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Doing Business - and Business Lending - in Tough Times

We're in turbulent times. With the stock market fluctuating hourly and the global economy struggling to right itself, you have little control over the economy or your possible loss of revenue during this crisis. There are encouraging signs. The Treasury Department's disbursement this week from the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) to banks across the country will ease the credit crunch, and you'll be better able to lend. The housing market has taken a slight up-tick. And now there's the Fed's half-percentage point rate cut. Encouraging signs yes, but we know that climbing out of this crisis will take us well into 2009 and beyond.

How can you manage this situation? How can you build your business for better times ahead? Eventually the economy will stabilize at varying times in different parts of the country. The common denominator for success is patience and the ability to move forward. Use this time to enhance your relationships with your customers - and your community. Reach out with marketing campaigns to your most profitable customers - that 20% who bring in 80% of your profits. Attend and sponsor local civic and community events. Network. Importantly, there was never a better - or more critical - time to offer financial education to customers of every level and every age. Consumers are hungry for financial education. And you want educated consumers! They need to know you're here to protect their businesses, their financial futures, and their children's futures. Position your bank to be their first choice for financial services.

Use this time to position your bank for small business lending. In this election year and ongoing, there's a national focus on growing small businesses.

SBA loans are a good deal in this environment - for lenders and small businesses. As a lender, the SBA-backed guaranty mitigates your risk and increases your opportunity to realize solid income. You also can convert customers with personal accounts into business borrowers, and new borrowers into full-service customers. As borrowers, small businesses gain access to capital from a stable financial institution: your bank.

Last week, I attended the Annual Conference of the National Association of Government Guaranteed Lenders (NAGGL). We discussed several initiatives introduced in the U.S. Senate that would help stabilize the small business marketplace. We hope these initiatives will be discussed when the Senate reconvenes in mid-November. I'll keep you advised on the status.

If you're new to business lending, or if you have a business lending department, but have shied away from the SBA process, we're here to help. At J.R. Bruno, we're experts in every phase of SBA lending. In addition to customized workshops for new and experienced lenders, we offer loan packaging, portfolio review and due diligence, documentation, and marketing strategies. The J.R. Bruno team will make your bank's SBA lending program easy and profitable. Call us at 626.963.1267 or visit www.jrbrunoassoc.com.

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