

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: PREDA/CRI GREENING STUDY

May 20, 2010

1. Key to the “greening” of Peace firms is creation of the network. For the network to have longevity and influence it must have relevancy to the members beyond simply being a “club”. Relevancy is provided through dissemination of education, generic or specific, using tools such as a Peace web site (and/or seminars/symposia, newsletter, research dedicated to Peace issues). Facilitating the migration of Peace firms is mentoring the formation of a stable and sustainable waste/recycle system for the Peace Region while promoting the conversation about green into stakeholders other than the traditional private sector organizations.
2. PREDA through the Centre for Research and Innovation at GPRC initiated a project in late summer 2009 to understand how prepared Peace firms are to take advantage of the shift in society preferences for more environmentally friendly goods and services. There is growing expectation on the part of consumers that a firm will offer products which are environmentally responsible and manufacture products/conduct business in an environmentally responsible way. The project continued from August 2009 until May 2010.
3. The Peace Region is dominated by firms less than 100 employees which accounted for four-fifths of the firms participating in the study. Half of the participating firms employed less than 25 people. It is then primarily these firms, employing less than 100 people, on which the study is based.
4. Seven significant observations are evident from the study.
 - i. Dense social networks in the Grande Prairie and environs;
 - ii. Strong entrepreneurial spirit in the GP and surrounding regions;
 - iii. Strong concern for the environment and the impacts which firms have on their surrounding environment;
 - iv. Where there is a choice, decision makers will choose processes/approaches which are environmentally friendlier;
 - v. Economic motives drive interest to pursue a green agenda in SMEs;
 - vi. Lack of understanding of “green” and how to learn more about it, the green trends which are taking place outside of the Peace, what constitutes “green”, and what are the opportunities and threats linked to it;
 - vii. Desire for a mechanism/infrastructure through which to express their interest/concern for the environment.
5. The seven major observations can be collapsed into four key interlocking themes which must be factored into a five year plan. At the centre of the plan is the creation of a network of like minded people, brought together through a system providing education about greening, supported by an infrastructure that allows all stakeholders an easy way to express their commitment to green, that then results in the green conversation being a constant throughout networks. Through the entrepreneurial sector, calibrated to think with a “green” lens, and rewarded for doing so, Peace firms then can be better prepared to compete in the emerging world of an environmentally friendly society.
6. A key step is creating the infrastructure for a network. Without having a nucleus of people and or organizations through which to express their issue, the ability to change people’s behavior let alone ensure a rapid dissemination of knowledge about green will be much less effective.

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7. While a green network is a key feature of the long term strategy to migrate the firms in the Peace, it is not sufficient. Greening is only one issue that can occupy the interest of stakeholders in the Peace. In order for longevity of this network to occur, it must also develop some momentum in society that ties into the other networks that exist in the GP regions. The ties that bind the people together in the network need to be strengthened through frequency of meetings and in providing substance to those meetings.
8. It was quite clear that while there was a general environment ethos in GP and environs, five things were holding firms back. One was knowledge about the greening in general and how that impacted the operating environment of the firms; second, what constituted best practices in their respective business and how to measure the greenness of one approach versus another; third, the extent to which the different components of society fit together to promote opportunity to express greening; four business opportunities represented by greening; and five selection process by which Peace firms might participate in business opportunities.
9. Seminars and other mechanism through which to deliver the educational experience need to be resident in Grande Prairie and surrounding areas. Length of these seminars need to be less than three days and tied to the interests of the network and region.
10. Creation of a newsletter tied to the Green Network is an additional tool to disseminate information and maintain interest in the network. It can also be used to identify interesting and new sources of information as well as provide updates on a Peace Web Site dedicated to green issues.
11. A Peace Web Site dedicated to environmental issues, complementing a newsletter, brings the networking among green participants into the 21st century and provides the opportunity for unobtrusive research on opportunities without the prying eyes of competitors. It can also act as a library of commonly asked questions and solutions that can link organizations with similar problems or organizations with complementary products and services to form a consortium in bidding for new business.
12. An additional tool that can be used to generate interest, relevancy and credibility are Network sponsored research projects tied to the interest, needs and concerns of Peace firms.
13. Further information is available from Peace Region Economic Development Alliance (PREDA) at: 780 833 1035 or “preda@peacecountrycanada.com”.