



PORTLAND DISTRICT  
OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT  
&  
NEWSLETTER

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**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT REPORT** (continued)

## "TAKING OUR SHOW ON THE ROAD"



Going back to basics and enjoying what we do each and every day is the theme that the Business Development Division followed during the past fiscal year. We have had some great successes, and we wanted to share them with our friends. Thus, the "Beacon for Small Business" event went on the road. We held four events in Portland, Eugene, Medford, and Vancouver, Washington, and we averaged 40 friends in attendance, including lenders and other SBA resource partners. We did a little bit of training, a little bit of role-playing, and a lot of sharing stories from some of our customers, and we received a lot of good feedback. This year we plan "Beacon" events in Lincoln City and Pendleton. We're getting our acts polished up and our costumes ready for another great time! You'll be hearing more on these events later.

You may ask yourself, why take field trips to visit small business friends and owners? Well, for the educational value, networking, and plain fun. The management and staff of Portland SBA had fun this year visiting small business friends and owners to see what actually happens behind-the-scenes. In this way, our office captured the essence of what actually takes place at such work sites as a day spa, a stained glass shop, a web design business, an oak trolley manufacturing plant, and a doggie day care, to name a few. All of the small business owners who were visited by our office were enthusiastic about their work. Not only did they take pleasure in sharing their jobs with us, they were flattered that we noticed them. Our office felt great shaking hands and sharing jokes with small business owners out in the field. What's more, our visits turned out to be sources of great stories for our newsletters. After all, how can we learn about all the wonderful things that business owners do unless we spend time with them? We look forward to more field trips and more great stories from other interesting business owners in the field.

## CAPTURING AND TAMING ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Donna Cohen, an information services specialist and a consulting librarian, loves capturing and taming organizational knowledge. "I'll never forget the first time I saw online information being accessed. An acquaintance connected a computer to CompuServe. This was 1987 and, although librarians had been accessing electronic data since the '70s, to a layperson, it was a revelation. At that point I knew that being involved with electronic data delivery and organization was for me," says Cohen.

Fourteen years later, with an additional Master's Degree under her belt in Library and Information Studies,



Donna L. Cohen runs a successful small business – d. l. cohen information services [<http://www.dcoheninfo.com/>] - focusing on helping businesses, non-profits, and government agencies access, organize, manage and distribute information.

In 1996, during the early stages of developing her business, Cohen contacted the Portland U. S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) to secure advice on business start-up issues such as what to consider when negotiating contracts with clients. With the guidance and support of Joe Mascari, retired attorney and a SCORE volunteer counselor, Cohen was off and running assisting companies with Internet and other electronic information retrieval, management and distribution. Mascari continues to give guidance and support to Cohen periodically. In turn, several Portland SBA employees have attended Cohen's workshops on accessing quality business resources on the Web.

**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT REPORT** (continued)***Knowledge Management***

According to Cohen, "The amazing thing about new information technologies – the Web, the growth in online databases as well as database products for aggregating and organizing information – is the capability to bring together internal company data with external information. In doing this, a point of entry is created for employees to access all relevant organizational knowledge. Some call this knowledge management or KM."

KM is the process of generating value from intellectual or knowledge-based assets. Intellectual assets include business plans, marketing research and the knowledge or know-how contained in people's heads. "KM prevents the 're-inventing the wheel syndrome,' reducing redundant efforts when a person or team in an organization needs data that has already been collected." says Cohen.

Cohen states that, strategically, the first step is to do a needs assessment to find out what information and knowledge already resides in the organization, what information is needed for the success of the business, and to identify the gaps. The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), based in Portland, benefited from Cohen's information needs assessment, which recommended ways to integrate content of various types into a database as well as online to the public. Cohen's company provided the Oregon Health Licensing Office with the technology, organizing schemes and staff training to develop a database which combines records of an internal library, Web sites, and legislative and attorney generals opinions. Her company also provided staff training for Hewlett Packard in Corvallis on effectively using the Web.

Another aspect of her business is to design websites. "Internet and Intranet [an internal Internet] Web sites are first and foremost communication projects, not technical projects. Good, well-organized content, within an intuitive and usable interface, is the key to a Web site

with impact," says Cohen. [See the LCDC Coastal Management Program's Web site for her work <http://www.lcd.state.or.us/coast/index.htm>].

Tools that support a KM system include searchable knowledge repositories and expertise access. KM is first and foremost a strategy, created from answering many questions, such as: Will an "experts" database – one that identifies the skills and areas of knowledge of employees – be helpful? Does the culture of your business encourage the sharing and collaboration of knowledge? Are there spaces, physical and/or virtual, for employees to connect and share? Are you making the best use of the Web for information access? Are you aware of fee-based online services that make up in time what you will spend in dollars for their use?

The best advice Cohen can give is to develop a well thought-out human information strategy before embarking on change. An effective KM program adds to a company's bottom line because:

- \* Timely, actionable information is easily available
- \* Innovation is encouraged through the free flow of ideas
- \* Employee retention is improved because employee knowledge is valued and rewarded
- \* Repetitious and unnecessary practices are eliminated thereby reducing costs

Cohen states that all these strategies represent the holistic approach to information that is a hallmark of her business. "Technology is the tool, not the driver. A well thought-out communication/information strategy must be developed before deploying technology. This is a very exciting area to be in right now. On the other hand, the pace of development is so fast that keeping up with changes is a job in itself."

