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There's help for area budding entrepreneurs

Jennifer Youssef / The Detroit News

Entrepreneurs in Metro Detroit who need help navigating the often complicated and confusing process of establishing a new business will now have an easier time locating a consultant who can assist them.

The Business Improvement Team, LLC -- a network of business consultants -- formed in April to help entrepreneurs find the advice they need. BIT has six member firms specializing in different areas of business -- from sales and advertising to finance and accounting -- which enables them to refer their clients to other professionals who can help with other aspects of business. Clients don't pay for the referrals, but they pay for the adviser's services if they work with them.

The Business Improvement Team not only benefits entrepreneurs seeking advice, but it also generates more business for consultants by broadening their client lists, members say. The concept is not new, but it's another helpful resource for the many entrepreneurs here who don't have a business background and need professional advice, said Mike Rogers, vice president of communication for the Small Business Association of Michigan. Anecdotal evidence suggests there are more entrepreneurs in the state today as thousands of laid-off workers venture out on their own.

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"There's more of a need now for good, solid information" on how to operate a business, Rogers said. "There are a lot of neophytes starting small businesses, and the more resources they have access to, the better their chances of success."

Ninety-eight percent of Michigan businesses in 2007 were small businesses, employing nearly 2 million workers, according to the Small Business Administration. Small businesses employ more than half of Michigan's nonfarm private sector employees.

Consultants say the BIT is as advantageous for new business owners as it is for the consulting firms that help them.

"It's a way for us (consultants) to use everyone's contacts," said BIT member Joey Silvian, owner of Virtual Interactive Agency, a Farmington Hills-based marketing company. "It expands our contacts exponentially, and if companies need a combination of our capabilities, we have that team together. It's a win-win."

The program is still building its client list and working to get off the ground, the consultants said.

Greg Knapp, president of AspenTech Consulting Group, Inc., a Plymouth-based firm that specializes in customer relationship management, has been working with many more novice entrepreneurs who need guidance to get their start-ups off the ground.

"A wealth of skills are needed to keep a business alive and every one is necessary these days," he said.

By working together, consultants can give one another leads and provide business owners a one-stop shop of

More information

More information

- Contact Spencer Silk at ssilk@frankincio.com or Curt Petterson at cpetterson@absolutedec.com.
- See the Web site at www.BizImpTeam.com.

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experts who can make their company more efficient and profitable, said Spencer Silk, co-founder and owner of Franklin CIO Services, LLC, a Bloomfield Hills-based information technology services company and one of the members.

"We're helping small businesspeople improve the bottom line," he said.

Silk says BIT aims to eventually have 15 members with different areas of expertise.

He has been volunteering at TechTown, a small business incubator in Detroit, for a year and realized that many of the entrepreneurs there had good ideas, but some didn't know how to get their ideas off the ground. He and fellow volunteer Curt Petterson began to discuss what they could do to make new business ventures less burdensome for entrepreneurs.

"It just puts more eyes, ears and handshakes out on the street," Silk said of the new organization. "Split two ways, it's good; split 15 ways, it's very good. We're all busy people and we don't have time to do it all."

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