

United Way, chambers group partner to start Business Briefcase

Pilot program offers businesses information via Web pages

By LYNN GLOVER

DOWNTOWN — In a joint collaboration, the United Way of Allegheny County and the Chambers of Commerce Service Corp. are reaching out to small and mid-sized business owners through an Internet initiative called The Business Briefcase.

In January, United Way will begin offering customized Web pages that feature current business news and human resource tools free to members of six local chambers of commerce. The pilot will involve the African American, Greater Pittsburgh, Monroeville, Northern Allegheny and South Hills chambers and the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance. All told, these groups represent about 3,500 business owners.

The customized Web page of The Business Briefcase will showcase the business owner's company name, logo and message to employees. It will provide content from a variety of sources useful to business owners, including the Small Business Administration, Internal Revenue Service and news publications such as the Pittsburgh Business Times and SBN, Small Business Network magazine.

In addition, United Way has placed its online directory of more than 5,000 listings of services and programs that are available to employees locally.

Many business owners don't have "the time, inclination or funding" to develop such a site, said Jessica Hettler, COO of the Downtown-based Chambers of Commerce Service Corp. She said that if a company set up its own Intranet site with the links and

■ AT A GLANCE

The Business Briefcase

Customized Web page available free to chamber members to keep current on business news with links to human resource tools

■ **Developers:** United Way of Allegheny County and Chambers of Commerce Service Corp.

■ **Launch:** Pilot in January involving six local chambers of commerce

■ **Web site:** www.businessbriefcase.org

it would cost more than \$10,000.

"We're starting it as a pilot in Allegheny County with those six chambers," said Ms. Hettler. Another eight to 10 chambers will be added toward the end of the first quarter 2004, she added.

"Our objective is to take it to every chamber in Pennsylvania over the next two years," said Ms. Hettler. She explained that the Web offering will be used as another inducement to attract members to join local chambers.

For the United Way, it will serve as a way to show that the nonprofit is a valuable information resource, said Bob De Witt, spokesman for the Downtown-based organization.

"When people think of United Way, they think of us as fund raisers, but we're much more than that," Mr. De Witt said. "Eventually, we want to encourage companies to build long-term relationships with us and run a (United Way) campaign."

United Way will maintain and update the Web site daily, customize it for individual companies and oversee the content for The Business Briefcase. Equitable Resources contributed \$25,000 toward startup costs. The rest of the costs are being absorbed by United Way.

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