



[December 05/
January 06](#)



[Women in IT](#)

[Consumer tech](#)

[Systems engineers](#)

[Pharma & biotech](#)

[GLBT techies](#)

[BDPA entrepreneurs](#)

[UMUC tech faculty](#)



[Supplier diversity](#)

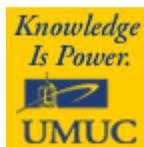
[Managing](#)

[Diversity in action](#)

[News & Views](#)



[CAREER OPPORTUNITIES](#)



Supplier Diversity **Growing BDPA**

BDPA's new entrepreneur advisory board helps business owners

"IT is a critical part of every business venture and we have evolved with the industry." - Wayne Hicks, president, BDPA

Fifteen years ago Tony Rhem launched his software consulting company, A J. Rhem and Associates Inc (Chicago, IL). No one told him how to do it; he relied on common sense and learned the business as he went along. "I'm an entrepreneur by heart and by trade and I really enjoy what I do," he says.

Today Rhem is reaching out to help other minority business owners as chair of the entrepreneur advisory group of Black Data Processing Associates (BDPA, Washington, DC). Established less than a year ago, the group is the latest branch of the association that has been helping African Americans with their IT careers for three decades.

Points of interest

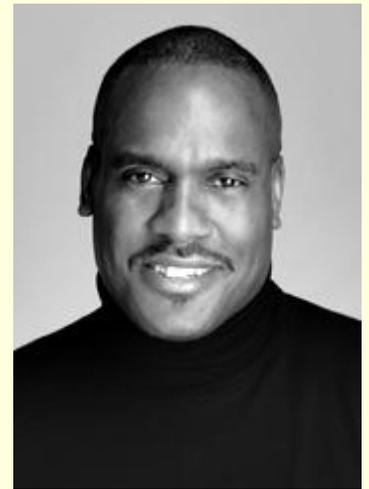
BDPA has always served entrepreneurs, says national president Wayne Hicks, "but today we have a stronger focus on our entrepreneur stakeholder group."

Founder Earl A. Pace, Jr agrees that business owners and entrepreneurs have always been points of interest for BDPA. Until recently, however, the primary focus was on a path "from the classroom to the boardroom," with the focus on rising within the existing corporate IT structure.

As the importance of IT has grown so have BDPA's supporters. Of more than a hundred major corporate sponsors, many are technology-based companies like IBM, Dell and Compuware, but even more are technology-using companies: Sears and Walgreens and organizations like Freddie Mac. "IT is a critical part of every business venture," Hicks points out, "and we have evolved with the industry."

Entrepreneurship is part of economic empowerment

The needs of African Americans are changing as well, Hicks says. "We're



Entrepreneur Tony Rhem knew BDPA could meet his goals of networking and service.



BDPA national president Wayne Hicks: "It's a matter of building economic empowerment."



Article Archive

no longer just fighting for civil rights. BDPA is recognizing that it's a matter of building economic empowerment." Part of that is ensuring that black IT pros have their share of influence in large corporations. Another part is entrepreneurship.

As employment opportunities tighten, a growing number of technically savvy African Americans are starting their own businesses.

And, as Hicks notes, "At the end of the day every entrepreneur needs contracts." That's where BDPA may be able to help.

Founder Pace explains that "The commonality of business owners and corporate members in BDPA lets us bring them together for bidding on contracts and joint ventures. Our own small business owners can help our sponsor corporations solve some of their IT outsourcing and contracting needs as well as their employee needs."

To help its entrepreneur members do business, the new advisory board connects BDPA sponsor corporations with BDPA small business owners on a very personal level. "I will often make the phone call myself," Hicks says.

Showcasing entrepreneurs

At the BDPA annual conference in Detroit last August, an entrepreneur showcase offered workshops of interest to business owners from entry level on up. The 2006 conference, in Los Angeles, CA in August, will have even more variety, Rhem says.

"Entrepreneurs have unique needs," he explains. "They come with issues related to business owner insurance, health insurance, certification questions. They need information regarding business operations, taxation, marketing and planning."

The advisory board has so far offered its helpful seminars on a national level. Now it hopes to get local chapters tapping in, doing their own programs based on the national model.

Networking through the database



Dr Craig Brown

BDPA's database, which serves as a directory for all BDPA members, is especially helpful to entrepreneurs, says Dr Craig Brown, a member of the entrepreneurial advisory board. Brown is the owner and president of CBC Inc, a technical systems solutions provider in Houston, TX.

He and other business owners have been helping their BDPA colleagues informally for years, he notes. "They come to us and we point them in the right direction. I like to help other folks realize the things I learned the hard way."

The database formalizes some of this help. Small companies can often benefit from partnerships with others, and the database lets small business owners access detailed info about other BDPA entrepreneurs and the work they do.

Hundreds of members are currently in the database, but Brown hopes to expand it to thousands. "Think of it as a black chamber of commerce," he

says.

Entrepreneurs can use the BDPA website to get help in other areas, too. For example, soon after Hurricane Katrina information was posted on connecting with FEMA for rebuilding efforts.

Giving back

Rhem didn't know about BDPA until his company was a year old, but he quickly found the association could meet two of his goals: to broaden his own horizons through networking, and to give back to the community.

One of his first BDPA assignments was chairing the educational branch of the Chicago chapter. "We helped high school kids with computer skills and let them write software and present it," he says. "We steered them in the right direction."

Rhem is also the author of *UML for Developing Knowledge Management Systems* (CRC Press, 2005).

Brown and Rhem consider their work on the board as a gift back to the community. With the help of BDPA's entrepreneur advisory board, folks who did not feel they had the support to go out on their own may want to reconsider, Brown notes. "If you have a talent, by all means explore it."