

business trends

The Next Big Thing: One-Stop Shopping for Small Business Services

(NAPSA)—Small-business owners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, and they are critical to helping our nation thrive. Yet the challenges they face are many, including the daily balancing act of growing the business and serving customers while effectively managing necessary behind-the-scenes administrative tasks.

A recent survey of small-business owners conducted on behalf of The Home Depot found that 71 percent believe that providing health care benefits for employees is important, but most didn't have the time or resources to find a cost-effective and comprehensive benefits plan. This is just one example.

Regardless of the size or specialty of a small business, there is a certain amount of administrative work that simply can't be eliminated. Unlike larger businesses that typically have full-time employees who specialize in a variety of administrative responsibilities—including handling health and other employee benefits, managing payroll and ordering office supplies—small-business owners may have to do it themselves. While administrative service vendors often approach small-business owners offering to

handle back office needs, the considerable time it takes to properly evaluate each proposal isn't a luxury these owners have, and the services can be expensive.

Now large service companies—and even retailers—are taking notice of this important customer base and are taking steps to strengthen their offerings to small-business customers. They realize that an advantage over their competition can often come from providing extra or special services that no one else offers to small businesses.

The latest options in this area are programs that bundle services so small-business owners have a one-stop shopping resource for any number of products or services. It helps these busy entrepreneurs save time and take advantage of competitive prices previously only available to larger businesses with many employees. In addition, since the background work has already been done, small businesses can set up a program in days or even minutes, instead of the weeks it can take to research, negotiate and arrange services on their own.

Providers such as the Business ToolBox from The Home Depot bring together a variety of compa-

nies offering immediate discounts on essential products and services. These include health insurance, payroll processing, business insurance, wireless communications, shipping, computers and technology, direct mail, office supplies, logowear and uniforms, business checks and more, all at costs a small business typically could not obtain by dealing directly with the individual providers.

Savvy providers are also granting access to other added-value tools such as free access to online management tools that include forms for a variety of administrative tasks, as well as information on cost control, safety tips and marketing ideas. This approach has been well received, with thousands of small businesses signing up to take advantage of the services and cost savings every week.

For the bundler, there's more than just the satisfaction of helping a business run more smoothly. As small-business customers grow their companies, providers hope to attract and retain a loyal customer base for many years to come.

For more information, go to www.hdbusinesstoolbox.com or call 866-333-3099 toll-free.