

Web link program helpful for entrepreneurs

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First-time entrepreneurs should be able to figure out with a few clicks online what licences and permits they will need, thanks to the City of Saskatoon signing on as the first municipality in Saskatchewan to join the national BizPaL web link program.

All three levels of government will be connected to the BizPaL site, which was launched in B.C., Ontario and the Yukon last year. As government acronyms go, BizPaL is simple in that it stands for Biz Permits and Licences.

While most permits and licences for small business are to meet municipal and provincial requirements, the creation of BizPaL is heavily supported by Industry Canada. In fact, the most recent federal budget provided \$6 million over two years to accelerate expansion of the BizPal project.

Saskatoon joins Kamloops and a number of communities in the Yukon as early adapters to the federal initiative.

Provincial Industry and Resources Minister Eric Cline says embracing technology to make things simpler should be welcome news to small- and medium-sized business owners.

"A lot of young entrepreneurs don't have a lot of money," Cline said. "It's important to cut down on start-up costs."

He also noted the service will be available for people to check out 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Mayor Don Atchison said working together with other levels of government



CREDIT: Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix

Industry Canada's Jane Kralik speaks during the BizPaL launch in Saskatoon on Monday

shows the city is not a municipality that is comfortable providing services the way they always have.

"It's going to eliminate a lot of overlap," he said.

"We'll put an end to that, along the way."

Federal Industry Minister Maxine Bernier wasn't at the launch event held at the Odeon Events Centre on Monday. However, senior project officer Jane Kralik, of the Industry Canada offices in Ottawa, said the BizPaL initiative had its genesis three years ago, "with a lot of goodwill" between governments to address the fact that regulatory compliance impacts small- and medium-sized businesses the most.

Marilyn Braun-Pollon, Saskatchewan vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, praised the three levels of government for the initiative.

She said CFIB surveys show that businesses estimate two hours a week -- or 13 working days a year -- are spent complying with government regulations.

"Many entrepreneurs are frustrated because it takes a lot of time and effort to go through that maze," she said.

Greater Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce volunteer director Jill Sauter said she went through the process of getting a licence the old way when she set up her communications consulting business last winter. "It wasn't an onerous process, but very time-consuming," she said.

Sauter gave a demonstration of how BizPaL asks questions, based on the business category a person is planning to launch.

For example, one question about setting up a bed and breakfast relates to whether the house might have a hot tub or swimming pool. If a person clicks yes, regulations relating to public health agencies might come into play that wouldn't otherwise.

In the example shown to the people invited to the BizPal launch Monday, Sauter clicked 'Yes' to a question about whether liquor would be served at the imaginary bed and breakfast. That provided a link to the permitting process of Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming.

However, that might have led to a dead end in any event. Randy Grauer, Saskatoon's branch manager for development services, said that the better

answer to that question should have been 'No,' since Saskatoon's bylaw allows bed and breakfasts to serve just one meal a day before noon, so it isn't likely a bed and breakfast proprietor would want a liquor licence.

Grauer says the city intends to further develop its website services to businesses to allow payment of business licence and other fees on line.

Links to BizPaL in Saskatoon can either be made available through provincial or municipal web links at www.bizpal.gov.sk.ca or www.saskatoon.ca.

The province is hoping to launch BizPaL in other Saskatchewan cities through municipal partnerships, starting with Regina and Moose Jaw.

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