

# Proceedings of the 6th Annual Federal Depository Library Conference

April 14-17, 1997

---

## Agency Update: the Small Business Administration

John Ward, Small Business Administration  
Washington, DC

Compared to the larger Federal agencies that are engaged in publishing research and statistics, the Small Business Administration (SBA) is something of a poor relation: It's a small agency (some 4,513 employees nationwide, compared to some 34,228 employed by an organization such as the Commerce Department), it is relatively new (it only came into existence in 1953), and its publication function is somewhat limited, since its primary focus is on program delivery (issuing loan guarantees, administering procurement assistance programs, running a disaster loan program, etc.), rather than publishing statistics or research.

### **About the SBA**

The Small Business Administration is engaged primarily in writing loan guarantees issued by bank lenders to small businesses, in administering a disaster assistance program, and in offering counseling and technical assistance to small businesses. It delivers its services through a network of some 84 SBA field offices, as well as through Business Information Centers (BICs), and One-Stop Capital Shops.

It also delivers counseling and assistance through some "resource partners," such as the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), a network of over 400 chapters staffed by some 12,400 volunteers, and through over 900 Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), a business assistance effort co-funded by the SBA and state governments.

### **Getting Information about the SBA**

The simplest way of getting basic information about the Small Business Administration--from office locations and telephone numbers to the text of many information pamphlets--is by consulting its home page on the World Wide Web at <<http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov>>. Basic information is also available to the public from the Small Business Answer Desk (800-827-5722), a toll-free information line that is accessible 24 hours a day.

Another valuable information resource is the U.S. Business Advisor, a one-stop electronic link to all the business information and services that the Federal Government provides. It is located at <<http://www.business.gov>>.

## **SBA Publications**

Broadly speaking, the SBA publishes two types of materials. The first type, "general" publications, consisting primarily of pamphlets and other ephemera, are intended as brief guides to the agency's services and programs.

The second type of published material consists of publications that are of a more technical nature. They include:

- statistical publications;
- research reports;
- legal and administrative publications, and
- official reports required by law.

The first group of materials will probably continue to be printed and disseminated in the same manner in which they have in the past: that is, they will be print products produced through the Government Printing Office (GPO) (thereby making their way to depository libraries in the traditional way) and distributed to SBA field offices and the public at no charge. Some of them--a group of publications consisting of the old "management aids" series--are offered for sale through an SBA sales outlet in Denver, and will continue to be distributed that way.<sup>1</sup> The only change that is occurring with this group of publications at the present time is that the information contained in some of them is now being posted to the SBA's site on the World Wide Web.

The second group of publications--the technical and research publications--contains those that are probably of most interest to document and reference librarians, and will be the focus of this update. They are also the group of publications most likely to go "fugitive"--that is, public documents that are unrecorded, uncataloged, not distributed to depository libraries, and therefore unavailable to the public--in the face of budget cut-backs and rapidly evolving technology.

It is to avoid this problem of fugitive documents that the SBA recently undertook a number of steps to ensure that its publications are cataloged and made available to depository libraries and the public.

## **Core Technical and Research Publications**

The most basic of the SBA's technical and research publications--its "core" publications--include:

- Annual reports, including the SBA's annual report, the annual report of the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, the annual report of the chief financial officer, and other such reports;
- Economic and statistical reports, such as The State of Small Business: A Report of the President (an annual economic report that is similar to the Economic Report of the President), the Handbook of Small Business Data (a periodically revised collection of statistical data), and the Small Business Answer Card;
- Research finding aids, such as the Catalog of Small Business Research (a bibliographic guide to the SBA's funded research reports that are available from the National Technical Information Service); and
- Certain legally mandated reports, such as special reports to Congress, the quarterly report of the inspector general, and the quarterly SBIR solicitation announcements.

Another, ancillary group of technical publications includes:

- Administrative documents, such as the SBA's standard operating procedures (SOPs), regulations, and industry size standards;
- Legal documents, such as the Legislation Handbook and the Opinion Digest; and
- Public affairs documents, such as press releases.

Most of these items have, in the past, been print products that were produced and made available to the public in the traditional manner: that is, they were printed at GPO and then either given away upon request or sold through the Superintendent of Documents' sales program.

Over the past several years, a number of factors have conspired to change the document production and delivery process at the SBA. Some (or even most) of these developments are common to other Government agencies and include reduced staffing, budget cut-backs, program recisions, etc.

Other factors are more technology driven, such as the implementation of desktop publishing systems, the increasing cost-effectiveness of short-run, in-house printing equipment (such as Xerox's Docutech system), and the ability to release publications in an electronic format (through the Internet, on CD-ROM, on diskette, etc.).

This scenario will be familiar to anyone who has had to deal with Federal publications in the past few years.

### **Improving Access to Documents**

For documents that are falling off the traditional path to publication and dissemination, what is being done at the SBA? A number of steps, some of them tentative, others quite definite, have been taken recently.

### **Identification of Fugitive Documents**

One of the first steps the SBA has taken was to identify documents that make up its core documents group. Among other things, this task entailed making up a list of documents that have either never, or only sporadically, been printed through GPO, and therefore may not have entered into the bibliographic record.

### **Establishment of Closer Ties with the Superintendent of Documents**

The old, automatic system of document cataloging and delivery to depository libraries that presumed all printing was done by GPO had clearly begun to break down with the turn to in-house duplication in the mid-1990s. In September 1996, officials of both the Library Programs Service of the Superintendent of Documents and the SBA met to discuss ways of better insuring that the agency's documents were sent to the Superintendent of Documents for cataloging and distribution to depository libraries. This initiative has already brought into the bibliographic stream several SBA publications that might have ended up as fugitive documents.

### **Bibliographic Control of Serial Titles**

Occasionally, some SBA serial titles were either never printed, never truly disseminated outside of a small group, never cataloged, or never assigned ISSNs. Searches conducted on OCLC and at the Library of Congress confirmed the existence of this problem. The agency has begun to rectify this situation by working with the National Serials Data Program to get ISSNs assigned to its serial titles, encouraging program offices to identify and number their documents consistently (and include the ISSN), and to divert copies that are duplicated in-house to the Superintendent of Documents for depository library distribution.

### **Creation of GILS Records**

While the Government Information Locator Service (GILS) may have been intended for something other than bibliographic control, its usefulness in this regard cannot be overstated. If nothing else, it creates a bureaucratic imperative to recognize that certain documents need to be published and made available to the public (unfortunately, the two are not always the same thing in the Federal Government!).

The SBA's GILS site is posted to the World Wide Web at <<http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/gils/>>. The GILS site is an important one to check for SBA information, both print and electronic. For the first time, a nearly comprehensive list of the SBA's publications and information products is available in one place, together with information on public access.

### **The Specifics: A Look at Some SBA Publications**

What is happening right now with some key SBA publications? Here is a look at the present state of a few titles, to better highlight some trends in the SBA's approaches to document production and dissemination.

### **The State of Small Business: A Report of the President**

The State of Small Business (ISSN 0735-1437) is an annual economic report on small business that is written by economists and statisticians in the SBA's Office of Advocacy. It has been, and will continue to be for the immediate future, a print product. Some of the data contained in the some 50 tables that make up the appendices of the book are making their way to the SBA's Web site.

### **Small Business Profiles**

Small Business Profiles (ISSN 1066-646X) is a collection of basic business statistics organized on a state-by-state basis. With the 1996 edition, it has been discontinued as a print product. Instead, it has been posted to the SBA's Web site at <http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/ADVO/stats/>

1996/> as an ASCII text file. Budget and staff cutbacks make it unlikely that this publication will return as a print product.

### **Opinion Digest**

A collection of digests of legal opinions, Opinion Digest (ISSN 1092-2628) for many years was printed by the Government Printing Office (GPO) and sold by the Superintendent of Documents. When the Opinion Digest was dropped from the GPO sales program in 1995, the SBA was faced with a dilemma as to how best to distribute it. Since the back file (dating to the agency's beginnings in 1953) was not available in digital form, a decision was made to make the entire collection, along with a comprehensive index (five volumes containing 153 issues), available on microfiche through the National Technical Information Service. Future issues will be made available to the public through NTIS, be distributed to depository libraries (even if they are duplicated in-house instead of being printed), and may eventually be posted as text files to the SBA's Web site.

### **SBA Annual Report**

The most recently issued edition of the SBA's Annual Report (ISSN 0083-3274), covering fiscal year 1994, was reproduced in-house on a Xerox Docutech system, instead of being sent through GPO for printing. This brought savings for the SBA, but left the two-volume report a likely fugitive document, since initially no plans were made to provide the Federal Depository Library Program with copies, and public dissemination was minimal. In an effort to avoid this situation, copies of the Annual Report were provided to the Superintendent of Documents for dissemination to the depository libraries and to the National Technical Information Service, for public availability and as an archival, "print-on-demand" resource. Future issues of this document will probably be handled in a similar manner.

### **Small Business Lending in the United States**

In certain ways, a three-year-old publication of the SBA, entitled Small Business Lending in the United States, points the way toward how certain kinds of technical information, particularly statistical information, will be distributed by the SBA in the future. The primary medium of this study of bank lending to small businesses is via the agency's Web site at <http://www.sba.gov/ADVO/sta0ts/>. A print version was given limited distribution, as well as a diskette version. Both versions are made available to the public by the National Technical Information Service.

### **What the Future Holds for SBA Publishing**

Unfortunately, a clear path for publishing SBA materials is not evident today: there is no single medium that could possibly satisfy the universe of users that a printed product, such as a book, does so well.

As can be readily noted from the narrative above, the SBA's publication effort dips its toes in a variety of formats: from traditional print, to short-run xerographic processes, to html postings on Web sites, to Adobe Acrobat (PDF) documents, to microfiche. None of these options is an ideal format for all audiences, but some formats are perfectly suited to the specialized audiences they attempt to reach.

For the near-term future, there are a number of publication trends that can be identified. There will likely be:

- Continued, though sometimes limited, print availability of major SBA titles;
- Growing electronic availability, especially via the Internet, of SBA publications and resources (though not, as yet, in any consistent format, whether html, ASCII text, PDF, etc.);
- Selected availability to the public of print products for sale, subject to the decisions of GPO's sales program; and
- Continued availability of the SBA's back file of major documents through NTIS.

Government document librarians will probably have mixed feelings about the scenario presented in this update. The competing demands of a technologically sophisticated public for fast dissemination, of pinched budgets for cheap solutions, and archivists and librarians for durable, accessible information make an ideal solution difficult.

Because technological change has come so fast to technical publishing as practiced by the Federal Government, it is not only difficult to keep abreast of current developments, but almost impossible to judge which medium, which technology, and which software standard will ultimately prove to be the wisest choice. Unfortunately, the hindsight we will have gained some twenty or so years from now will be the only way we can obtain an answer to this publishing dilemma.

1. This group of documents is listed in SBA form 115C, Resource Directory for Small Business Management. The text of the directory is also posted to the agency's Web site at:

**<http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/gopher/Business-Development/resource.txt>**