

InterConnexion

A newsletter for partners in Canada Business Service Centres

Volume 4, No. 1, June 1999

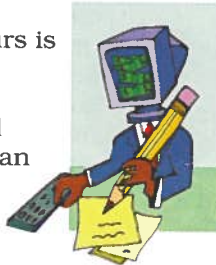
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The Interactive Business Planner – Another CBSC bright idea goes national

The CBSCs Interactive Business Planner (IBP) was officially launched on March 30, 1999 at the Regina SME Business Conference and InfoFair. This Web-based tool is another electronic service accomplishment for the network of CBSCs and its partners.

One of the biggest challenges for entrepreneurs is detailed planning of their enterprise. This requires forethought, research, and preparation. A business plan lays the groundwork for a successful business and provides the information required by lending institutions and government agencies ready to support the budding entrepreneur.



Like many great service ideas, the original concept for the IBP was "conceived" by front line staff, this time in the Canada-BC Business Service Centre. Front line staff have an uncanny knack for knowing exactly what clients need and where gaps in information products are. Many "how to" guides were available but

*The
Interactive Business Planner
is effective, easy to use and it's free.*

none really took full advantage of resources on the Internet. The English language prototype was developed by the C/BC BSC in collaboration with the B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, Western Economic Diversification, and the CBSC National Secretariat. Response to the IBP prototype was overwhelmingly positive and the decision was made to transform it into a national, bilingual product with province-specific links.

The Interactive Business Planner makes a tough job easier by:

- explaining what a business plan can do, and why it's important
- showing what to include in a business plan and providing sample entries
- helping to identify and collect information on marketing, management, regulations, risks, financing and more
- providing links to federal and provincial sources of information
- automatically generating an income statement, cashflow statement and balance sheet
- printing a well-formatted and professional-looking business plan

The entrepreneur's plan can be saved on a CBSC server for up to 60 days and retrieved using a name and password 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Over the last 8 weeks, 450-500 new users signed on per week and started to build their business ideas. The Interactive Business Planner is effective, easy to use and it's free. Visit the IBP site at <http://www.cbsc.org/ibp>

Envious international inquiries and praise from Canadian users of the IBP keep coming in. See the *Client Corner* section for a sample of these comments or visit the Web version of InterConnexion for many more:

<http://www.cbsc.org/interconnexion> ♦

Interactive Business Planner

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We're online!

We have a new look and a new Web site address

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

Client Corner

"FANTASTIC! The ease of use and easy to follow examples. We don't believe there is a better self-help program, short of paying \$5 - \$10,000 for a professional firm to do it. It saved our business."

Mitey Moe Tools Inc.

"I am finding the IBP VERY helpful! It is one of the best resources I have located on the WEB. I am estimating that using your system is saving me more than 1/2 my time and I am probably developing a more organized comprehensive plan."

Metron Biomedical Corp.

Seniors find “comfort” in starting their own business

Pat Ross, 69, and her husband, Jules, 83, stepped into the CBSC in Edmonton (The Business Link) a year ago with a hand-made “Comfort Collar” prototype, a lot of energy and many questions about getting their business idea started.



Pat and Jules Ross (left) show off their Comfort Collar to Sibéal McCourt-Bincoletto (right)

In her “first” career as a physiotherapist, Pat was aware of the problems many people face with injury or stress to their neck and

she saw first hand the pros and cons of the rigid collars already on the market. Working with her husband, the “Comfort Collar” design took shape using soft, unbleached cotton and a wheat filling.

Business Information Officer Sibéal McCourt-Bincoletto shared in their excitement and quickly went to work, guiding them through a maze of regulations and considerations for their product. “We had no idea of all the rules and regulations for producing the collar and letting it loose on the public,” Pat admitted.

Pat and Jules have made many return trips to the Centre through every step of their fast-growing business, from intellectual property and pricing issues to searching for fabric and sewers.

The Ross’ home-based business has now sprouted into a warehouse location, under the name Physio-Med Corporation. The family business has expanded to include their son and daughter-in-law and a manufacturing agent is pitching the

collar to pharmacies and drug companies with prospects for order of 20,000 or more.

We couldn't have done it without Sibéal.

With the quick success of the Comfort Collar, the couple has been inspired to design other related products. Their latest innovation, the “Bac-Pac,” will help relieve lower back pain. Pat explained, “You can wear the Bac-Pac when you’re working, driving, or digging in the garden.” She can’t wait to produce supports for the wrists, and warmers for hands, feet, and other parts of the aching body.

Declared Pat, “We couldn’t have done it without Sibéal.” They take comfort in knowing they can turn to The Business Link for help and guidance. ♦

Dear staff... signed a manager

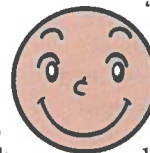
This e-mail note from the Manager to the staff of the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre speaks for itself and we have reproduced it here with her permission:

Memorandum to: All Staff

I worked the C/MBSC booth at the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce’s special After Business Show at the Arena Thursday night. I had my business cards on the table and when people noted I was the General Manager of the Centre, no less than a DOZEN people took the time to tell me first, how knowledgeable, helpful and friendly the Centre staff were, and second, what great information and resources we have.

I was “button bustin” proud of you all last night... again

Please note that these satisfied customers first talked about the staff. You use our leading edge resources to find the answers our clients need, but it is each of you and your commitment to service excellence that make us the success we are. I’m well aware there are many days when you feel bone weary, overwhelmed with work and backlogged with enquiries. Good reason for that. Since opening day in our new location April 1, 1998 we have had over 15,000 walk-in clients, responded to over 35,000 phone calls, e-mails and regular mail. All this in addition to moving in with new provincial partners, getting settled, learning new systems and so on. But, as you can see, your hard work is paying big dividends - very satisfied customers and an excellent reputation for our Centre and the CBSC concept. I was



“button bustin” proud of you all last night... again. I want to thank each of you for your hard work and dedication, for constantly going that extra distance on behalf of the client.

You are a team extra-ordinaire! ♦

Shannon Coughlin
Manager

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

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Including entrepreneurs with disabilities in CBSC service delivery

Following the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Roundtable sponsored by Human Resources Development Canada in February 1999, the CBSCs have launched a review of their services to see if improvements could be made. This is a multi-faceted challenge for the CBSCs as they provide many different modes of access -- telephone-based services, Internet, physical sites -- each posing different challenges for people with disabilities.

Three of the CBSCs are providing a basis to share best practices in our unique service environment. A full-time employee is co-located in the CBSC in Nova Scotia as part of the ACOA - supported Network for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities (NEWD). Al Roper, the Centre's manager observed "All staff have become more sensitive to the needs of clients who have challenges with things that we too often take for granted."

Recently, the CBSCs in Manitoba and Saskatchewan commissioned accessibility audits of their Centres and made changes to remove some of the obstacles that face entrepreneurs with disabilities trying to use the services. The results were shared with the other CBSCs in the network and each Centre is taking practical steps to make improvements immediately and in the longer term.

The National Secretariat is working with federal departments and agencies to obtain their publications in alternative formats upon request from CBSC clients.

Here is just a sample of the types of things we are working on: Internet: a "no frames" option for CBSC Web sites
Information collection: a coordinated central inventory of materials available in alternative formats such as braille documents, audio tapes, large print documents etc.

On the phones: TTD/TTY service
Physical premises: special client workstation with height control on the desk, voice recognition software, large key labels, oversize monitor
Staff: a manager's checklist, a designated business information officer trained to work with entrepreneurs with disabilities, sensitivity and awareness training for all staff
Outreach: promotion and liaison work with the disabled community and advocacy to promote the use of CBSC services by entrepreneurs with disabilities. ♦



The BIS has been busy!

The CBSC Business Information System (BIS) continues to grow! Currently the federal portion of the data base contains 353 regulations, 804 programs and services and 75 quick reference guides for businesses (fact sheets). Thirty-six federal departments contribute to this comprehensive inventory. What a find for the busy entrepreneur!

In a typical month, the federal BIS will be accessed 145,000 times through our different modes of access: by CBSC information officers responding to telephone inquiries, the Internet, and the fax-on-demand system. One data base supports all modes of access and changes are done overnight to all parts of the system.

On average, 250 documents are changed every month in both languages. Quality control standards ensure that at least 60 percent of the data base is reviewed every 3 months. The most frequently used documents are reviewed every month.

As you can see the BIS is the place to be. Be sure your information is included! ♦

Who is Carla?

Carla is the star of a short video that demonstrates new technology being piloted by the CBSCs. She lives in a small town in rural Canada and is typical of thousands of small home-based entrepreneurs. She is also fictional, an amalgam of the typical client served by the CBSCs who would benefit from this exciting new service enhancement -- voice to voice Web support. The



application marries up the strength of the CBSC telephone information service and the CBSC Web site and information collection. If Carla cannot find the answers to her questions herself using the Web, she can click on the voice to voice feature which will allow her and a CBSC business information officer to navigate together, both viewing the same Web pages simultaneously. The pilot project is currently underway in Ontario with the first

6 sites being operational by this summer and another 40 distributed across Canada by December. But, Carla explains the application so much better in the dramatization. A compact disk (CD) version of the video is available by contacting Grace Moores at the following address: moores.grace@ic.gc.ca ♦

Positively certifiable – ISO 9002 arrives

Direct from our newsroom... we have just received confirmation that the Info Entrepreneurs Centre of Montreal is the first Canada Business Service Centre to obtain ISO 9002 certification... the employees are delighted, but very tired... this was a special bulletin from our newsroom...

You will not hear this news on the radio, television, nor will you read it on the Internet or a newspaper (apart from this one). However, this achievement ensures that the business processes offered by Info Entrepreneurs to business clients and partners have been well thought out and carefully documented, and that the Centre meets ISO's internationally recognized standards. In layman's terms, this means that we have:

- 1- described the work methods we use;
- 2- adhered to those work methods in our work;



3- proven that we respect our work procedures;

4- made a formal commitment to continue to improve our quality system.

For over a year, the staff of Centre Info Entrepreneurs adjusted their schedules to accommodate ISO work periods. Every aspect of the Centre's activities was carefully examined, discussed and documented. Everyone understands the limits and potential of his/her role and is able to describe fully what we can do for clients. Our work did not change much because of this but it created an atmosphere

of control and clarity that everyone appreciates. Being "ISOed" does not mean that our work is squeezed into a hardened and inflexible box. If anything, quite the reverse is true. By clearly identifying our areas of activity, our ISO system has given us the tools to enhance these areas in the light of our various clients' changing requirements.

Celebrations to mark this achievement have not been held as yet, but they will be organized soon... as soon as we get hold of the ISO procedure for such festivities!!! ♦

Yvan Deslauriers
Manager



Easing the strain on new entrepreneurs

After draining their savings to develop a unique cookware design, Mich Delaquis and Fred Coakes of Delfre Enterprises Inc. feared their novel idea might end up sitting on a back burner. So they turned to the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre for assistance.

The Centre helped the two new Winnipeg entrepreneurs find the business information and contacts they needed to get their product to market. Now EasyStrain® Cookware, an eight-piece set of high quality pots and pans with unique built-in locking strainers, is being sold successfully on The Shopping Channel and through the company's Web site: www.easystrain.com

vice-president, sales and marketing for Delfre. "Now they're helping us with UPC codes. They're a great resource. We know we're going to turn to them for more help in the future as our company grows and we look at adding products."

Delaquis, Delfre's president, conceived the built-in strainer concept four years ago when he scalded himself cooking pasta. The first prototype of the special pots - which cleverly incorporate a lock and strain capability into the pot and lid allowing safe one-handed draining - was developed in Coakes' basement. However, after spending thousands of dollars for a patent, the pair discovered it couldn't be manufactured cost effectively.

Financing from friends and family was almost exhausted when a second patent was needed for a new design. With guidance from the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre, a Technical Information Search was done; as well, after pursuing many leads a manufacturer was found to produce the cookware. The first shipment of EasyStrain® Cookware was sold on The Shopping Channel in February of this year.

Delaquis offers these words of advice to would-be entrepreneurs: "Believe in your product and believe in yourself. Just keep plugging away. Coakes adds, And get the help you need. You can't do it alone." ♦



Mich Delaquis and Fred Coakes show off their wares

"The Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre helped us to make the right contacts."

"The Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre helped us to make the right contacts. Those are tough to find when you're starting out," says Coakes,