

Evaluation of the Quebec Component Canada Business Service Centres

Final Report

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SUMMARY

This report contains the results of an evaluation of the Quebec segment of the Canada Business Service Centres (CBSC) Network, conducted in accordance with Industry Canada's *National Evaluation Framework for the Canada Business Service Centres*.

In Quebec, info-entrepreneurs (Montreal) acts as the CBSC, while Ressources Entreprises (Quebec) is the regional satellite centre, regional access partner and office for Eastern Quebec.

- Info-entrepreneurs has 22 employees who delivered 304 000 transactions (including Web site visits) in 2001-2002 (down 16% from 2000-2001, when demand increased by 40% over the previous year). Info-entrepreneurs is the product of a partnership between Canada Economic Development and the Metropolitan Montreal Chamber of Commerce.
- Ressources Entreprises, another partner of the Agency, is a non-profit organization with a history predating its presence in the CBSC Network. Its ten permanent employees delivered 39 000 transactions in 2001-2002, up 40% from 2000-2001. In accordance with its mission, Ressources Entreprises has other mandates beyond the CBSC Network. The evaluation process is based on the following:
 - A survey of 600 CBSC clients.
 - A survey of 400 potential clients.
 - An analysis of a consultant's report on the status of Info-entrepreneurs at the time of renewal of the agreement with CED.
 - Complementary interviews with representatives of CED, Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises.
 - Conversations with Info-entrepreneurs employees.
 - Qualitative interviews with a small group of clients of the documentation and research services.
 - An analysis of the centres' operational reports.

CONCLUSIONS

Client needs

- In general, 90% of clients said they were satisfied or very satisfied with CBSC services.
- 60% of potential clients said they needed business information during the past year, and 24% of them (12% of the businesses) experienced difficulties obtaining the information in question. Thus a market exists for the service rendered by the centres.

- Eight clients out of ten indicated that their needs were met in their most recent contact with one of the two centres. Eight clients out of ten also indicated that the information was somewhat useful or very useful. Half of the clients were referred to other resources. Among clients who followed up on the referral, 85% found the information obtained from the second source somewhat useful or very useful. Thus the service provided by the centres is generally meeting the needs.

Partner needs

- CED feels that the centres are doing a good job as intermediaries transmitting government information to entrepreneurs. However, to satisfy CED, Info-entrepreneurs must promote their services more effectively and diversify their funding sources.

Effects of CBSC activities

- General recognition of the centres ranges from 15% for Info-entrepreneurs to 22% for Ressources Entreprises. CED is generally satisfied with the products and services available from the centres within the assigned budget envelope.

Alternative to the current service delivery model

- The CBSC services for client businesses are free, with the exception of certain research services which are often paid for by a service agreement type of association.
- The research services have the benefit of being able to finance themselves in part by charging fees. However, they are not part of the core business determined by the national bodies including the National CBSC Secretariat and the management partners, namely access to information on the programs and services of the Canada and Quebec governments.
- Clients indicated a certain willingness to pay fees for products or services customized to a degree, but not for generic products or services.

Implementation of national service standards

- The centres aim at and generally achieve the national service standards, although the unilingual Ressources Entreprises Web site is an exception.

Assessment of CBSC staff

- Info-entrepreneurs plans to adopt a new staff assessment model over the coming year in order to better meet the needs of employees and management. Info-entrepreneurs employees are generally satisfied with the amount of training available to them.

Regional access to service centres

- The most popular services (Web sites and telephone information) are also accessible throughout Quebec. The Info-entrepreneurs research services are provided by a better equipped library and a more specialized team than those of Ressources Entreprises. The information regionalization activities seem to be experiencing great success.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Service delivery

- The severe budget cuts planned for the centres in Quebec for 2003-2004 could jeopardize their ability to ensure the delivery of the basic service called for the CBSC program.
- The centres might be wise to develop research services for a relatively mature business clientele more willing to pay for them.
- The centres would be wise to continue investing in updating their Web sites and to plan to add regionalized information. Ressources Entreprises should plan to provide an English version of its Web site.
- Steps could be taken to have Ressources Entreprises offer "Talk to us" from its own Web site.
- The centres must provide the most up-to-date information possible and let the clients know this.
- Since referrals to other organizations is an important added value for clients, the centres should provide such referrals wherever possible.
- Info-entrepreneurs could initiate steps to obtain the support and participation of a permanent resource in the Canadian Technology Network.

Links with the community

- Info-entrepreneurs should focus on gaining a foothold in significant communities. This could help to diversify its funding sources.
- The centres need a structured promotion/communication plan to become better known and to generate more business.

Performance measurement

- The centres should improve their analyses of Web journals for accountability purposes and plan a study of the use of their Web sites in order to gain a better understanding of how they might improve.
- Specific statistics should be kept on use of the “Talk to Us” service and submitted in the periodic reports to CED by the centres.
- The centres should devise a way of measuring the intrinsic quality of their activities this normally takes the form of inquiries by mystery clients.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Objectives of the study

This report contains the results of an evaluation of the Quebec component of the Canada Business Service Centres (CBSC) Network. In Quebec, Info-entrepreneurs (Montreal) acts as the CBSC, while Ressources Entreprises (Quebec) is the regional satellite centre, regional access partner and office for Eastern Quebec (Area Code 418).

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the *National Evaluation Framework for the Canada Business Services Centres* (November 2001) prepared for Industry Canada, the national coordinator for the initiative, and aims to contribute to the national evaluation of CBSCs while suggesting ways of improving the centres in Quebec.

1.2 Activities studied

a. Mandate and missions

CBSC Mandate

"is to serve as the primary source of timely and accurate business-related information and referrals on federal programs, services and regulations, without charge, in all regions of the country."

Annual Report 1999-2000

The *National Evaluation Framework for the Canada Business Service Centres* (page 3) sets out the mission of the CBSCs as follows:

- improve the start-up, survival and growth rates of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by giving businesspeople in every part of Canada access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals;
- reduce the complexity of dealing with various levels of government by consolidating business information from the client's perspective in one convenient service;
- enable clients to make well-informed business decisions in a global economy; and
- encourage business success through sound business planning, market research and the use of strategic business information.

(*Evaluation framework*, page 6):

- information and referrals remain the CBSCs' core function;
- flexible arrangements are needed to capture regional diversity;
- [...] federal visibility remains a priority;
- [...] minimizing costs is a priority;
- the initiative should support federal priorities vis-à-vis targeted groups and activity sectors;
- partnerships are used to access information, develop databases and deliver services

b. Tools and resources

The *Evaluation Framework* places CBSC activities under four headings:

- Promotional activities, including marketing, outreach and other ways of publicizing the Centre and its services;
- Developing and maintaining partnerships with the business community to anchor interventions and to extend both the range of action of the centre and the diversity of the services it provides as a single window for service access;
- Finding relevant information for clients, including maintaining collections and libraries, access to databases, delivery of ad hoc research services and organization of seminars;
- Business information delivery through different modes of access (telephone, Internet, e-mail, fax, in-person services).

The annual budget¹ of the CBSCs was \$15 million for the three fiscal years 2000-2001 to 2002-2003, and that of the CBSCs in Quebec, \$1,881 million. The budget for all Network components will decline to \$14 million in 2003-2004, a drop of 7%. The anticipated decline for Quebec is \$194 000, or 10%. Other reductions are Atlantic, 5%, West, 9% , Industry Canada (Northern Ontario), 6%, and National Secretariat, 5%.

c. Info-entrepreneurs

- In existence since 1994, Info-entrepreneurs is the outcome of a partnership between Canada Economic Development and the Metropolitan Montreal Chamber of Commerce, and is managed under an agreement between the two.
- The main partner of Info-entrepreneurs is CED, followed by the ministère de l'Industrie et du Commerce du Québec. Its network includes Ressources Entreprises and the Aboriginal Business Services Network.
- Info-entrepreneurs acquired ISO-9002 certification in 1999 and ISO-9001 in April 2002. It has 22 employees in 6 departments: reception-call centre, documentation centre, consultation centre, information technologies management, product development and administration.

¹ As per 2000-2001 Canada Business Service Centres' Annual Report, page 14.

Table 1.1
Info-entrepreneurs, activity levels 2001-2002

	2001-2002			2000-2001	% change
	Number	% of sub-group	% of total		
Assisted requests					
Telephone information	25 124	69 %	8 %	32 151	-22 %
Visits	8 085	22 %	3 %	8 265	-2 %
Fax and mail	305	1 %	<1 %	412	-26 %
E-mail	2 933	8 %	1 %	1 700	73 %
Sub-total	36 447	100 %	12 %	42 528	- 14 %
Automated requests					
Web visits	253 385	95 %	83 %	298 345	-15 %
Telephone capsules	11 909	4 %	4 %	16 136	-26 %
Info-fax	2 933	1 %	1 %	5 711	- 49 %
Sub-total	268 227	100 %	88 %	320 192	- 16 %
Total	304 674	---	100 %	362 720	-16 %
Source : Info-entrepreneurs performance report, 2001-2002					

- Info-entrepreneurs completed more than 360 000 interventions in 2000-2001 (including Web services), up 40% from the previous year and due essentially to Web site visits, since all services apart from incoming e-mails declined¹. In 2001-2002 the general activity level fell by 16% (Table 1.1). There was a decline in all types of requests, e-mails excepted.
- Info-entrepreneurs collaborates with the National Secretariat of Business Resources Centres in Canada and other CBSCs to develop and update 275 information products.
- CED and the MMMC recently (March 2002) agreed to new operating terms and conditions for renewal of the cooperation agreement. In order to better meet the information needs of Quebec businesses, CED is currently looking at the details and development potential of this new type of partnership.

d. Ressources Entreprises

- A non-profit agency based in Quebec City and established in 1993, Ressources Entreprises is headed by a board of directors made up of representatives of local and regional businesses, institutions and organizations.
- The list of the main partners of Ressources Entreprises includes large businesses that are enabling the centre to expand its network, branching out with greater impact; these include Desjardins/Telus, the Metropolitan Quebec and Rive Sud Chambers of Commerce, Laval University and the City of Quebec.

¹ As per 2000-2001 Canada Business Service Centres' Annual Report, page 14.

- Ressources Entreprises completed more than 28 000 interventions in 2000-2001 (including Web services) and 39 000 in 2001-2002, an annual increase of 40%. This growth is due primarily to Web site visits and, to a lesser extent, to the documentary research service (up from 453 requests to 773) and to the personalized consultation service. Demand for other services declined.
- Ressources Entreprises has 10 permanent employees providing services associated with the mandate of the CBSCs and other services sponsored in other ways.

TABLE 1.2
Ressources Entreprises, 2000-2001 activity levels

	Number	% of sub-group	% of total
Assisted requests			
Telephone information	4 677	80 %	17 %
Documentation centre	689	12 %	2 %
Consultation service	453	8 %	2 %
Sub-total	5 819	100 %	21 %
Automated Requests			
Web visits ¹	12 488	56 %	44 %
Telephone capsules	7 028	31%	25 %
Info-fax	2 918	13 %	10 %
Sub-total	22 434	100 %	79 %
Total	28 253	-	100 %

¹ There are of course no geographical limitations on Web site access. Some of the visits to the Info-entrepreneurs Web site doubtless originate in the territory served by Ressources Entreprises.
Source: Ressources Entreprises annual report, 2000-2001

- In addition to its single window role in providing information to businesses in the 418 Area code, Ressources Entreprises has a number of specific mandates in accordance with its mission, including the following: regional consultancy for immigrant businesspeople, watch function for Capital Connexion Quebec, and active member and permanent marketing consultant for the Canadian Technology Network. Over the past two years, Ressources Entreprises has signed a number of service agreements with economic development agencies working with SMEs.

1.3 Structure of the report

In addition to the introduction, this report contains a description of the evaluation strategy and its methodologies (Chapter 2), a report on the observations made during the study, corresponding to the evaluation questions proposed in the *National Framework* (Chapter 3), and a summary of the conclusions and recommendations (Chapter 4).

Chapter 2

EVALUATION STRATEGY

2.1 Evaluation Questions

This evaluation study was prepared in accordance with the *National Evaluation Framework for the Canada Business Service Centres* (Industry Canada, November 2001). The following questions were examined:

- client and partner (CED) needs
- effects and impacts of CBSC activities
- options under the current service delivery model
- implementation of national service standards
- assessment of CBSC staff
- regional access to service centres

In this evaluation, the organization Ressources Entreprises has been treated as a regional access partner; the relevant evaluation questions are, on the one hand, those related to the performance measurement framework agreed upon between CED and the centre, and on the other, those related to the issue specific to regional access identified in the *National Evaluation Framework*.

2.2. Methodology

The following methods were used to produce the findings in this study:

- A survey of clients of the centres (Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises).
- A survey of potential clients.
- An analysis of the Stragesult et Plante report on Info-entrepreneurs.
- Supplementary interviews with representatives of CED, Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises.
- Discussions with Info-entrepreneurs employees.
- Qualitative interviews with a small group of clients of the documentation and research services.
- An analysis of the centres' operating reports.

Client survey

The survey questionnaires include the compulsory questions in the *National Evaluation Framework*. We made a number of adaptations, as noted in the questionnaires themselves. The interviews were carried out between March 19 and 29, 2002, by Écho Sondage, the survey division of *Réseau Circum inc.* Some 609 interviews were completed with self-declared clients of the centres, selected at random from the complete list of clients served by Info-entrepreneurs or Ressources Entreprises during the last six months of 2001 (according to the centres' client information system). The response rate was 53%, which is normal for surveys of businesses, given the time frame available for completing the field operations.

The clients who indicated they had no recollection whatsoever of dealing with either agency were as numerous as those who eventually answered the questionnaire; this indicates a weakness in the development of the centres' brand image. The clients of Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises were included in the sample according to their natural proportion on the list of clients. One quarter of the sample (26%, 169 people) were from the clientele of Ressources Entreprises.

Survey of potential clients

Constructing the sample of potential clients was a difficult task. The non-client group must be representative of the client population while being drawn from the group of individuals and businesses that might avail themselves of the CBSC. The profile in Table 2.1 was determined on the basis of the first 200 client interviews.

TABLE 2.1
Description of samples

Group	% of clients according to survey ¹		% of client group potential
	All categories	Excluding researchers and students	
Businesses incorporated with a maximum of two employees	12	13	3
Businesses incorporated with at least three employees	12	13	56
Unincorporated businesses	45	52	25
Consultants	19	22	16
Researchers and students	13	-	1

¹ After 200 interviews; residual categories were excluded from these calculations.

We did not include the "researchers and students" in the group of non-clients, because this segment was not among primary CBSC clients. The above table gives the distribution of clients with this segment excluded.

Lists for sampling the group of incorporated businesses and the consultant segment are easily obtainable from specialized companies such as Dun & Bradstreet and B J Hunter. The unincorporated businesses group is more difficult to access. We considered five possible strategies: recruiting entrepreneurs at the pre-start-up stage based on a survey of the general public; using the list of clients to create, by reference, a list of entrepreneurs at the pre-start-up stage; contacting the subscribers to magazines such as L'Autonome or Entreprendre; recruiting participants for a Web version of the questionnaire based on an invitation launched in a list pertaining to the subject; and sampling businesses that had registered a business name¹ during the first three months of 2002. We adopted the latter option, despite its weaknesses. Lists of recently registered businesses, businesses registered earlier and business consultants were obtained from B J Hunter Inc.

Interviews were conducted between March 28 and April 5, 2002, by Écho Sondage. Some 400 interviews were completed with a response rate of 53%. The profile of businesses contacted differs from that of the client businesses. In spite of our efforts we were unable to locate a sufficient number of businesses starting up and of small incorporated businesses, as seen in Table 2.1.

Stragesult and Plante report

CED asked a team of consultants to analyse the situation of Info-entrepreneurs to gain a better understanding of the issues and context of the renewal of the CED/MMCC agreement ending on March 31, 2002. The experts met with representatives of CED, the MMCC and Info-entrepreneurs. The report (Stragesult and Plante) was used in analysing certain issues pertaining to the evaluation.

Supplementary interviews

A number of aspects of the evaluation issues require additional qualitative data compiled from interviews in addition to the sources already mentioned to provide information in order to supplement the factual data from the other sources. Interviews were conducted among the following:

- representative of CED Inter-regional Intervention and Partnership Branch
- representative of Info-entrepreneurs
- representative of Ressources Entreprises

¹ Incorporation and registration of a business name are two different processes. The first creates a legal entity which may or may not have a business name; it represents a fairly advanced stage of starting up in the case of a very small business. Registration of a business name does not create a legal entity; it simply adds a file to the registry of a judicial district, with the entrepreneur planning to do business as an individual. Registering a business name is a step in the start-up of a very small business. In establishing our sample of potential clients, we gave equal weight to business name registration and to incorporation.

Discussions with employees

The question on assessing staff requires collection of information from representatives of the centres' staff. Ten Info-entrepreneurs employees were interviewed alone or in small groups.

Additional qualitative interviews with clientele

Because of the size of the client groups of the various services, not many of the clients contacted in the telephone survey had been in touch with the documentation centres or had benefited from the related research service. We completed twenty additional qualitative interviews (ten per centre) with clients of these services to learn more about them and to provide a more comprehensive context for the analysis.

2.3 Scope and limitations of the study

This study generally provides solid proof to support the analysis of the evaluation issues. On the other hand, it says nothing about issues that may be relevant but are not among those identified in the *National Evaluation Framework for the Canadian Business Service Centres*.

The information sources are generally reliable. The main shortcoming relates to the comparability of the sample of "potential clients" actually reached in this study. This sample contains businesses larger and more established than the group of clients of the Canada Business Service Centres located in Quebec. This limitation must be considered in analysing the needs of the businesses.

None of the methodologies used made it possible to collect information on clients using only the centres' Web sites – the segment with the largest growth rate.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

This chapter presents the observations of the evaluation along the lines of the major issues raised in the *National Evaluation Framework for the Canadian Business Service Centres*. The six topics are: profile of clientele, response to the needs of the clients and of the partner, effects of CBSC activities, options, compliance with service standards, staff evaluation and regional access.¹

3.1 Profile of clientele

Based on the information gathered in the survey of clients conducted for this evaluation, the general profile of the CBSC clients group² is as follows:

- At the time of their most recent contact with the centre, half (49%) of the clients were involved in businesses starting up. One-fifth (21%) were involved in an established business and another fifth (17%) were acting as business consultants.
- Four of the client businesses out of ten (42%) had no employees, and a similar number (39%) had between one and five employees.
- Nearly four out of ten of the client businesses (37%) were incorporated. Of these, in a third (30%) of the cases, incorporation occurred in 2001 or 2002, and in another third (32%), between 1995 and 2000.
- Excluding participants who were unwilling to disclose the revenues of the business involved with the centre, half (49%) indicated that the business had zero revenues, and 38%, revenues below \$500 000.

The general profile for use of the services is as follows:

- Half (47%) of the clients had used the centre's services once in the past year, a quarter (28%), two or three times, and another quarter (23%), four times or more. Frequency of use was greater among the clients of Info-entrepreneurs, among consultants and among the largest businesses.
- The kinds of information most frequently sought after pertained to start-up of a business (44%), financing of a business (16%) and, third, import-export (12% in the case of Info-entrepreneurs) and government programs and services (9% in the case of Ressources Entreprises).

¹ The overall results, including the observations relative to Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises, are given priority. Differences between the two organizations are specified.

² It is essential to note that this profile corresponds to the clients contacted in the course of this evaluation, and therefore excludes Web site users who did not use the other services provided by the centres. It will be recalled that a majority of the transactions counted by the centres were Web site visits (83% for Info-entrepreneurs and 56% for Ressources Entreprises).

- According to the centres' operational data, Web site visits, followed by telephone consultations are by far the two most common methods of access.
- Only 5% of the clients stated that they had to spend money to gain access to the desired service.

3.2 Client and partner needs

a. Client needs

This general question raised in this section is: "Are the CBSCs meeting the needs of clients?". The information gathered in the study is organized by sub-questions.

Are clients needs for easy access to accurate, relevant, current information on government programs and services (including referrals) being met?

- 78% of clients indicated that they got what they needed in their most recent contact with one of the two centres (client survey, Question 18). Satisfaction in this regard was expressed slightly more frequently among clients of Info-entrepreneurs (80%) than among those of Ressources Entreprises (71%).
- 60% of potential clients indicated that they needed business information during the previous year «survey of potential clients, Question 58). Of these, 24% indicated that they had difficulty obtaining the desired information from sources other than the CBSCs. The main difficulties were: insufficient information (32%), obscure information source (30%), difficulty contacting the organization (28%), inadequate information (14%) and slow or indifferent service (12%) (survey of potential clients, Question 59). These data suggest that there is a need for an information service to address the concerns of businesspeople.

Are clients satisfied with the products and services they are receiving from the centres?

- Table 3.1 summarizes the answers to the questions on client satisfaction. The overall level ("satisfied" or "very satisfied") was 90%.
- Satisfaction was highest in regard to service in the client's preferred official language (96%) and staff courtesy (95%).
- Only two indicators fell below the 80% threshold specified in the cooperation agreements: satisfaction with cost of service (applicable only to clients who had to pay for services – CBSC services are free except for some research services, which are often paid for an association under a service agreement) registered 76% and the automated telephone system, 60%.¹ These are typical sore spots among clients of federal government services.

¹ Info-entrepreneurs is presently adjusting its telephone capsules, giving clients direct access to agents.

TABLE 3.1
Client satisfaction

% satisfied or very satisfied	All clients	Info- entrepreneurs	Ressources Entreprises
Official language of your choice	96	96	97
Courtesy of staff	95	94	99
Research and documentation service	92	92	92
Brochures and printed material	92	91	94
Professionalism of staff	91	89	95
Overall service	90	90	87
Competence of staff	90	88	94
Web site	88	88	86
Service accessibility	88	86	91
Response time	87	88	85
In-person consultation service	86	87	85
Telephone consultation service	86	84	91
Electronic databases	85	91	71
Info-Fax service	85	88	67
Information supplied	85	85	84
Waiting period during delivery	85	84	89
Ability to meet your needs	84	86	78
Info measures to obtain service	83	83	86
Fairness and equitable treatment	82	84	78
Referral to other resources	82	82	80
Cost of service	76	77	75
Automated telephone system	60	63	43
Source: client survey, Question 14.			

- Where comparable, the results in this survey are similar to those produced from the CROP data collected for Info-entrepreneurs in 1998 and 2000. For example, CROP reported in 2000 that 89% of clients said they were generally satisfied or very satisfied. The satisfaction rate varied between 82% and 90% from one service to the other.
- Owing to the small size of the samples concerned, there are no statistically significant differences between the Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises client groups.
- The satisfaction of clients (some of whom paid for the services provided) with the research and documentation services was the subject of a special measurement owing to the small size of these groups in the general client sample. Semi-structured interviews were held with 20 clients of these services.

- The vast majority of the clients indicated that the service met their needs. The only complains were out-of-date data and lack of specific information.
- Most of the clients knew about other information sources, but chose CBSC for the free services and the convenience of the single window service.
- The main suggestions by clients were: improve the databases, provide support for clients wishing to use the documentation centre themselves, standardize the service (same request, same answer), develop a detailed requisition form and use electronic formats rather than paper.
- On the whole, the clients were very satisfied with the research and documentation services. With Ressources Entreprises, the main comment had to do with getting answers within reasonable time-frames.

Are the clients satisfied with the quality of the services received from the resources to which they are referred?

- Half (49%) of the clients indicated that they had been referred to other resources in the most recent contact with the CBSC (client survey, Question 9). Three-quarters (73%) of the clients followed up on the centre's recommendation and contacted the reference (Question 10).
- 85% of the clients indicated that the information supplied by the sources to which they were referred and which they consulted was very useful (53%) or somewhat useful (32%) (client survey, Question 12).

Do the clients have any suggestions for new products or services?

- The clients did not suggest any new products or services (client survey, Question 25).

Is the satisfaction level related to a client's geographical location?

- There were not many differences arising from the clients' geographical locations. Within the limits of the available data, those located outside the Montreal and Quebec City administrative regions could be said to be generally more satisfied with the various aspects of the service than those in the two central regions. This was especially true where the professionalism and competence of the staff were concerned (client survey, Question 14).

Were the clients satisfied with the methods of access?

- 88% indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with "the accessibility of the services" (client survey, Question 14d). The question obviously covers more than methods of access, but the results nonetheless indicate that accessibility was not a major problem.

- Among potential clients, the preferred methods for transmitting information were: mail (62%), Internet and e-mail (61%), Info-Fax (14%), telephone (6%) (survey of potential clients, Question 60).

TABLE 3.2
Importance placed by clients on various aspects of the service

Services	Service delivery	Method of access	Weight attributed ¹
Competence of staff	*		90
Information supplied	*		88
Professionalism of staff	*		88
Official language of your choice	*		88
Service accessibility		*	87
Ability to respond to your needs	*		87
Response time	*		87
Courtesy of staff	*		87
Method of providing information about how to obtain service	*		84
Referral to other resources	*		83
Documentation and research service	*		83
Waiting time for delivery	*		83
Fairness	*		80
Telephone consultation service	*		80
Web site	*		80
Cost of service	*		79
Brochures and printed material		*	77
In-person consultation	*		76
Electronic databases		*	76
Info-Fax service		*	66
Automated telephone system		*	61

¹ Score varying between 0 and 100; the five categories of replies were recorded as follows: "very unimportant," 0; "unimportant," 25; "neutral," 50; "important," 75; "very important", 100.
Source: client survey, Question 15.

What are the clients' service priorities?

- According to the importance ratings given by clients to various aspects of the CBSC service (Table 3.2, client survey, Question 15), the clients felt that the qualitative aspects of the service¹ were more important than methods of access.²

¹ Competence, professionalism, quality of information, language, accessibility, response to needs and courtesy scored above 85.

² Brochures, consultation in person, databases, Info-Fax and automated telephone scored below 78.

b. Partner needs

- CED is the key partner of Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises.

Are the partner's needs for other ways of disseminating information to potential entrepreneurs and to businesspeople being met?

- CED believes that the centres are doing a good job as intermediaries transmitting government information to entrepreneurs. It sees the centres' service as something complementary in terms of contacting entrepreneurs in the field and providing fee-based research services outside the CED mandate. The centres serve a single windows for the entrepreneurs.
- The partner would prefer to have the centres more actively promote their services to broaden the impact of its information dissemination.

Is the partner satisfied with the reports, products and services it is receiving?

- CED is satisfied with the reports provided by Info-entrepreneurs. The reporting requirements are being renegotiated using indicators more consistent with a partnership relationship.
- Ressources Entreprises has delivered the required organizational performance reports.
- CED feels that Info-entrepreneurs has delivered the goods to the entrepreneur clients, but must do more to diversify its funding sources¹ and raise its profile.
- Raising its profile is also something which Ressources Entreprises would like to achieve. The Agency is very satisfied with its performance from the viewpoint of service delivery, impact in significant networks, service diversification from the viewpoint of its mission, and development of fee-based services to increase the number of income sources.

Is the partner satisfied with the products and services being received by its clients?

- CED expressed a high level of satisfaction with the quality of service provided by Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises and with respect for the service standards of the CBSC network.

Does the partner have any suggestions for new reports, products and services?

- CED expects Info-entrepreneurs to increase the emphasis on fee-based services. This is a sector where demand is growing rapidly and where the centre can be become cost-effective.

¹ CED recognized that info-entrepreneurs has increased the portion of its budget provided by contributions from other founders, but noted that the income sources have not yet been diversified.

- CED would also like to have more diversified services (seminars, for example) made available and attractive to the client entrepreneurs of Info-entrepreneurs.

3.3. Effects and impacts

a. Impacts on clients¹

How has the client used the information supplied since its latest contact with the centre?

- The clients feel (Table 3.3) that the most useful information is that which pertains to a specific subject (here, international trade and the Canadian Technology Network). The information is used primarily to inform the entrepreneur rather than to enable him to take concrete action.
- Various anecdotal elements (letters from clients, for example) indicate that the centres' services often lead to a better informed, more justified business decision.
- Centre clients report an average of 3.4 approaches to government services requesting support in the previous twelve months (client survey, Question 33). By comparison, potential clients made 2.4 attempts on average (survey of potential clients, Question 68).

What value do the clients place on the information received?

- 82% indicated that the information received from the centre at the time of the most recent contact was very useful (40%) or somewhat useful (42%) (client survey, Question 19).

¹ The *National Framework* asks the following question: "Is there a difference between clients' and non-users' perception of access/knowledge/understanding of business information?" The questionnaires for clients and potential clients contained questions on the degree of satisfaction in understanding the business information. It should have been possible to answer this question by comparing the data. Having done the analysis, it was concluded that the evidence was of insufficient quality for inclusion in this report.

TABLE 3.3
Usefulness of information

% very or somewhat useful	All Clients	Info-entrepreneurs	Ressources Entreprises
To learn more about international trade ₁	67	72	46
To learn more about the Canadian Technology Network ¹	66	65	67
To improve access to relevant information on your business	61	62	59
To improve your knowledge of government programs and services which concern you	58	58	58
To carry out plans for international trade ₁	56	59	43
To make better use of government programs and services	54	55	51
To enable you to carry out projects with partners in the Canadian Technology Network ₁	53	49	67
¹ Addressed only to clients concerned. Source: Client survey, Question 23			

b. Impacts on the partner

- The centres' impact on CED clientele depends among other things on their visibility among the people and organizations targeted by them. Some 15% of the entrepreneurs contacted in the survey of potential clients had already heard of Info-entrepreneurs (19% beyond the 418 area code and 11% within it); in its territory, Ressources Entreprises had a recognition rate of 22% (potential client questions 37 and 38).
- The figures were quite different from the CROP survey of 2000, which reported 54%. This difference arises from the composition of the respective samples. The CROP sample consisted only of businesses dealing with a youth entrepreneur assistance service in Greater Montreal; this was a business start-up group (as are half of CBSC clients) dealing with an organization very likely to refer it to Info-entrepreneurs. The sample in the present study consists of a group of businesses drawn from a larger population more representative of Quebec businesses generally (but biased to more closely resemble CBSC clients).
- General recognition levels of 15% to 22% might be sufficient if the centres were aiming at a niche in the general business population corresponding to the segment familiar with the centres. However, in their CBSC mandate, the centres have a rather broad target clientele (businesses seeking information on Government of Canada services) which doubtless extends beyond their recognition level – thus they would do well to increase their recognition. On the other hand, this would eventually produce an increase in their business; as part of a strategy to raise their public profile, the centres would have to ensure their capacity to respond to the demand – increased recognition must therefore go hand-in-hand with plans for service delivery.

What kind of feedback did the centre agree to supply to the partner? With what frequency? Is the form in which this feedback is provided of use to the partner?

- The cooperation agreements signed between CED and the authorities responsible for the centres contain a detailed framework for measuring performance.
- The information requested by CED concerns both the operational aspects (for example, number of transactions, speed of service delivery) and very short-term impacts (quality of information supplied, client satisfaction) along with medium-term ones (utilization of information).
- The cooperation agreement between CED and Info-entrepreneurs calls for “annual reports, annual operating plans and monthly results reports,” while the agreement with Ressources Entreprises calls for “annual reports, annual operating plans and, when requested, periodic results reports.”
- The operational data describe the effort deployed the effort deployed and are used by CED to gauge the efficiency of the operations.
- The data on short- and medium-term effects provide a basis for the logic of the intervention.

To what extent are the senior managers/officers/employees of the partner aware of the centres’ products and services?

- The representatives of CED are convinced that the centres’ products and services are very well known by the agencies’ employees. We did not attempt to corroborate this statement.

Has the partner fulfilled its commitments to the centre? Has there been any change in the demand for the partner’s resources?

- According to the information gathered, CED has fulfilled its commitments to the centres.

Did the partner perceive any change in the preparedness of its clients?

- CED was not equipped to answer this question. The program representatives might look at ways of verifying this, but the cost of obtaining the information might well surpass the benefits of having it.

Does the partner feel that the benefits of participating in the centre outweigh the costs?

- CED is confident that the federal government gains through the delivery of services pertaining directly to the cooperation agreements, i.e. delivery of information pertaining to Government of Canada services.

- CED would like info-entrepreneurs to put forth a greater effort to provide additional value added services such as more effectively promoted research services and more numerous and closer ties with the economic community.

3.4 Options

Is the demand/added value for some services too small to justify the cost?

- The centres rightly regard the consultation and research services as having greater added value. Simply providing information has a smaller added value – even though referrals to other organizations do have a significant value – but delivery of this service is crucial in the view of CED and is an important contribution from the viewpoint of entrepreneurs.
- Demand for the Info-Fax service is flagging. The National Secretariat apparently intends to terminate it in August 2002.
- Only 1% of the clients contacted felt that the centres were providing services or products that were not needed to or not relevant (client survey, Question 26).

Might these services be provided in a more cost-effective way if the clientele were to increase?

- The representatives of the two centres indicated that the information services are not producing at full capacity at this time and would be able to meet an increase in demand.
- The fee-based services are operating closer to capacity, according to the centre managers, but they too could grow through the revenue generated by an increase in the customer base.

Are the services being provided in the most cost-effective mode of access?

- Demand for the Info-Fax service is down sharply. Centre representatives have indicated that it is costly to maintain, and the National Secretariat plans to terminate it in August 2002.

Are there any services which are not yet available and which the clients would like to have?

- The clients did not suggest any additional products or services that they would like to have (client survey, Question 25).
- Approximately one of five potential clients indicated having needed information on starting up a business or managing an existing business during the previous year (Table 3.4, survey of potential clients, questions 42 and 46). These clients found less than all the information needed in half of the cases after consulting primarily the government and professionals.

- Information on acts and regulations seems easier to find (28% did not find everything they needed). On the other hand, information on government programs or services, requested by more than 1/3 of potential clients (37%, survey of potential clients, Question 54) was as difficult to find as information on starting up or managing existing businesses. This is further proof of the centres' value as intermediaries in the transmission of government information.

TABLE 3.4
Information needs and sources identified by potential clients

	New business	Existing business	Acts and regulations	Programs or services
Need for information	20	18	42	37
Obtained info partly or not at all	49	49	28	45
Satisfied with info obtained	79	79	82	82
Sources:				
Government	47	35	58	48
Professionals	36	47	41	17
Internet	25	22	28	39
Word of mouth-networking	15	13	4	10

Source: Client survey, Questions 42 to 57.

Are there any existing or proposed services for which clients would be prepared to pay?

- Depending on the services in question, nearly half of the clients said they would be willing to spend money to obtain certain services (Table 3.5, client survey, Question 28).
- The service for which billing was most justifiable was preparation of customized research reports (45%), followed by training sessions (41%) and patent services (40%).
- Less attractive in terms of charging fees are generic services such as research on standardized information (25%), access to an Internet workstation (26%) and an interactive business planner on the Web (27%).
- Among potential clients, 46% said they were prepared to pay a reasonable price for improvements to their information sources (questionnaire for potential clients, Question 62). The main changes requested were better coordination of information sources (single window), faster service, more information and more in-depth research (survey of potential clients, Question 61).

TABLE 3.5
Clients prepared to pay to obtain services

% prepared to pay direct costs, direct costs plus service fee per hour or market value	% Clients
Preparation of customized research reports containing up-to-date information	45
Training sessions or seminars	41
Patent services	40
Loan of publications such as books, catalogues and directories	38
Business start-up assistant	33
Research longer than 15 minutes	32
Office and meeting room space	31
Counselling longer than 15 minutes on specialized, customized information	29
Interactive business planner on the Web	27
Use of a computer workstation including access to the Internet, CD-ROMs and printer	26
Consultations longer than 15 minutes on standardized information	25
Source: Client survey, Question 28	

3.5 Services standards

The key question in this section is: "Are the CBSC service standards¹ and the quality indicator applied in the centres?" Answers are provided in the following sub-questions.

¹ The CBSC service standards are as follows as per CBSC National Web site (http://www.rcsec.org/english/search/display.cfm?code=1020&Coll=FE_FEDSBIS_F, consulté le 2002.060.05).
"The Canada Business Service Centres continuously strive for cost effective and user-friendly ways to make business information easily accessible to the small business community in Canada.
Our commitment to service means:

- CBSC services are available to anyone and core services are free of charge (some centres may offer some enhanced local services for a fee)
- Service is delivered in each province and territory
- Service is provided in the official language of your choice.
- We strive to make our services known to you.
- Clients are treated with courtesy and respect.
- We provide current information on federal and provincial government business-related products, programs, services and regulations. This information is accurate, helpful, relevant and timely.
- The majority of enquiries are responded to within one business day upon receipt of a request in person, by telephone, fax, mail or Internet. Responses are provided through your preferred method of communication.
- If we are unable to provide an answer within one business day, we will provide you with an estimate of the time required to get back to you with an answer.
- If you must be referred, we will provide you with the telephone number of the contact who will best assist you. We encourage you to report back on unsuccessful referrals.
- Information Documents: the top 50 federal documents in our business information database are updated monthly and the remainder of the federal documents are updated every 9-12-months.
- Telephone Service: available free of charge, generally from 9:00 – 5:00 Monday to Friday (except on holidays as they apply in each province). For exact service times, contact the centre in your province or territory.
- Web site: Available 365 days per year, 24 hours per day, except during period of system maintenance.
- Info-FAX Service: available free of charge, 365 days per year, 24 hours per day, except during period of system maintenance."

Are the service standards for the centres at least as rigorous as the CBSC national service standards?

- Info-entrepreneurs is subject to and has adopted the service standards set by the CBSC National Secretariat. According to the organization's managers, the service delivery objectives found in the Info-entrepreneurs ISO certification manuals are more demanding than those of the Secretariat's service standards.
- Ressources Entreprises is not subject to the national standards because it is a regional satellite centre and a regional access centre. It has nonetheless adopted front-line national service standards.

What progress have the centres made in improving their success ratings and/or implementing corrective measures?

- Aside from the standards relative to business hours and response times (one day for voice and Internet requests, ten days for mailed or faxed requests), the service standards are essentially qualitative. It is therefore difficult to assess improvements in success ratings.
- In commenting on the performance measurement framework, Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises indicate success in responding to more than 90% of requests within the indicated time periods, as set out in the performance guidelines.

Are the complaint and redress procedures appropriate?

- Complaint procedures exist in both organizations. For Info-entrepreneurs, the complaint system is described in the ISO certification. The two centres have received a total of three complaints during the past two years.
- The two centres have committees (Info-entrepreneurs has a continuous improvement committee) responsible for following up on unsatisfactory occurrences that have been observed but have not necessarily led to a formal complaint.

To what extent are clients and staff aware of the service standards for the centres and of the complaint and redress procedures?

- 15% of the clients indicated a knowledge of the centres' service standards (client survey, Question 16).
- 6% were aware of the complaint and redress procedures (client survey, Question 17).

Is the service's performance being measured acceptably?

- Operational performance (number of calls, response times, etc.) is measured regularly – monthly in the case of Ressources Entreprises.

- Info-entrepreneurs performs rigorous measurement of client satisfaction twice a year; a less structured quarterly survey is also conducted. The questionnaires used predate publication of the *Outil de mesures communes* [common measurement tool] and should be revised by reference to a strategic satisfaction measurement. Ressources Entreprises has no regular, systematic way of measuring client satisfaction.

How does the performance of the centres compare to the CBSC service standards?

- The centres meet the operational standards for service availability and delivery times. The survey of clients conducted as part of this study indicates that courtesy, respect, quality and relevance of information are factors found satisfactory by more than 80% of clients.
- The Ressources Entreprises Web site is available only in French for the primary services (in terms of volume) although the service standards refer to availability of service in the official language chosen by the client.

How often is information on client priorities collected?

- No measurement of client expectations and priorities has been done by Ressources Entreprises. The CROP study in 2000 for Info-entrepreneurs did include questions on client priorities. Moreover, this kind of information is provided in our study.

What kind of medium is used to convey the service standards to the clients?

- The service standards are posted on the centres' Web sites. A brochure is also available from Info-entrepreneurs.

Has the situation evolved since the findings presented in the CBSC evaluation report of 1998?

- The findings of the 1998 national evaluation indicated that the service standards were posted on the centres' Web sites and that not much follow-up had been done on compliance with them – the evaluation report also noted that the targets appeared easy to reach.
- Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises gather information to assess compliance with the front-line service standards.
- The 1998 national evaluation indicated that there was no formal complaint mechanism. Today, Info-entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises have opened the doors to complaints on their Web site, but this is the only real information available to clients. The small number of complaints received over the past two years may indicate either a weakness in this mechanism, or near-perfect service delivery, something difficult to envisage regardless of the organization in question.

3.6 Staff assessment

The question of staff assessment pertains essentially to Info-entrepreneurs as the official CBSC for Quebec, recognized as such by the National Secretariat.

What is the staff assessment process?

- To date, Info-entrepreneurs has been using the Metropolitan Montreal Chamber of Commerce process whereby once a year, the team leader for each section completes a generic assessment grid containing questions on the type, quantity and quality of the work done. Only recently have the assessments been subject to follow-up during the year. The assessment results were then discussed with the employee and the training needs identified.
- Recently (March 2002), CED and the MMCC agreed to new methods of operation as part of the renewal of the cooperation agreement. As a result of these changes, the centre is planning to adopt a new model for staff assessment and a time schedule more in line with the organization's cycle.

Do the assessments take job skills into account?

- According to Info-entrepreneurs management, the employees have complained about the MMCC assessment process, in which needs to improve skills and receive training were not identified.
- Info-entrepreneurs plans to introduce a more comprehensive process during 2002-2003.

Does the process allow identification and resolution of staffing and training issues?

- The new assessment system will be more capable of addressing staffing and training issues.

How frequently are staff assessed?

- The assessment process calls for an annual review.

Is the training program adequate?

- Info-entrepreneurs spent \$26 000 on training last year. With about 20 employees and a payroll of \$1.1 million, this represents an investment of 2.4%, slightly above the legal standard set by the Quebec government.
- Info-entrepreneurs offers monthly information sessions on government programs and other issues relevant to the clientele.

Do staff feel that they have the necessary tools?

- The small size of the organizations limits opportunities for promotion and lateral transfers. Many employees see training as the only way to ensure their professional growth.
- It is generally felt that Info-entrepreneurs provides adequate training. Some employees have indicated that participation by specialized groups in general training should be reviewed.

3.7 Regional access

Is the service provided by Ressources Entreprises comparable to that of Info-entrepreneurs? Does a business have access to the same services wherever it is located in Quebec?

- The CBSC network in Quebec had 32 decentralized service points until March 31, 2002. They were eliminated because of the low volume of business and the limited services available.
- Entrepreneurs have access to the telephone and Web services of the CBSCs throughout Quebec. Respondents felt that the information and consultation services were of equal value in both centres.
- Ressources Entreprises does not have as many documentary resources or staff as specialized as Info-entrepreneurs in the research services area.

Did the regional access partner provide broad access to federal government information on business services?

- Ressources Entreprises offers the same information and consultation services as Info-entrepreneurs and has access to the same information sources by way of its own resources and loans between it and Info-entrepreneurs. Ressources Entreprises also participated in regionalizing the information offered by the centres. CED favours this method of enhancing the relevance and accessibility of the CBSCs throughout Quebec.
- The clients of Ressources Entreprises are as satisfied with its services as are Info-entrepreneurs' clients.
- Ressources Entreprises feels that its success is based on the following: regionalized service, strategic partnerships, service agreements with the economic development organizations, promotion and involvement in the community.

Has the regional access partner demonstrated that it is possible to find and to apply new and effective forms of program delivery by way of partnerships with other levels of government and the private sector, and by effective use of technology?

- Ressources Entreprises has a long history of partnership with the private, public and community sectors. The organization has experienced various phases of partnership and is now focussed on a smaller number of targeted partners of special relevance to the clientele. It recently concluded various service agreements, adding to the network of services available to clients.

Has the regional access partner increased federal visibility and access to services and business programs in the communities beyond the current CBSC locations?

- With regionalized information for entrepreneurs, the federal information provided by Ressources Entreprises is more relevant.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Findings

a. Client and partner needs

- Eight clients out of ten indicated that they received what they needed in their most recent contact with one of the two centres. Eight out of ten also indicated that the information received was somewhat useful or very useful to them.
- Among potential clients, 60% indicated having had a need for business information in the past year, and 24% of these (12% of businesses) had difficulty obtaining the needed information.
- Globally, 90% of the clients said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the centres' services. The only two aspects below the 80% threshold were cost of service (among the small percentage of clients who are charged for the services) and the automated telephone system (a common criticism of all government services). Info-entrepreneurs is currently adjusting its telephone capsules; clients now have direct access to an agent.
- Half of the clients were referred to other resources. Among those who followed up on the referral, 85% found the information obtained from the second source somewhat useful or very useful.
- Regular mail and electronic mail are the preferred methods of transmitting information among potential clients.
- Clients placed more importance on the qualitative aspects of the service (competence, professionalism, quality of information, language, accessibility, response to needs, courtesy) than on methods of access. This could be interpreted as a signal from clients that the CBSCs can model the service according to their constraints and client needs, provided that the qualitative aspects of the service are present.
- CED feels that the centres are doing a good job as intermediaries transmitting government information to entrepreneurs. However, Info-entrepreneurs must improve service promotion (to extend its outreach) and diversification of its funding sources.

b. Effects and impacts of centres' actions

The information available on benefits to clients is limited.

- Clients indicated that they found the information transmitted to be useful (82%). Clients avail themselves more of the government programs than do potential clients – this difference may arise from a greater maturity among the potential client group. Clients are as satisfied as potential clients with their grasp of the business information.
- The general recognition rate of the centres varies between 15% for Info-entrepreneurs and 22% for Ressources Entreprises. This is probably below the optimum level, but it must be balanced with the centres' ability to cope with the demand.
- On the whole, CED is satisfied with the products and services provided by the centres within the budget envelopes.

c. Alternatives to existing service delivery model

- Overall demand for the centres' services declined in 2001-2002, increasing with Ressources Entreprises and dropping with Info-entrepreneurs. Documenting the relevance of Web site visits (the majority of the transactions counted by the centres) in the light of the CBSCs' mandate is not within the scope of this study; note that half of the Info-entrepreneurs Web site visits were from the United States.
- The growth in demand for research services is real, and these services offer the advantage of being able to be financed in part through fees for the services. However, they are not a part of the "core business" defined by the national bodies including the National CBSC Secretariat and the management partners, namely access to information on the programs and services of the Canadian and Quebec governments.
- Demand for the Info-Fax service may have bottomed out. The National Secretariat apparently intends to end this service in August 2002.
- Information collected from potential clients indicates a real need for a tool giving entrepreneurs easier access to government information.
- Clients have indicated a certain willingness to accept fee-based services provided the product or service involves a certain level of personalization. They are reluctant to pay fees for generic services or products.

d. Implementing national service standards

- The centres comply with and generally attain the national service standards, with the exception of the unilingual Ressources Entreprises Web site.

- The centres say they are open to client complaints, but the existing processes do not lend themselves to the expression of dissatisfaction.

e. Assessment of centre staff

- So far, Info-entrepreneurs has been using the MMCC system of staff assessment; this, however, has met with dissatisfaction among those concerned. The organization plans to adopt a new staff assessment model during the coming year.
- The employees of Info-entrepreneurs are generally satisfied with the quantity of information available to them; more selective participation in training is felt to be necessary by Info-entrepreneurs management.

f. Regional access to centre services

- The most popular services (Web sites and telephone information) are equally accessible throughout Quebec.
- The Info-entrepreneurs research services are available through a better equipped library and a more specialized team than those of Ressources Entreprises.
- Ressources Entreprises has participated in regionalization of information, which has made it more relevant to the clientele.

4.2 Suggested improvements

Improvements for the Canada Business Services Centres in Quebec have been grouped under three headings: service delivery, links with the community and performance measurement.

a. Service delivery

- The annual budget of the CBSC will decline from \$15 million to \$14 million in 2003-2004, a drop of 7%. The annual CBSC budget of \$1.88 million in Quebec represented 12.5% of the national budget; this is expected to drop by 10% in 2003-2004. These budget constraints are severe and could jeopardize the centres' ability to deliver the basic service called for in the CBSC Network program.
- The difficult budgetary situation coincides with greater demand for the centres' research services, which are the activities offering the greatest added value. The centres might be wise to develop these services for a relatively mature business clientele more willing to pay for them. In addition to helping cope with the budget cuts, this strategy would help the centres meet the CED requirements for diversifying income sources.

- The Web has become the main medium for service delivery by the centres. Although the number of visits to the Info-entrepreneurs site declined in 2001-2002, the Web should maintain its dominant position for a number of years. The centres would therefore be wise to continue investing in updating their Web sites and to plan to add regionalized information. For the same reasons, Ressources Entreprises should plan to offer an English version of its Web site.
- Again because of the importance of the Web as a service delivery method, action could be taken to have Ressources Entreprises offer “Talk to us” from its own Web site.
- Regionalized information is probably a key factor for success with entrepreneurs. Efforts in this direction should be supported; they might take the form of information products (including Web sites) adapted to the regions or variable geometry partnerships with regional resources.
- Two other aspects appear to be crucial:
 - First, the information supplied to clients must be as up to date as possible (quality of service issue), and the clients must be sure that they are receiving the most recent information available (communication with clients issue); improvements are needed in these areas;
 - Second, as single windows the centres have both the opportunity and the responsibility to refer their clients to relevant complementary resources; the referrals currently made are very satisfactory for the clients; the centres should see that these referrals are made wherever possible.
- Given the density of the technology industry in Greater Montreal, Info-entrepreneurs might take action to obtain the support and participation of a permanent resource in the Canadian Technology Network.

b. Links with the business community

- The effectiveness of the centres is greatly increased by judicious use of the networks affecting their target clientele. Ressources Entreprises seems to have developed a network denser than that of Info-Entrepreneurs; the latter should strive to gain a better foothold in the significant communities.
- A greater emphasis on forming partnerships may help achieve the diversification desired among the centres’ financing sources, especially in the case of Info-entrepreneurs.
- Recognition of the centres is probably below optimum level. Increasing it must go hand-in-hand with capacity to cope with greater demand; this does not seem to be a problem in the short term, however, since the centres have a surplus capacity in delivering telephone services (the core business). The general decline in business also calls into question the centres’ promotional strategy, especially that of Info-entrepreneurs. The centres need a structured promotion/communication plan.

c. Performance measurement

- Most of the transactions counted by the centres are Web site visits. Not much is known about these visitors or their membership in the centres' target groups. Given the quantitative importance of the Web services, the centres should improve their analysis of Web journals for accountability purposes and plan a study of use of their Web sites in order to gain a better understanding of how they might improve.
- In the same vein, the "Talk to us" service is the leading edge of the centres' technology and a source of pride; specific statistics should be kept on use of this service and submitted in the periodic reports to CED by the centres.
- The intrinsic quality of the centres' activities has not been measured for some years. The traditional method has been inquiries by mystery clients. While recognizing the complexity of organizing such inquiries, it is important to complement the quality measurement currently conducted through client satisfaction by adding a rigorous objective component.

Canada Business Service Centres Action Plan
Info-Entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprise

Canada Business Service Centres Action Plan

Réseau Circum Inc.'s Recommendations	Action by the Agency	Expected Completion Date	Responsible Body
Service Delivery			
1. Observation: The annual budget of the Canada Business Service Centres Network must decrease from \$15 million to \$14 million, or 7% in 2003-2004. The annual budget of CBSCs in Quebec was \$1.881 million or 12.5% of the national budget, which is expected to decrease by 10% in 2003-2004. The cutbacks are severe and could undermine the centres' ability to ensure basic service delivery under the Canada Business Service Centres Network program. (Page 45)	<p>The National Secretariat is currently making representations to the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Department of Finance for an extension of the CBSCs budget and its inclusion in A Base for \$14 million. A submission to the TBS is being prepared.</p> <p>CED is aware of the budget constraints associated with a \$14 million budget. It recommends a review of how the envelope is allocated, as discussed at the ADM meeting on October 15, 2002. The cutbacks do not affect the ability of CBSCs to carry out their mandate, but product development and flexibility are diminished.</p> <p>The National Secretariat proposed a new allocation, which was approved by CED.</p>	<p>November 2002</p> <p>October 2002</p>	<p>National Secretariat</p> <p>CED-IIPB</p>
2. Observation: In addition to the difficult budget situation, there is an increased demand for the centres' research services, which offer the greatest value added. (Page 45) Recommendation: Centres may be advised to develop services based on a relatively established business clientele that is more likely to defray service costs. In addition to making it easier to deal with budget cuts, this strategy would help centres meet CED requirements in terms of diversification of revenue sources. (Page 45)	<p>CED does not expect this recommendation to be implemented in the short term.</p> <p>Diversification of revenue sources and the development of paid research services will be enhanced by the signing of service agreements with partners, especially CED's partners, offering services to developing SMEs, who account for most clients of CBSCs.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Info-Entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises</p>

Canada Business Service Centres Action Plan

Réseau Circum Inc.'s Recommendations	Action by the Agency	Expected Completion Date	Responsible Body
<p>3. Observation:</p> <p>According to the centres' operational data, the two most frequently used methods, by far, to access services are Web site visits and by telephone. (Pages 16-17)</p> <p>The Web has become the main service delivery medium for the centres. Despite inconsistencies in the number of visits to the Info-Entrepreneurs Web site in 2001-2002, the Web should continue to lead the way for many years. (Page 45)</p> <p>The Ressources Entreprises Web site is available only in French, yet it is a key service (in terms of quantity) and service standards indicate that the service is available in the official language of the client's choice. (Page 35)</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>Consequently, centres would be well-advised to continue investing in updating their Web sites and to plan to add regional information. For the same reasons, Ressources Entreprises should plan to have an English version of its Web site. (Page 45)</p>	<p>Explanation-Inconsistency: the number of Web site visits is calculated differently in CBSCs in Canada. The National Secretariat is currently developing a procedure to harmonize the process.</p> <p>Observations resulting from the assessment were approved by the centres. The sites are updated on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Ressources Entreprises has already taken steps to regionalize information available.</p> <p>The Ressources Entreprises Web site is being translated.</p>	<p>Winter 2003</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>January 2003</p>	<p>National Secretariat</p> <p>Info-Entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises</p> <p>Ressources Entreprises</p>

Canada Business Service Centres Action Plan

Réseau Circum Inc.'s Recommendations	Action by the Agency	Expected Completion Date	Responsible Body
<p>4. Observation:</p> <p>Ressources Entreprises carried out more than 28,000 interventions in 2000-2001 (including Web services) and 39,000 in 2001-2002, an annual increase of 40%. This increase is in large part as a result of Web site visits, and to a lesser extent, of documentary search services (from 453 requests to 773) and individual consultation services. The demand for other services declined. (Page 5)</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>Because of the importance of the Web as a method of service delivery, steps may be taken for Ressources Entreprises to offer <i>Consultez-nous</i> from its own Web site. (Page 46)</p>	Discussions will begin in the coming weeks with the National Secretariat, responsible for <i>Consultez-nous</i> to review policies and guidelines for using the tool.	Winter 2003	CED-IIPB National Secretariat
<p>5. Observation :</p> <p>The regionalization of information for entrepreneurs makes federal information provided by Ressources Entreprises more relevant. (Page 40)</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>The regionalization of information may be a key element for the success of entrepreneurs. Efforts in this direction must be supported and may be in the form of information products (including Web sites) tailored to the regions, or different types of partnerships with regional resources. (Page 46)</p>	In March 2002, the CED/IE/RE management committee made a decision on the relevance of regionalizing information. Additional products are being developed by Ressources Entreprises.	Ongoing	Info-Entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises

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6. Recommendations: Two other elements seem to be keys to success : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information provided for clients must be as up to date as possible (service quality) and clients must be confident that they are receiving the latest information available (communication with clients); there is room for improvement in these areas; As a one-stop service, centres have both the opportunity and responsibility to refer their clients to additional, relevant resources. Clients are very satisfied with current referrals; centres should ensure that they provide referrals in as many situations as possible. (Page 46) 	Centres are aware of the success of this element and make sure that the quality of referrals is maintained. However, centres remain a front-line information delivery service (governmental and value added) for entrepreneurs and organizations that offer direct services to SMEs (second line).	Ongoing	Info-Entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises
7. Recommendation: Since the technology industry is concentrated in Greater Montreal, Info-Entrepreneurs could take steps to obtain the support and involvement of a permanent resource from the Canadian Technology Network. (Page 46)	Info-Entrepreneurs is developing a strategy to reach potential partners, including those in the technology industry. One of the means being looked at is the addition of a resource from the CTN.	March 2003	Info-Entrepreneurs
Ties with the community			
1. Observation: The centres' efficiency is dramatically increased by the wise use of networks related to their target clientele. (Page 46)			

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Recommendation: It seems that Ressources Entreprises has succeeded in developing a more concentrated network than Info-Entrepreneurs; it may be to the advantage of Info-Entrepreneurs to be more present in relevant communities. (Page 46)	Over the past two weeks, Info-Entrepreneurs has begun official visits and presentations to organizations, similar to their target clientele, likely to be interested in their services. The performance measurement framework compels Info-Entrepreneurs to develop its network of partners.	Fall 2002 Winter 2003	#Info-Entrepreneurs
2. Observation: Partners provide access to information, develop databases and deliver services. (Page 2) Recommendation: Greater focus on establishing partnerships may contribute to the desired diversification of funding sources for the centres, particularly in the case of Info-Entrepreneurs. (Page 47)	Over the past two weeks, Info-Entrepreneurs has begun visiting organizations likely to be interested in their services and in signing service agreements for value-added paid research. The performance measurement framework compels Info-Entrepreneurs to develop its network of partners.	Fall 2002 Winter 2003	Info-Entrepreneurs
3. Observation: Overall visibility levels between 15% and 22% may be enough, if the centres target a niche of the general enterprise population that corresponds to the segment aware of the centres. However, as CBSCs, their mandate targets a fairly broad clientele (enterprises that require information on federal government services) that undoubtedly exceeds their visibility. (Page 27) Public visibility of centres is probably below the optimum level. (Page 47)			

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<p>Recommendation:</p> <p>With increased visibility must come the ability to deal with an increase in demand. This does not appear to be a problem in the short term since centres are able to deliver more services by telephone (core business). The general decrease in patronage also relates to the promotional strategy of centres, in particular Info-Entrepreneurs. Centres need a structured promotional/communication plan. (Page 47)</p>	<p>Ressources Entreprises already has a communication plan.</p> <p>Info-Entrepreneurs is currently developing its communication plan. Advertisements and inserts in target publications have been purchased over the past few weeks. In addition, Info-Entrepreneurs was nominated at the E-Business Gala (Government On-Line) on November 7, 2002.</p> <p>The main distinguishing element is recognizing that the two centres constitute one-stop services where entrepreneurs can obtain information.</p> <p>Explanation: The core business of CBCSs consists of the integrated delivery of government information, not the medium used to access it.</p>	Fall 2002	Info-Entrepreneurs
Performance Measurement			
<p>1. Observation :</p> <p>Most transactions recorded by the centres are Web visits. Little is known about Web visitors and their affiliation with the centres' target groups. (Page 47)</p> <p>Recommendation:</p>			

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Given the quantitative significance of Web services, centres should improve their analysis of Web journals for accounting purposes and plan to conduct a study on the use of their Web sites to gain a better understanding of applicable ways of improving. (Page 47)	The National Secretariat is currently studying measures to improve this situation. An analysis of Web site users is ongoing at the National Secretariat.	Fall 2002	National Secretariat
2. Recommendation: There should be statistics on the specific uses of the <i>Consultez-nous</i> service, which is the centres' most advanced supply tool and of which they are very proud. The statistics would be presented in the progress reports submitted to CED by the centres. (Page 47)	Info-Entrepreneurs, in co-operation with the National Secretariat, is currently developing assessment specifications for <i>Consultez-Nous</i> .	2003-2004	National Secretariat Info-Entrepreneurs
3. Observation: The inherent quality of the centres' activities has not been measured for a few years. It took the form of mystery client surveys. (Page 47) Recommendation: While we recognize the complexity of organizing such surveys, it appears important to measure quality, which is currently done through client satisfaction with an objective and strict component. (Page 47)	The next complete assessment of CBSCs in Quebec is scheduled for 2004. The methodology chosen should take into account measurement of inherent service quality.	Winter 2004	QITB
4. Recommendation: Questionnaires used predate the publication of the Common Measurements Tool. It would be beneficial to review the questionnaires based on a strategic measurement of satisfaction. Ressources Entreprises does not have a formal, systematic way of measuring client satisfaction. (Page 35)	Centres should develop tools in co-operation with the various CBSC partners (CED, National Secretariat, other CBSCs) in order to harmonize fact-finding in this area.	2003-2004	Info-entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises CED National Secretariat

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Service Standards			
<p>1. Observation:</p> <p>The 1998 national assessment indicated that there was no formal complaint mechanism. Today, Info-Entrepreneurs and Ressources Entreprises receive complaints through their Web site; however, this is the only real information source available to clients. (Page 36)</p> <p>Centres say they are open to client complaints, but existing procedures do not encourage clients to express possible dissatisfaction. (Page 44)</p> <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>The low number of complaints over the past two years could indicate a flaw in the mechanism, or practically irreproachable service delivery, difficult to imagine in any organization. (Page 36)</p>	<p>As the high satisfaction rate indicates, the quality of services provided by the centres is obvious and proven. However, a more detailed analysis of the complaints referral and handling mechanism will be carried out.</p>	2003	Info-Entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises
Partner's Needs			
<p>1. Recommendation :</p> <p>Partners would prefer that centres be more active in promoting their services to ensure information is reaching more people. (Page 23)</p>	<p>Centres are aware of this issue and are more active in various networking activities.</p>	Ongoing	Info-Entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises
<p>2. Recommendation:</p> <p>CED expects Info-Entrepreneurs to increase its focus on paid services. This is an area in which demand is rapidly increasing and in which centres can benefit in terms of profitability. (Page 24)</p>	<p>The framework for measuring the performance of centres provides for more partnerships, leading to service agreements for paid research. Centres will be accountable for their results in this area.</p>	Ongoing	Info-Entrepreneurs Ressources Entreprises

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3. Recommendation: CED would like more diversified services (eg, seminars) to be offered to Info-Entrepreneurs clients in order to be able to attract them using different means. (Page 25)	Explanation: CED believes that Info-Entrepreneurs must limit its mandate to delivering information to entrepreneurs. It must, however, find innovative ways of promoting its services. The performance measurement framework takes into account the use of various mechanisms to promote Info-Entrepreneurs services.	Ongoing	Info-Entrepreneurs
4. Recommendation: CED would like to see Info-Entrepreneurs focus more on additional value-added services, such as better promotion of research services and more and closer networking relationships with the economic community. (Page 29)	The framework for measuring the performance of centres provides for more partnerships, leading to service agreements for paid research. Centres will be accountable for their results in this area.	Ongoing	Info-Entrepreneurs