

ACCESS

ALBERTA

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WHAT DOES WD OFFER IN ALBERTA?

By Carla Boudreau

As a department focused on encouraging economic diversification in Western Canada, Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has many programs and initiatives that span across all western provinces, but what about those specifically for Alberta?

WD offers several specific programs and initiatives here in Alberta, including the **Urban Youth Entrepreneurs Initiative** and **Urban Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Initiative**, as well as the **Capital City Savings Micro Loan Program** available to small businesses in Edmonton and surrounding areas.

Funded by WD, the Urban Youth Entrepreneurs Initiative is operated by the **Mennonite Centre for Newcomers** in Edmonton, and is available to youth, particularly those who are Aboriginal, immigrants or from the inner city.

The initiative has two main components: an Urban Youth Loan Fund, for the purpose of providing micro loans not exceeding \$10,000; and the Urban Youth Entrepreneurship Program, for the purpose of enhancing the business skills of the youth to receive the micro loans. Youth who participate in the entrepreneurship component are pre-qualified to receive the micro loan.



WD provides programs and services for small businesses, including specific programs for entrepreneurs with disabilities.

The Urban Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Initiative is available in both Edmonton and Calgary.

In Edmonton, the program is called **VENTURES** and is operated by the **Distinctive Employment Counselling Services of Alberta (DECSA)** in conjunction with the Edmonton Community Loan Fund (ECLF). With this program, VENTURES provides entrepreneurial training and business support to individuals with disabilities who want to pursue self-employment or who wish to expand their current business.

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The loan fund allows participants to access loans of up to \$75,000 to start, expand a business, purchase and apply new technology, upgrade facilities and equipment, develop marketing and promotional activities, and establish working capital.

The Calgary program is very similar to that of Edmonton, but is administered by the **Alberta Centre on Entrepreneurship and Disabilities**.

For anyone who does not qualify for the above-mentioned loans, but wants to start or expand a small business in the Edmonton, you may want to consider the **Capital City Savings Micro Loan**

Program. In cooperation with Capital City Savings, WD can help business owners access loans of up to \$25,000 that can be used for getting your product or service ready for sale, marketing, developing or enhancing your product or service, working capital or purchasing equipment or other assets. While Capital City Savings makes the final decision on the loan, WD can help you prepare your business to qualify for the loan.

For more information on these or any other WD programs or initiatives in Alberta or across Western Canada, call our toll-free number at 1-888-338-WEST (9378) or visit our Web site at: www.wd.gc.ca. ♣

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION GROUP (MIG) MAKING THE MOST OF WD PROGRAMS



By Carla Boudreau

Two minds are better than one – or rather six better than none. That's what a local Edmonton company found out after hiring six new employees through two Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) programs.

Edmonton-based **Management Information Group (MIG)** hired six new employees over the last several years with the help of WD's **International Trade Personnel Program (ITPP)** and **First Jobs in Science and Technology Program**.

MIG is a rapidly growing information technology company that specializes in two main computer software packages: financial solutions software for municipalities and those developed for the school marketplace that include schools, school boards and school districts.

Initial success for MIG came with selling the financial solutions software to municipalities. This application allows organizations

to do everything from manage their taxes, to track utilities usage, and more.

The company's latest release, the *Student Information Record System (S.I.R.S.)* is an enhanced software application that helps school's track its students' history, attendance, site-based management /fees, medical information, marks and much more. This comprehensive package allows school administrations to store all the necessary information they need at the click of a button. The application also includes a Security Management System that allows the system administrator to configure the precise functions a specific user is allowed to access.

S.I.R.S. has been the company's best selling product as demand has increased in recent years. MIG's Financial Coordinator, Sheila E. Denman, says, "Over the last 10 years our market has switched from the financial package to the S.I.R.S. programs."

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As well, after initial success in Western Canada, the company soon realized that there was a great market with their friendly neighbor to the south, the United States. Founded in 1977 in St. Albert, MIG has had success in both Western Canada and the U.S. So much, in fact, that it has grown to a five-office operation, with locations in Edmonton; Scottsdale, Arizona; Chicago, Illinois; Griffith, Indiana; and St. Louis, Missouri.

Denman says, "There is a greater market in the U.S. than there is in Canada because there are a greater number of schools and school boards. In Chicago alone, there are over 1,300 schools."

In addition to a great product idea and the hard work and dedication of its employees, MIG can also contribute some of its most recent success to the graduates it was able to hire for international marketing and product enhancement purposes.

General Manager Stephen Khan says, "These positions have allowed us to maintain our high levels of customer satisfaction, as well as assist in ensuring that our products are feature rich and competitive for international trade.

"They have directly assisted the company in its marketing strategy of establishing strong links to local government agencies via seamless data transfers from their school sites to their local government sites," he added. "This level of functionality has given the company a significant advantage over its competitors, and is an area where MIG has utilized its graduate positions extensively."

WD's International Trade Personnel Program allows western Canadian businesses to hire qualified university graduates to help market their products and services internationally.

The First Jobs in Science and Technology Program is very similar to ITPP, because western Canadian businesses are able to hire recent graduates of science, technology and engineering programs. This program enables companies to hire the people they need to remain competitive in today's global marketplace.

WD will provide a non-repayable amount up to 50 per cent for the first two years salary and 25 per cent for the final year of a three-year project to a maximum of \$37,500. For many businesses such as MIG, this means hiring employees who they otherwise may not have been able to afford. As well, it gives the students the necessary experience they need to make themselves more employable.

After accessing both of these WD programs, MIG knows how successful they can be.

Under the First Jobs program, "the graduates have had an enormous bearing on ensuring that MIG's software is competitive in the international marketplace through the enhancement and development of its modular software," says Khan.

"One of our company's primary strengths is customer support of our software. Prior to our expansion into the international marketplace, we took on the challenge of rapidly expanding our client base, while maintaining high levels of customer service and support," says Khan. "WD funding has allowed us to maintain these high levels of customer care and to enhance them as well."

Since hiring the graduates, customer calls to their help desk have increased by 50 per cent, along with an increase in the quality of customer support. Khan says, "The assistance we receive from WD has allowed us to meet this challenge head on and to surpass our goals."

There is no doubt that the ITPP and First Jobs programs have been a success for MIG. To find out how your company can access these or any other programs and services from WD, call our toll-free number at 1-888-338-WEST (9378) or visit our Web site at: www.wd.gc.ca. ✪

WD WORKSHOPS CAN OPEN DOORS FOR ALBERTA BUSINESSES

Providing information on selling to government and how to improve export readiness through skills development and export counselling services are ways Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) helps expand business opportunities in the West.

Selling to the Government

Has your company considered government as a potential customer?

Alberta municipalities alone are responsible for over 50 per cent of all procurement dollars spent in the province by the MAASH sector, which includes: municipalities, academic institutions, school boards, social services entities and health care institutions. And this doesn't include opportunities at the provincial and federal government levels. Just think of the huge market your company may be missing!

You don't need to be on the Fortune 500 list to take advantage of government purchasing opportunities, but is there one door that opens all the procurement opportunities, or do you need to open many?

WD partners with other federal, provincial and municipal government departments to offer the "**Selling to the Government Seminar.**" The seminars offer businesses the opportunity to learn about marketing their business products and services to all three levels of government, including:

- How each government makes purchasing decisions.
- How to access bidding opportunities through the MERX Electronic Tendering Service.
- How to make the right government contacts for your products and services.
- Tips on how to prepare bids for government.

The following Selling to the Government Seminars are being offered:

April 25, 2001 - McDougall Centre, Calgary

May 9, 2001 - Edmonton (location to be determined)

May 30, 2001 - Southern Alberta (location to be determined)

June 13, 2001 - Northern Alberta (location to be determined)

June 27, 2001 - McDougall Centre, Calgary (tentative)

For additional information about seminars in southern Alberta (Red Deer – south), contact Tom Heffner at (403) 292-5304.

For seminars in northern Alberta, contact Sherry Moir at (780) 495-4028.

Ready for Export

Is your business looking to begin exporting its products or services? WD may be able to help. Our one-day "**Ready for Export Seminar**" helps business understand the basic steps in exporting and becoming familiar with the vast resources available to exporters.

May 8, 2001 - McDougall Centre, Calgary

For more information about the Ready for Export Seminar, contact Catherine Barclay at (403) 292-5494. ♣