# **Canada Business** Network



# **HELPING BUSINESSES GET GOING AND GROWING**

The Canada Business Network's Year in Review summarizes the achievements, partnerships and special initiatives that defined our network in 2011-12. It also celebrates the successes small businesses across the country have achieved through our combined efforts to help them start up and grow.

This unique partnership between the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, and not-for-profit entities is unparalleled in its reach, with hundreds of partners offering information, expertise and guidance to Canadian businesses. By working together, we help tens of thousands of small businesses save time and money through our online, in-person and telephone services.

As we look to the future, we will continue to evolve our approach and service delivery model to meet the growing needs of Canada's entrepreneurs. Building and strengthening our partnerships will remain central to our success as a network.





# STRONG PARTNERSHIPS SPELL SUCCESS

When it comes to serving the needs of Canadian start-ups and businesses in growth mode, there is strength in numbers. After all, the Canada Business Network's success relies on a vast network of more than 400 small business service providers across the country—from rural and remote communities to urban centres.

In each region, partnerships are carefully forged. There are many different types of partners, ranging from service providers such as the Community Futures Development Corporations, local Chambers of Commerce and economic development offices to associations, educational institutions, libraries, private sector companies, and municipal, provincial and territorial governments. Partnerships help us deliver information on government programs and services for business, as well as educational programs and expert advisory sessions. In addition, we cross-promote services and serve clients across vast geographical distances.

"Partnerships help us to extend our reach to people and organizations who can benefit from Canada Business services," says Patricia Field, Manager, Canada Business New Brunswick.

Many centres partner with provincial and territorial government departments and agencies to better serve small businesses in their region. Canada Business Ontario cites its innovative Business Info Line as a solid example of its successful collaboration with the province. "The phone service consolidates more than 160 government telephone numbers and 70 programs into a single toll-free number," says Senior Project Manager Demetra Zouzoulas. "Through it, callers have easy access to both the federal and provincial information and services they need to do business."

(continued on page 2)



# **OUR REACH**

The Canada Business Network's reach is vast—offering businesses online, telephone, and in-person services through our service centres and hundreds of regional partner sites. The network is managed by Industry Canada in collaboration with the Regional Development Agencies: Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Western Economic Diversification Canada, and the Canadian Economic Development Agency for the North.



# **SERVICE DELIVERY POINTS**

Web → www.canadabusiness.gc.ca Tel. → 1-888-576-4444 TTY → 1-800-457-8466 (hearing impaired) A network of regional business centres



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# STRONG PARTNERSHIPS SPELL SUCCESS

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Partnerships in regions such as Nova Scotia are built over time as opportunities to present to new groups, participate in events, and promote services are identified. Our Prince Edward Island centre partners with the PEI Rural Action Centres in five locations. "By expanding our network of partners, we build our brand and our reputation as a source of sound business information," explains Supervisor Deborah Doucette.

Partnering also helps the network leverage operating budgets, avoiding duplication with other service providers. "Our partnerships allow us to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale while remaining client-focused," adds Elaine Unrau, Manager of **business infosource** in Saskatchewan. "Our clients do not see the distinction between partners. They just want information provided in a timely and comprehensive manner. Together, we achieve that."

Guy Jobin, the Vice President of Business Services at Info entrepreneurs in Quebec, agrees. In a province with up to 1,000 economic development organizations—over 80 on the island of Montreal alone, his centre acts as a unifying force. "Entrepreneurs are confused about who does what," he explains. "We link them to the right service providers and we offer complementary services instead of duplicating our partners' services."

Some regions, including Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta, can leverage their partnerships financially because they operate as not-for-profit entities. For Small Business BC, this means taking on cash sponsors for everything from workshops to major events, such as the Successful You Awards. They also partner with the private sector to create products that will benefit clients while generating revenue for the centre.

Small Business BC CEO George Hunter says it's all part of a carefully planned strategy to establish 'street credibility' for his centre among small business owners. "Partnerships are central to our methodology. Our strong focus on leveraging partnerships means we can embody all the attributes of good entrepreneurship, which is essential to our reputation."

And what do the partners think? By all accounts, they too benefit. "Business start-up is an emotional rollercoaster, and the Canada Business team has provided the personal and professional touch that helps flatten the ups and downs of much of the ride for my members," says Brian Aird, Executive Director of Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Network in Nova Scotia.

Shelley Yagelniski, a Business Development Officer at the Community Futures office in Yorkton, Saskatchewan agrees. "Working with **business infosource** allows us enhance our capacity so we're better able to assist our clients and strengthen the regional economy. We can request market reports for our clients. We have access to the library and training sessions."

When done right, the result is a successful synergy that meets the needs of entrepreneurs in every corner of the country. "Our partnerships are true collaborations," says Brent Bushell, Executive Director of The Business Link in Alberta. "We source partners with shared goals or fundamental issues that we can solve together. We all win because we serve our clients better together."



# **SERVICE TO CLIENTS IN 2011-12**

The Canada Business Network's service centres provided assistance in 2011-12 to thousands of small business clients across the country. Service delivery channels include the web, face-to-face (except Ontario), telephone and email. In total, there were 147,589 officer-assisted interactions, plus an additional 64,047 interactions with groups, for a total of 211,636.

The numbers don't tell the full story. Client feedback is equally important in guiding the network's efforts. CBN captures its impact on small businesses through testimonials and success stories, comment boxes, Facebook, Twitter and email. With comments such as, "knowledgeable service", "everyone was eager to help", "I love this place!" and "absolutely great resources and great people", we know we're on the right track.

Will Woods, owner of the walking tour company Forbidden Vancouver, says, "Everyone at Small Business BC does an incredible job supporting start-ups like mine. It's truly an invaluable service." Brittini Beebe, who opened Spa Habit in Yorkton, Saskatchewan with the help of **business infosource**, concurs. "The business planning advice and research I received is yielding results. I credit my success to a smart business plan that targeted the right demographic with a service they wanted."

# **SUPPORTING GROWTH FIRMS**

Now more than ever, our centres are engaging and serving established businesses. After all, growth firms are important to the Canadian economy. They create jobs and spur innovation.

"As Canada's economy evolves, it is important to understand what firms require in order to grow, and how the Government of Canada can better meet these needs," says Sarah Powell-Smith, Acting Director of Canada Business Ontario. "Here at CBO, we want our staff to be well-informed in order to provide the best possible client support."

Shannon Coughlin, Manager of the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre, concurs. "Growth-oriented firms have always existed, but we are now working to meet their information needs in addition to our business start-up clients." This focus means ensuring that staff have the expertise and can direct growth firms to the right information resources and services.

Small Business BC has experienced the rewards of engaging firms from start-up to maturity. "We have legacy clients," explains CEO George Hunter. "They came to us as start-ups and we continue to serve them intensively. We are broadening our products and services to include this market. Our experienced clients come back to us and offer seminars to start-ups. They're giving back."

Supporting mature companies also means helping many of them grow their businesses beyond Canada's borders. In Quebec, Info entrepreneurs is co-located with the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal and the World Trade Centre. "We work together," explains Guy Jobin, the Vice President of Business Services. "We also support export advisors across the province. Our team does research—from financing to suppliers, market intelligence and competition. We point exporters to the right programs and regulations for their chosen markets."

In PEI, providing export assistance to entrepreneurs is crucial, explains Deborah Doucette, Supervisor at Canada Business PEI. "We're a small jurisdiction. We need to capitalize on export opportunities to grow local business."

# THE SUCCESS FILES: KIT FOCUS



When Montreal's Jérôme Mariaud de Serre launched his tutoring business, he noticed that most of his young clients could hardly sit still in their seats. Their inability to focus had him focused on finding a solution.

He tapped into his theatre and comedy background, combining that expertise with skills he learned as a professional filmmaker and communicator, to create a memory and concentration game called Kimnemo. The game helps children focus and keeps them engaged in their learning.

"With this game, students get to step into the driver's seat.

They become taken by the idea of pushing their own limits," explains Mariaud de Serre. "First, they learn to imitate.

Next, they seek to understand. And finally, we have their attention. It's a pedagogical approach that works wonders."

Knowing he had the germ of a great business idea, he reached out to Info entrepreneurs, the Canada Business office in Montreal. "The Business Information Officer was immediately interested in my idea. She asked me questions, which forced me to define my business," he says. "I was invited to join a learning circle and I met a business mentor, who I see twice weekly. I've learned to package my idea and transform it into a business."

He also offers workshops to teachers, health care providers, social workers and speech therapists. Dubbed KIT FOCUS, he teaches professionals to get children hooked on learning. "I also provide support to parents. I diagnose challenges in the learning environment—televisions and electronics distracting the child, poor lighting or a lack of resources. Perhaps the child doesn't know how to hold a pencil. These are simple, yet critical, issues," says Mariaud de Serre.

He credits the guidance he received through Info entrepreneurs for helping him get his business off the ground. "To have them believe in my idea and recognize its potential was extremely motivating," he explains. "They have been true partners in my success."

www.kit-focus.com



# **CLIENT SERVICE OUR TOP PRIORITY**

At the Canada Business Network, we survey our clients every year to evaluate our approach and to make plans for improving how we do business. In 2011-12, we sought feedback from clients who used our walk-in and call centre services. Here's what we found:

- 96% of phone clients reached a CBN service agent on their first call attempt;
- 95% of walk-in clients reported that they were greeted and served within five minutes of their arrival;
- 95% reported receiving all or most of the information or service they needed:
- 92% said they had a successful service interaction at our walk-in centres; and.
- > 59% of our walk-in clients visited a service centre two or more times.

What do the numbers tell us? We're doing well and we're staying focused on meeting our clients' needs. Yet as client needs evolve, the network will keep client service at the centre of our mandate by continuing to partner with other small business service delivery agencies and to enhance our online offerings to reach our clients where they need us most.

# THE CANADA BUSINESS NETWORK IN NUMBERS » 2011-2012

**2,197,770** visits to www.canadabusiness.gc.ca

**211,636** staff-assisted client interactions

**10,921** Twitter followers (English and French)

**2,705** promotional and educational events

400+ active Regional Access Partners across Canada

105 training sessions attended by CBN staff

**69** new partnerships established

THE CANADA BUSINESS NETWORK

**50** blogs posted to the CBN website

# **MEETING BUSINESS NEEDS ONLINE**

With our 20th anniversary quickly approaching, the only constant over the years has been our commitment to delivering the services entrepreneurs need through the most effective channels. From online to in-person, telephone and email, our service delivery model is constantly evolving.

Now more than ever, businesses are getting their information online. They are tapping into resources using smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers. They are also demanding greater interaction with service providers—and they're getting it from CBN. Our team tweets and engages with businesses and partners through Facebook and our regular blog posts.

At National Office, CBN streamlined the process for creating, maintaining and publishing content on **www.canadabusiness.gc.ca**. Every province and territory submits content that contributes to the site's full depth and breadth of business information. We migrated to the latest version of our content management system in 2011-12, improving the site's functionality, search tool and filtering. We have placed the Canada Business blog front and centre on our website to offer our clients regularly updated information on topics relevant to their businesses. We have also fully integrated BizPal into the site. These changes and our ongoing efforts underscore our commitment to constant improvement in online service delivery.

We are also leveraging the networks each of our centres has built, working with them to provide timely business information without duplicating efforts. This cross-promotion has given our blogs, tweets and Facebook posts better exposure. The approach has helped CBN and our partners do more outreach and create greater awareness without extra costs.

As business needs and technology continue to change, CBN will remain at the forefront of creating a positive client experience.

# OUOTE, UNOUOTE

"It's rewarding to work with entrepreneurs who go from the excitement of their business idea to selfemployment, growing their business and becoming employers. We're one of a number of organizations in the North working to support people who turn their passion into a business."

### **Brad Poulter**

Canada Business NWT

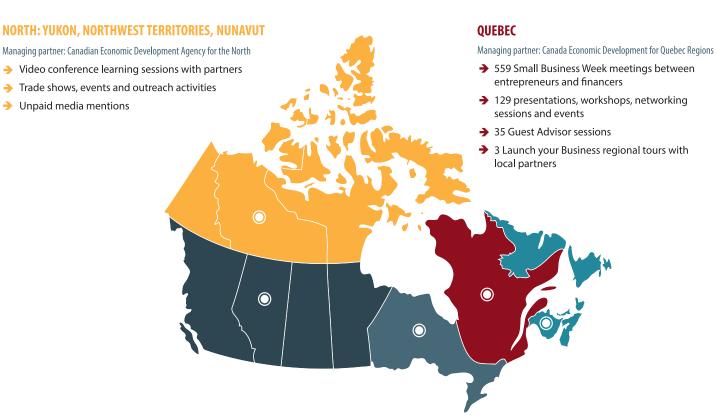
"It's very important to establish a level of trust with each client, so that they feel secure in sharing their business ideas. Because our service is free and confidential, clients are grateful, often resulting in repeat clients and requests."





# **OUR 2011-12 ACHIEVEMENTS**

When it comes to connecting with Canadian businesses and offering them valuable learning opportunities, our centres achieve impressive results year after year. Across Canada in 2011-12, they hosted and attended more than 2,705 outreach and educational events. Each centre actively contributes to Small Business Week in October, hosting networking sessions, planning meetings, delivering presentations and creating greater awareness about CBN's range of offerings. This map highlights their accomplishments region by region:



# WEST: BRITISH COLUMBIA, ALBERTA, SASKATCHEWAN, MANITOBA

 $Managing\ partner: Western\ Economic\ Diversification\ Canada$ 

- → 855 learning seminars and training sessions
- → 457 unpaid media mentions
- → 413 events, tours, trade shows and presentations
- 201 Guest Advisor sessions

## ONTARIO

Managing partner: Industry Canada

- → 206 events, tours, trade shows and presentations
- → 75 information products for entrepreneurs created or updated
- → 67 unpaid media mentions
- → 30 documents available in 14 languages

# EAST: NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, NOVA SCOTIA, NEW BRUNSWICK

Managing partner: Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

- 304 events, presentations, outreach activities, tours and expos
- Guest Advisor sessions, including intellectual property, law, accounting and marketing

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Ryan Slater and Zach Berman's entrepreneurial journey started during a year-long trek through Nepal and India. Snowbound in a Himalayan village, they noticed the locals drinking a sweet, nutrient-rich juice made of sea buckthorn berries. They were quickly sold on the taste and made it their mission to discover every juice blend they could find during their travels.

When they saw how much better they felt drinking juice every day, they knew they were on to a great business idea. "We realized that our juice idea was a perfect fit for Vancouver's fast-paced lifestyle," says Slater. "Juice is nutritionally dense, fast and accessible for customers who want a guick fix on the run."

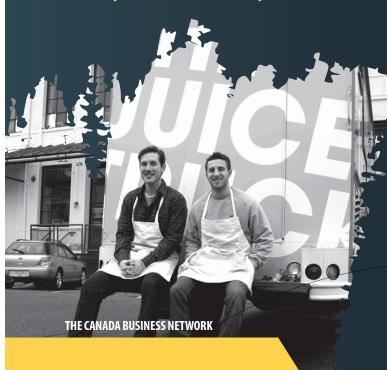
The duo decided the best way to reach customers was to start on the streets, and operate their juice bar out of a truck. They applied for a loan through the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. The process involved working with Small Business BC and a mentor to prepare a solid business plan, complete with financials. "Small Business BC helped us articulate our vision and fill in all the details. Our advisor was just awesome," explains Slater. "He was really big on hashing out our numbers to make sure that our idea was a viable business."

The Juice Truck officially launched in Gastown in 2011 and growth has been impressive. The truck operates year-round, changing the menu to reflect the seasons. Slater and Berman do mobile catering to offices every morning, and they have launched a juice cleanse program designed to help customers recharge their bodies. "We cold press our juices to ensure that they retain more vitamins, minerals and enzymes," says Slater. "We've built our brand around our high standards."

It's this passion for entrepreneurship and excellence that drives the two 26-year-olds—best friends since the age of 11. They are working on plans to expand the business. "Our market potential is great. Our two year vision is to have two to three juice bar storefronts in Vancouver, plus a retail line of our juices in local health food stores."

Not bad for two backpackers with a dream.

www.thejuicetruck.ca and www.thejuicecleanse.ca



## OUOTE, UNOUOTE

"It's an amazing resource. Every time I have a question, I know where to go first. And if they don't have the answer, they know where to point me."

### Lydia Moss

A Bit More Hip Apparel, Saskatoon, SK

"I came into the Canada Business office for guidance in establishing my business. The officer helped prepare me for the various aspects of running my own business – successfully!"

### James Oia

Big Orange Lunch Box, Charlottetown, PEI

# **EXPERTS BRING VALUE TO THE TABLE**

Across the Canada Business Network, expert advisors, including accountants, lawyers, bankers, marketers or ebusiness specialists are volunteering their time to provide expertise and advice to our small business clients. From Newfoundland and Labrador to Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC, these sessions allow entrepreneurs to tap into valuable resources at a fraction of the cost—or in some cases, for free.

Businesses sign up to discuss their questions or problems with experts who volunteer their time. "The program is win-win-win for everyone involved," says Alberta's Linda Chorney. "Our clients gain by getting access to professionals in-person, by phone, via Skype or even by email. Our volunteer experts get to give back to the business community. Finally, our centre gains because we're able to offer specialized advice that will improve our clients' chances of success."

Entrepreneur and owner of Saskatoon's Unique Upholstery, Cyril Schlosser, has experienced the benefits of the program first-hand. "We were running ourselves ragged and we needed a business plan. The advisor's advice was fantastic, and he continued to support us as the business expanded. We are taking off in new directions, and our sales are picking up!" Now that's value.

# OUOTE, UNOUOTE

"Enhancing the skills and knowledge of staff is essential to providing good service to a clientele that is dealing with a more sophisticated business climate."

### John Kavanagh

Canada Business Nova Scotia

"We value the importance of ongoing learning and understand the direct impact it has to our success. We strive to stay on top of trends in information management by participating in training sessions and conferences. This not only enables each employee to enhance their skills, capabilities and knowledge, but allows us to better serve our clients. Time spent on learning is always worthwhile."

### Leanne Battaglia

Canada Business Ontario

# **INNOVATING FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS**

At CBN, our passion for entrepreneurial success drives innovation in our service delivery. Right across the network, our teams deliver outside-the-box solutions to Canada's small businesses. Take, for example, the 881 Business Incubation Centre located on the Highway 881 corridor between Lac La Biche and Fort McMurray in Alberta. The area is home to small, mostly Aboriginal communities, that are well-placed to fill the growing demand for locally-contracted services from oilsands developers.

Sensing an opportunity, oil companies ConocoPhillips Canada and Statoil Canada partnered with the governments of Canada and Alberta to establish the business incubator—three mobile trailers that are becoming a hub for entrepreneurial activity. "Once we had community buy-in for the concept, The Business Link drove the project to fruition," explains Executive Director Brent Bushell. "We are housing three new businesses, including an internet service provider and a transportation company. Other non-resident clients are also accessing support services. Everyone shares the space and taps into our expertise. This is a unique model and the potential is exciting."

In Quebec, Info entrepreneurs has introduced learning circles—one for start-ups and another for growth-oriented firms. Each group boasts 12 entrepreneurs and meets once a month over the course of a year. "We bring in an expert and topics can range from start-up challenges to intellectual property," explains Guy Jobin, Vice President of Business Services. "Participants exchange information, ideas and contacts. Often, we'll hear, 'I've had that problem and here's how I solved it.' The dynamic makes it such a positive experience for everyone involved."

Entrepreneur Jérôme Mariaud de Serre says the benefits of participating in a learning circle are many. "Meeting regularly with other entrepreneurs keeps me disciplined and reminds me that I am not alone on my journey. It pushes me to persevere and set the pace for my own progress. It has definitely helped light the way for me."

# **ASSISTING ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURS**

As Canada's community of Aboriginal entrepreneurs continues to grow, CBN is committed to helping them find answers and solutions to meet their challenges. "It's a market segment with huge opportunities," states Alberta's Brent Bushell. "We're focused on delivering customized services that meet the needs of our Aboriginal clients whether they're located in remote areas or in urban centres."

CBN works with a network of organizations—from government programs to the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce—to offer a full spectrum of services. "The Aboriginal entrepreneurs we work with are involved in all types of ventures: service, high tech, arts and culture," says Manitoba's Shannon Coughlin. "We offer information products such as Doing Business on a Reserve and the Aboriginal Business Guide. We also have an Aboriginal business consultant on-site."

In Saskatchewan, home of the Aboriginal Business Services Network, Elaine Unrau says, "There's great potential to increase employment and promote entrepreneurship among our Aboriginal communities." The network helped establish a Centre of Excellence on Big River First Nation to offer skills development, job training and counselling to First Nations. "The centre will also incubate Aboriginal businesses such as a restaurant and catering business and a laundromat and sewing centre."

Sometimes, it's a matter of reaching Aboriginal communities that may not be aware of CBN's services. In the Northwest Territories, where distances are vast and communities are isolated, Brad Poulter helps clients deal with the unique challenges of life in the North, such as transportation on ice roads and seasonal connections to the rest of the country. Canada Business Nova Scotia delivers presentations and trade shows supporting Mi'kmaq communities across the province.

As Alberta's Bushell explains, "The success of our Aboriginal programming is based on our ability to establish relationships and gain trust within the Aboriginal communities across the province."

# THE SUCCESS FILES: BOOMERS & ZOOMERS



Sometimes a personal experience turns into a smart business solution. That's exactly what happened when Brenda Harll's beloved aunt was forced to move into assisted living after going into a diabetic coma. The stress of organizing the move from a distance while managing her career and volunteer work was overwhelming. "This was a life-changing experience," explains Calgary-based Harll. "I thought, 'How many other people are going through this havoc without support?' That's when I decided I wanted to do something bigger and help seniors and their families."

This dynamic Métis entrepreneur became a regular at The Business Link's workshops and networking events. She spent endless hours in the resource centre researching and developing her business plan. She earned her Senior Move Manager certification from the National Association of Senior Move Managers. Boomers & Zoomers became bonded, licensed and insured, then launched in 2011.

"I like to say we take your roots and revitalize your life," Harll explains. She offers a full circle of services, helping clients downsize and sort their belongings, find a new home, plan the space, pack, move and set up. She considers herself an advocate for seniors and their families. "Even if the boomer child is paying for my service, my client is actually the senior. I work with all family members while respecting the senior's dignity and perspective. To see them be a part of that process and be engaged—that's what I love most about my work."

Her passion has paved the way for her success. She plans to hire employees and eventually franchise the business. Still, she says she couldn't have done it without The Business Link. "I highly recommend them to others," she says. "It's an opportunity for small businesses to get a free education from people who have years of experience providing advice. It's a real goldmine of information."

www.boomers-and-zoomers.com

photo credit: Marilyn Gillespie Photogra

# **FOCUS ON THE FUTURE**

What's in store for CBN in 2012-13 and beyond? "This is definitely a year of transition," explains Dan Batista, Senior Director of Service Delivery and Partnerships at National Office. "In Atlantic Canada, our service delivery model is changing. As an organization, we are actively pursuing highly strategic partnerships that will help us build a stronger national service network."

CBN's online delivery will continue to evolve to meet the demand, with plans underway for web chat and other online services. We are growing our content syndication partnerships and developing processes to better manage them and measure our performance. "We're constantly trying to capture the value of our web content so we can track if it's well placed and if it's useful to entrepreneurs," says CBN Analyst, Rylee Raymond. "We're always adapting and responding to what our clients need."

Across the network, a number of initiatives are underway:

- Atlantic Canada is consolidating services and establishing new ways of serving small business clients.
- Quebec is planning 24 Hours of Entrepreneurship, an up-all-night effort to help entrepreneurs achieve targeted goals, such as building a website, quickly.
- Ontario is filling service gaps and information needs to help clients meet challenges such as business growth and succession planning.
- Manitoba is creating information products for growth-oriented businesses on topics such as ebusiness, product commercialization and financial planning.
- Saskatchewan is delivering Bookkeeping from a Shoebox training to clients throughout the province.
- Alberta is expanding its business learning services with direct delivery

