefex

If your city, town, or civic organization is planning a mural project or downtown beautification initiative, Artefex partners with communities as an American manufacturer committed to preserving cultural legacy. Visit Artefex online to learn more about American-made composite panels and public art substrates, or contact the team at acct@artefex.biz to discuss project scope, custom dimensions, and civic partnerships.

Start and Grow Your Business with SCALE

If you are a business owner in Mendocino County interested in growing your business, accessing capital, or putting new technology to work in your operations, connect with the West Business Development Center, home of the Mendocino SBDC, to learn about their no-cost advising and training programs.

Connect with Your Local Resources Today

For more about SCALE support services throughout California, visit CalOSBA: www.calosba.ca.gov

