

InterConnexion

A newsletter for partners in Canada Business Service Centres

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Best Practices

How We Give Clients the Latest Breaking Information

There are never enough hours in the day for people who run small businesses. When they need business information, the last thing they want is to waste time calling dated phone numbers and chasing false leads. By meticulously updating the Business Information System (BIS), the cornerstone of CBSC service, we make sure it doesn't happen.

The BIS is an electronic, bilingual database of more than 700 federal government programs, services and regulations related to start-up entrepreneurs and small business.

"We make sure a person is not referred to a wrong number or an Internet address that has changed"

Keeping BIS information current is so critical that five BIS liaison officers work at it full-time. They note when programs are launched, ended or extended. They find out when eligibility criteria change. And with so many people on the move as government restructures, they make sure the BIS lists the correct names and phone numbers of key contact people.

"We make sure a person is not referred to a wrong number or an Internet address that has changed," says Vicki Kohse, manager of CBSC Information Products.

Each BIS liaison officer manages about 140 BIS documents and keeps track of five government departments. They:

- ▶ monitor Internet sites, business directories and the daily media to spot new program announcements;
- ▶ regularly contact government departments to track program changes;
- ▶ review the most popular programs once a month, the rest at least twice a year;
- ▶ write new BIS information in clear, everyday language;
- ▶ make sure clients can get the information by phone, in person, through Info-FAX or, for those with access, on the Internet.

Within 24 hours, updates are electronically posted to every CBSC and the CBSC Web Site. Bulletins on new initiatives are posted weekly on a separate database called The Source.

With access to this one-stop information storehouse, clients take more from CBSCs than timely and accurate information; they leave with a good impression of government service.

For more information please contact Vicki Kohse at (613)954-4966 or kohse.vicki@ic.gc.ca. ♦

We're online!

Visit InterConnexion at
<http://cbsc.org>:
88/interconnexion

National News

Strong Links with Partners

The CBSC has built strong links with those partner departments spearheading initiatives to improve service to small enterprise. The CBSC is part of:

▶ **Regional Trade Networks (RTN) and Team Canada:** a number of federal and provincial departments and agencies are working together to encourage small businesses to export products. As a member of this network, the CBSC 1-800 phone number will be printed on all government publications about export. CBSCs provide general information to both experienced and novice exporters and refer clients to the appropriate members of the RTN.

▶ **Contracts Canada:** Despite improvements to the Open Bidding System, small business still finds it hard to sell products and services to government. An inter-departmental initiative headed by Public Works and Government Services is developing a strategy to give business easier access to low dollar-value contracts. As part of this solution, the CBSCs will be a first stop for supplier education and contracting information.

▶ **Canadian Technology Network (CTN):** A web of agencies and technology experts provides advice to business to encourage the use of technology in managing business and producing goods. As members of the network, the CBSCs identify clients who need CTN services and makes referrals using the CTN database of experts.

Partnerships

One More One-Stop Service

Automated workstations are simplifying business registration for entrepreneurs in British Columbia. A job that used to mean filing several provincial and federal registration applications to several offices, can now be done in one visit to a self-serve computer station.

The pilot project is a jointly-funded project of Western Economic Diversification B.C. and the B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, and involves Revenue Canada, Workmen's Compensation Board (B.C.) and the B.C. Ministry of Finance. Through a single user-friendly program, it allows people to register a company as a partnership or sole proprietorship, apply for a Business Number, and register for GST and PST numbers and workers compensation coverage.

"I would say 90 per cent of clients are thrilled with it, particularly people who have gone through business registration before and may have run around to several different offices," says Bridget Field, team leader of the Start-Up area in the Canada/B.C. Business Service Centre.

Workstations are in place at the Centre in Vancouver and at provincial government offices in several other B.C. towns. The project, launched six months ago, will be evaluated after the pilot. In the meantime, Revenue Canada is consulting with other provinces to explore self-serve registration systems that will suit their business communities. ♦



We want to hear from you. If you have any comments about InterConnexion or Canada Business Service Centres please contact:

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Partnerships

Business Office Assists Black Community



The Black Business Initiative (BBI) celebrated its official opening on October 25, 1996. The five million dollar, five-year project offers business support to black entrepreneurs throughout Nova Scotia.

It serves a community that is under-represented in business.

Executive director Rustum Southwell says many people in that community feel excluded from the entrepreneurial economy.

"We may be saying the same things as a white agent but the perception on the client's side of the table is different"

"The perception within that community was that they did not feel welcome. At the BBI we may be saying the same things as a white agent, but the perception on the client's side of the table is different."

The goal of the BBI is to help clients shape business plans, learn business skills,

and increase their chances of getting bank loans. To help them overcome financial barriers, the BBI has a small equity fund and a loan fund with a reduced equity requirement. A mentor program pairs experienced business people with new entrepreneurs.

The BBI is funded by the Canada-Nova Scotia Cooperation Agreement on Economic Diversification. Collocated with the Canada/Nova Scotia Business Service Centre, the BBI offers clients specialized service coupled with access to the Centre's resources.

"It allows both their staff and their clients to take advantage of everything else we have in the Centre, like our library and our databases," says Mel Coombs, manager of the Canada/N.S. Business Service Centre.

Southwell's dream is to see people in the black community launching businesses and employing people.

"If we do our job well there will be no need for us to be here."

For more information contact Rustum Southwell at (902)426-8948. ♦

CBSC Leaves Home

The CBSC national Web site has a new address. It used to share a URL, the cyberspace equivalent of a street address, with Industry Canada. The new URL is government-neutral, a symbol of the CBSC's multi-governmental approach to service.

The new address, in place since December, is: www.cbsc.org

Since June 1996, when the Business Information System (BIS) database of government programs and services was first put on the CBSC Internet site, over 190,000 BIS documents have been "served" to cybersites. With over 1,000 federal and provincial programs

and services to search, the range of information people want is vast. The five documents requested most often?

1. Small Business Loans Program (Industry Canada)
2. Micro-Business Program (Business Development Bank of Canada)
3. Self-Employment Assistance (Human Resources Development Canada)
4. Venture Capital (Business Development Bank of Canada)
5. Small Business Statistics (Statistics Canada)

Best practices

Smooth Ride for Bummer Toboggan



Anyone who has lugged a snow-encrusted toboggan up a hill would understand why Phil Poetker invented the Bummer Soft-Slide Toboggan.

"I realized that toboggans are such a struggle," he says.

Poetker designed a safe, lightweight, folding model. Made of a foam core covered with cold-resistant vinyl fabric, the entire five foot sled folds into a neat bundle that fits easily into a car trunk. Because it is soft and flexible, it can skid sideways without tipping and glides, rather than flies, over bumps.

"The depth of information the CBSC has in their library is second to none"

Poetker and his business partner Carol Goodmanson are the founders of Movement by Design, a small Winnipeg-based company. A prolific inventor, Poetker knew that to market a new product he had to do his homework and that meant taking advantage of the resources at the CBSC in Winnipeg.

"The depth of information the CBSC has in their library is second to none," says Poetker.

First, the partners wanted to know whether anyone else had designed or researched a similar product. So they used the resources of the CBSC to conduct a Patent Information Exploitation search, a specialized computer program that allows a search of the holdings of the Canadian Intellectual Property Office records.

The next task was to research the toboggan market. They searched for information on emerging markets and learned how to make deals with retailers,

distributors and catalogue dealers.

"To us, Phil represents the typical small business person who has the need for emerging market and business information but doesn't have access to it at the local library," says Shannon Coughlin, Manager of the CBSC.

Poetker and Goodmanson launched the Bummer at a Canadian Tire store in Winnipeg in 1994 and in two weeks sold 80 toboggans. A year later it was in stores throughout Western Canada and parts of the U.S. This year they bought specialized equipment, allowing them to roll out 60,000 toboggans. They employ a full-time staff of four as well as seasonal help, usually students, who benefit from the experience of working in a growing, hands-on business.

Lately, they have been focussing their marketing efforts overseas and next winter hope to see the Bummer on store shelves in Japan and Germany.

"The way business goes today it is no longer local or national," says Poetker. "You have to be global, even for a small business like us."

Technology

Also Online...

Clients can now find information from the Business Information System (BIS) bundled in convenient topic packets called Pathfinders.

The Canada-Ontario Business Call Centre has produced Pathfinders on seven topics: business start-up, business start-up financing, employment and training programs, existing business financing, exports and imports, and taxation. They pull together information about those government programs and services, both federal and provincial, related to one topic.

BIS info now in packets called Pathfinders

"Often people who are starting out find the BIS overwhelming and they find it hard to decide what is relevant and what isn't relevant at all. Pathfinders make it easier to manage," says Alex Helcl, team leader of the Information Management Unit at the Canada-Ontario Business Call Centre.

Pathfinders also make the job easier for Call Centre agents. Clients in the same phase of business planning are usually after a common list of programs. Pathfinders provide Call Centre agents with a ready list they can send to clients.

Clients can access Pathfinders through the Info-FAX service, on the Internet or by calling the Call Centre.

Openings

◆ In July 1996, the first CBSC north of the 60th parallel opened in Yellowknife. Funded by both the federal and territorial governments, the Canada/NWT Business Service Centre is staffed by territorial employees supported by the national CBSC network. Already offering bilingual service, the staff are making efforts to translate their business resources into Inuktitut, the first language of 18,000 N.W.T. citizens.

◆ Another CBSC network member, The Business Link opened in April 1996 in Edmonton. Partners include: Western Economic Diversification, Alberta Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism, and Economic Development Edmonton. The Alberta Women's Enterprise Initiative and the regional office of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency are also collocated in the Centre.