

# CONTENTS

## Features

14

### BUILDING BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

The pros & cons of P3 *by Terry Collins*



16

### IN DEFENCE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR — CUPE LOOKS AT P3

Not all is as it seems, according to the president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees *by Judy Darcy*

18

### ATLANTIC CANADA PARTNERS ONLINE

Efficient access to government information is a winner for the Atlantic provinces *by Barbara Webber*

20

### THE HALIFAX HARBOUR CLEANUP: A PARTNERSHIP IN THE MAKING

Don't hold your breath, but it looks like the long-planned cleanup is about to get underway *by Jim Meek*

25

### YOU'VE GOT MAIL

Canada Post partners with Cebra Inc. to launch a new, secure electronic mail service *by Terry Collins*

28

### THE WHEAT AND THE CHAFF

Scandals push Saskatchewan to revamp rules of game *by Dave Margoshes*

30

### CERTIFIABLY PROFESSIONAL

The federal government launches a training and certification program for materiel and supply professionals *by Catherine Morrison*



**COVER SHOT:** Jane Peatch, executive director of the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships looks at partnering as a long-term, complicated relationship.

# Atlantic Canada partners online

A major public-private partnering (P3) project in Atlantic Canada is an online information service that provides electronic access to government information

by Barbara Webber

Atlantic Canada On-Line (ACOL) is a unique contractual agreement between Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and Unisys Canada Inc. The service ([www.acol.ca](http://www.acol.ca)) offers a single point of access to public information from a remote PC or from client-activated workstations in participating government departments. It uses the latest ecommerce technology, meeting strict standards of security and confidentiality. ACOL can accept information for registration purposes in addition to managing the simple retrieval of data.

The behind-the-scenes development of ACOL was lengthy, reflecting the emergence of a new approach to resource management in the public sector.

In 1991, the Conference of Atlantic Premiers identified information technology as a prime opportunity to generate cost savings, achieve operating efficiencies and streamline business processes by sharing resources and leveraging economies of scale. The premiers' Information Technology Committee took a hard look at the possibilities.

Des Lecky, CEO of Technology PEI in the province's Department of Technology and Environment, was involved with the committee process from the start. "We had a lot of success," Lecky recalls, "including addressing common training needs and exchanging information on standards and concepts. The committee was proactive in developing common standards at the time client server technologies were just coming in. Once we had the Atlantic Canada On-Line concept, we had to determine if it was valid."

The committee commissioned a feasibility study that included an evaluation of government information bases for businesses, the readiness of government databases for electronic access, legislative issues and the receptiveness of the marketplace, both to doing business with the government electronically and to paying for information. Business models and technology architecture were examined for possible application to the concept.

"ACOL is an umbrella service that allows a wide variety of services to be offered," Lecky says. "To actually make it happen, legislation and government processes had to be changed."

The Atlantic premiers agreed to a business model which retained ownership of data but allowed controlled secure use of it, changing legislation where necessary to permit electronic access. A Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued for a private sector partner who would be responsible for the design and development of the infrastructure to make the databases accessible and to operate the service.

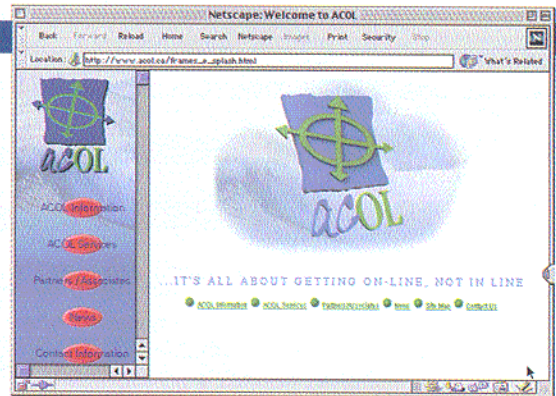
Nova Scotia administered the search for a private sector partner using the Cooperative Business Solutions (CBS) tendering process. CBS is used to select suppliers of innovative, high quality solutions through a continuing alliance with government. It is ideally suited for situations where increased efficiencies can be demonstrated, or performance measurably improved, by establishing a

long-term relationship. A steering committee, with representation from the four provinces, oversaw the procurement process, including selection and negotiation.

Five firms bid on the RFP, with two short-listed. The winner was Unisys Canada Inc., a global information management company. Local associates included Software Kinetics (now xWave) and the CCL Group of Companies.

Unisys committed to investing \$10 million over five years in the design, development and management of the ACOL business and technology infrastructure. In return, it was granted the exclusive, non-transferable right and license to use registered official marks of the Atlantic Provinces' "Atlantic Canada On-Line" and "ACOL". Unisys also received non-exclusive, but non-transferable, rights and licences to access provincial databases and to provide access to clients for information retrievals, searches, updates and registration.

The Master Strategic Alliance Agreement between Unisys and the four provinces runs for seven years with automatic renewal options of three years. The first database application, the Nova Scotia Personal Property Registry



System (PPRS), went online November 1997, followed by the Prince Edward Island PPR System in April 1998, New Brunswick in April 1999 with the Newfoundland and Labrador PPR system expected to be live by year end.

Gary Kelly, Unisys business development manager for ACOL, commented on the unconventional approach of the procurement process. "Rather than define specific requirements and then look for an organization to supply these at a fixed price, each short-listed vendor was asked to propose an approach, including business case, and make an oral presentation. On that basis, Unisys was chosen as the preferred vendor to enter into negotiations with the provinces." The process allowed the opportunity to negotiate a mutually beneficial business relationship.

As for Unisys approach, Kelly says, "We have a pretty significant client base in the public sector. Governments on a worldwide basis want to improve service, decrease costs and, if possible, generate new revenues. Electronic access has the

ability to do all three. The public-private alliance is a vehicle to make it happen."


Those involved in the partnership express satisfaction with its performance. ACOL liaison official Clyde Horner says, "From a business partner perspective, Unisys is the best partner government could have. They are investing all the capital money to design, build, and manage the project. Now it's a matter of identifying applications that will give Unisys a return on their investment."

Adds Lecky, "For the government, it has streamlined our business processes and has increased the volume of transactions. The ease of doing business with government has encouraged the financial sector to do more transactions and, as a result, we have seen additional revenue."

As for the future, says Lecky, "One of the objectives was to encourage economic development in the region. We felt by developing this service that it would produce jobs and wealth in Atlantic Canada through the creation of a product that can be exported to other regions." Lecky has

had expressions of interest in the ACOL model from Brazil, Argentina and Chile.

Kelly says Unisys sees the service growing on a regional basis and into other jurisdictions. "The Northwest Territories is looking at the personal property aspect. Other applications can expect major growth. We are using the e-commerce expertise and technology base in Atlantic Canada to pursue similar opportunities in other provinces, including Ontario and Western Canada, and with the federal government".

ACOL is currently offered through subscription. Clients are issued software, user ID and password enabling connectivity to the ACOL network using Windows or direct Internet. Unisys' Kelly says "services soon to be introduced include web-based access and availability to non-registered users via the Internet on a pay-as-you-go option, leading to increased use and more databases online." 

*Barbara Webber is a freelance business writer based in Halifax.*