

NEWS

State kicks off online marketplace for vendors

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Vendors that do business with the state must register on a new online-based system by July 1 to continue doing business with state agencies.

The Florida Department of Management Services and the Department of Transportation are the pilot agencies that will be using the 'eProcurement' system to buy all their goods and services from vendors through the Internet, said John Kuczwanski, spokesman for the DMS, which is undertaking the project with the State Technology Office and the State Chief Financial Officer.

But even vendors who may not do business with the two departments still must register because there are plans for all Florida executive branch agencies, local governments, universities, colleges and schools to use the system by 2004, Kuczwanski said.

To register, visit MyFlorida.com and click on the [MyFloridaMarketPlace/e-Pro](#) link under "Hot Topics."

Benefits to the state include faster and more accurate ordering because the buying is one online transaction, according to the [MyFloridaMarketPlace](#) Web site.

The current system is not centrally organized, with buyers sometimes using fax machines and e-mail to contact vendors, said Lalla Sheehy, program manager for the University of North Florida Small Business Development Center in Gainesville.

"I think it (the state) is just trying to keep up with technology," Sheehy said.

She said, for example, if an office supply store wants to sell pencils to the state, it would have to register online along with all the other office supply companies wanting to do business with the state. Then they would all bid online.

Also, the system will show how much of a particular item the state buys, and this will enable the state to negotiate better bulk prices for such items in the future, Kuczwanski said.

"It's going to make the purchasing process easier for larger and smaller businesses," Kuczwanski said.

Benefits to the vendors include greater access to state buyers from small and minority businesses; access to online, interactive quoting and bidding; and automated collection of a 1 percent fee, which eliminates the responsibilities of self-reporting, he said.

The 1 percent fee will be collected for every contract and payment transaction and will be used for the development and operations of the [MyFloridaMarketPlace](#) system, Kuczwanski said.

Sheehy said small and minority businesses should diversify and become more flexible in the slower economy, which includes doing business with state agencies.

"Anything that can streamline the process will be a benefit to the small business owner," Sheehy said.

She added that most vendors have access to a computer and that the state is "kind of leveling the playing field" for small businesses.

Kuczwanski said that in a market like Gainesville's, the smaller and minority businesses will benefit from this state-of-the-art system. He estimated that 10,000 businesses have already registered with the system.

