

SMALL BUSINESS BRIEF

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**UTILIZATION OF THE SMALL BUSINESS ADVANCEMENT
NATIONAL CENTER IN CREATING A MORE VIABLE
CLASSROOM SETTING AND VIBRANT UP TO DATE RESEARCH**

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ABSTRACT

This article provides the reader with a better understanding of how to utilize the Small Business Advancement National Center in their classroom and their research. The Center's website is used by numerous colleges and universities for research and classroom information. The Electronic Resource allows the professor and students a much greater opportunity to communicate via the Internet and e-mail as well as receive classroom and business consulting information. The paper also gives ideas as to how to utilize other Internet interfaced teaching tools.

INTRODUCTION

This article provides an overview of how to utilize the Small Business Advancement National Center (SBANC) in the classroom and for research. The Center's website has been employed by numerous colleges and universities around the world to assist in research and to provide information for the classroom. In addition, a large number of academic institutions, foundations, small businesses and governmental agencies use its web site and newsletter. This article provides the reader with the essentials to explore the many teaching techniques that can be utilized by the Center's electronic resource (web site <http://www.sbaer.uca.edu>) and the Internet.

The United States Government has instituted as its number one goal that "All students and teachers will have access to information technology in their classrooms, schools, communities and homes" (www.ed.gov). "With the soaring cost of college tuition, students are compelled to spend more and more time working. One of the consequences is that they have fewer hours in which they can utilize a teacher's office hours. The number of adult learners is also growing, and they too are pressed to find a time when both they and their professor are free for consultation" (Banks & Coombs, 2002). The Electronic Resource allows the professor and students a much greater opportunity to communicate via the Internet and e-mail as well as receive classroom and business consulting information.

SMALL BUSINESS ADVANCEMENT NATIONAL CENTER (SBANC)

Located on the scenic University of Central Arkansas campus in Conway, Arkansas, the Small Business Advancement National Center (SBANC) is an organization that was founded in 1990 by an act of the United States Senate. Since its inception as the Small Business Institute Directors' Association National Center, it has evolved into a multi-faceted small business counseling and electronic resource information center.

"While high-tech companies have long nurtured intellectual capital, companies today of all types recognize they are in the business of creating value through applied knowledge. Even small corporations have surprisingly diverse needs for up-to-date knowledge and skills" (workforce.com). Now a leading-edge facility, SBANC offers small businesses some of the newest, freshest information on advances in today's small business technology. SBANC's purpose is to provide the following constituents with the necessary resources to further their business and economic efforts and goals:

- Small businesses
- Economic development officers
- Entrepreneurs
- Government agencies
- Educators
- Small business counselors and consultants
- Students
- International trade development officers
- Lawyers
- State and federal legislatures

One main focus of the Center's activities is the promotion of the entrepreneurial spirit. This is accomplished through consulting, educating, and training Center constituents. These activities are provided locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally for those interested in small business and entrepreneurship using the following methods:

- Internet
- Conferences
- Distance learning
- Newsletters
- Seminars
- Counseling sessions
- Research
- International exchanges
- Internships

The Center's mission is part of the broader mission of the University of Central Arkansas and College of Business Administration, which is built on teaching, research, and service. The Center's staff has expertise in the areas of small business counseling/consulting, training and education, entrepreneurship, international programs, the Internet, electronic commerce, publications and more. In addition, student workers and interns who are eager to help provide small businesses with needed assistance will have the opportunities to provide fresh ideas and learn while they are working on real business problems. The Small Business Advancement Electronic Resource is available around the clock. Staff members will be available to answer questions from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Central Time) Monday through Friday. All data is updated daily with information that is received from many sources concerning small business and entrepreneurship.

Instant up-to-the-moment electronic small business information is provided to small business constituents through our Small Business Advancement Electronic Resource. This connection serves as an extensive electronic link among small business owners, entrepreneurs, foundations, educational institutions, associations, international partners, and local, state, and federal government. The World Wide Web site offers an endless supply of valuable information that is geared towards helping already established businesses, as well as those just beginning. At the present time, the electronic resource is servicing the United States and its protectorates, as well as over eighty nations worldwide. Examples of information provided include industry profiles, business plans, research articles, international and domestic contact databases, and loan information.

The Small Business Advancement Electronic Resource: The following resources and services are provided free of charge to the Internet public.

- Houses research information on all aspects of small business and entrepreneurship, including articles from conference proceedings, industry profiles, and publications from other pertinent sources.
- Has software that will produce cash flow reports, profit/loss statements, a business plan, and provide a user with the probability of obtaining a loan.
- Provides a means for electronic consulting and training.
- Provides on-line databases that can be queried on programs such as Service Core of Retired Executives, Small Business Institute, international small business contacts, Small Business Development Centers, Small Business Institute (formerly the Small Business Institute Director's Association), Congressional contacts, Small Business Administration and the International Council for Small Business.
- Offers a weekly electronic newsletter to provide "helpful hints" to small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Serves as a source for important news and information concerning small business such as conferences, educational resources, government programs and issues, and small business programs.
- Provides links of other small business and entrepreneur sites on the World Wide Web.
- Serves as a clearinghouse for small business advocacy information.
- Provides a Web server that is accessible through the Internet with any web client software. (<http://www.sbaer.uca.edu>)

The following associations have their proceedings listed on the website: Small Business Institute (formerly the Small Business Institute Director's Association - SBIDA), Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ASBE), United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (USASBE), Academy of Collegiate Marketing Educators (ACME), Western Decision Sciences Institute (WDSI), International Council for Small Business (ICSB), Southwestern Marketing Association (SWMA), Decision Sciences Institute (DSI), Society for Marketing Advances (SMA), International Small Business Congress, Small Business Administration (SBA), Service Corps of Retired Executives, Southwest Decision Sciences Institute (SWDSI), Federation of Business Disciplines (FBD), Institute for Supply Management, US Department of Veterans Affairs and the Marketing Management Association (MMA).

"Teachers are becoming freed from the physical boundaries of classrooms and the time restrictions of schedules" (Charp, 2000). Having technology set up in the classroom is just a small part of what the instructor has to put up with. "It has been noted that one out of every four visitors to Internet sites is either a student or an educator seeking curriculum ideas, research tools, information on publications, or opportunities for professional development"

(Charp, 2000). The real question is: "How does the instructor utilize all of these resources?" (Levine, 2002). Fortunately, there are many answers to this question. Some ideas as to how to utilize the SBANC Electronic Resource and other Internet interfaced teaching tools are presented below.

Of course, the easiest way to use the Internet is to present notes that the instructor has prepared. These lecture notes should also be available to students either as a handout or downloadable from the instructor's website. If a website is not available, the instructor can utilize the same material with slides and an overhead projector. But it is a lot easier to do this with a computer. The only problem that the author has found in utilizing this method is that it is very easy to present more material than the student can absorb. Thus, the instructor must pay attention to the student's reactions and check to see if the students understand the material by asking questions. "Use of the Internet for reinforcement of concepts already learned in the classroom and as a practical application of theoretical principles are great examples of how to make concepts more easily understood" (iloveteaching.com).

The electronic resource also offers software that can be downloaded and utilized in the classroom. One of the most important downloadable software items is *The First Step Review*, which allows a student or business to plug in their financial data and see their opportunity of getting a loan at the bank. This is a piece of software that has been heavily utilized not only in the classroom, but also with students utilizing the Small Business Institute live case approach.

Links to other small business related web sites appear on our electronic resource. These links can be used for instructional purposes or research. Our links section can be utilized as a one-stop shop for web sites with information pertaining to small business and entrepreneurship all over the world. There are hundreds of web sites listed. Many times the author will utilize these web sites as part of the author's lecture to bring current and up-to-date information to the students. The response from students has been very positive both from the utilization of the web sites live in the classroom and by having assignments made from these links. This information is not only much more current, but in many cases more accurate than what is available from other resources.

Another instructional tool is the utilization of demonstrations and simulations by having the students connected to the Internet and a projection system. The instructor or the students can give demonstrations and simulations that make the topic come alive. It has been amazing to the author how much more the students learn by interactive learning techniques.

When utilizing the Small Business Institute live case model, many students across the world have utilized the electronic research by a laptop in a place of business or meeting room. With a lab top, modem and phone line, the students can literally utilize the electronic resource right in the place of business or give a demonstration or seek information immediately. Many times the students will have a demonstration loaded on the electronic resource that can be played back to the business over the Internet. Small business owners have been overwhelmed by the ingenuity of the student teams. "Instructors who value the processes of discussion, dialogue, and public discourse and who are interested in incorporating these forms of electronic resources into their courses, whether serving small or large numbers of students, will find useful ideas for enhancing (economics) courses" (Gillette, 2001).

We are just looking at the beginning of these new pedagogically techniques. "E-learning is surging largely on the strength of advances in networking and Web technologies, collaboration software, multimedia, content management systems, and other building blocks for educational and training applications (Bowen, 2002).

Center staff and College of Business faculty to further economic opportunities conduct primary and field research. Research is disseminated, shared, and exchanged with various small business related entities around the world to promote the development and globalization of Arkansas businesses.

The Center provides the Small Business Institute program with needed information and data. SBI is conducted at approximately 475 colleges and universities nationwide assisting over 6,000 small businesses annually. The Center also supports the efforts of the Small Business Institute (formerly the Small Business Institute Directors' Association) by providing some operational and archival support on a mutually acceptable basis.

Information Clearinghouse - SBANC serves as a central information point for up-to-date knowledge, skills, and techniques on small business and entrepreneurship.

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