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## Supplier Diversity

# African American MBEs thrive providing services for corporate America

*The MBEs fill useful niche roles with flexibility and entrepreneurial vigor*

*By Dachell McSween  
Contributing Editor*

Census Bureau figures indicate that African American-owned businesses in the U.S. grew 45 percent from 1997 through 2002 and generated close to \$89 billion. Through their own dedication, the support of large companies and the help of NMSDC and its local affiliates, African American MBEs are making a strong impact on corporate America.

### Ray Wright's c2o Solutions: building relationships

Although c2o Solutions, LLC (Atlanta, GA) is only a year old, it has already landed a contract with the Coca-Cola Co (Atlanta, GA). Ray Wright is president and CEO of c2o Solutions, an IT management consulting firm that offers business services in the areas of IT vision and planning, process improvement, architecture and operational effectiveness.

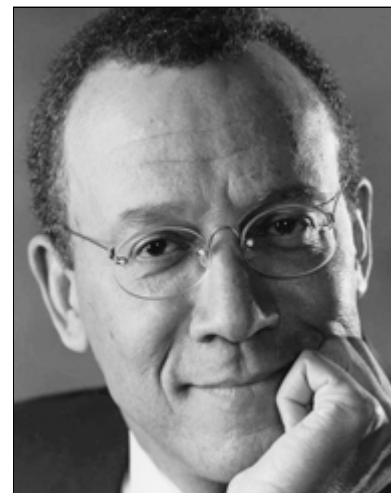
"We help businesses work better with IT," Wright explains. "The whole idea is to align IT and the business to meet the company's objectives." Wright studied business admin at Georgia State University.

Last year c2o Solutions was certified as an MBE by the Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council (GMSDC). Through GMSDC, the company connected with Coca-Cola and its supplier diversity program.

"We were incorporated in February 2006 and signed our first contract with the Coca-Cola Co in May," Wright recalls.



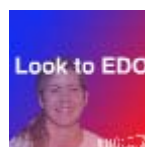
Ray Wright of c2o Solutions: "The whole idea is to align IT and the business."



William P. Beckett's ChrysPac helps with customized peripheral manufacturing steps.

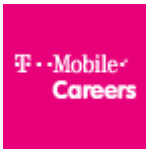


We take our hats off to you





"When you talk about diversity, Coca-Cola's supplier diversity organization does a great job of leveling the playing field to make opportunities available for minority businesses."



Wright feels that the GMSDC and other NMSDC affiliates also do a great job helping minority suppliers develop their skills and confidence in pitching their services to large companies. Wright's vision is to grow c2o into a national and eventually global firm, providing services around the world.



"It's about building relationships with your clients and getting them to understand the value you offer," he says. "It doesn't happen overnight. Over time, those relationships will pay off."



William P. Beckett's ChrysPac: developing a customized business Six years ago, William P. Beckett's goal of becoming "independent and financially comfortable" led him to start Chrysalis Packaging and Assembly Corp (ChrysPac, Milwaukee, WI). ChrysPac helps its clients with customized peripheral manufacturing steps like inspections, sorting, assembling, testing, packaging, warehousing and distribution.



The company has facilities in Chicago, IL and Milwaukee, WI. It has worked for Harley-Davidson, International Truck, WesCo, Fleetguard/Cummins Filtration and more.



"Our specialty is labor-intensive services, very flexible, customized to our customer's requirements and all quality-driven," explains Beckett, who is a former banker, venture capitalist, U.S. Army officer and a Vietnam vet. His BS in sociology and MS in urban affairs are from the University of Wisconsin, and he's also a graduate of the executive management program at the Amos Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH).



Last year the NMSDC named ChrysPac a regional supplier of the year for sales between \$1 and \$10 million. Beckett is proud of his company's success, and pleased he was able to overcome the challenges that arose in the startup phase.



"Despite my venture capital experience and relationships in the financial area, I really couldn't get any financing at first. In the beginning, raising capital was the major problem."



Beckett believes that minority suppliers should get involved with their local NMSDC affiliates to network with other entrepreneurs and meet potential customers. ChrysPac is a member of the Wisconsin Supplier Development Council and the Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council.

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"These organizations give you access to corporate buyers and others who influence purchasing decisions. They help develop the business relationships you need for success," says Beckett.

### Dynamic business duo

Joseph and Dorothy Richburg are strong supporters of NMSDC and other business associations. In 1987 they and another partner started Keystone Computer Solutions, Inc (Maplewood, MN), an IT consulting firm that provides staff augmentation for Fortune 500 corporations and tech support to companies of all sizes.

The Richburgs first met as students at Ohio University (Athens, OH), where they were both majoring in math and CS. Joseph went on to work

for several large companies, including Pillsbury and 3M. Dorothy worked for 3M and the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

When they started raising a family, Dorothy decided to try home-based contracting work. Then Joseph was laid off, and it seemed the right time to establish Keystone as an incorporated entity, taking advantage of the Richburgs' varied business backgrounds. Keystone has since worked with a number of large companies and organizations, including 3M, General Mills, the State of Minnesota and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Richburgs praise the Minnesota Minority Supplier Diversity Council (MMSDC) for giving them credibility in their bid to work directly with large corporations as a tier one supplier.

"I think customers trust us because we give them high-quality service and they know we'll deliver. The more creative we are with our solutions, the more attractive we are to our customers," says Dorothy Richburg.

"It is beneficial to have a corporate background," adds Joseph Richburg. "Entrepreneurship is a good thing but the entrepreneur should have experience working in corporate America as well, especially when big corporations are your customers."

#### **Manpower: guiding and learning**



Kathy Greco.

At Manpower (Milwaukee, WI), Kathy Greco, director of supplier diversity and vendor operations, agrees that M/WBEs offer valuable services. "Minority suppliers shouldn't feel that because their companies are small, they won't have an opportunity to work with large companies," she says.

In fact, Manpower's supplier diversity program includes a mentoring arrangement to guide minority suppliers and help them achieve their business goals. Every year the staffing company invites twenty-five M/WBEs to participate in a roundtable discussion, network and discuss business issues with company reps. Manpower finds likely M/WBEs through its customers, at trade fairs, and by referrals from NMSDC and WBENC affiliates.

"When we bring these suppliers together for the roundtable event, we're not just bringing them in to network and gain expertise. We are also looking for them to tell us how to make the program better."

#### **The corporations speak up**



Kevin Beirne.

Kevin Beirne, manager of supplier diversity development at Pitney Bowes Inc (Stamford, CT), notes that the company has some forty African American suppliers. They provide a variety of services from technology to advertising.

"Our African American suppliers do a fantastic job. Not only do they help us, but they touch our corporate customers with their services," Beirne explains.



Johnnie Booker is global director of supplier diversity for the Coca-Cola Co. She agrees that MBEs provide valuable insights into the marketplace and help Coca-Cola build stronger relationships with its customers and consumers.

"Minority-owned businesses are employers, leaders and role models in the communities we serve. In many cases they know our customers and consumers better than we do," Booker

Johnnie Booker. declares.

Brian Tippens, supplier diversity manager at HP (Houston, TX), says MBEs bring new and innovative ideas to the company and its customers. "Our supplier diversity program is about creating opportunities and opening doors for small businesses," he concludes.

D/C

Dachell McSween is a freelance writer and communications consultant living in the Bronx, NY.



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