



What Small and Medium-size Companies Want: Results of a Survey

By Gary S. Insch, Assistant Professor, WVU Dept. of Management and Elizabeth Hardman, Undergraduate Research Assistant

The WVU College of Business and Economics recently completed a survey of small- and medium-sized businesses in conjunction with the West Virginia Manufacturer's Association (WVMA) and the Industries of the Future – West Virginia program. The purpose of the survey was to help the WVMA identify ways it could better serve its existing membership base and provide insights into services that it could provide to West Virginia's small- and medium-sized businesses.

Data for this project were collected between September 2005 and January 2006 through a mail survey with an online version also available. The survey was sent to a database of small-to-medium sized companies in West Virginia. In all, 140 surveys were analyzed. The survey participants responded to questions regarding their company's awareness and need for additional information on issues such as environmental permitting, OSHA regulations, tax requirements, human resources, safety management, and workers' compensation.

Workers' Compensation was the area of highest interest to both WVMA members and nonmembers. Respondents strongly indicated that the WVMA should send out regular updates on issues pertaining to workers' compensation. Additionally, there was interest in the WVMA conducting periodic seminars on workers' compensation.

WVMA members were much more concerned about employment law and unemployment compensation issues than nonmembers. This difference in the level of interest may be attributed to the demographics of the respondents. The WVMA members on average have more employees than the nonmembers; therefore, a larger company would be more aware of employment law issues.

There were no differences between members and nonmembers on hiring and retaining good employees, and both groups indicated that it is harder to find good people than it is to retain them. WVMA members had a higher level of awareness of training funds available to them than nonmembers. Both groups showed a moderate interest in human resources training programs conducted by the WVMA and a slightly higher interest in information on training programs conducted through community colleges. A majority of respondents agreed that participating in WVMA safety management programs and being informed about security/terrorism issues would be helpful.

Respondents strongly indicated that a website of frequently asked questions (FAQ's), reminders of due dates, and legislation summaries would be extremely helpful. There was moderate interest for an e-mail listserv and roundtable discussion group. There was little interest for an online discussion forum.

Time limitations are a major factor for WVMA members as 74% of them said they have difficulty attending meetings for this reason. Online access to the Small Business Information Network (SBIN) would allow businesses to seek out information for themselves, on their own time. The website should be updated frequently with information on external programs, reminders of permit deadlines, and due dates.

Establishment of a WVMA SBIN was strongly supported by all respondents. The SBIN would be a new WVMA program to provide seminars, training programs, and similar resources to the West Virginia small and medium size business community. In addition to seminars on workers' compensation and human resources issues, SBIN could provide information on safety/security management, OSHA regulations, and environmental permitting. The incorporation of external organizations such as the West Virginia Development Office, universities, research organizations, and community and technical colleges would give a well-rounded balance to the WVMA's already well-established legislative lobbying work.

— Gary S. Insch, PhD, is the Assistant Professor of Management at West Virginia University's College of Business and Economics, and a member of the university's Management and Industrial Relations group. You may contact him at (304) 293-7937 for additional information on the survey.

EVENTS

Energy Relevancy of the Glassmaking Process Seminar sponsored by ITP and Alfred University's Center for Glass Research will be held July 25-27, 2006 in Alfred, NY. For more information or to register, log on to http://engineering.alfred.edu/outreach/short_crse_desc/energy_relev_glassmakinghtml.html.

25th International Conference on Ground Control in Mining sponsored by NIOSH, MSHA, WVU and the WV Small Business Development Center will be held Aug. 1-3, 2006 at Lakeview Scanticon Resort & Conference Center in Morgantown, WV. For more information or to register contact Karen Centofanti at (304) 293-7860 ext. 3304.

West Virginia Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting will be held Aug. 30 - Sept. 1, 2006 at the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, WV. Visit www.wvchamber.com for more information.

23rd Annual International Pittsburgh Coal Conference will be held Sept. 25-28, 2006 at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh, PA. Visit www.engr.pitt.edu/pcc/ for more information.

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Co-Funding Opportunities for IOF-WV Research Teams

| Announcement | Due Dates | Funding |
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| National Science Foundation Partnerships for Innovation www.nsf.gov | Now Open (Request for Proposals) June 28, 2006 (Letters of Intent Due) August 30, 2006 (Proposals Due) | \$9,000,000 in total funding anticipated for 10 to 15 awards |
| U.S. Department of Agriculture SBIR www.csrees.usda.gov/funding/sbir/sbir.html | Now Open (Requests for Proposals) Sept. 1, 2006 (Proposals Due) | Up to \$80,000 for Phase I awards Up to \$350,000 for Phase II awards |
| NASA SBIR and STTR http://sbir.gsfc.nasa.gov/SBIR/SBIR.html | July 7, 2006 (Request for Proposals) Sept. 7, 2006 (Proposals Due) | Up to \$100,000 for Phase I awards Up to \$750,000 for Phase II awards |
| U.S. Department of Energy Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (DOE-EPSCoR) Implementation Awards http://e-center.doe.gov | Now Open (Request for Proposals) Sept. 27, 2006 (Proposals Due) | \$3,000,000 in total funding anticipated for 4 to 6 awards |
| U.S. Department of Energy Solar America Initiative (SAI) Technology Pathway Partnerships Phase I http://e-center.doe.gov | Now Open (Request for Proposals) July 27, 2006 (Letters of Intent Due) October 2, 2006 (Proposals Due) | \$170,000,000 estimated between fiscal year 2007 and fiscal year 2009 |
| U.S. Department of Energy Collaborative Energy Efficiency Research in Iron-Making and Steel-Making http://e-center.doe.gov | Now Open (Request for Proposals) Aug. 1, 2006 (Letter of Intent Due) Oct. 3, 2006 (Proposals Due) | \$700,000 in total funding anticipated for fiscal year 2007 |

Mark your calendar!

The 10th Annual IOF-WV Symposium
November 8th - 10th, 2006 @ the Town Centre Marriott
Charleston, WV

For more information contact Kathleen Cullen at (304) 293-2867 ext. 5426 or
Kathleen.Cullen@mail.wvu.edu or visit us on the web at iofwv.nrcce.wvu.edu.

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