

## Immigration Reform: What Might it Mean for Job Creation and Hiring?

By: Melanie Berkowitz, Esq.

No doubt about it -- immigration reform, long-overlooked by Washington, is finally getting serious attention.

“It would be extremely unlikely if we don’t have a signed law by August,” says immigration lawyer Justin Burton, partner at Kriezelman Burton & Associates.

More and more members of Congress are jumping on the immigration reform bandwagon. And if politicians from both parties are to be believed, reform is coming soon, and it is going to generate a significant number of jobs along with it (potentially up to 1.6 million over the next 10 years.)

Just how significant is immigration reform for America’s economy growth? We’ve heard the statistics over and over -- 40% of Fortune 500 companies have at least one immigrant founder; while one in four small businesses is started by an immigrant.

Now is the time to take a hard look at what existing US businesses and business owners should do to take advantage of

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this potential economic bounty.

### What Might Immigration Reform Look Like?

If the law includes the often-discussed provisions for amnesty, increased availability of start-up visas and a guest worker program, Burton sees a boost to the economy on multiple fronts.

“Whether skilled or unskilled, educated or not, these are people who have nothing to lose and a strong desire to gain. Comprehensive reform would allow them to fulfill their potential and in turn, help grow the economy in their adopted country.”

### Skilled Immigrants: New Businesses and Business Opportunities

“With close to half of the 11 million undocumented workers living in the US because they overstayed work or student visas, there is a lot of STEM skill (science, technology, engineering, mathematics)

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already here,” Burton says.

He adds that this group is waiting for the legal right to jump back into workforce, “and use their skills to innovate, develop and start new businesses.”

This forecast is supported by research from the Kauffman Foundation, an entrepreneur-support organization.

The Foundation estimates that a pathway to permanent residency for highly skilled immigrant entrepreneurs (who meet certain funding and hiring criteria) could lead to anywhere between 500,000 and 1.6 million new jobs in the next ten years, mostly in the high-tech and engineering fields.

There is plenty of data and anecdotal evidence available to support the notion of the immigrant entrepreneurial spirit. But getting these new companies off the ground will not happen in a vacuum, which will further generate business and staffing opportunities.

Existing businesses such as banks, investment companies, real estate agents, marketing and PR firms can provide new start-ups with much-needed support -- everything from investment capital to a storefront to computer hardware. This may mean expanded growth opportunities for established

companies.

## **Small Business: Benefitting from More Skilled Workers**

The legalization of millions of undocumented immigrants and easing of visa requirements for skilled workers abroad could dramatically change the way that smaller businesses hire, particularly as STEM expertise becomes more available state-side.

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## **Opportunities for Strategic Partnerships**

Businesses that currently offer services and products to start-ups should consider how to

best leverage new opportunities generated by immigration reform.

For instance, a high-tech start-up may need manufacturing capabilities, a sales force or product development assistance. Another new company might need a fleet of trucks, raw materials or advertising services.

As immigrant-owned start-up companies get off the ground, current businesses can work with local Small Business Association chapters or with community lenders to create strategic partnerships. Such symbiotic relationships can benefit both businesses.

## **Immigration Reform: Industries to Watch**

Whether it’s the creation of new businesses, opportunities for strategic partnerships or an expanding hiring pool for existing companies, immigration reform is likely to impact both high-tech and low-tech employers.

Companies would be wise to explore the possibility for growth and increased demand created by reform. Some of the industries likely to benefit include:

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## **High-Tech/High-Skilled Workers:**

- IT staffing, including computer coding, app development, hardware and software development, “Smart” technology, database oversight and programming.
  - Engineering for construction, manufacturing, defense and infrastructure.
  - Research and development for pharmaceutical companies.
  - Healthcare staffing, including researchers, physicians, skilled nurses.
  - General scientific research in physics, aerospace, biochemistry and other disciplines.
  - Business-administration hiring, including companies that oversee payroll, visa tracking, business loans, health insurance and staffing.
- assistance.
- Healthcare, including lab technicians, aides, medical assistants.
  - Agriculture jobs, including everything from landscaping to farming. ■

## **Low-Tech/Low-Skilled Workers:**

- Food-service companies.
- Retail-oriented small businesses such as florists, bakeries, groceries, gift shops.
- Wholesale suppliers who service small retailers.
- Service companies that provide cleaning, babysitting, entertainment and other such