



FINANCIAL REVIEW

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### Free software will help fill out the paperwork

Tuesday, 09 June 2009 | Enterprise | Page 52 | Jason Clout

A trio of IT businesses has combined to offer a rare deal: downloading their products free for a year.

The companies - B-free, Legal Toolbox and ThoughtWare - have provided a no-cost software option for 1000 small businesses entitled the Small Business Stimulus Package.

Chief executive of ThoughtWare, Sonja Bernhardt, said it was a decision taken to help other small businesses deal with compliance, risk management and preparing their business activity statements.

"They can just take the software they like, they don't have to take all of it," she said.

"Any business in Australia can access it. However, we don't want overseas users as it's for local businesses."

"It's really for micro, small and medium-sized businesses, like ourselves. Other than that it's just the first 1000 to apply."

Ms Bernhardt said if there was any "catch" to the deal, it was simply that at the end of the 12-month period, the users would like the product so much they would decide to renew their access for an annual fee of about \$150.

"We hope they can see enough benefit in the products to renew. We stress that the offer is only for a 12-month period.

"But if they don't renew, their data is returned to them at our cost and in a useable format. There is an element of extending brand awareness for us through this project. But it's more that the way forward for small businesses is not government handouts, but to improve their productivity, which will also leave them better prepared for when the economy turns around," she said.

ThoughtWare's software contribution, i.on my business, had recorded strong growth in the March quarter. Sales were up 77 per cent on the same quarter in 2008 and the business's profitability had also improved.

"We're not multimillionaires, but we're doing OK and that's why we've decided to make this offer," Ms Bernhardt said. "As it's software, we can do it without it costing too much, although there are costs involved such as the extra traffic on our servers."

Many small businesses struggle with financial reporting. Ms Bernhardt said B-free's product expedited preparation of a firm's BAS, allowing

the owners to concentrate on running the business.

The global financial crisis had left many small businesses vulnerable, she said

"But if we can help them with their compliance and legal affairs, that might assist them through this difficult period. We'd like to see other businesses make a similar offer - small business helping other small businesses."