

Statement of Chris F. Willis, CEO, Media 1 Interactive, Inc.
Hearing on the Effectiveness of the Small Business Administration
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information,
and International Security
April 6, 2006

Mr. Chairman, Senator Levin, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the hearing record on the Effectiveness of the Small Business Administration.

My name is Chris Willis. Since 1993, I have been the proud owner and CEO of Media 1 Interactive, Inc., a women-owned business enterprise (WBE.) Media 1 is a small West Michigan training company with proven ability to assist the largest multi-national corporations in solving their toughest performance challenges. In the past six years, Media 1 has designed and developed over 100 courses for HP alone. The company completed over 90 training projects for various clients in 2005, and, after initiating a new goal-driven profit sharing plan with its team members, is on track to meet revenue growth from \$1 M to \$1.25 M for 2006.

Over its 13-year history, Media 1 has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to re-engineer itself to overcome any and all competitive challenges, to master new technologies, and to meet ever-changing client needs. Today, as development of eLearning titles continues to shift to offshore production, Media 1 continues to recruit and train team members to offer full-service strategic learning and performance support consultation and program development to the largest global corporations. Through projects with Global 500 companies, such as HP and Siemens, Media 1 regularly works with multi-national project teams to deliver learning programs worldwide. This global focus and experience allows Media 1 to continue to thrive despite local or regional economic downturns, and positions the company ahead of many of its competitors in the emerging global economy.

All throughout our history, the SBTDC, our local business counseling branch of the SBA, has provided free or low-cost professional guidance to help us grow and thrive. They supported me with training in the early years, when I was just learning what it meant to be a successful entrepreneur, and helped us set up the financial projection and tracking systems which were the foundation for the systems we use today. They provided marketing consultation and guidance when times were lean, and support and advice that helped us survive the tech sector downturn and a severe slump following the 9/11 attacks. They have provided networking assistance, and have helped connect us with qualified strategic partners and new team members. I have always promoted the SBTDC to new and seasoned entrepreneurs as one of the most valuable business resources we have available – a true demonstration of our “tax dollars at work.”

We are a creative and technical services business, and our business location is very important to recruiting and retaining the best talent. We recently relocated our business into a refurbished formal school building, nestled within the resort community of Grand Haven, where we are good neighbors to the nearby residents and support the local merchants. The space suits us so well that we are in process of purchasing the building under an SBA 504 loan; it would have been difficult for us to qualify for our building loan without SBA assistance.

With the sudden real estate investment and revitalization taking place in that area, we were highly concerned that we might find ourselves priced out of our building within a few years. By locking into fixed mortgage payments, we can enjoy and improve our space, invest in the growth of the community, and focus on building our business. And I can purchase with confidence, knowing that I won't face a mortgage "balloon" that could make it difficult to meet future mortgage payments.

SBA programs have provided my support and safety net throughout the growth of Media 1. This support, in turn, has had a positive ripple effect in many ways. For our current team members, we provide an enjoyable and financially secure career path and health care for themselves and their families. For many of those who have left us for whatever reason, I am proud to know that we provided training that launched them toward a successful career elsewhere – sometimes in support of larger businesses, and sometimes in launching new businesses of their own. We have recruited former residents back to the state of Michigan, and through our work with global companies have brought dollars from Europe back to the US. Meantime, the couple from which we are purchasing the building are reinvesting in a larger development within the community.

Why would our government do anything at this time that could in any way have a negative effect on business growth, revitalization of communities, or job creation? Dismantling the SBA would be a huge mistake with a negative impact on business, citizens, and communities in untold ways for years to come.

Sincerely,
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