

{upfront art works!}

It's Time for Business to Get Creative

By Christina Wood

In the 21st century, ideas are the hot commodity. As we continue to retool our economy, the needs of an information-based system focused on delivering cutting-edge services and highly customized products become clearer. Innovation tops the wish list of nearly every CEO looking for a competitive advantage in the high-speed chase for customers in a global marketplace.

There's just one hitch.

Employers hungry for originality are finding that people with the ability to think creatively and look at challenges with fresh eyes are, unfortunately, not found hanging on trees.

"The arts are part of the solution," says Robert Lynch, president and CEO of Americans for the Arts, who was in town recently for the Palm Beach County Cultural Council's SmARTbiz Summit, sponsored by The PNC Foundation.

A survey conducted by the American Management Association identified certain job skills that will be needed if businesses are to thrive in the coming years. Creativity and innovation top the list, followed by communication, collaboration and critical thinking and problem solving. Further research shows that involvement in the arts has been identified as a key marker of creativity in prospective employees.

Countless other studies have unequivocally demonstrated the economic value of the arts and the benefits of arts education. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review* blog, Tony Golsby-Smith spells it out, "People trained in the humanities who study Shakespeare's poetry, or Cezanne's paintings, say, have learned to play with big concepts, and to apply new ways of thinking to difficult problems that can't be analyzed in conventional ways."



Jazz celebrates improvisation. In the theater, every set is the creative solution to a problem and every performance communicates ideas. A member of the high school marching band learns a lot about collaboration. An afternoon spent wandering through a museum may provide a new perspective.

"I firmly believe that an understanding and appreciation of the arts, and well-developed creative skills are central to the future of America's workforce development," Charles Segars, Ovation CEO, testified before Congress. "There is no question that our rapidly evolving global economy demands a dynamic and creative workforce. If we want America to stay competitive, we must invest in the arts to a greater degree."

In Palm Beach County, bridges are being built that will make the path to a vibrant economic future much smoother – and potentially shorter. Members of the cultural and business community are coming together, as they did at the SmARTbiz Summit, and forging new relationships that are mutually beneficial. Arts organizations are learning how to more effectively structure their operations while sharing valuable insight into their passionate and creative can-do approach.

"Palm Beach County has one of the richest arts and culture environments in the country," says Kelly Smallridge, president and CEO of the Business Development Board of Palm Beach County. "Strong partnerships between businesses, community members and the arts stimulate economic growth."

Our non-profit arts organizations have always relied on support from the business community. To meet the need for innovation and creativity in what former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan calls an "Economy of Ideas," businesses may want to consider relying on the arts. 



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Americans for the Arts



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