

We're On The Internet!

Change Leads to Transformation

[This is the first in a series of articles on the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Internet Implementation Plan.]

On July 26, 1995, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gordon Smith, inaugurated the Department's Site on the Internet. Speaking to a large crowd assembled in the lobby of the Lester B. Pearson Building, Mr. Smith said that the day was a historic one for the Department. "Our presence on the Internet," he stated, "is part of the Department's strategy to use technology to help achieve its mandate. By establishing this presence, we have not only broadened the Department's profile in the international community, but also enhanced the service we offer our clients by providing them with instant, cost-effective access to up-to-date information on our services and activities."

The Deputy Minister concluded his remarks by saying that to make the DFAIT Web site a success, all employees need to provide the InfoCentre with up-to-date and relevant information on the broad range of topics that relate to the Department's mandate. "The challenge for each of us," Mr. Smith remarked, "is to think 'electronic' when preparing material for the public — and therefore to provide the InfoCentre with an electronic copy of your text."

There are several Internet-related projects underway at Headquarters. They are co-ordinated by an Internet working group composed of representatives from areas of the Department that have an interest in the subject of DFAIT and the Internet. This group meets regularly, reports on its progress and updates the Implementation Plan.

The following four key projects make up the Internet

Implementation Plan and form part of the Department's long-term strategic planning in the information technology field:

1. DFAIT Web Site
2. Intranet Site
3. The DFAIT Research Page
4. SIGNET User Access to the Internet

1. DFAIT Web Site

This is our site on the Internet and is one of the Department's four Internet-related electronic information dissemination services. The DFAIT Web site is the most immediate for the Department, as well as the most advanced, high profile and public. The site offers the Department a means of publishing information on the Internet in core subject areas of interest to all clients: trade, foreign policy and culture. To ensure that these areas were represented on the Internet site, a Home Page Advisory Group was established with representation from the International Business Development Branch (TFB), Policy Branch (CPB), International Cultural Relations Bureau (ACD) and the Communications Bureau (BCD). Input from the Consular Affairs Bureau (JPD) was also sought to ensure that travel and consular information would be incorporated into the site.

Via the site, clients from Canada and around the world have instant access to non-sensitive, current information on the Department's services and activities. This information is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week in both official languages. The DFAIT Web site's Internet address is

<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca>

What are the benefits of the DFAIT Web site to the Department?

Having a presence on the Internet reduces delays in the delivery of information, it reduces costs (publishing, printing, distribution and storage), and it relieves staff from answering routine requests for information. Simply put, it represents a more efficient, effective and strategic management of information.

This site also builds on the InfoCentre's role as the public window into the Department and primary disseminator of departmental publications and information. The existing InfoCentre Bulletin Board (IBB) is now integrally linked to the Web site so that clients accessing the Web site also have access to the Bulletin Board's non trade-sensitive document bank.

How do the Department's clients access information on the Web site?

The Web site has been established for clients outside the Department. Once connected to the Internet, clients can input the address of our site (<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca>) and the home page will appear. The home page is the entry point into the site and provides the Internet user with a choice of working in English or French. Following this, the next level consists of the Main Menu, which categorizes the sets of information that are available.

There are essentially two types of documents on the DFAIT Web site: hypertext mark-up language (HTML) documents and documents in native format. The HTML document section, which includes the menu structure and all viewable pages, provides a pleasing interface to the most frequently requested information products (contact lists, popular trade documents, etc.). Hypertext links embedded within these pages provide the client with immediate