

**Message Development**

SBA:  
Putting  
Research into  
Action

**Background:**

The Small Business Administration (SBA) serves millions of small businesses that start and grow each year, adding jobs and productivity to the U.S. economy. One of SBA's primary missions is to support the small business community with helpful information and assistance. Past efforts were focused primarily on developing print products that often sat in the warehouse. The lack of a strong centralized marketing program caused various components of the organization to develop multiple approaches to branding and messaging on their own. The result: a scattered brand message.

The new Marketing Director eliminated alternative versions of the logo and changed the agency's positioning statement to "Your Small Business Resource." With plans due for the upcoming year, the invigorated marketing program now needed to assess the information and resource needs of the small business community and determine the most effective means of delivery.

**JDG's Solution**

JDG and the SBA developed a research strategy with two complementary but distinct directions: An internal communications audit and external focus groups with small business owners.



The communications audit focused on discovering both successful and unsuccessful practices, messages and approaches. In addition, the process helped to identify the marketing needs of regional and district offices.

Focus groups with small business owners were conducted in 3 cities to identify their information and resource needs, highlight preferred delivery channels and to test messages.

**Results**

Findings were put to work immediately. Based on the research, several

important changes and additions were made to the proposed Marketing Plan, such as undertaking a campaign featuring real small business success stories, adding a marketing newsletter and other tools for its regional offices, marketing the breadth of services offered by the agency and increased partnering efforts with other business organizations and events. Other initiatives were validated, e.g., the need for consistent and cohesive branding and messaging, more multi-media approaches and greater reliance on the Web site. Most interesting is that the findings of the internal audit and the focus groups with small businesses resulted in similar conclusions.

**Awards**

JDG and the SBA were recognized for "Excellence in Government Communications for Message Development" by the Performance Institute at their 2005 Government Communicators Conference.

*"The JDG message research underscored a number of key points that were immediately included in our latest Marketing Plan and are being tracked in the agency's Score Card."*

**Bonnie Friedman,**  
Director, SBA Office of Marketing

