

## Schoolwide News

### Minding Their Own Business

*Two members of the Sloan Fellows Class of 2003 open Zigo-- a retail food store in Kendall Square*

*By Sarah Foote*

How many times has this happened to you? It's 7:30 at night and you've just finished your last class, or perhaps you just left work after a long day. You've missed dinner and are hungry. You quickly take a mental picture of what's in your refrigerator at home and it's not a pretty sight -- some cheese that may or may not still be good, a head of lettuce that should have been tossed out the day before, and some leftover pizza. The thought of going food shopping and cooking something is too time consuming and the idea of another bowl of Cheerios for dinner just doesn't seem very satisfying. Enter Zigo with the solution.

Zigo is a retail food store located at One Broadway, (across the intersection from the Kendall Square fountain) that opened this past spring and is the brainchild of Sandi Simester and Mike Rorick, both members of the MIT Sloan Fellows Class of 2003.

While they were students at MIT Sloan, Sandi and Mike often found themselves in similar situations. Seminars and study groups frequently ran through dinner time and ended late at night. Hungry after encountering such situations, they often found themselves on the phone ordering takeout food that in turn didn't taste particularly good and wasn't especially healthy.

Mike and Sandi agreed that there had to be a better way and began to brainstorm ways to fix this problem that they and many of their colleagues encountered day in and day out. And then they came up with the solution. This past April they opened Zigo a food store right here in Kendall Square that sells chef prepared, ready to eat meals. The food is fresh, delicious, and convenient. And business is already booming.

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We welcome story ideas, photos, suggestions, and comments from students, faculty and staff.

Please send items to:  
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*Sandi Simester and Mike Rorick, both graduates of the MIT Sloan Fellows Class of 2003, want to give people a fresh, healthy alternative to vending machines and fast food.*

“Even if you are a small company, don’t be afraid to use your voice. You have a lot more power than you think.”

– Sandi Simester, ‘SF 03

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Sandi started her career in retail working for Sears, May Company, and then at Federated Department Stores as product manager in charge of private label jewelry from such places such as Thailand, India, and Italy. Managing profit and loss on the jewelry and advising the stores on what to advertise were just some of her responsibilities. With her fiancé in Boston (Sandi is now married to MIT Sloan professor Duncan Simester) she decided to move to Boston and return to school—something that she had been contemplating for a while.

Sandi found the Sloan Fellows program “fantastic” as her classmates exposed her to new and different industries and how they conducted business. “It was very interesting to see how people from such industries as engineering, automotive, oil, and banking thought about things. In addition, there were things that they did in their industries that you could apply to your business, that if you didn’t otherwise have exposure to them, you would probably never think of doing things that way,” says Sandi.

Go Vertical. He is still involved with the company and does much of the work necessary for the club by tele-conferencing with his colleagues.

With experience working with smaller start-ups, Mike was always interested in learning more about how large businesses worked. His mother-in-law worked in the MIT Sloan Executive Education Office and always had encouraged him to look into the MIT Sloan Fellows Program. He did, applied, was accepted, sold his house, packed up all his family’s belongings and moved to Cambridge. “The program also offered me the chance to glimpse into the international business world, which we hope will one day be helpful for Zigo,” Mike says with a smile.

Both Mike and Sandi found the Sloan Fellows program invigorating, challenging, and overall a wonderful experience. Mike found the Systems Dynamics, Intellectual Property, and Entrepreneurial Law classes especially helpful. Both found the leadership seminars interesting especially when executives from top companies such as Intel came to speak. Both agree that MIT and MIT Sloan “opens doors” for students.

### *How Zigo started*

After finishing the program Sandi wanted to start her own business, while Mike worked for a friend who was developing the idea for Stubhub.com. Sandi emailed two of her classmates and asked if they were interested in starting a retail food business. Mike jumped at the chance and the two began a year of planning and research before the store opened last spring.

While conducting their research, they quickly learned that 65-70 percent of people do not know what they are going to eat for dinner at 5 o’clock each afternoon. Sandi went to England to conduct research while Mike scouted out store locations in Cambridge and Boston. Sandi visited many stores in London that offered chef prepared meals—and not just grocery stores. She found that department stores, gas stations and even liquor stores were selling ready-to-go meals. In fact, she found it hard to find the items necessary for cooking in most grocery stores.

Mike went downtown and watched foot traffic in several potential locations. Zigo’s location at the corner of Third and Broadway (right across the road from MIT Sloan) proved to have the best head count. “We quickly realized that this idea was a great



*Color and presentation are important to Simester and Forrick, as shown in their Kendall store and their catering displays.*

Mike began his career in accounting but soon felt the entrepreneurial bug biting. After working for Arthur Andersen putting his master’s degree in accounting to use, he began two new businesses. He worked with grocery stores to design and implement some of the first loyalty club discount cards. When funding did not work for that venture he then worked in the health club business, starting his own rock climbing club called

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opportunity. Other businesses were trying to grasp it, like Boston Market, but we felt that no one really had the right formula,” says Mike, adding, “You really have to be in a location that people trip over you on their way home. Sandi agrees, adding, “People don’t want to drive even five minutes out of their way for dinner. We wanted to solve that problem for everyone.”

The two also went to food shows and conducted focus groups with friends and family to test not only the food, but also packaging ideas, and even the company’s name. (Zigo is derived from Sandi’s maiden name.) Sandi and Mike loved the feedback they received about the name and the food samples and were happy that everyone loved the food.

“I really enjoyed helping Sandi and Mike with the food tasting but also providing feedback on menu ideas as well. I don’t always have the time to cook, and when I don’t, I want something healthy to eat. Zigo is great and really convenient,” says Tracey Mellor, Coordinator for the Sloan Fellows program who attended some of their focus groups.

Sandi and Mike say that their success is in part due to their flexibility, keeping an open mind, and their willingness to start a new retail business together. “You can have the best business plan in the world, but things always change, so you need to be flexible and expect delays,” Mike says. “And remember every business starts off as a small business.”

Sandi offers these pieces of advice to any MIT Sloan student interested in starting their own business, “Choose something closely

related to your skill set. It reduces your stress level, and things will come more naturally. But don’t be afraid to draw on your past experience either. Even if you are a small company, don’t be afraid to use your voice. You have a lot more power than you might think.”

With an ever changing menu, Zigo expanded from just lunch and dinner offerings to a breakfast menu within the first week of the store’s opening. In addition to the ready to go meals, heat in just 5-minute meals, and meals that cook in just 15 minutes, Zigo

recently started to offer Indian food, which Mike and Sandi say has just flown off the shelves. Zigo keeps a database of its customers’ catering orders so they know when its time to suggest a new menu item or bring over a slightly different order than the usual. They are currently open Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m., and are contemplating opening on Saturdays as well.

With the “word of mouth loop” fully caught on to Zigo, Mike and Sandi will continue to push the business

forward. They hope to open another location in downtown Boston soon, and with just five part-time employees in their Kendall Square location they already see the need to hire more people. “We are also looking for a new catering site as well,” says Sandi.

So, when you’re tired of take out and the idea of another peanut butter and jelly sandwich for dinner seems less than appealing, try the flounder, rack of lamb, lasagna, or tuna salad sandwich on 3-grain bread with cranberry chutney from Zigo. They guarantee it’ll be delicious, because just like their menu says, they eat there too.



*Zigo sits in the same building as Dunkin Donuts and Wainwright Bank, a location Florick picked after counting heads at this and other area locations.*

## **GMS News/SAB Events Calendar**

Please note that the GMS (Graduate Management Society) has changed its name to SAB (MIT Sloan Activities Board).

**Gypsy Bar C-Function**  
Thursday, September 15  
Gypsy Bar, Boston  
8:00 p.m.

**Japan Club C-Function**  
Thursday, September 22  
Walker Memorial  
7:30 p.m.

**Meet The Faculty C-Function**  
Thursday, September 29  
E52 Lobby  
6:00 p.m.

**70’s C-Function**  
Thursday, October 6  
Big Easy, Boston  
9:00 p.m.