

B.C. aims at Internet, TV to fill jobs

MARKETING | New plan to attract skilled workers

VANCOUVER SUN

Web-based advertising and television advertising are two options being considered to tell the rest of Canada that there are lots of jobs in British Columbia.

"I think if you go to Eastern Canada there is a perception that [there is a] place where there are more jobs than there are people — and B.C. doesn't quite make that list, although, over the last five years, B.C. has been creating jobs at a rate faster than Alberta," Minister of Economic Development Colin Hansen said Monday.

On Sunday Premier Gordon Campbell announced "an aggressive" new marketing campaign to attract skilled workers from across Canada and the United States as a fundamental part of B.C.'s skills recruitment strategy.

Hansen said ministry staff are looking at the best ways to get the message out and Web-based advertising and TV advertising were among the options being considered.

He said the cost of the campaign is not yet known, but "we have identified some existing dollars within this year's budget that we can direct to that program."

To reach skilled workers outside Canada, Campbell pledged "a dramatic expansion" of the Provincial Nominee Program which offers

accelerated immigration for qualified skilled workers and experienced entrepreneurs who want to settle in B.C.

Hansen said his ministry will hire additional staff over the next few weeks to help administer the program and their goal is to increase the number of people it handles by 50 per cent next year — from about 800 individuals to 1,200.

Campbell also pledged to "substantially increase" the number of industry training organizations in partnership with the private sector and the government's Industry Training Authority.

"We believe that industry training should be driven by the industries involved because employers know what particular skill sets they want and they are the ones that have the strongest vested interest in us producing credentialled workers that meet the needs of the workplace," Hansen said.

Currently there are four industry training organizations — in horticulture, automotive, residential construction and industrial, commercial and institutional construction.

An organization for tourism has just been green lighted and Hansen said he expects 85 per cent of apprentices to be served by an industrial training organization by the end of the current fiscal year.

Hansen also said his ministry is rolling out a program called Skills Connect that helps immigrants to upgrade their English language skills and encourages organizations in the sector to speed up accreditation for new immigrants.

Firms' attitudes towards disabled improving: poll

BY BRIAN MORTON
VANCOUVER SUN

Most members of the B.C. Chamber of Commerce would consider hiring a person with a disability, according to a recent survey conducted by the chamber.

"A lot of times, employers have biases about [hiring] people with disabilities," chamber president and CEO John Winter said in an interview. "But our research suggests the costs of accommodation are far less than some employers think."

Winter said another factor is that employers are experiencing a shortage of skilled workers in B.C. "So, they're looking at other options that they hadn't in the past."

According to the survey, 69 per cent of respondents said they'd consider hiring a disabled person and 79 per cent agreed with the statement that "persons with a disability represent a qualified, but largely untapped pool of potential job applicants."

The telephone survey of 506 businesses was conducted over two weeks in October 2006.

Phyllis Knudsen has osteoarthritis in both knees, a disability that means she can't sit or stand too long in one place throughout the day and prevents her from walking great distances.

With the assistance of Triumph Vocational Services, which helped her with a resume and narrow down the types of jobs she could do, Knudsen found work with False Creek Design of Vancouver.

Knudsen said in an interview that the chamber survey results bode well for people with disabilities. "Perhaps, people are more open-minded now. Disability prevents you from doing some things, but it doesn't prevent you from doing a lot of things."

There are currently 300,000 working-age people with disabilities in B.C., a chamber news release stated.

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Value of building permits down in the city, up in the valley

While the value of building permits fell in the Vancouver census metropolitan area (CMA) from August to September, Abbotsford recorded the second biggest percentage increase of any CMA in Canada (after Regina).

Value of building permits by CMA, % change August to September

Abbotsford:	+116.6%
Vancouver:	-15.2%
Victoria:	-36.6%
Edmonton:	-5.7%
Calgary:	+30.4%
Regina:	+172.3%
Saskatoon:	+8.3%
Winnipeg:	+46.6%
Toronto:	0.0%
Ottawa-Gatineau:	-21.1%
Montreal:	+4.1%
Quebec City:	-2.8%
Halifax:	+9.6%
St. John's:	-31.4%

Source: Statistics Canada



VANCOUVER SUN FILES

Construction proceeds on the side of Sumas Mountain in Abbotsford, which is in the midst of a building boom.

Abbotsford boom based on diversified economy

BY DERRICK PENNER
VANCOUVER SUN

The City of Abbotsford experienced another burst of building-permit applications in September to go along with an already record pace for construction intentions in the Fraser Valley municipality.

Statistics Canada, on Monday, reported that Abbotsford received \$30.2 million worth of applications for new buildings in September, a 116-per-cent increase from August.

For the year-to-date, city economic development manager Jay Teichroeb added that at the end of September, the \$309 million in new construction projects were running 50 per cent ahead of the same period a year ago.

"I think that we have a healthy, diversified economy," Teichroeb said about the reasons why Abbotsford is booming.

"[And] because of the squeeze on the inner Greater-Vancouver communities [such as] Burnaby, Richmond, you're seeing an awful lot more development pressure into the valley."

Teichroeb noted that a surge of 11 multi-family-housing projects, worth \$20.9 million, contributed the biggest boost to September's numbers.

Between a Canada/U.S. border crossing, its airport and highway link to the

north shore of the Fraser River, Teichroeb said Abbotsford is becoming "an important hub for a lot of economic activity."

On a percentage basis, Abbotsford is still posting bigger gains in construction activity, as measured by permit applications, than the provincial average.

Statistics Canada reported that across B.C., building permit applications dropped 7.5 per cent in September, compared with August, to \$893.2 million. For the year to the end of September, however, permit applications were still up 11.3 per cent to \$8.25 billion.

Greater Vancouver, meanwhile, saw building permit values dip by 15 per cent in September to \$513 million. However, year-to-date Vancouver's permit values were still up 9.7 per cent to \$4.56 billion at the end of September.

Keith Sashaw, president of the Vancouver Regional Construction Association, said the September-to-August declines in permit applications are not particularly significant.

"Month-to-month, there is a lot of volatility [in applications]," Sashaw added, "especially in institutional, commercial and industrial."

For the year-to-date at the end of September, Sashaw said the construction sector "is still showing a lot of strength."

And Sashaw echoed Teichroeb's observation that a lot of growth is flow-

Building furiously in Abbotsford

Growth in construction continues to outpace provincial averages, recent Statistics Canada research shows.

Abbotsford, value of permit applications

September: \$30.2 million, up 116% from August.

Year-to-date: \$309 million, up 50% over 2005.

Greater Vancouver, value of permit applications

September permits: \$513 million, down 15.2% from August.

Year-to-date: \$4.56 billion, up 9.7% over 2005.

Source: Statistics Canada, City of Abbotsford economic development department.

ing eastward into the Fraser Valley following the relative affordability of property east of the Port Mann bridge.

"We've seen large-scale industrial and commercial projects going on [in Abbotsford], which again, might be a factor of cheaper land values driving some of that development."

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Public surprisingly ready to accept a 'carbon tax'



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COLUMNIST

It's a big step from telling a pollster you'd pay the price of a greener planet to actually ponying up without complaint for gas and home heating and all those petroleum-based products you use and never think about.

But it's still remarkable that an Ipsos Reid poll this week found that a small majority of Canadians, 52 per cent, endorse the idea

of a carbon tax.

Even more noteworthy is that petroleum-rich Alberta, where political wisdom has it that any carbon tax would be an anathema that would fan Western separation, showed the third-strongest provincial support for the idea. It was 54 per cent, behind only B.C. with 55 per cent and Atlantic Canada with 59.

Darrell Bricker, president of Ipsos Reid, notes that a lot of Canadians — presumably including many of the 1,003 people his company polled — don't really know what a carbon tax is. He doesn't think this means these results should be dismissed, but rather taken with a grain of salt.

"It was less an endorsement of a carbon tax than people scrambling around looking for a solution to what they see as a problem that needs solving."

But the surprising result is, he

said, an entree to a broad public discussion of this and other potential solutions.

A carbon tax is, in reality, a simple one. It would likely be based on the amount of carbon dioxide a product emits in its manufacture or when it's consumed. It would hit oil, natural gas and coal, and be assessed mainly at the refining plant gate.

Of course, it matters how this tax would be implemented. And some Canadians think they know — with the loudly stated certainty of true believers — how good or how awful, depending on your political bias, that would be.

The same view, oddly, is often shared by headline lefties, who believe big industry deserves to die, and the hard right, for whom it can do no wrong. They seem to think such a tax must be big, fast and ugly, and that it would bring modern commerce to its knees.

In fact, in the places that have implemented carbon taxes, they are much gentler and more sensible than that.

Prof. Mark Jaccard, an energy guru at Simon Fraser University, notes that in the U.K. and other European countries, carbon taxes have started small and a long-term timetable for escalation is spelled out clearly.

The idea, he said, isn't to turn economic progress on a dime, or to force consumers to rethink their spending overnight. Rather, it's to foster incremental change, gradually shifting the focus of research, development and investment — and thus consumption — to cleaner technologies.

There's also another myth that needs busting. It's that a new carbon tax, or any new tax for that matter, must be an additional tax.

Not so. A new carbon tax in Canada could be — and, in my

view, most emphatically should be — a replacement for some existing tax. It's adoption could, in fact, be a springboard for broader tax reform based on fairness and efficiency.

Jaccard noted that other jurisdictions have made a point of ensuring their carbon taxes are revenue neutral, and that the public knows exactly how the tax shift took place. The U.K., for example, lowered some other energy taxes, and Germany cut some job-killing payroll taxes.

Still, even a revenue-neutral, phased-in carbon tax will be a tough sell politically in Canada. Just look at the rhetoric surrounding the Harper government's rescinding of tax-free status for income trusts.

In the Alberta energy patch, John Dielwart, chief executive of ARC Energy Trust and chairman of a coalition of 35 such trusts,

was quoted as saying, "We will personally — myself and other CEOs — will do everything in our power to see that there is a change in government."

And that vitriol is because his company will be expected, in four years time, to pay normal taxes, not because the energy sector was singled out in any way. What might he or like-minded others might say in response to a tax proposal that targets his products?

I can only imagine. But I don't expect to see many politicians stepping up to this plate any time soon.

Still, if the current level of public interest and attitudes hold — and Bricker says Ipsos Reid will be asking the question regularly now to see if it does — our political leaders won't be able for very much longer to avoid a conversation on the issue.

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