

Partners

The Ministry

The Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture (MSBTC), now the Ministry of Competition, Science and Business, is one of the smallest ministries in British Columbia. It was set up to structure relations between the business community and government administration. One unique feature of this project, and a key to its success, was precisely the fact that this tiny ministry was not perceived as a threat by the others. It could scarcely be accused of "bureaucratic imperialism". In other words, MSBTC had nothing to gain from the venture. Its officials saw their role as basically that of legal counsel, or representatives of small business within the government. Their aim was to make life easier for small business in a province where it was hard to create jobs. Everyone interviewed gave them credit for OSBR's success.

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The kiosks made possible by the Internet and OSBR's technological content in general represent a rather modest technological advance according to experts in that field. But the partnership formed by ministries and agencies of the British Columbia government is a major revolution in the way West Coast public administrations operated. Everyone interviewed stressed the fact that, before OSBR, they had no contact with one another. Today, they can no longer backtrack because their clients have responded very positively. Cooperation is also the right path because people do not care what level of government provides the service, as various surveys have shown.

The partners are:

- The Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture;
- Canada Customs and Revenue Agency;
- The Consumer Taxation Branch of the British Columbia Ministry of Finance;
- The British Columbia Worker's Compensation Board;
- The Corporate Registry of the British Columbia Ministry of Finance;
- Western Economic Diversification Canada;
- Municipalities;
- UNIServe Online, which maintains the system; and
- JASCO, the computer consultant.

Also noteworthy in this case, along with the relations between government agencies, is that the technological dimension was developed in association with a private consultant. In practice, only the officials at the heart of the project deal with the computer consultant. One of the people interviewed who helped to develop payment through the Internet said the consultant was an essential cog in developing the project. Ministry of Small Business officials also praised his work. This collaboration is in keeping with the government's decision not to acquire internal computer expertise, but rather to hire the necessary personnel on a contract basis. This ensures acquisition of the necessary expertise without hiring full-time personnel whose jobs might become obsolete. Moreover, the public sector cannot compete with computer and high-tech salaries, which makes hiring experts difficult if not impossible.

Also worth mentioning are the efforts of the government agencies (see the government's website) and the Community Futures Development Corporation Offices, which are nonprofit organizations dedicated to economic development. The agents are government personnel whose jobs date back to the 1858 Gold Rush. They have always been professionals who performed a variety of tasks such as registering births, serving as police, controlling alcohol in Prohibition days, collecting school taxes, preparing voter lists etc. Today they manage over 50 government programs, collect some \$1.6 billion in revenue, and provide information about government services for some 30 government organizations. Located in 59 offices throughout the province, for many people they represent the front line in contact with government services. This made it logical to set up the OSBR kiosks in their offices, especially since, until last summer, they came under the same ministry. They are now attached to the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

Western Economic Diversification funds the Community Futures corporations. In both cases, their one common goal is to foster business development. For them, OSBR is therefore a tool that makes their jobs easier and their clients happier.