

Government of Bermuda brings students home



The Government of Bermuda has implemented www.careers.gov.bm, an interactive Web site that links Bermudian students and graduates to local employers. The project was initiated through CURE (Commission for Unity and Racial Equality) in close cooperation with other departments. The site, which integrates using Web services with the Department of Immigration, was built by LANSA Professional Services and implemented with the help of Bermuda Information Technology Services (BITS).

Dr Myra Virgil, Director of the Department of Human Affairs, says, "The site helps to broker relationships between employers, students and graduates. It assists the employers in locating educated and skilled Bermudians and communicates with them about jobs, training, internships and other opportunities. Students can now make arrangements with employers and come back to the island with a career plan."

Making the Information Available

Bermuda, an overseas territory of the UK, is a group of islands located in the North Atlantic Ocean, east of South Carolina and north of the Caribbean islands. Its land mass is 53.3 sq km and its population is about 66,000. Bermuda's economy is primarily based on providing financial services for international businesses and luxury facilities for tourists.

Bermuda enjoys the third highest per capita income in the world and has less than a one percent unemployment rate. Salaries are high and the island is generally considered a great place to live and work. Yet it is a challenge to persuade young Bermudians who study overseas to return after graduation.

As a result, the international business community tends to rely on overseas staff

for senior positions. Bermuda has over 9,000 expatriate work permit holders, mostly in upper level management. This imbalance discourages Bermudian students to return home and is a concern to the Government.

Virgil, the main driver of the Careers Web site and heading CURE at the time, explains, "Only a small percentage of upper level management jobs are held by Bermudians; the majority are held by permit holders. This gives Bermudians the feeling that visitors are doing better and it discourages our own students from seeking a career on the island."

"Employers would rather recruit Bermudians, as it is an expensive and lengthy procedure to arrange work permits for overseas job candidates. Moreover, there is a strict six year term limit, so you are going to have a lot

of turnover. Employers would rather recruit someone who is going to stay."

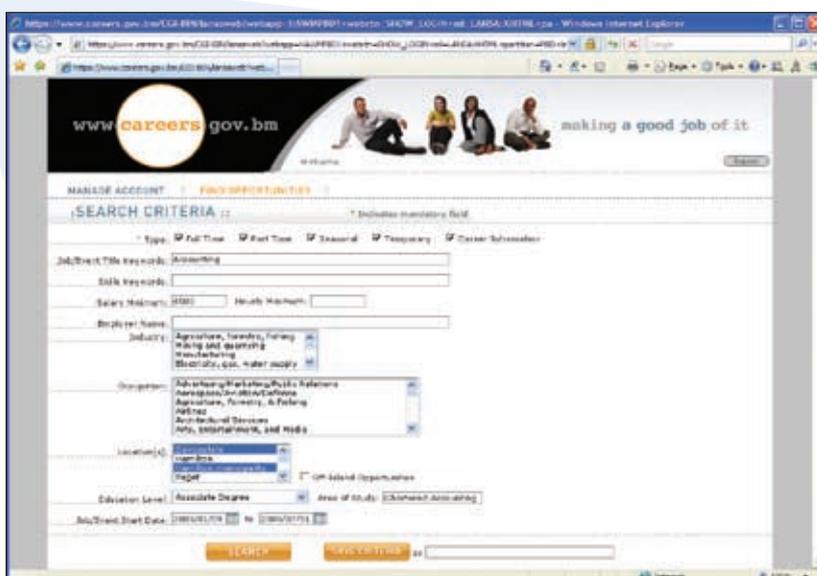
Employer representative groups indicated that in order to make better use of Bermudian skills they needed a better way of finding out who is studying overseas, what is their degree and skill set and when they will be returning to Bermuda. Previously, some of this information had been captured on immigration departure cards that were scanned. But the information was incomplete, out of date and not available in a usable format.

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Virgil formed the idea of using a Web site to get an electronic flow of information going between employers and students. "I wanted it to be more than just capturing student data and posting jobs. Employers would need to be able to post all kind of opportunities, such as summer internships, training and future employment openings. Through forums, younger students would have to be able to ask questions and get employer mentoring and advice, such as, what subjects to study and what career steps to take, if they are aiming for a specific job."

With a rough model in mind, Virgil drafted a concept document and drove approval to get budget. From there, with further input from other departments and stakeholders and technical direction by the Department of e-Government and the Information and Technology Office, the project took shape. LANSA Professional Services and BITS were selected to build the solution.

David Atwood, Director of e-Government, explains, "We selected LANSA because they had a deep understanding of what our requirements were and came up with additional ideas that were valuable. LANSA and their business partners had already been involved in various other Government projects such as the online Tax Commission system, Drivers Licensing and Vehicle Registration for the Transport Control Department and an Application Processing and Permit Tracking system for the Department of Immigration." →



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The Careers Web Site

The site has been built with LANSAs Web Access Modules (WAMs) and Ajax technology for a rich user experience. LANSAs Integrator works behind the scenes to facilitate the exchange of documents.

Once students log on and create an account, they can post cover letters, upload résumés, access employment resources and search for jobs. Even after students sign off, the system continues to match them to potential opportunities, emailing results as new jobs and career information is posted.

Employers can manage online profiles, post and update job and training information, employment applications and access registrant information. As an example, they may contact students studying economics in different countries and notify them of upcoming opportunities within that field.

In designing the site, the team had to resolve several concerns, such as preserving confidentiality by programming for blind matching of student and employer searches.

The Bermudian status of students was more complex to verify. Students are asked to enter their name and passport number when they register, but many Bermudians, especially overseas students, have dual nationality and may hold another passport. To verify the Bermudian status of a student, the careers system uses LANSAs Integrator and Web services to communicate with the Department of Immigration's system.

Initially Atwood was considering email messaging for students who could not be matched immediately, as he was worried about scope creep and the project budget.

"To communicate using Web services, we had to collaborate with both Immigration and the vendor of the MPI (Master-Person-Index) product. But I am happy that we followed the Web services transaction route. It wasn't hard to set up and it guarantees that registration requests will not fall in between the cracks."

"Development was pretty rapid. The entire solution took just a few months," explains Atwood." Also, the original requirements were well done."

The careers site is deployed on an IBM System i, as are many of the other systems of the Government of Bermuda. "The System i is solid and secure and you don't need as many people to run it," explains Atwood.



Marketing the site was a critical success factor. In addition to magazine, newspapers and search-engine advertising, the site has appeared in video ads in cinemas and on the radio.

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"Currently we are running the site in a hosted System i environment. By hosting it externally, we took away some of the delays that may have occurred in setting up the infrastructure ourselves. Also, most students are in America and Canada, another reason why hosting works well."

Marketing the site to students in innovative ways was a critical success factor, and Insight Visual Communications brought an in-depth plan to the Government. In addition to magazine, newspapers and search-engine advertising, the site has appeared in video ads in cinemas and on the radio during holidays when students return home. Bermuda's premier has visited a number of universities and has been active in getting students involved.

Long-term Foundation

"Employers have commented that the site helps them locate young educated Bermudians at various stages of their study and career, the exact audience they are aiming for; people they can develop and mentor and who are committed to the community," explains Virgil.

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"The site may seem slightly out of CURE's and Human Affairs' mandate, but one of the major factors for equality in the workforce is access to resources and access to people. Knowing about the right training, the right opportunities, the right access to certain companies helps our students to go up the ladder and get a fair shot at those upper level management jobs."

"The solution also addresses a longstanding data management challenge. For many years, information was limited to what students filled out on their immigration cards. Now using the latest Web technology we have the capability to collect up-to-date data about students, both overseas and local," concludes Virgil.

"I believe that the careers system will provide years of service in facilitating a mutually beneficial career dialog between students and employers."

"The solution has been modeled on best practice for Web-based self-service and is easy to use. It provides a long-term, sustainable foundation for ensuring that we capture the extent of available human capital in Bermuda and that this information is available to all parties concerned," concludes Atwood. ■

COMPANY AND SYSTEM INFORMATION

- Bermuda is a British overseas territory in the North Atlantic Ocean. Bermuda has one of the world's highest GDP per capita. Total population is about 66,000 with over 7,000 guest workers (2007 survey).
- For more information about BITS (Bermuda Information Technology Services) and Insight Visual Communications, visit www.bits.bm and www.insight.bm
- For more information about the careers site visit www.careers.gov.bm