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BUSINESS

Xerox promotes women-owned businesses

By Julie Fishman
Staff Writer

Xerox Corp. has built a reputation for being a champion of women entrepreneurs, and over the years the Stamford-based copier giant has collected numerous awards and recognition for supporting women-owned businesses.

Continuing its efforts, the company has launched the Xerox Women's Business Owners Initiative - a free program geared at helping women in the New York metropolitan area grow their ventures, said Allen Vasan, Xerox's vice president, of marketing for North American operations.

The program will connect women entrepreneurs with resources, assistance and networking opportunities as well as give Xerox an opportunity to reach what it considers a growing and important market segment, Vasan said.

The initiative will offer women free resources such as technology consultations with Xerox employees, seminars featuring topics such as work/life balance and leadership strategies, and an e-mail newsletter touching on business trends and advice, he said.

While the initiative is meant to help women entrepreneurs, it also makes good business sense

for Xerox according to Vasan.

"Women are a growing segment of our customer base and are known to be brand loyal customers," Vasan said.

The number of women-owned businesses continues to grow at twice the rate of all U.S. and those businesses show significantly greater increases in revenues, the Center for Women's Business Research has said.

Brand loyalty is key to the buying process, Vasan said, who describes the Women Business Owners Initiative as a grassroots effort to help Xerox tap into a strong, thriving market. Xerox hopes as it helps women-owned firms grow, Xerox will grow alongside them, he said.

I think it is a very smart move on Xerox's part to put forth this type of initiative," said Annette Richmond, owner of Rowayton based career-intelligence.com, an online career resource for working women.

Richmond, a member of the professional organization Women in Management, said the networking and educational seminars offered by Xerox are much-needed resources for women entrepreneurs.

One of the biggest problems of being a small-business owner is not having colleagues to get

the support from, said Richmond.

To truly understand what makes women business owners tick, Xerox, teamed up with Delia Passi Smalter, the former publisher of "Working Woman" and "Working Mother." Smalter is now president of Medelia Communications, and Irvington, N.Y., company that specializes in marketing to women.

It is so refreshing to see this," Smatter said. "This is really a company that is making an effort. Xerox is putting in not only the time, effort and resources, it is saying, 'We really mean it.'"

Smalter said Xerox has also launched a multi-media campaign, geared toward women customers, and the company hired her to train its sales force in how, to sell to women.

"Women do purchase differently than men," she said. "We communicate differently, we build relationships differently and we buy differently."

