

Appendix – Employer Phase

The employer phase of the Ambassadeur project was part of an effort to make small and medium-sized businesses aware of the new information technologies but also aimed at providing an Internet infrastructure suited to their needs.

The project, initiated by Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC in a partnership primarily with CFDC managers, has two aspects. The first, of a technical nature, involved the creation of an integrated website, "Employers On-Line"(9), a portal where each enterprise will have an opportunity to showcase its products and services with a view to business development. The second aspect has to do with the content and purpose of the site, with the partners involved in development orientation, educating businesses, coordination and community mobilization around its achievement.

The project received a \$263,000 grant from the Canada Jobs Fund (CJF) spread over three years from 1999 to 2002 (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999a). Although managed internally by HRDC, it attracted a number of regional partners and, like the citizen phase, called for the community to eventually take over the project.

For the website, Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC already has a database on employers updated through agreements with various economic players in the region, particularly Emploi-Québec, the Société de promotion économique de Chicoutimi (SPEC), the Société de développement de Jonquière (SDJ) and the Société de développement économique de La Baie (SODEB). It will be available at the HRDC website and adjusted and improved to rapidly offer the products and types of information responsive to the needs expressed in the employer phase.

But creation of the portal required a more robust interactive search engine and, following analyses, the choice fell on Industry Canada's Strategis(10). The Department was a federal partner. The agreement covered the creation of a separate regional interface, namely a home page with access to the Strategis search engine with the specified keys, using the database already built by HRDC. Updates would be handled by Industry Canada.

To meet the needs of a number of regional partners and employers, the plan was to develop a web product, a portrait of the region intended for employers and investors that would provide information about location factors as well as investment and operating costs and conditions in a specific area. Also, for a clear picture of the territory, teaming up with the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi and its Electronic Atlas project(11) led to the creation of 35 maps covering the industrial areas in the region. The e-atlas is a research project whose purpose is "to identify the strong trends shaping development of the territory and making the findings available to the social players involved in development planning".

Thus in June 2000 "Employers On-Line" offered, in addition to access to the employer database, the following products: list of occupations in demand, guide on 1999 pay rates, developments/outlook (1998-2001), the study on workforce erosion in the Saguenay, community profiles, a portrait of the region, and the e-atlas.

At the same time, the site is making employers aware of the "Branché en affaires" site. The Local Development Centres (CLD), CFDCs, and economic development corporations in Saguenay-Lac St-Jean, in association with CED, are managing "Branché en affaires," a business opportunity watch and search website offering services such as information about business opportunities, bid transmission and follow-up, prospecting for clients, partnerships and alliances, etc.

The employer phase involves a number of partners, primarily HRDC, CFDC managers in the region, industrial commissioners, CED and the regional manufacturers corporation.

At present people seem to be very satisfied with the results of the employer phase despite occasional problems brining certain partners aboard. In fact, the challenges of this phase lie mainly in creating synergy among existing initiatives, avoiding redundancy by relying on partners' expertise, and providing a consistent and efficient network of information that meets the needs of SMBs in the region.

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(9) Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, Employers On-Line, <http://employers.gc.ca/> Information also available at Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC website.

(10) Strategis, <http://strategis.gc.ca>.

(11) Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Electronic Atlas, <http://atlas.uqac.quebec.ca/saguenay-lac-saint-jean/accueil.html>.