

LEADER TIMES

Pittsburgh firm wants county's voices to be counted

By Michael Miller

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To Pittsburgh-based Campos Inc, your opinion matters, especially if you're from Armstrong County.

For the past year, the company has been trying to build an opinion panel comprised of thousands of people in a 10-county area surrounding Pittsburgh, but has yet to garner sufficient numbers in Armstrong County.

"We have hardly anyone represented in Armstrong County," said Yvonne Campos, the company's founder.

Finding county residents willing to participate is vital to the opinion panel's success, she said.

"We were hoping to get at least one percent (of the entire panel) from each county," Campos said. "That gives us some numbers we can work with."

The idea of having an opinion panel is somewhat new -- where companies and polling firms build databases of thousands of people who willingly submit to opinion surveys or product testing.

But most are done with an international or national pool of people, rather than a regional one, as Campos is trying to build.

"We feel like this is a vehicle that will allow us to take the pulse of the region on issues," she said.

So far, the panel, called Vo!ce of the Region, has about 23,700 participants, most are from Allegheny County, Campos said.

The panel is done largely via the Internet, she added. Participants are notified when a new survey is being taken and can decide each time whether they'd like to participate or not, she said.

Survey subjects have ranged from cultural issues, public education, economic forecasting, and health and fitness, Campos said, and are conducted on a quarterly basis.

Campos Inc does marketing research for businesses, universities, financial institutions and many others. The information collected by the panel could be used by a company to determine whether it is possible to locate in the area, or whether its product is marketable in the region, she said.

The company's clients include Pittsburgh television stations, Carnegie Mellon University, Dollar Bank, the Heinz History Center and Pittsburgh Regional Alliance.

Participation in the panel is free and voluntary, she said. The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review is partnering with Campos Inc. to help build the opinion panel database.

In addition, Campos said, the names in the panel are not disseminated to any company, or any other organization.

"We have very tight controls on that," she said.

Campos said she is hoping to "create a buzz" about the panel, building it into a tool that could help attract businesses to the area, and provide current companies with valuable data about the people they serve.

But Voice of the Region can't be a complete success until it truly represents the area, she said, which is why she is hoping to get some interest locally.

"It's really almost impossible to find out how a county feels about something," she said, adding that she believes the panel can change that.

For more information about the panel, or to sign up as a participant, visit www.voiceoftheregion.com or call 412-471-8484, ext. 409.

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