

InterConnexion

A newsletter for partners in Canada Business Service Centres

Volume 3, no. 1, November 1998

ISSN 1205-6499

Renewed Mandate for CBSCs

The Government recently gave its all important stamp of approval for another 5 years of quality, client-centred service to Canadian business through the network of CBSCs. Since 1995, the CBSCs have been part of the government's *Jobs and Growth - Building a More Innovative Economy* initiative with funding to March 1999. The early mandate approval allows the lead federal departments (Industry Canada, ACOA, WED and CED) to send positive signals to staff, provinces and other

partners that the federal government remains committed to innovative quality service arrangements and support to small business.

In the October 21, 1998 News Release, Minister Manley said: "CBSCs provide businesspeople with timely and accurate information and referral services free of charge in all regions of the country and we all know that more competitive small businesses create more jobs and economic growth."

They Shoot, They Score - Team Canada Inc 1-888-811-1119

When a business client calls the new toll-free Team Canada Inc -Export Information Service, the voice answering "Team Canada / Équipe Canada" is none other than a CBSC business information officer. The new toll-free service has been active since January 1998 and provides a customized service for new and existing exporters. The service was leveraged from the established CBSC technical and human infra-



structure. Like a winning hockey team, all Team Canada players have to be counted on to do their part - the CBSCs' part is to provide excellent telephone information service to Team Canada clients. At the face-off, the new Team Canada number starts the play by routing the call to the nearest CBSC where callers are greeted by an information officer within 3 rings - no recordings or buttons to press. Calls can be transferred directly to trade special-

Looking back, the CBSCs have come a long way from 3 experimental pilot projects to a network of 12 Centres from coast to coast to coast. By March 1999, the 12 main Centres will support an extended network of 370 regional access partnerships with existing business service organizations in communities across the country. Providing access to the CBSC information collection, training and research back-up, these new partnership arrangements will bring accurate, relevant business information closer to small business and start-up entrepreneurs regardless of where they live. ♦

ists in IC and AAFC regional offices and referred to other domestic export development services. The role is an excellent fit for the CBSCs as many business clients do not separate their export questions from other business questions on potential markets. Already, the business information officers have answered over 7,800 calls and volumes are increasing steadily as the number is promoted and listed in the Blue Pages of all Canadian telephone directories. ♦

Inside this issue:

Health Canada Joins Partnership	2
In Search of Telephone Excellence	2
Bringing InterConnexion In-House	2
Web Site E-Mails	3
Is the Ice Storm Really Over?	3

We're online!

We have a new look and a new web site address

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

Client Corner

"...you have done something to be proud of here, to be sure!"

"Good Job!!!!!! I am soooooo happy this site exists. This is one of the best Alberta business sites on the net. Very helpful!!!! Keep up the GOOD/EXCELLENT/SUPERB work :)"

Health Canada Joins the CBSC Partnership

Regulations governing everything from cigarette machines to smoke detectors are now accessible to CBSC clients by phone, toll-free fax and Internet since Health Canada's Environmental Health Directorate joined the CBSC partnership. The federal directorate that regulates hazardous products recently added 53 new, user-friendly documents to the CBSC database, simplifying client access to useful regulatory information.

Health Canada was approached by the CBSCs when front-line officers noted a growing demand by clients for easy-to-use information on rules affecting their business. CBSC Information Products manager, Vicki Kohse,

says it was hard to give clients fast access to regulatory information, because existing documents were neither user-friendly nor online.

Work began in 1996 on a



Vicki Kohse, Robert Smith (National Secretariat) and Rod Raphael (Health Canada) signing the Letter of Understanding

prototype database containing plain-language versions of the hundreds of federal regulations administered by CBSC partners.

Given the success of the project and the demand by clients for health-related regulatory information, the CBSC Secretariat began working with Health Canada officials to reformat health regulations for inclusion in the database, even though the department wasn't officially a CBSC partner. The Environmental Health Directorate formalized its link with the CBSCs in an official Letter of Understanding that opened the door to a new long-term relationship between the CBSC network and Health Canada. ♦

In Search of Telephone Excellence

Things needed tweaking with our phone system." But rather than treat the problem as cosmetic, Canada-Saskatchewan Business Service Centre manager, Diana Matsuda, took it upon herself to launch a full-scale audit of the telecentre.

Matsuda called in Phone Power, the business-services division of SaskTel parent, Stentor, to conduct a complete evaluation of the call centre's infrastructure.

"I think people saw it for what it was – a process to help us do our jobs better."

"It's not something you want to enter into lightly because it's a big commitment," says Matsuda, recalling how the evaluation proc-

ess began with a 30-hour detail-obsessed questionnaire.

Evaluators then came on site to observe the centre in action, interview staff and examine records. In a soup-to-nuts assessment, evaluators analyzed everything from the use of technology to record-keeping, training and employee morale, and offered detailed recommendations on how to improve the centre's performance.

The recommendations included both quick fixes and longer-term changes from replacing agents' headsets to separating the telephone answering and research functions to allow agents to concentrate on a single task per shift.



Now let's see... I know there's "excellence" around here somewhere.

One recommendation was to route calls to a busy signal when all agents were busy and the queue was full. This measure was adopted following consultations which indicated that clients would prefer a busy signal so they could call back at their convenience, rather than being forced into a series of recorded messages. Using reports generated through the Centre's call tracking system, Operations can be adjusted to minimize the number of busy signals received. The study also established a baseline for future evaluations. "Although we're focusing on the things we want to change, we also found out we're doing a lot of things really well," says Matsuda.

Maybe that's why staff responded so enthusiastically. "I think people saw it for what it was – a process to help us do our jobs better." ♦

Bringing InterConnexion In-House

Software is now available in the CBSC National Secretariat enabling us to write, illustrate and lay-out *InterConnexion* in-house, ready for printing. The main effort is now simply selecting and composing the articles. The rest is as simple as cut and paste. Photographs with captions are easy options and an HTML version for the CBSC extranet site is created in a simple conversion step. All this...at a 36% cost saving over previous production costs. ♦



Web Site E-Mails

Sending e-mail to a Web site can be a bit like putting a message in a bottle and setting it adrift. But for the CBCSs, answering e-mail is an integral part of the Centres' access strategy and gets the same priority as other types of access. In fact, the CBCSs have introduced a service standard for handling e-mail from the web site. Every message received at the Centres is responded to within one business day.

E-mail, unlike toll-free phone, fax and walk-in, is accessible around the globe and questions originate from foreign countries and Canada alike - an interesting challenge when the services of the CBCSs are really geared to helping Canadian businesses. But, the CBCSs are part of the "face" of Canada to the world and therefore, feel compelled to deal appropriately with all questions, even misdirected questions.

The messages are as varied as snowflakes. Not surprisingly, many questions are from people

doing research to start-up a business - sometimes with very high expectations about what they might receive! Here is an example: "We are interested in raising ducks in Northern Quebec or Labrador. Please provide information sources on land, feed, taxes and an agricultural consultant who can create a business plan and funding package." There are also more specific questions on business processes such as hiring and firing practices; ISO certification or labelling requirements; and business acquisitions: "I want to buy a business or franchise. Kindly send me some information."

But what do you do with requests for information on student loans, maps of good kayaking rivers, finding addresses or phone numbers of long lost relatives, questions from students around the world using the Internet

to do research? Stock replies and "boiler plate" answers help keep this efficient.

Requests from foreign businesses are literally "all over the map". "Our company is looking to buy used clothes..." "The Bonsmara Cattle Breeder's Society of South Africa is interested in doing parentage tests by means of DNA on about 5,000 - 15,000 animals per year. Could you please..." The amount of time and effort that can be devoted to these questions has to be carefully managed.

Some of the e-mail received at the CBSC web site are pats on the back and expressions of gratitude. These we

circulate internally to boost employee morale, though we print the odd one in Interconnexion just to show off. (See our "Client Corner" on page 1.) ♦



"Sending an e-mail to a Web site can be a bit like putting a message in a bottle and setting it adrift."

Is the Ice Storm Really Over?

Some of us may think the ice storm affecting Eastern Ontario and western Quebec in January 1998 has faded to an interesting memory. However, the CBCSs in Ontario and Quebec are still involved in ice storm recovery assistance for small business. During the height of the emergency,

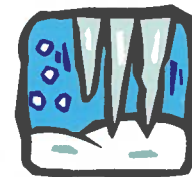
the Centres in Ontario and Quebec quickly organized an essential service for business: toll-free telephone access, knowledgeable staff and relevant information to

"Although no one wishes a repeat performance this winter, knowing that CBSC resources can be rallied so quickly in an emergency situation is something of which we can be proud."

assist business callers desperate for help. Without electricity and impossible road conditions, many businesses were brought to a standstill - goods were spoiled, service interrupted, sales lost,

equipment and buildings damaged. Stress levels were high as information officers took calls from people exhausted by the storm's impact and looking for assistance from government. Some 10 months after the storm, the Centres continue to provide information on the recovery assistance programs, screening these calls for eligibility and referring them to the right program delivery point.

Although no one wishes a repeat performance this winter, knowing that CBSC resources can be rallied so quickly in an emergency situation is something of which we can be proud. ♦



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

Robert Smith, Executive Director
National CBSC Secretariat
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H5
Fax: (613) 954-5463
E-mail: smith.robert@ic.gc.ca