

# Just looking around can be a help to your business

Every time I visit Manhattan, I gain a renewed sense of the competitive spirit that exists among the city's small business population. With companies literally situated next to, beneath and on top of one another for miles and miles, the competition is nothing short of fierce. After talking to several of the city's business proprietors during my stay, I found that many rely on a simple tool to obtain competitive data, a tool that is available to any small business owner regardless of the business.

AND WHAT is this "secret" that can help any new or existing busi-

nesses keep abreast of and act on changes regarding competitive activity?

Observation. It doesn't take a genius to observe successfully how competing businesses operate, but many owners avoid this activity. The reasons include claims that the owners are "too busy" to evaluate competitive activities on their own, or don't want to if they are known by their major competitors.

In this type of situation, a company designate may be used to observe competitive activity instead of nothing being done at all.

WHAT KIND of information can a



## focus: small business

Mary DiPaolo

business owner expect to obtain through observation? A wide range of operational activities going on both inside and outside the company can be monitored. "When I visit a competitor I think of myself as a roving reporter," says one Troy-based business services consultant. "What I can't see with my own eyes, I find out about

through conversations with clients or employees I meet on the premises.

"When I'm not at the company, I'm busy checking through local publications to see when and where they're advertising, what they're saying through advertising and look

for other promotional activities they may be pursuing such as seminars or workshops."

BUSINESS OWNERS can obtain additional operational data along these lines. Gaining access to client brochures, price sheets, annual reports or service proposals and contracts are examples.

"It's amazing what people will give you if you just ask for it, especially when the information is generally available to potential customers."

Of course, not all competitors are willing to provide information to current or prospective customers. In

this case, the business owner may want to focus additional attention on reviewing printed documents that offer more in the way of competitive company data.

Next week, we will discuss what some of these documents are and how they can be obtained through a variety of independent sources.

Mary DiPaolo is the owner of *MarketTrends*, a Farmington Hills-based business consulting firm. She is also producer and host of the cable television series, "Focus: The Small Business Environment."

## datebook

### ● DISABILITY & FINANCIAL PLANNING

Saturday, May 7 — A video dramatization of financial planning for an older family that must prepare for disability will be offered for financial planners 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Rochester. Fee: \$125. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

### ● LOTUS 1-2-3

Saturdays, May 7 to June 4 — Lotus 1-2-3 offered 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Rochester. Fee: \$150. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University division of continuing education.

### ● SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Monday, May 9 — "Daily Management of Small Business" offered 6:30-9 p.m. in Detroit. Fee: \$25. Information: 852-8000 Ext. 320. Sponsors: Small Business Development Center, U.S. Small Business Administration.

### ● PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

Monday, May 9 — Michigan Professional Women's Network meets in Southfield. Information: Diane Wilbur, 647-4480 before 5 p.m.

### ● REAL ESTATE EXECS

Tuesday, May 10 — National Association of Corporate Real Estate Executives meets in Rochester. Information: Rachel Long, 1-353-7370.

### ● BLACK MBAs

Tuesday, May 10 — National Black MBA Association meets. Information: Belva Davis, 224-0814.

### ● PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

Tuesday, May 10 — Professional Women in Sales meets in Bloomfield Hills. Information: 473-2253.

### ● CONTRACTS WITH GOVERNMENT

Wednesday, May 11 — "Selling to the Federal Government" will be offered 9 a.m. to noon in Detroit. Fee: \$20. Information: RoseAnne Herzog, 577-4850. Sponsor: Wayne State University.

### ● BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

Wednesday, May 11 — International Association of Business Communicators meets in Southfield. Information: Sue Robach, 855-2288.

### ● REAL ESTATE WOMEN

Wednesday, May 11 — Comm-

cial Real Estate Women meets in Southfield. Information: Kathleen Valenstein, 350-3338.

### ● PERSONAL FINANCE

Wednesday, May 11 — "Understanding the Financial Pages" offered 7:30-9:30 p.m. in Bloomfield Hills. Fee: \$10. Information: 645-3835. Sponsor: Cranbrook Schools.

### ● TRAINING SOCIETY

Wednesday, May 11 — American Society for Training and Development meets in Rochester. Information: 258-8823.

### ● BUILDING OWNERS

Thursday, May 12 — Building Owners and Managers Association meets in Southfield. Information: Jaki Lewis, 984-4000.

### ● EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS LAW

Thursday, May 12 — Employment Relations Law Seminar offered 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Detroit. Fee: \$20. Information: Joan Moorman, 223-3659. Sponsors: Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce; Dickinson, Wright, Moon, Van Dusen & Freeman.

## DuMouchelles MAY ESTATE AUCTION

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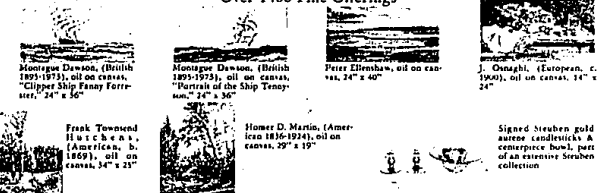
Friday, May 13, 1988 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 14, 1988 11:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 15, 1988 12:00 noon

Preview exhibition begins Friday, May 6, 1988 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. through sale dates. Special preview Wednesday, May 11, 1988 10:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Call or write for a free brochure. Illustrated catalogues available \$10.00 postpaid. Annual subscription \$45.00. Featuring: Oil paintings: Peter Ellenshaw, Hutchins, Talbot Hughes, Douglas Arthur, Teed, William Shayer, Louis Icar, P. Pavesi, G.H. Boughton, J. Van Couver, Gilbert Gaul, and more. Antique Oriental rug collection. Late Victorian sterling miniatures, Georgian silver, Francis I vermeil flatware, antique Sheffield. Steuben: Ivtene, gold aurene, fruit and stemware. Dinnerware: Capo-di-Monte, Spode, Minton, etc. Fine jewelry.

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