

## Focus Group Creative Concept Testing

### **Purpose**

The purpose of these online focus groups is to test creative concepts for the U.S. Small Business Administration. Focus groups are a useful and efficient research tool for obtaining immediate audience input into an overall creative concept. These focus groups will help us test draft creative concepts for the SBA such as logos, and printed marketing materials.

### **Methodology**

Creative testing will be conducted on behalf of the U.S. Small Business Administration by contractor Marketing Maven and its subcontractor ThinkNow Research. They will execute as many as 12, online group sessions up to 60-minutes in length each that will be conducted among small business owners and aspiring business owners across the United States and its territories. During this one-hour session, creative concepts/items (no more than five) will be presented to participants where they will be asked to evaluate them and provide feedback.

We will recruit 9 respondents per group in the hope that no fewer than 6 participate and each will receive an incentive of \$75 for their cooperation. These participants will be recruited by professional qualitative research recruiters, most of whom have pre-identified business owners in their database of respondents. Recruiters will reach out to potential participants via telephone or email and similar to the quantitative study, all participants will need to answer a screener to qualify for the research.

The online focus groups can be observed in real-time and transcripts of the discussions will also be available.

### **Rationale**

Qualitative testing will allow us to collect in depth data and details about the small business owner's behavior, emotion, and personality characteristics that quantitative studies cannot match. Having the focus group online will help streamline the testing process and reduce overall costs.

## Focus Group Creative Concept Testing Part A: Screener

### SCREENER

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ with ThinkNow Research, an independent marketing research firm. We are not selling anything or asking for donations. We are looking for people to participate in an online group discussion to test creative concepts on behalf of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to identify the best idea before designing materials. If you would like to volunteer and are selected, you would earn \$75 for participating in a 60- minute online group discussion. May we take 5 minutes to ask you some questions to see if you're a good fit?

#### 1. No – THANK THE PERSON AND TERMINATE PHONE CALL

Do you have regular access to a computer with high-speed internet which you can use for personal purposes? (This study cannot be done on a mobile device or tablet)

1. Yes – **CONTINUE**
2. No – **TERMINATE**

- S1. Have you ever been or are you considering becoming a small business owner or managing a small business? (If no, thank and end. If yes, verify they are either a CEO, COO, or CFO, i.e., hold a decision making role in the business.)
- S2. In what stage of entrepreneurship do you currently consider yourself? Please select one.
- a. INTENDING TO START OR TAKE OVER A BUSINESS within the next 1-2 years (i.e., has actively taken one or more steps to start a business such as investigated how to start, sought counseling, or is planning to take over the management of an existing small business, etc.)
  - b. A START UP (i.e., has been in business for up to 12 months, is likely registered, owner may have other sources of employment, business may bring in limited or no revenue)
  - c. "YOUNG" SMALL BUSINESS/SURVIVAL STAGE (i.e., has been in operation at least a year, likely at least 1-3 years, may have employees other than self, likely has acquired debt or equity capital to sustain itself, has a continuous revenue stream)
  - d. "MATURE" SMALL BUSINESS (i.e., has been in operation at least a few years, is self-sustaining/has a constant revenue stream, employs at least one other employee, and owner has no other employment)
  - e. NONE OF THE ABOVE – **THANK & TERMINATE**
- S3. What would you describe as your primary business goal within the next 5 years?
- a. Start a business.
  - b. Grow my business.

- c. Business survival/stay afloat/stabilize.
- d. Maintain current business size/revenue.
- e. Close or sale of current business.

S4. How many years has your company been in business?

- 1. Less than 1 year
- 2. 2-4
- 3. 5-9
- 4. 10-19
- 5. 20 or more

[SP]

S5. **OWNER:** In what state are the majority of your business operations located?  
**ASPIRING OWNER:** In what state will the majority of your business operations be located? (RECRUIT WITH REGIONAL DIVERSITY IN MIND)

**[INSERT DROP DOWN BOX WITH 50 STATES]**

[SP]

S6. How old are you? (RECRUIT TWO from each category/group)

- 1. Under 18 - **TERMINATE**
- 2. 18-29
- 3. 30-39
- 4. 40-49
- 5. 50 or older

[SP]

S7. What is your gender? (RECRUIT NO MORE THAN 60-40 SPLIT/group)

- 1. Male
- 2. Female
- 3. Prefer not to answer

[MP]

S8. Which of the following best describes you? You may select more than one response.  
(RECRUIT WITH DIVERSITY IN MIND/group)

- 1. American Indian or Alaska Native
- 2. Asian
- 3. Black/African-American
- 4. Hispanic/Latino
- 5. Pacific Islander
- 6. White (non-Hispanic)
- 7. Other
- 8. Prefer not to answer

S9. Are you now or have you ever served in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, including the Coast Guard, the National Guard or a Reserve component of any service branch? (RECRUIT NO MORE THAN ONE/group)

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

**Articulation Question:**

**(Rationale:** As part of the screening process for the online discussion boards, an articulation question is included in the screener in order to ensure that the respondent is able to communicate well enough in English to engage in the group discussion.)

Almost done! If you had \$10,000 to donate to a cause, charity, person or family, who would you give it to and why?

**IF RESPONDENT CANNOT ARTICULATE A “WHY” ANSWER, TERMINATE.**

These are all the questions we have for you today. It looks like you are a good fit for this group discussion.

- This 1-hour discussion will take place on [FILL IN DATE AND TIME].
- Another member of my team may be calling you to confirm some of your answers and following up with an email confirming the date and time of the discussion, as well as the login information you will need to participate.

## **Focus Group Creative Concept Testing Part B: Discussion Guide**

### **I. Research Overview (2 minutes)**

- Introduction to the online/virtual format, all housekeeping issues, all rules, detail that there are no right or wrong answers, etc.
- Purpose of research: To understand your perspectives on owning your own business and to evaluate your reception of a creative concept or idea that is targeted towards small business owners.
- Procedures/Confidentiality:
  - o This discussion utilizes an independent researcher
  - o We will be spending 60 minutes together
  - o There are no right or wrong answers
  - o All information gathered, including audiotaping, remains confidential
  - o These results from this discussion will only be for the internal use of the client, the Small Business Administration (SBA).
- Before we continue, please note that we may not ask you to participate in this discussion group without the approval of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The SBA obtained that approval under OMB Control Number 3245-XXXX. If you have any comments or questions about the estimated 60 minutes it will take to participate, please write to Small Business Administration, 409 Third Street, SW, Washington DC 20416, or the SBA Desk Officer, Office of Management and Budget, New Executive Office Bldg., Rm. 10202, Washington, DC 20503

### **II. Participant Introduction (5 minutes)**

- Let's go around and do quick introductions. Tell me your name, where you're calling in from, the type of business you own, and the number of years you have been in business.

**Aspiring Business Owners:** Tell me your name, where you're calling in from and the type of business you would like to own.

### III. Awareness/Familiarity with SBA (5 min)

- Who has heard of the SBA?
  - o How did you initially hear about the SBA?
  - o Which specific services and/or programs do they provide?
  - o What kinds of businesses use their services/programs?
  - o Have you used their services and/or programs?
    - o If so, which ones?
    - o What is your opinion of those services or programs?

### IV. Evaluation of Creative (30-45 min)

- I'm going to read you a short description of the SBA:

The mission of the U.S. Small Business Administration, or SBA, is to aid, counsel, assist and protect the interests of small business. SBA helps Americans start, build and grow businesses through an extensive network of field offices and public-private partnerships. SBA also plays a critical role in the economic recovery of communities after disasters.

- o What do you think about that description?
- o Which services and/or programs would you expect an agency with that name and description to provide to entrepreneurs?
- Now I'm going to show you some creative ideas for a new awareness campaign (e.g., messages and visuals) for the SBA and I would like your honest feedback on each one.

### SHOW CREATIVE IN ROTATION

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK OF EACH:

- What is your first impression of this creative idea (message, visual, etc.)?
- What is it telling you? Are the message and visuals clear?
- What, if anything, would make the message and visuals clearer or more appealing to you?
- What do you like about it?
- What do you not like about it?
- Is anything confusing?
- Does it fit with your opinion of the SBA? How?
- How, if at all, does it change the way you feel about the SBA?
- What, if anything, does it make you want to do?
- What, if anything, is missing?

**AFTER ALL HAVE BEEN TESTED:**

- Now that you have seen them all, which one would you say is most appeals to you as a small business owner? Why that one?
  - o Which one is least appealing? Why that one?

**CLOSING**

Those are all the questions I have. Does anyone have something they would like to add?

That concludes our discussion. Thank you all very much for your participation. I hope this was an enjoyable experience.