

BizPaL

Technology and collaboration cut red tape

by David Newman

CANADIAN BUSINESSES, particularly small and medium-size businesses, are facing a rethink on how they operate... and some might be very put out. Before long, they may not be able to blame government 'red tape' for added start-up cost, effort and hassle (another excuse down the tubes!), and all because of a new service for business – BizPaL.

It is no secret to anyone that businesses have constantly complained about their confusion and frustration with the burden of requirements at multiple levels of government. They find themselves having to turn to many different departments of at least three levels of government to find out what permits and licenses they need for their business, never being sure if they've missed something. Indeed, some even have complaints that businesses fail and go under when faced with a regulatory requirement of which they were not even aware. There is no doubt that business would welcome a clearing house to deal with government demands, let alone the savings in time, effort and runaround entailed. Removal of procedural disincentives could even act as a stimulus.

Welcome to the world of BizPaL, a partnership based upon the premise that facilitating a level playing field and more productivity for businesses and governments will create a stronger economy that benefits all Canadians.

Everybody get together (try to love one another right now)

BizPaL is a self-described, Web-based service that will allow business clients to easily generate a customized list of the permits and licenses they require from all levels of government. It can be found on

the Internet at www.bizpal.ca. What stands out immediately is that BizPaL is a cross-government collaboration aimed at making permit and license 'red tape' obsolete. It is not only client focused, but driven by client needs – the need for business to better know what is going on; what they need to do to comply with multiple and multi-level laws and regulations and how to get through the process of getting those licenses and permits.

Industry Canada and the governments of Kamloops, Halton, Whitehorse, Yukon, British Columbia and Ontario are conducting the pilot project. BizPaL, which is being designed as a stand alone, self-governing and self-funding entity, will be available to all governments in Canada.

Elise Boisjoly is director general, Government On-Line (GOL) at Industry Canada and oversees the BizPaL pilot for the federal government. She stresses the collaborative governance structure and client focus at the core of the project. "When we explored the concept beginning about two years ago, we determined that it was essential that the planning and design elements be undertaken by all levels of government to ensure that we could address the full range of client needs and different jurisdictional requirements. However we also wanted to take a solid business case based approach to developing BizPaL to fully establish its operational viability."

The pilot was supported by all levels of government, with three provinces and municipalities concentrating on the daunting task of mapping the wide variety of permit and licensing requirements. Federal funding of some \$2.5 million over two years was provided under Treasury Board's GOL special business transformation proj-

ect fund, focusing on Web, system and project design and management.

The family that buys together

Input was received from private-sector technology developers who were consulted through a request for information issued in November 2003 and a proof-of-concept was undertaken in collaboration with one territory, one province and two municipalities. In early January 2005, EDS won the request for proposal (RFP) competition to develop the pilot to implementation – targeted for the autumn of 2005. The RFP drew very substantial interest and response from prospective suppliers.

Boisjoly has ambitious plans for BizPaL. "By the summer of 2005, an operational website is expected to be available, encompassing some 200 business sectors for sector specific permit and licensing requirements. In the intervening period, the steering committee, composed of the pilot project's government partners, will examine governance options and fee and funding structures. We all share a client and one of the most impressive things about this project is that we are all clearly focused directly on better serving that client."

Takin' care of business

A major product design challenge was the wide variety of regulation and the difference in permit and licensing requirements from one municipality and province to another for each of hundreds of business sectors, from retail to construction to restaurants. Any pilot needed to develop a program with common parameters and the flexibility to meet the regulatory environment of each jurisdiction. Add to that the different approaches and levels of

sophistication of GOL services in each jurisdiction. BizPaL had to be designed to provide services at multiple levels from Web-based to electronic to telephone to counter service, all of them consistent, compatible and meeting the needs of the various governments involved, but, most importantly, being responsive to the needs of different business sectors. Certainly business would welcome a clearing house that would help them save time, effort and runaround when dealing with government demands. Removal of procedural disincentives could even act as a stimulus.

Governments also have something very worthwhile to gain. All levels of government lose revenue and add to their own process costs when clients who want to comply don't understand all the permits and licenses that are required and, on occasion, don't comply. Compliance costs and efforts could be substantially reduced with BizPaL. The duplication of effort across governments is not only an irritant for clients but is a drain on increasingly strained government financial and human resources. As the website notes, since it is designed as a self-service tool, governments will be able to redirect valuable client service resources.

Elise Boisjoly fully appreciates the potential their work could open up. "The collaboration within and between governments that is at the core of BizPaL could well serve as a model and learning tool for other collaborations that promise to lead to more streamlined and efficient government services. There is an obvious opportunity for economies of scale, improved learning synergies, best practice sharing and continuous improvement. A consolidated and coordinated approach to information collected in the process would also provide accurate and solid data to better inform policy development, government business and process transformation and overall e-government service."

In this first phase, says Boisjoly, "the focus is to provide easy comprehensive access for the business; data on the business will not be collected. In future phases, where more transactions will be possible, collecting and securing data on the business will become an important issue and the project team will look to learn from other projects such as Canada Revenue Agency's 'My Account' feature." And in

fact, if BizPaL results in an effective and efficient service approach that satisfies government service delivery providers and business clients alike, it could well serve to inform the Government of Canada's Service Canada initiative announced in the 2005 federal budget.

Collaborations like BizPaL applied to public procurement could well build advantages for all levels of government for everything from MERX evolution to e-cataloguing and bidding processes to regulatory and policy set-aside coordination

to combined negotiation capacities. It is even a true, if complex, variation on public private partnerships (P3s) with partnering between the private sector and multiple levels of government. The economies of scale similar to those for federal operations already identified in the 2005 'Lastewka federal procurement reform report' and other analyses could be just the tip of a very big cross-jurisdictional iceberg. ~~~

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