

Ontario Business Connects cuts red tape for small business start ups

You know you're ready to start up your own business.

You have an innovative product that can't miss. You have the skills and resources necessary, you know the people in your market and you're prepared to invest the time and effort vital to success. Now what?

A financial adviser will tell you to prepare a business plan and file the appropriate government registrations. If you're like most budding entrepreneurs, you won't be sure where to start.

Experts at Ontario Business Connects, a provincial government project designed to help cut red tape for small business people, said your next step is a visit to your local library or small business centre.

"I'd strongly advise anyone who doesn't have access to the Internet on a home computer to ask the help of their library or small business centre, so that they can look through the available online resources," said Jim Evans, project executive of Ontario Business Connects, which is part of the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

Evans said information available through the Internet on such issues as developing a marketing strategy or tapping new markets, can mean the difference between the success or failure of a new venture.

Evans also suggested, once they've absorbed the appropriate information, entrepreneurs should meet with counsellors at small business centres, who can help answer many of the questions that will have been raised.

Then you're ready to register your business. In the past, you would have had to waste time lining up at as many as five different provincial government offices.

Now, Evans explains, there's a better way to go. You can apply for any combination of the five basic Ontario small business registrations at one of the easy-to-use, single-window computer workstations which are now available at 53 locations across the province.

At the workstations, business owners can prepare all the essential information, transmit it and comply with the necessary government regulations for registrations, including:

- Business Name Registration
- Retail Sales Tax Vendor Permit
- Health Tax for the Self-employed and Workers' Compensation

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Clients can also do a business name search instantly at the workstation.

People who have used the system report they've filed their applications with ease, even though many of them had no background in computers.

One indication of client comfort with the system is the fact that almost half of Ontario's 130,000 new business registrations each year are now being filed at Ontario Business Connects sites.

Evans said one big advantage of the system is that applicants have to fill in the essential information only once. It is sent to the specific offices as needed for processing and approval of the registrations.

Also, advancements made in September 1996 make it possible for Business Name registrations to be registered on the spot.

The client walks away with an instant Business Name registration in hand. This cuts time, making what used

to be a six-to-eight-week process possible in less than 20 minutes.

Renewals for Business Name registrations can also be done immediately on-site. As well, clients can apply for the federal Business Number.

"Businesses can now spend less time jumping through administrative hoops and concentrate on what they do best: creating jobs and fuelling the economy," said David Tsubouchi, the consumer and commercial relations minister.

Ontario Business Connects advancements have met with the approval of business community experts including Canadian Federation of Independent Business Director Judith Andrew.

"We see the single-window concept for government programs leading to positive results for Ontario's small businesses."

Most Ontario Business Connects workstations are available 8 am to 4 pm on business days, although York Simcoe Community Business Access Centre offers extended hours.

For details call 1-800-565-1921 or (416) 314-9151 in Toronto.

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