

Small Business News & Notes

Private Mailboxes Are A Small-Business Field Of Dreams

(NAPSA)—Have you ever walked into one of those postal and business services centers and noticed the bank of mailboxes? You might have wondered who would pay to have mailbox services when home mailbox service is free. What you might not realize is that many of those mailboxes are actually “storefronts” for some very intriguing small businesses.

In fact, a 2002 independent study commissioned by Mail Boxes Etc., Inc. and UPS revealed that more than 60 percent of private mailbox customers use their mailbox for business purposes; nearly 75 percent of those work from home.

“We’ve been serving small business for over 20 years,” says Stuart Mathis, president of The UPS Store and Mail Boxes Etc. “In recent years, we’ve done some research to help us understand these customers and their needs more clearly. During that process, we discovered some fascinating business concepts and industrious business people. There are as many different ideas as there are mailboxes.”

Who’s behind the boxes?

A closer look at this consumer segment provides a glimpse into the diversity of product and service offerings from the nation’s 22.9 million small businesses. Among the standard mix of consultants, accountants and freelancers are some creative and innovative entrepreneurs who demonstrate that American ingenuity is alive and well. Examples



Many small businesses turn to private mailboxes to handle their postal needs.

abound, including a company that provides free weekend support and educational retreats specifically tailored for women who have, or have had, breast cancer and a company that manufactures self-molding novelty teeth.

Online auctions fuel growth

The birth of the online auction industry has fueled even more growth for the mailbox services industry. eBay has millions of registered users around the world. Many of their sellers have turned an avocation into a cottage industry, running small businesses from their homes and selling everything from collectibles to clothing and computers. At some point in the growth of these businesses, the proprietors (eBay calls them “Power Sellers”) realize that their home mailbox can no longer accommodate the volume of mail

they’re receiving.

Safe and secure

According to the mailbox user study, being able to provide their customers with a mailing address other than their home address or a P.O. box rates high with small-business people. Private mailboxes provide a safe, secure place to receive not only mail but also packages. Unlike the post office, places like The UPS Store or Mail Boxes Etc. can accept packages on behalf of a mailbox customer from any carrier or delivery company.

“For many of our small-business customers, we’re more than just a mail drop,” says Mathis. “We’re also their shipping/receiving center, office supply store, and duplication center.”

It doesn’t surprise Mathis that many of his company’s franchisees have developed close relationships with their customers. “Our franchisees are small-business people themselves,” he says. “Therefore, they understand the unique needs and challenges of this market.”

According to the Small Business Administration, 2002 saw the creation of more than 550,000 new small businesses. As workers are downsized or given early retirement, many take the opportunity to pursue the dream of being their own boss and testing the entrepreneurial waters. Signing up for professional mailbox services is often a first step. For Mathis and his company’s franchisees, those mailboxes represent thousands of people pursuing the American dream.