

NPGA Affinity Program Providers Offer Exclusive Discounts, Best-in-Class Service

When propane marketers utilize business products and services from NPGA Affinity Program Providers, they are working with vendors that have been vetted by industry members and endorsed by the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA). As a page that is to be included in the next edition of the NPGA Membership Directory puts it, these providers offer “Products and Services Chosen Especially for Propane Companies.”

Christine Hutcherson, director of member services at NPGA, says these vendors offer NPGA members exclusive discounts and benefits. They also have a real understanding of the industry and its members’ needs. By choosing these vendors, she adds, association members can save both time and money.

“We vet all these programs,” Hutcherson told *BPN*. “We take the time and effort comparing different vendors, learning what they do, and seeing if they will work for a propane marketer’s business. The association has done the homework, so the members can save time. A lot of times these vendors have programs set up specifically for the propane market; they understand your business, so the ramp-up to fit your needs is less steep.”

The Affinity Program includes only one vendor for each category of product or service. “This provides members with a best-in-class choice and better customer service,” Hutcherson explained.

“Time is money,” she added. “When you don’t have to spend time selecting vendors, you can do other activities related to your business. Plus, the Affinity Program Providers offer discounts and other benefits exclusively to members.”

When propane marketers sign up with an NPGA Affinity Program Provider, it also benefits their state association. There is a revenue-sharing agreement, with up to 60% of the royalty allotted to state associations. The distribution of those royalties depends on which marketers utilize these products and services.

“As part of the vetting process, we have a group of volunteers who have formed a task force and look at NPGA supplier members to see who might offer benefits to members. Supplier members have a leg up in this process because they know what our members do,” Hutcherson said. “The task force makes recommendations to the

Member Services Committee and ultimately the Executive Committee, so we have views from different perspectives. These are your peers and they have the best interests of the industry in mind. Everything we get offered doesn’t become part of the program. We are choosy. We ask, ‘Is it relevant to our industry?’”

The newest members of the program are AVATAS Payment Solutions and P3 Propane Safety. Both were introduced to NPGA members in February 2018, at the NPGA Board of Directors meeting. AVATAS Payment Solutions offers credit card processing; P3 Propane Safety offers a safety documentation and compliance management system and a duty-to-warn program.

These companies joined a group of NPGA Affinity Program Providers that also includes Cintas (uniforms and facility supplies), Crum & Forster (insurance solutions), Goodyear (tires), HR University (human resources support), Laborchex (background checks), NPGA Propane Marketplace (online products and services directory), Staples Business Advantage (office supplies), and TekCollect (accounts receivable solutions).

P3 Propane Safety, one of the newest members of the NPGA Affinity Program, offers two programs that are endorsed by the association. One, the P3 Compliance System, offers a safety documentation and compliance management system that includes Error-

Recognition Technology to help marketers achieve 100% accurate safety documentation. The other, the P3 Duty to Warn program, is a cost-effective, turnkey process designed to provide propane marketers with a customized annual consumer safety mailing. The company mailed more than 1 million pieces for more than 300 marketers in 2017.

“NPGA Affinity Program Providers have been endorsed by NPGA,” Jerry Schimmel, vice president of P3 Propane Safety, told *BPN*. “They have gone through a selection process, have been reviewed, and have been found to provide added value and benefits to marketers.”

HR University has supplied human resources support to NPGA members for more than 15 years. The company’s affiliation with NPGA began when other trade associations recommended the program. Soon after, it was contracted to offer services to association members as well. HR University provides NPGA members with

NPGA

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AFFINITY PROGRAM PROVIDER

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Tires

HR University

Human resources support

Laborchex

Background checks

NPGA Propane Marketplace

Online products and services directory

P3 Propane Safety

Safety documentation and compliance management, duty-to-warn program

Staples Business Advantage

Office supplies

TekCollect

Accounts receivable solutions

simple solutions to employment issues for their companies.

Through its contract with NPGA, HR University provides human resources-focused news and forms that NPGA members can use free of charge. These include the Personnel Notebook, HR On the Job, and HR Library of Forms found in the members' section of the association's website. HR University also provides a hotline members can call, email, or fax for private discussions about employment issues. Non-NPGA companies contract for these same services at a cost of \$1000 a year;

if the company were in California, where the laws are more complex, that cost is \$1500 a year. HR University offers additional programs to NPGA members for a fee; these include services like creating employee handbooks, writing a severance agreement, or managing job-related investigations.

"Most members of NPGA are small companies and they don't have an HR department," said Bill Cook, president and owner of HR University. "We become their HR department."

Over the last 15 years, NPGA members have visited the company's website about 70,000 times. Over the last 10 years, association members have called the hotline, emailed, or faxed the company asking for help about 4000 times.

Laborchex, the NPGA Affinity Program Provider of background checks, offers NPGA members discounts on background checks for current or prospective employees. The company also verifies employment and professional credentials.

"We have been a partner with NPGA for many years," said Kym Lewis, director of client services at Laborchex. "We provide a full spectrum of screening services that go hand in hand with the best customer experience in the industry. Laborchex provides a discount to all NPGA members on all of their screening needs. Laborchex understands this industry and the standards the members are held to, specifically criminal screenings as well as DOT employment verifications. The benefits we provide to NPGA members are a reduction in their screening spend; fast, efficient turnaround; and service professionals that stand ready to meet any and all needs."

TekCollect, the NPGA Affinity Program Provider of accounts receivable solutions, has been awarded the endorsement twice.

"We went through an RFP process that was very detailed," said Diane Schumm, vice president of corporate services at TekCollect. "After our company had been endorsed for four or five years, the NPGA membership



P3 Propane Safety, one of the newest members of the NPGA Affinity Program, offers two programs that are endorsed by the association: the P3 Compliance System and the P3 Duty to Warn program.

committee did a review of each category—even though we had no problems and have very good relationships—and we are very proud to have been endorsed again."

TekCollect provides comprehensive accounts receivable management, collections, and customer retention solutions. The company reports it has helped NPGA members resolve 86% of accounts submitted at a substantial cost savings when compared to other AR solutions. It works to provide non-alienating collections that does not cause the retailer to lose the customer.

"We have a dedicated group of collectors that exclusively work the propane industry," Schumm said. "They become very familiar with the ins and outs of that industry. We also integrate with most of the software packages used in the propane industry."

"We provide a customized service," she added. "Smaller dealers can enjoy benefits otherwise offered only to larger ones; at the same time, there is no business too large for us to handle. Many times in business, a smaller dealer is competing with larger ones; NPGA, to their credit, wants to give benefits to all members."

NPGA continually seeks out different programs to provide new benefits. "We'd like to hear suggestions from members," Hutcherson of NPGA said. "If there is a solution you need, or if there are things you wish we would offer, we'd love to hear it."

"The Affinity Program is gravy for the membership," Hutcherson concluded. "The real work of NPGA has to do with the advocacy and regulatory issues the association deals with. The Affinity Program is something that's extra, but if a member takes advantage of one or two of these offerings, the savings could cover their NPGA dues."

NPGA members can contact the vendors and learn about the benefits they offer by visiting the Member Dashboard section of the NPGA website. To learn more about the Affinity Program or about joining NPGA, visit the association's website at npga.org. —Steve Relyea