

I'm From the Government and I'm Here to Help

By Peter Rassel

You can receive valuable information, including the latest grant notices from the federal government, absolutely free. Go to www.firstgov.gov and the world of federal grants and assistance is at your beck and call. No need to purchase the latest book on federal government assistance programs. You're thinking, "What's the gimmick?" There is none, and it's absolutely free!! Or should I say that it's been prepaid with your tax dollars.

Firstgov.gov doesn't require that you sign in and provide any personal data about yourself. The home page directs you with relative ease to sites that could answer numerous questions as you strategize about your business. "What type of information is available?", you might ask.

One such question could be "where is all the free federal money that I've heard about?" Firstgov.gov cuts right to the chase. On the first page you can click on "Apply for Government Grants" and it takes you to www.grants.gov. At this site, you will enter the world of the federal grants award process. Just a click away is the latest grant announcements from the different federal agencies. And for no extra charge, it will provide you with instructions on preparing a grant proposal.

Before you spend too much time going down that path, jump back to the home page of firstgov.gov and look at

the other selections. Click on "For Business and Non-profits." At this portal, you can find out about contracting with the federal government, filing taxes online, getting an export license, and even verifying your employees' social security number. Do you need to know more about the laws and regulations affecting your business? Search no further than www.BusinessLaw.gov which you can access by clicking on "Laws and Regulations."

At BusinessLaw.gov you can go federal or local in your search. You can apply for your employer identification number (EIN) online then jump to the "State and Local Gateway" for the nonfederal government rules and regulations for each state as well as for Guam, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. Clicking on the "Compliance Assistance Directory" will send you to the SBA web site that guides you to the agencies that handle regulatory requirements from advertisements to trucking. Additionally, BusinessLaw.gov will provide you with handy tips on topics such as under what circumstances should you hire an attorney. Here are some examples of when it would be a good idea to retain legal counsel:

- choosing a business structure
- signing contracts

- negotiating a lease
- hiring employees
- doing business in areas involving heavy government regulation

It will also give you advice on what to do when you've been sued and where to go for low cost legal help.

Jump back to the "Business and Nonprofits" page. Now is a good time to review tax law and regulation. Clicking on "Taxes" takes you to the IRS and its labyrinth of tax regulations. No worries. This is the home of the "kinder and gentler" IRS. All the forms and publications that you need to stay in compliance with the federal tax code are here. The IRS web site also provides helpful tips on a wide variety of topics such as tax scams and offers in compromise.

Before we end this whirlwind tour of www.firstgov.gov, let's take a peek at the statistics that the federal government collects. There's banking statistics, demographic data, earning data and labor statistics, and the list goes on.

Clicking on "Data and Statistics" in the Reference Center will lead you to the mother lode of information, the Statistical Abstract of the United States. The Statistical Abstract pro-

vides data on practically all areas of interest within the United States. You can get information on population change from 1990 to 2000, the growth of the federal budget since 1945, the number of RV parks in 1999, the per-

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centage of college graduates attending opera, and so on. Not only are the statistics provided but the sources are provided as well.

Firstgov.gov is not the sole source of information for the small business owner but it can certainly provide a tremendous amount of facts, figures and forms with very little effort and expense.

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