



“The process itself is pretty straightforward, but designed to be very intrusive and intense,” Allen said. “And it’s designed that way to weed out those companies that are not truly woman-owned.”

As with many non-profits, the greatest challenge Allen faces is in getting enough funding to support her organization. To help with that, they partner with other companies and with the national WBENC, which has more than 700 sponsors, including many Fortune 500 companies.

Another challenge Allen and WBENC face is that many female entrepreneurs do not know that this support network is available to them.

“We have a great product. We provide a great service. But it’s always a question of how many women out there don’t even know we exist,” she said.

What sets WBENC apart from other minority organizations is that it has the third party certification process dedicated entirely to female entrepreneurs, whether they’re ethnic minorities or not. It is the largest network of its kind in the country.

Annette Taddeo, founder and CEO of LanguageSpeak, Inc., said that her business benefited greatly from the opportunities she got through WBENC and specifically the Florida affiliate. Office Depot, for example, was much more receptive to doing business with

her after LanguageSpeak became certified as a woman-owned business. They ended up translating the Office Depot Web site into Spanish to appeal to the U.S. Hispanic market.

LanguageSpeak also benefited by getting another huge contract with ING. The financial services firm had done a nationwide search for a language translation company that was nationally certified as being woman or minority owned.

“My business has grown by leaps and bounds since becoming certified by WBENC,” Taddeo said. “The value-added for me has been the ability to now serve national contracts for major corporations, rather than just local contracts. I would highly recommend it to other women-owned businesses that have the capacity to fulfill the requirements of working with large corporations.”

Margarita Gonzalez, chief financial officer for AccuBANKER USA, was impressed with how WBENC’s annual conference and trade shows brought together different companies to network and discuss future opportunities. Unlike some other trade shows, she said the major companies were very forthright at these gatherings. She was so pleased with her WBENC experience that she has been recommending it to other female entrepreneurs.

“One also forms friendships with these women because a lot of them are on the same boat whether they started

their company a year ago or 20 years ago. We’ve all faced similar obstacles trying to wear different hats – trying to be a wife, mother, business owner – and keeping a balance,” Gonzalez said.

Allen hopes to continue to develop a supportive network for women-owned businesses, and she hopes that other female entrepreneurs will take her current clients’ cues and apply for certification.

“We have a very diverse and successful group of women business owners that are interested in helping other business owners,” Allen said. “As you know, women are very nurturing, and we are interested in helping other women. So if anybody is interested in joining, they would be joining a group of very, very successful and powerful women who are making a difference.”



Shari Francis