

# Project Background

OneStop Business Registration (OSBR) is an Internet-based system for registering new businesses at kiosks located throughout British Columbia. The purpose of this pilot project is to make it easier to launch businesses in the province, where the economy has been tottering for a number of years. OSBR eliminates the need for entrepreneurs to visit several offices, learn about the registration procedure, fill out a number of forms and provide the same information repeatedly. Also noteworthy is the collaboration among the federal and provincial governments and municipalities that recently joined the system. The system is soon expected to be converted from kiosks to the Internet for 24-hour on-line access. Interview subjects identified two innovative ideas in this project: first, access to different levels of government through a one-stop centre or the partnership, and second, better service for the public.

## Historical Setting

OSBR was launched in July 1996 as a business registration system built on an Oracle database. The application, available at 76 kiosks in summer 2001 (then 90 kiosks at 79 sites by the end of 2001) connected through the Internet, enables new businesses to register simultaneously with a municipality and the provincial and federal governments. The involvement of all three levels of government is a major innovation; in fact, preliminary research at OSBR's indicated that it was a first. The kiosks are expected to be replaced by direct Internet access from a registrant's computer in the near future. They also hope to quickly increase the number of municipalities participating in the project in the coming months. There is a kiosk in Calgary as well.

OSBR aims to simplify the business registration partnership and forge a partnership among the governments to reduce red tape. It can be used to:

- register a business or corporation,
- register for the provincial sales tax and GST, as an employer and individually with the Worker's Compensation Board, and
- apply for a municipal permit.

By June 2001, 25,600 clients had used the service to fill out 65,900 forms.

Before OSBR, someone wanting to register a business had to go from one government office to another and learn to adjust to the rules of the different government departments and their office hours, not to mention traveling from town to town. Electronic processing of the applications has reduced response time. Despite the OneStop name, it is really a two-step procedure. First, the name of the business has to be approved by the Finance Ministry; then comes registration. Both steps can now be completed within a day; previously it took a week or more.

## Strategic and Political Setting

British Columbia business people had complained for years that the rules and procedures for registering a new or existing business were complicated and costly in terms of time and money. More specifically, they criticized the lack of integration among the different forms that had to be filled out and the muddled information about what office they had to go to.

The British Columbia government is also in the process of developing alternative methods of service delivery organized in terms of a client-focused approach. Due to budget demands and harsh economic conditions, cutting red tape soon became a popular trend under the New Democratic government that started the process. The new Liberal government plans to continue deregulating the economy. Through various measures, including an income-tax reduction, the new government also wants to make the province more attractive for economic development (Lunman, 2001). The new government, whose victory assured a sure thing a year before the elections, had time to prepare itself to govern. Extensive reforms are planned, including a substantial cutback in the size of government services. One of the new government's first steps was to reduce the size of Cabinet (Danard, 2001).

The alternative method of service delivery chosen reflects the growing complexity of government operations and the need to provide services with a horizontal dimension. British Columbia government personnel are familiar with the "Citizens First" survey conducted by the Public Administration Institute of Canada. They cite the survey in justifying the need to improve public services. The public administration is working in an environment where the public is more demanding and costs have to be reduced in a province whose geographic characteristics make travel difficult outside of the southwest corner.