

Wa\$teMatch gilds the white elephant

City-backed Web site allows exchange of surplus goods; lower costs, less junk

BY KERRY MURTHA

FOR YEARS, CHARLES FLICKINGER paid thousands of dollars annually to have tons of scraps from his Brooklyn-based glass company carted away. This summer, he discovered a better solution.

He registered his firm on www.wastematch.org, a new city-backed Web site that aims to connect businesspeople wanting to buy, sell or give away surplus goods.

"It's a great way for people to get additional value from the glass we make," says Mr. Flickinger, who has found artists and others eager to take some scraps off his hands.

Flickinger Glassworks is just one of hundreds of companies that have registered to use the Web site, which launched in July bearing the tagline: "Out of your Dumpster. Onto your bottom line."

Businesspeople can look around the site without making a commitment; if they choose to register,

they receive a user name and password at no expense. Those seeking to pick up materials can list the specific items that interest them. Those wanting to unload wares can offer goods for free, state a firm price or make the price negotiable. While there is no fee for using the site, people making transactions are asked to donate 20% of the item's value to the program.

"The Web site allows companies to find each other," says Stefanie Feldman, program director of NY Wa\$teMatch, which is run by the Industrial & Technology Assistance Corp., a government-funded organization under contract with the city.

Out of the rubble

The idea for the program surfaced more than six years ago at the city's Department of Sanitation. The department was trying to find ways to reduce trash volume as the closing date neared for the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island.

The service began as a simple online bulletin board. The city acted as middleman, posting requests that it had received and then helping parties come to terms after a match had been found.

The initial effort, while relative-

ly primitive, produced solid results. The city reckons that Wa\$teMatch diverted some 12,000 tons of waste from the landfills, while saving customers more than \$1.6 million.

Determined to improve on that record, the Department of Sanitation kicked in \$250,000 to help create wastematch.org. Thanks to the Web site, participants now can input information directly, contact trading partners on their own, and select categories to trigger automatic e-mails when those materials become available.

In the site's first three months of operation, 138 tons of materials—ranging from 4 tons of carpet tiles to \$75,000 worth of workstations—found their way to new owners, saving those businesses an estimated \$45,000.

What's more promising, the number of trading partners quadrupled to 1,000 within three months of the Web site launch, says Robert Lange, director of the Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse

and Recycling at the Department of Sanitation.

"It's much more user-friendly," Mr. Lange notes.

Richard Norris is among those who are sold on the Web site. Courtesy of wastematch.org, he was able to spruce up his office in Long Island City, Queens, for free, using 1,400 square feet of commercial-grade carpet from a Manhattan office building slated for renovation.

Small investment

"I spent just a few minutes perusing the site, and within days, I sent a van to pick up the carpet," says Mr. Norris, manager of transportation company TransCore.

Others are using the site to offload their by-products or surpluses and save themselves the disposal costs. Ray Mascia—a manager for C.R. Wallauer's, a retailer in North White Plains—did this recently with 725 gallons of house paint that had been returned to his store.

"It's gotten so expensive I can't afford to dispose of it," says Mr. Mascia.

Instead, through wastematch.org, he has found a number of church-

es and nonprofit organizations eager to take the paint off his hands. He reckons that such arrangements will save him around \$20,000 annually in disposal costs.

The Web site may be even more valuable for George Dertinger, vice president of Gem Sound Corp., a Bronx-based manufacturer of sound equipment. He has become so fond of the site that he uses it to both give and receive.

Mr. Dertinger found a Midwestern logistics firm willing to take 300 surplus cartons off his hands, freeing up storage space. He also connected with an industrial company in the Bronx that supplies him with pallets every month at no charge.

"This service is win, win, win," says Mr. Dertinger. "You save the cost of removing waste and purchasing items while reducing what goes into the dump." ■



TRASH ONLINE: Wa\$teMatch was designed to reduce garbage as Fresh Kills closed; the Web site has quadrupled the number of traders.

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