

# Entrepreneurs to be taken seriously

Practical solutions, not theorising, are the aims of the Small Business Council, writes **Mark Fenton-Jones**.

**T**he chairwoman of the federal government's new Small Business Council insists that this time Canberra is serious about doing something to help entrepreneurs.

"The minister wants to hear from us what we think the issues are. He doesn't want to tell us what the issues are," says the 29-year-old chairwoman, Kim Tunbridge, chief executive officer of NSW law firm Jungle Management.

The Minister for Small Business and Tourism, Joe Hockey, last week appointed Ms Tunbridge to head 12 paid members on an advisory council to run to December 31, 2004.

The chairwoman expects two features of the council will set it apart. First, representatives of the Office of Small Business, the Australian Taxation Office and other government departments will attend meetings. "The purpose of the council is to bring small business operators to communicate with the public service," Tunbridge says.

Second, with membership comprised of small business owners, it will take a more entrepreneurial approach to getting results.



**Kim Tunbridge says the new council won't be a talking shop.** Photo: MICHELO SULLIVAN

"We want to come out of it with some definite outcomes or some kind of proposed solutions that will actually work, as opposed to theorising about what would be great in an ideal world."

The risk is that the council will become a talking shop designed to appease small business in an election year. The former chairman of the Small Business Consultative Committee, Kurt Rendall, says that

the body should focus on specific issues such as cutting back red tape.

Rendall was chairman of the SBCC that first ran between December 1998 and June 2001 with a brief to advise on tax reform. He was also chair when the committee was reconstituted to advise on a broader range of SME issues between July 2001 and June 2003.

Rendall says that towards the ends of the committee's life he

advised the minister that he did not see the need for a panel with such a wide brief, especially as many industry bodies lobbied the minister.

Tunbridge says that this time Hockey wants the council to advise on the issues affecting small business at the grass roots, and work out a practical way of dealing with those issues.

Issues likely to be discussed include late payments by big business, unfair dismissal laws, tax compliance costs, succession planning, insurance premiums and education and training.

"The minister hasn't tried to steer us in any particular way."

Tunbridge, who has a background in public relations and marketing with Channel 7, established her own business to provide legal services to people working in sales, marketing, advertising and the creative industries.

"I was appointed because I'm probably quite a good representative of the sorts of people starting up small businesses these days," Tunbridge says.

"I'm under 30, I'm female, and I've started a home-based business that I've moved into an outside office."

The new Small Business Council will hold its first meeting in Canberra this Thursday. The council will hold three meetings over the year in Canberra.

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