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Area firms find right solutions

Throw a stone any direction and you'll find advice on how to make a business succeed in tough economic times.

Some of the "advice" is mere propaganda to get you to buy a product, while other suggestions are made with the best interests of small-business owners as heart. You can read many of those each day in the local columns that our area chamber of commerce and business leaders write for our business section.

The best of their advice can be found in action by the two businesses featured today and honored recently by Inc. magazine – National Gift Card in Crystal Lake and Other World Computing in Woodstock.

If you've read any of our stories on the successes of OWC, you already know how that company has found success. The technology retailer empowers customers to handle computer repairs and upgrades on their own, but also provides top-notch service to its clients. That could come in terms of competitive pricing for products, in creative approaches to making new products, or in direct customer service between the clients and OWC.

Those methods are echoed at NGC. The company has experienced explosive growth in the past three years – a 288 percent rise in sales from 2007-09 – and as a result the company has transformed the way it does business.

No longer is it enough for NGC's sales staff to ask customers to pick a store, pick a quantity of gift cards, and pick a delivery date. Now staffers are in direct communication with clients, finding out what they hope to accomplish by buying the gift cards, and what NGC can do to help customize the products, quantity and delivery to meet their needs.

It's what you would read in the words of Crystal Lake Chamber President Gary Reece, or McHenry Area Chamber President Kay Bates when they write about making local businesses work.

Find the best ways to listen to your clients and make their success your success. Clearly, NGC and OWC have found a way to make that happen.

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President Obama last week pitched anew his latest economic plan to help businesses grow. The lynchpins of the program are a tax break to encourage business investment in 2011, continuing tax cuts for those making \$250,000 annually or less, funding for

infrastructure projects, and money to help spur lending for small businesses.

Most of the proposals are familiar, but at presentations last week, Obama took the opportunity to point the finger at Republicans for causing the recession and holding up Democratic plans to fix its effects.

U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean, D-Barrington, helped put together the small business lending bill that is awaiting Senate approval. Considering how many businesses we hear from that are struggling still to access funding, passage of that bill seems obvious. And if the president wants to encourage investment with tax breaks, I'm sure plenty of businesses will consider it.

But the continued political blaming between both parties has gotten in the way of an economic recovery. Focusing more on ways to help businesses would be a much better use of everyone's time.

Getting government off businesses' backs sounds great, but we know it's not that easy. Finding ways to give struggling businesses a hand certainly seems like the best use of our politicians' time.

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