



[A CASE STUDY FROM UPS]

Stacking Up

BULK DISCOUNTER **BUSINESS ADVANTEDGE** GIVES ENTREPRENEURS
CORPORATE-SIZE BUYING POWER.



chasing, and made sure packages went out the door on time. I even cleaned out the office fridge and shoveled snow out front."

Like Hazzard, many small-business owners start out with a passion—maybe to bake the world's best cookies or help clients plan the vacation of a lifetime. Then the more mundane administrative duties begin to take over. "Entrepreneurs want to get in there and do their jobs, but they keep getting pulled in different directions. Suddenly, they need to buy a copier, even though they don't know a thing about copiers," Hazzard says. "And because small-business owners don't have the buying power of big companies, they wind up paying full fare for everything."

While running her first business, a travel agency in Minnesota, Mary Hazzard experienced firsthand the joys and travails of being an entrepreneur. Along with the benefits of being one's own boss came the frustrations of lacking the kind of in-house support and expertise that employees of large corporations often take for granted. "You have to wear a lot of different hats," says Hazzard. "I did payroll and pur-

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Hazzard saw a way to help entrepreneurs around this lack of scale, which led her to start Business AdvantEdge (www.business-edge.net), a St. Paul, Minn., company whose mission is to "level the playing field between big business and your business." Hazzard's company negotiates bulk discounts on shipping, office supplies and equipment, local and long-distance calling rates, payroll pro- ▶

cessing, insurance, and myriad other costs of doing business. "But we don't just cut costs," Hazzard says. "We research each vendor to make sure they are reputable and offer high-quality goods or services. We carry out all the legwork the small-business owner might want to do but never has the time for."

Shipping is a vital part of virtually every business, but especially for Hazzard's clients, the majority of whom are independent travel agents. Since the mid-1990s, when online ticket purchasing and airline commission cutbacks threatened their livelihood, travel agents have turned to providing high-level service to lure high-end travelers. Because they must make complicated arrangements—a corporate group tour or an around-the-world trip, for example—they put a premium on getting the

best shipping to send contracts to clients and the necessary paperwork to vendors. So Business AdvantEdge gives some 8,000 agents access to the online UPS Service Center, which offers a host of time- and money-saving features and services.

"Travel agents, like other small-business owners, have to get documents out fast, get them signed, and get them back, so on-time delivery is crucial," Hazzard says.

The agents can access the UPS Customer Service Center through Vacation.com, a trade association Website where each agent can set up his or her own account. One of the site's handiest features is that quoted shipping rates reflect the volume discount that Business AdvantEdge has negotiated, so agents always know they are getting the best deal.

Among other UPS Customer Service Center features, agents receive accurate estimates of delivery times for packages sent to the more than 200 countries and territories served by UPS. So, whether the package is headed to a customer in Cleveland or a bed and breakfast in Barcelona, the guesswork is removed. To save time, users can store fre-

quently used addresses in their personal address book, then print shipping labels from their desktop.

INFORMATION CENTRAL

Agents also use the UPS site to compare service levels and rates to be sure they are picking the shipping option that best suits their needs and budget. For example, users can enter both a shipping and receiving address to calculate transit times at various service levels. If the package can wait a few hours, or an extra night, users can save money while ensuring that the package gets to its destination by the time it's absolutely needed. And, of course, once the package is on its way, they can track its progress online.

To be sure, sometimes it's the most traditional feature that means the most to busy business owners, Hazzard says. While they can easily arrange for UPS

pickups at their office, some agents prefer the expediency of personally dropping off packages. "People are creatures of habit. Even if the dropoff location is around the corner, if they don't know how to find it, they may never use it. Once they do know, they use it all the time," Hazzard says. With the UPS Drop-Off Locator on the Website, Hazzard's clients can instantly pinpoint drop box locations near their homes and businesses.

Little things like that go a long way toward making the business lives of entrepreneurs easier, allowing them to concentrate on the things they love most and do best, she says. "For many of my clients, UPS is more than just a preferred vendor; it's their business partner." ■ CHARLES SLACK



Business AdvantEdge's **Mary Hazzard**: Documents have to get out fast, get signed, and returned so on-time delivery is crucial.

UPS SERVICE CENTER AT A GLANCE

The UPS Service Center repackages UPS Web applications from ups.com and UPS OnLine® Tools into a single, online resource. Here are just a few of the Service Center's features:

- UPS TRACKING
- UPS INTERNET SHIPPING
- UPS RATES AND SERVICE
- UPS DROP-OFF LOCATOR
- UPS TIME IN TRANSIT
- OPEN A UPS ACCOUNT

For more on UPS e-commerce solutions visit www.ec.ups.com/clicks.html.