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Dr. Pamela Williamson and Virginia Gomez collaborate to create opportunities for diverse businesses.

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DIVERSITY PROFESSIONAL Celebrates 2 Years.
CDW: DIVERSITY'S BEST-CASE SCENARIO

BY ARTHUR SCHUHR

I money talks, then 3.19 billion says quite a lot. That's what CDW spent last year alone on supplier diversity. What's even more remarkable, that's pretty much the normal amount CDW spends each year to ensure that its supply chain mirrors the diversity of its customer base.

Headquartered in Lincolnshire, IL, CDW provides technology products and services for businesses, governments, and education. Founded in 1984, CDW employs more than 8,700 professionals. And it generated more than $11.5 billion in sales last year. From desktop hardware and software products to integrated IT solutions, CDW offers a broad array of products and technical services solutions with a product portfolio that includes more than 300,000 products from more than 1,600 brands. Though obviously a very large corporation, what's remarkable is CDW's ongoing and comprehensive commitment to supplier diversity.

What's really special about our program is that it just celebrated its 10-year anniversary. We're very proud of this, explains CDW Head of Supplier Diversity Kristen Malik. "When you consider that with our annual spending of $3.19 billion a year, it's a pretty formidable program. What's more incredible is, though, was that it was created specifically to meet customers' needs. We're a VAR distribution company. We procure on behalf of our customers. Our program was born just because of changing diversity goals. It has the very real purpose of helping us meet our extremely diverse customer base. And we've been spending at least a billion dollars a year since 2014 to ensure that. Yes, supplier diversity is the right thing to do. But it's also the best way to serve our customers. This is a real program that makes a real difference.

CDW Supplier Diversity Manager Marla Low agrees. "We're a reseller. We don't manufacture anything. We buy either direct from manufacturers or from distributors. Product lines go out to the field and our diverse suppliers compete with our other suppliers. We choose the low bidder. We want our diverse suppliers to have a level playing field to compete for those bids. And, by and large, we're very successful in that. We have over 800 partnerships with minority owned, women owned, and small disadvantaged businesses. We spend nearly $700 million on minority and women's business enterprises. Our goal is to spend 5% of our total spending. But again, there are not lacking, we are committed to supplier diversity. We've been successful in means and services to a very diverse customer base. Our employees and our suppliers must reflect that diversity to be effective and to provide comprehensive services."

"Together, Ray and Malik and the CDW Supplier Diversity team have crafted an effective working program to continuously enhance supplier diversity. Boosting a two-tier program that now includes an online registration tool, CDW provides comprehensive support for its suppliers to help them better serve CDW customers."

"Our program isn't just a strategy or a 'nice thing to have,'" adds Malik. "It's a must to compete. We're supply chain dependent. So, our supply chain has to be intelligent and secure, as well as diverse. We're simply irrelevant in the technology space if it's not all of those things. For us to succeed as a large, global entity, we must reflect the profile of our diverse suppliers. Often they don't have the same bandwidth or cash flow or organization and development that we do. So, we find funding and mentoring and help so that they can come to the table with us, so that they then succeed and grow with us. That's a win-win-win. It's a win for our customers, our suppliers and CDW. And it works. Last year, we created 8,680 jobs with 50 percent of them in diverse communities, and that's been replicated year after year. But for us, that's just business every day."

"And we're always open to new suppliers," continues Malik. "There are no open invitations at CDW. But if you don't just sign up and start, we prepare suppliers to help them succeed. We have a very significant onboarding process. We do one-on-one training. And we set up new suppliers with our legal team, contract proposal writers, negotiators, etc. The training with CDW is definitely come-as-you-are. But once you are part of our family, we work to help you succeed."

With that one clear goal, what else does CDW look to accomplish through its supplier diversity program? Malik answers that question.

"Next, we want to focus on job creation and where our impact is. Who are the leaders are we teaching? Where are we missing? Where do we need to focus more? We really want to be a benchmark program for technology."

As a leading provider of technology solutions for business, healthcare, government and education, CDW makes valuing diversity an important priority. A diverse supplier network adds innovation to our business and helps us serve our customers best. Visit diversityatcdw.com to learn more.

CDW - SUPPLIER DIVERSITY