

Finding People Faster

**How Transport Canada used innovation,
teamwork and technology to stop a looming crisis
in its tracks.**

**Nancy Simmons-Wright, Transport Canada
Recruitment Centre: e-Recruitment**

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In 1999, the red lights were flashing on the human resources flight deck at *Transport Canada* (TC). Under the converging pressures of retirements, resignations and competition from the private sector, gaps had been opening steadily in the ranks of both marine and civil aviation regulatory and inspection personnel.

Nancy Simmons-Wright, Manager of Transport Canada's *R/I Recruitment Centre*, sees the story of how Transport Canada turned the situation around as a best practices case from which other departments can profit.

Looking back at 1999, Nancy says, there were two main problems. One was *demographic*: a high proportion of Transport Canada's technical inspectors were on the verge of retirement. The other factor was stiff competition from the private sector, making it more difficult not only to recruit but also to keep present staff on board.

Partly because of these pressures, the *Public Service Commission* broadened Transport Canada's staffing delegation. Detailed studies by TC line managers showed the need for an integrated, Canada-wide response. In partnership with Human Resources, the line managers put one together.

In a break with past practice, the team's opening move was to bring in a commercial marketing specialist to help plan the advertising campaign.

On the basis of focus group and other research, Transport Canada management launched a national recruiting campaign in December 1999. The strategy had two prongs:

- A nation-wide advertising blitz backed by an array of eye-catching recruiting brochures and information sheets. In a testing of the Internet waters, ads offered readers the option of applying on-line using the department's website.
- Creation of a three-person recruiting centre to coordinate the resulting flow of applications, make sure they met minimum requirements before forwarding them to managers, and keeping in touch with applicants as the selection process unfolded.

The national ad campaign was rolled out just before Christmas 1999, in major newspapers and also, in line with media research findings, in selected technical journals.

The response produced two big surprises, both pleasant. The first was its size. Transport Canada suddenly found itself with an inventory of 4,200 applications.

The other surprise: more than half had come in on-line, a development with important implications for recruiting strategists. "It showed us the power of the Internet," says Nancy Simmons-Wright.

How do managers like the changes? One who has made them work for him is Don Sherritt, Director of *Aircraft Maintenance and Manufacturing*. Sherritt says the timing of the national campaign was perfect. He and his management team had just developed a "national standard of competencies to modernize the various standards from region to region."

This move meshed neatly with the new recruitment strategy. “Our managers across the country can now use these standards to reach into a national pool and pick out the best candidates.” Don says.

He also likes what the changes do for team spirit. “When you get managers working together across the country to recruit the best, that’s a team.”

Merlin Preuss, Director General Civil Aviation, sums up his assessment of the Department’s electronic recruitment succinctly... “A real success story”.

Based on this initial experience in electronic recruitment, Transport Canada lost no time in making it a permanent fixture. TC’s 5-member Recruitment Centre emerged as the focal point of this new type of recruiting, its mandate being to find and provide technical managers faster and more efficient means for managers to find qualified candidates.

For the past two years TC technical managers have had access to an electronic inventory for potential candidates. With sophisticated technology, managers can screen candidates in minutes rather than weeks.

Transport Canada’s advanced technology allowed it to be one of the first departments to run a fully electronic competition. In response to the post September 11, 2001 need to double its existing Security and Emergency Preparedness inspector workforce, Transport Canada received 9,000 applications over the course of a few weeks. Because these were all electronic applications, tailored to the specific job, the screening time was reduced to days, rather than weeks.

To date, Transport Canada has recruited 241 inspectors through its electronic process. This may not sound exceptional, but bear in mind that these are highly qualified, sought after people.

Having overcome a severe recruitment problem of its regulatory/inspection workforce, and recognizing the value for money (volume management, reduced burden on managers), Transport Canada is now determining how this system can be used for internal staffing purposes as well.