

**Final Report**

***The Prince Edward Island***

***Information Technology Study of***

***Small and Medium Sized Enterprises***

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## Introduction

The Internet is fundamentally changing the way in which businesses communicate, produce and trade. As a growing number of businesses access the Internet and employ e-business solutions, the traditional, linear supply chain is being transformed into networks of integrated, web-like links between business partners, suppliers and customers. At the global level, Canada stands to benefit by leveraging the potential of e-business to increase productivity and global competitiveness (Canadian E-business Opportunities Roundtable 2001, 2002).

Canada has made significant progress in driving connectivity. Based on the Conference Board of Canada's Connectivity Index (2001), it ranks second after the United States in overall connectivity. However, while a majority of Canadian businesses have Internet access, few are investing resources to explore more sophisticated e-business applications. Results from the most recent Statistics Canada Survey of Electronic Commerce and Technology (SECT, Statistics Canada 2002), indicate that while 71% of firms in Canada are connected to the Internet, only 7% are selling goods or services online.

In a report from Statistics Canada called "Embracing E-business: Does Size Matter" (June 2002), they concluded that firm size does matter when it comes to embracing technology. In 2001 68% of small firms accessed the Internet, compared with 91% of medium-sized and 94% of large firms. In addition only 24% of small firms had a web site compared with 57% of medium-sized and 74% of large firms.

This report contains the results of a study that was conducted using a random sample of small and medium sized enterprises on Prince Edward Island. Throughout the report, references to relevant Canadian comparisons will be demonstrated in order to show the similarities and differences that exist on PEI.

## Project Background

Over the past few years, Holland College and the University of PEI have developed several successful partnerships and joint initiatives. These have been encouraged and supported by the Presidents of each institution. The results have produced a number of innovative and successful programs and offerings to enhance the training and education of Islanders. This "Information Technology Study of PEI Small and Medium Sized Enterprises" is another joint initiative between these two institutions. The Information Technology Department at Holland College and the School of Business at UPEI are exploring the possibility of a joint outreach education/training initiative to achieve greater connections with the Island business community. The objective is to provide programs in Information Technology and Business Management to meet the needs of businesses in general, and of small to medium sized enterprises in particular.

This study assessed the e-business readiness and training needs of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) across Prince Edward Island. The study was conducted during April and May 2003 on behalf of the University of PEI, Holland College, and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. This survey represents the largest sample ever conducted on PEI into this area.

### Project Goals

The assessment of market needs, which is called the "IT Study", is only the first step in the overall project. The goal of the remainder of the project is to fulfill those IT and management training needs not being met at present for Island businesses. Specifically, there are four distinct project goals:

1. To collect market information on the needs of Island businesses for IT and management training needs. This information will be used as the basis for developing a strategy to fulfill these needs through joint efforts of Holland College's IT Department and UPEI's School of Business.
2. From the market data collected, several options will be developed and considered for developing the strategic report. This strategic report will include an organizational delivery structure, specific objectives, a Steering Committee concept for an advisory role, as well as the types of programs to be offered.
3. These institutions will then establish an integrated structure for this IT and management training that the general business population will consider top of mind as the place to get solutions for their needs. The initial focus for the project will be on PEI businesses' needs. The goal is to develop flexible offerings to meet the needs of the Island businesses in a manner and in the time frame that they desire. The longer-term goal is to develop programs and delivery methods that will be transferable to other regions nationally and globally.
4. This joint initiative will have a flexible structure to deliver programs to the primary market of small and medium sized enterprises. If required, the initial offerings might be industry specific to pilot the programs. The aim is to be cost effective while at the same time generate revenue for self-sufficiency in the long run.

## Methodology

The methodology that the IT Study used to complete this initial phase of the project was:

1. Meetings were held with both institutions to determine goals, research scope, desired outcomes, and the institutions' relationship for the project. Meetings with appropriate government representatives and IT industry providers were conducted. A literature review was conducted on the trends of the general IT training and education field.
2. Focus groups, surveys, and interviews were used to collect primary data from a representative sample of small and medium sized enterprises on the Island.
3. The data was then analyzed in order to provide insights and options to build the strategic direction for continued work on this initiative.

## Scope of the Study

A total of 3,207 surveys were sent throughout Prince Edward Island the return rate on these were approximately 15% or 470 respondents. These surveys were completed either through the online survey website or through paper-based mailing. The surveys were conducted during the period of April 8 through May 30, 2003. Two focus group sessions were held in eastern and western PEI, at the rural Information Technology Centres, Future Tech West in O'Leary and Eastech in Cardigan. The survey team also collected data during the first week of May as part of the IT Week conference at the Atlantic Technology Centre. In addition the team attended a PEI Tourism Technology Conference on April 8<sup>th</sup> to listen to and to respond to some of the technology concerns of this sector. The retail sector was also personally canvassed at street-level with surveys being distributed in person to merchants of the Confederation Court Mall and the Charlottetown Mall in Charlottetown.

Results of this survey are considered to have a confidence interval of +/- 4.37, 19 times out of 20.

## The Demographics

One of the first tasks of the study was to quantify how many small businesses there are on PEI. This depends on what is meant by a "business" and on how "small" a business should be in order to be considered a "small business". There is no standard for defining either, and Statistics Canada makes available different data sources for different needs. To get some idea of just how many small and medium size businesses there are on PEI, Statistics Canada had some information published on this, which is included in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
**Number of Employer Businesses**

(# of employees)	Canada	NF	PEI	NS	NE	QC	ON	MN	SK	AB	BC
All sizes	955,796	20,648	7,672	32,428	27,859	231,114	313,519	36,562	42,052	121,982	155,676
1 to 4	718,282	16,086	5,445	23,210	20,096	169,148	225,875	24,735	31,157	89,392	114,192
5 to 19	170,033	2,651	1,219	5,192	4,616	41,676	58,954	6,724	6,560	20,825	27,686
20 to 49	42,580	693	368	1,574	1,226	11,786	16,287	2,147	1,863	5,967	7,401
50 to 99	13,358	302	160	731	543	3,933	5,987	895	721	2,281	2,688
100 to 499	9,221	433	221	1,005	780	3,316	4,866	1,244	1,054	2,432	2,606
500 +	2,322	483	259	716	598	1,255	1,550	817	697	1,085	1,103

Source: Employment Dynamics – Stats Canada

From this table it was determined that there are approximately 7,192 small and medium sized enterprises on PEI. The survey was sent out to 3,207 of these SMEs which represents approximately 45% of the total number of SMEs. The industry sector classifications that responded to the survey were from fourteen different industry sector groups, with the largest number of responses from the

Agriculture and Fisheries sector (46%), followed distantly by the Miscellaneous Sector and the Travel and Tourism Sector.

**Figure 1 – Industry Sectors**

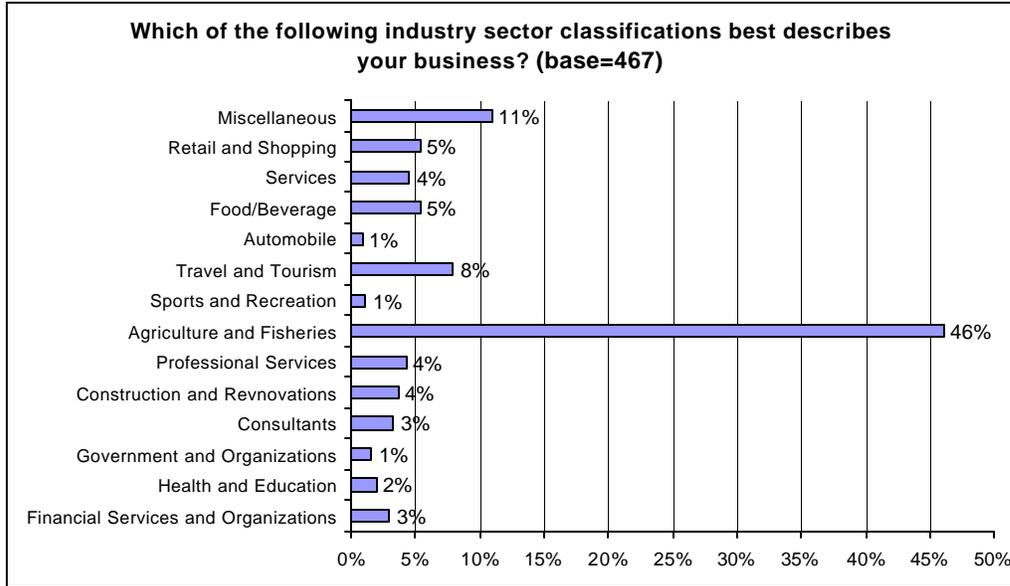
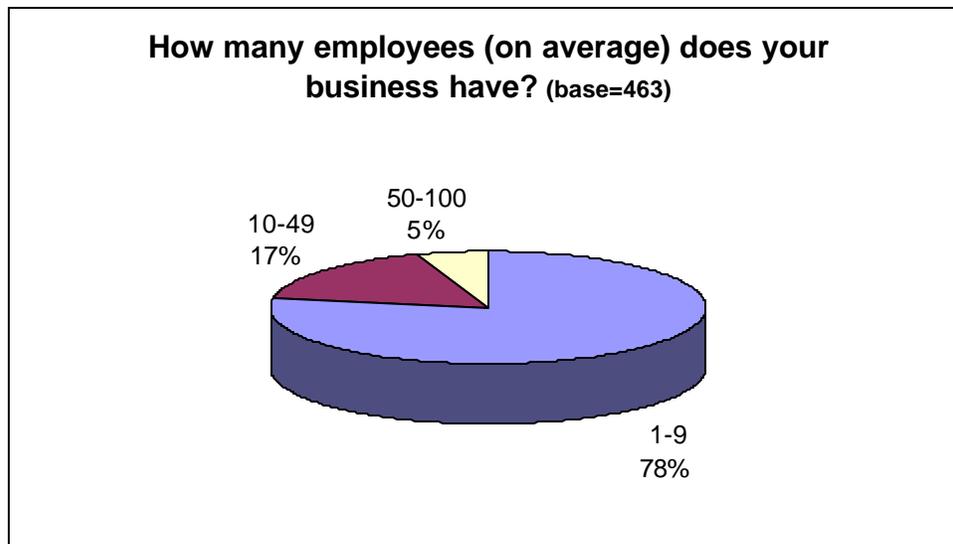


Table 1 on the previous page indicates that there are approximately 97% of SMEs with 100 or less employees on PEI. The survey respondents followed this similar pattern with the following breakdown:

**Figure 2 – Business Size**



## **Key Findings**

The first part of the survey attempted to determine the level of information technology that was being used by small and medium sized enterprises and to also look at the "IT and E-business readiness" of these businesses.

The past two years have seen considerable changes in the environment for business, in the technologies available, and in the way they are being deployed. Some of these changes have slowed or changed the direction of business development, and there have been some highly publicized business collapses. Coupled with the major stock market correction in April 2000 and subsequent technology downturn in 2001, these have caused some people to think that e-business is no longer an issue, that it was a passing fad, that it can now be ignored, and that business can go on as it always has gone on. ***Such a belief is ill founded and dangerous.***

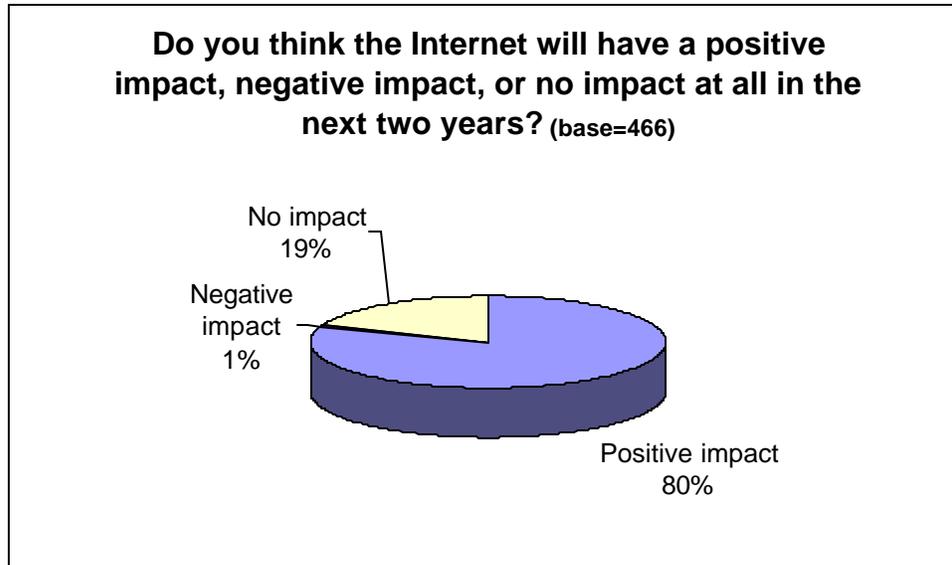
E-business continues to be the major issue facing enterprises today. How quickly they adapt, how well they adapt, and how flexibly they respond to changes in technology, in business relationships and customer behavior will determine their success and indeed their ability to survive. The slowdown in the world economy increases the imperative for businesses to adopt e-business and thereby increase their competitiveness.

To maximize the benefit to society, businesses need to refocus their efforts to create the best possible environment for e-business and to promote the adoption of e-business by enterprises, especially by small and medium sized enterprises SMEs.

## Impact of the Internet

The short-term perception of the impact of the Internet is very high over the next two years. A majority of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) surveyed believe that the impact of the Internet will have a positive impact (80%), while (19%) believe that the Internet will have a no impact.

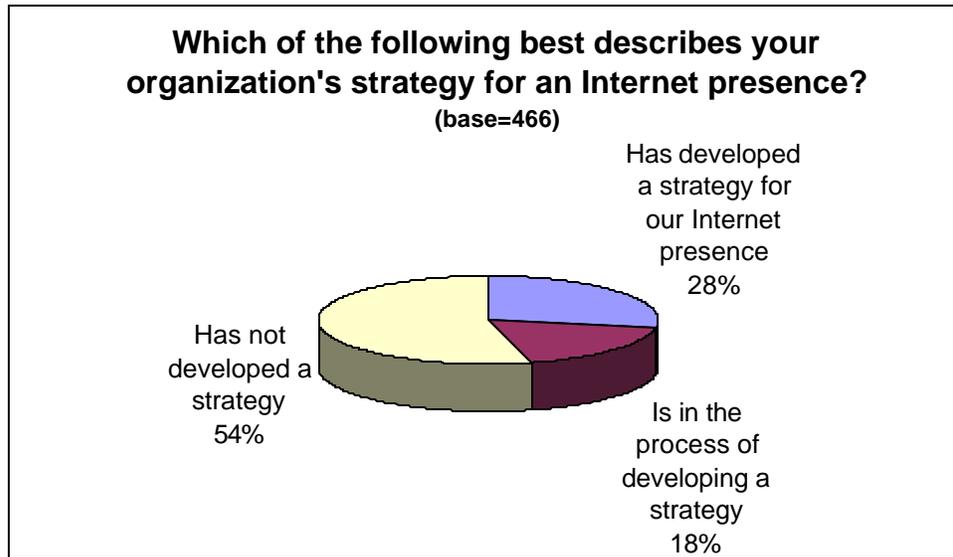
**Figure 3 – Impact of the Internet**



## Internet Strategy

SMEs still have lots of room to grow to become fully e-enabled. Further, the SME audience is far from homogeneous when it comes to their Internet strategy, with almost one in three (28%) who have developed a strategy and (54%) who have not developed a strategy. The remaining 18 percent are “in the process” of developing a strategy. While this may indicate that a segment of the SME market is advanced in their Internet development, the clear majority has not formed any kind of strategy.

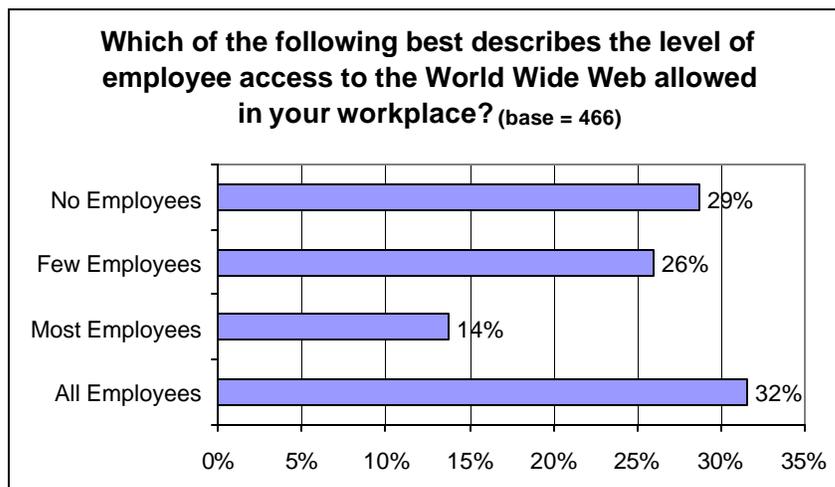
Figure 4 – Strategy for Internet Presence



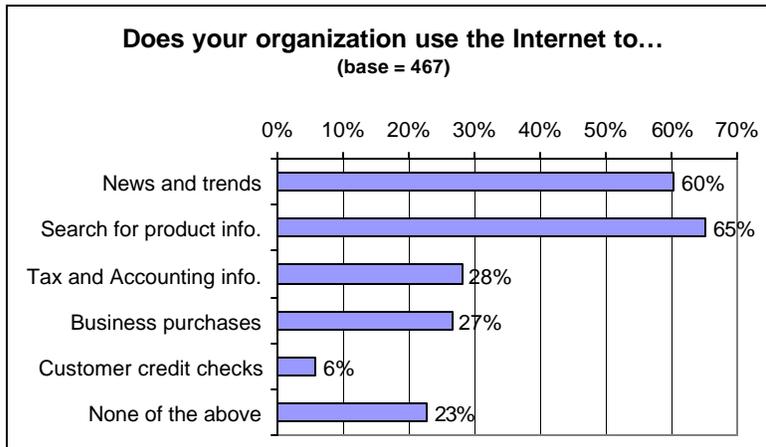
Access to the World Wide Web

Overall, 32% of SMEs allow all employees access to the WWW, with 14 percent who report that most employees have access. Fifty-five percent report either few (26%) or no (29%) employees have access. Among those SMEs who allow employees access to the WWW, the primary uses are searching for information (65%), Keeping up to date on the latest news (60%) and looking up tax and accounting information (28%). (Figure 6)

Figure 5 – Level of Employee Access to the Web



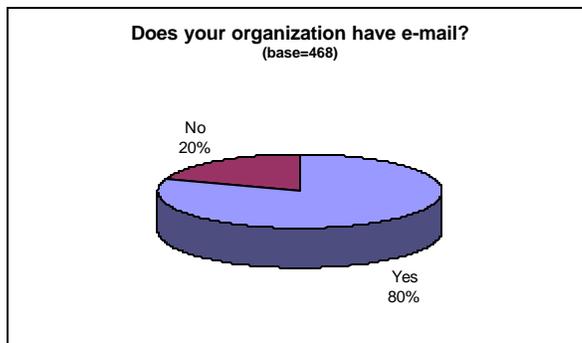
**Figure 6 – Use of the Internet**



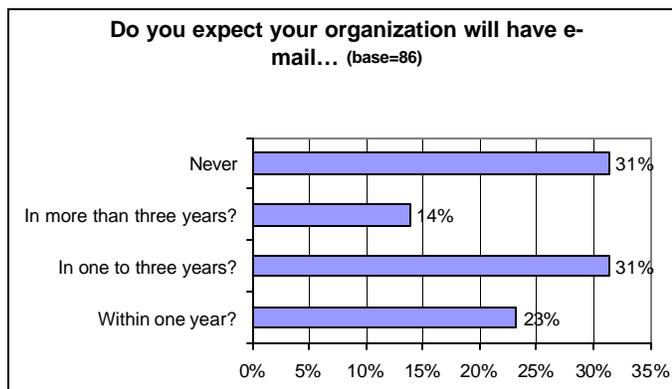
**E-mail Access & Usage**

Nearly all SMEs have e-mail access (80%). Of those who do not have e-mail, 31% predict that they will have e-mail within three years, while an equal proportion (31%) never plan to have email. Twenty three percent of SMEs surveyed report that their organization will have email within one year. It could then be concluded from this question that within one year a significant number of SMEs will have access to email.

**Figure 7 – Access to Email**



**Figure 8 – Expected Access to Email**



### Website Adoption

A majority of SMEs do not have a website (60%), although a large proportion of those without a website intend to develop a site within three years. However there is a significant percentage of SMEs that never plan on having a website (40%). From the comments received from SMEs, some of this can be explained by the individual SME not knowing what a website could be used for and what the benefits of website would be to their organization. This would clearly be an opportunity to educate these SMEs in order to show them how successful businesses are using e-business technologies.

Figure 9 – Website Adoption

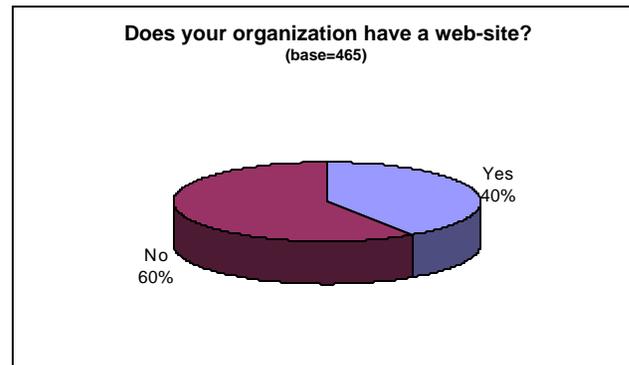
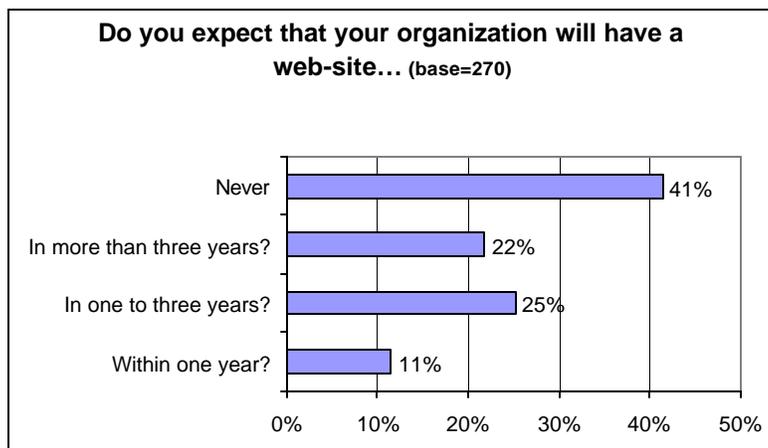


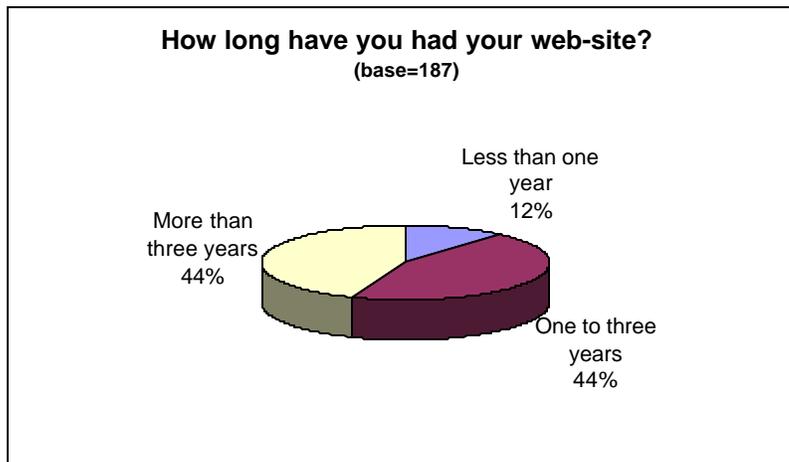
Figure 10 – Expected Website Adoption



### Profile of SMEs with a Website *(asked only to those with a web-site)*

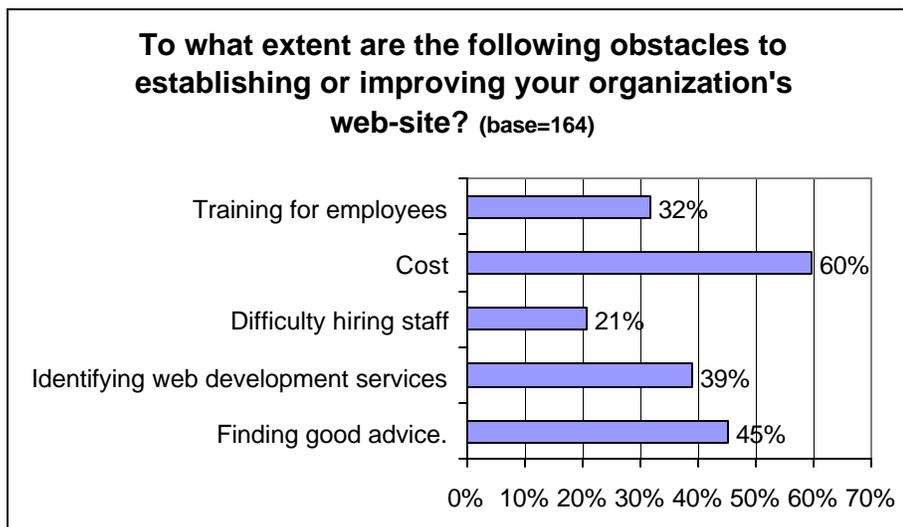
For those SMEs that do have a website now, they indicate that they have had a website for several years, while only 12% have had their website for less than one year. This would indicate that most SMEs (88%) were early adopters of using this medium to promote their business to customers.

**Figure 11 – How Long with a Website**



One of the interesting factors in the study is its investigation into barriers to expanding e-capabilities, and specifically barriers to establishing a website. The primary barriers include cost (60%) finding advice on adapting their strategy for the web (45%) and finding appropriate suppliers (39%). Difficulty hiring staff to manage their website is the least-cited barrier (21%). Of particular interest to this study was the fact that only 32% of SMEs stated that training for their people was a barrier to establishing a website.

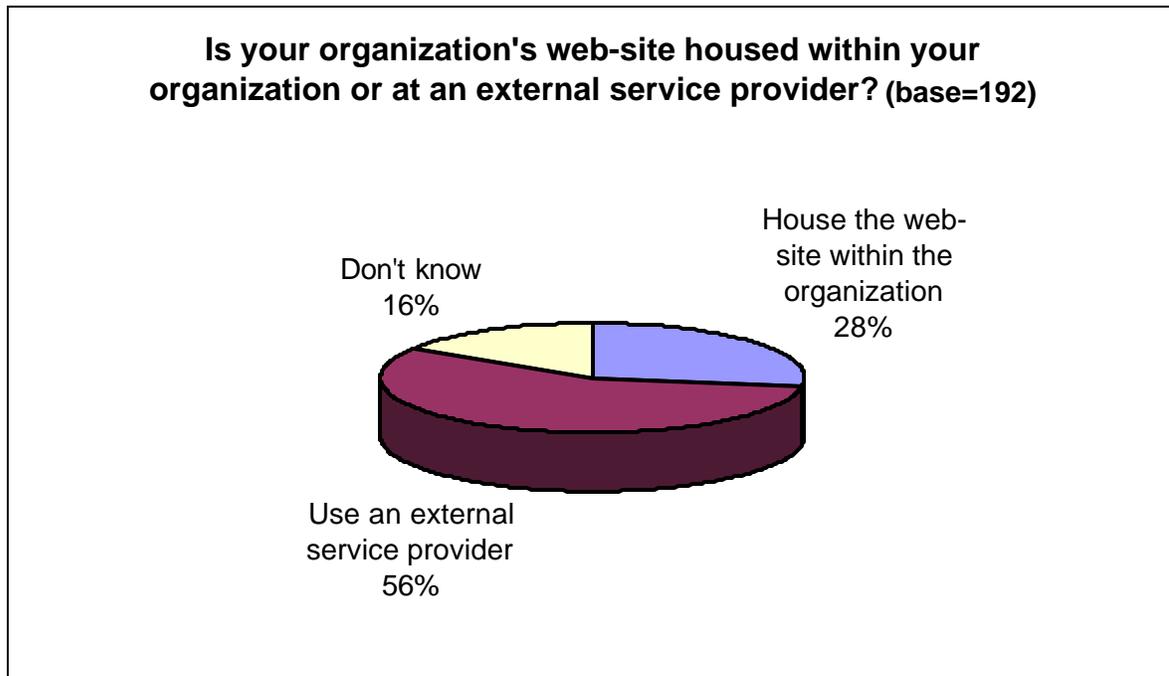
**Figure 12 – Obstacles to establishing a Website**



Web-Site Incidence & Usage

The large majority of SMEs with a website have an external service provider (56%), while 28 percent house their website within the organization. This high incidence of outsourcing the website to a third party, might account for the reason why only one third see training of their staff as a barrier to establishing or improving their website.

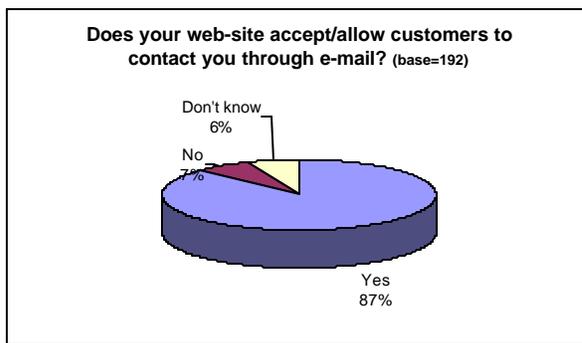
**Figure 13 – Website Hosting**



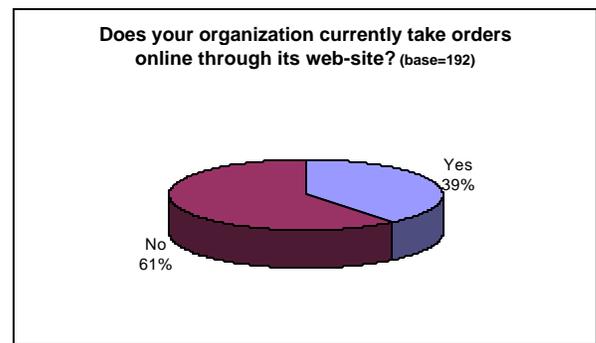
Customer Communications and Privacy

Nearly all respondents report that their website allows customers to contact them through e-mail (87%); however, only 39% can accept customer orders on their website. This would indicate that there is a potential for growth in this area and that more websites could become enabled to accept orders, if in fact the products lend themselves well to this type of environment. When asked if they plan to have the capability of accepting orders online, 45% said that they would never have this capability, while the remaining 55% are planning to have this capability within the next one to four years. This will present opportunities for educating these SMEs in the area of e-commerce.

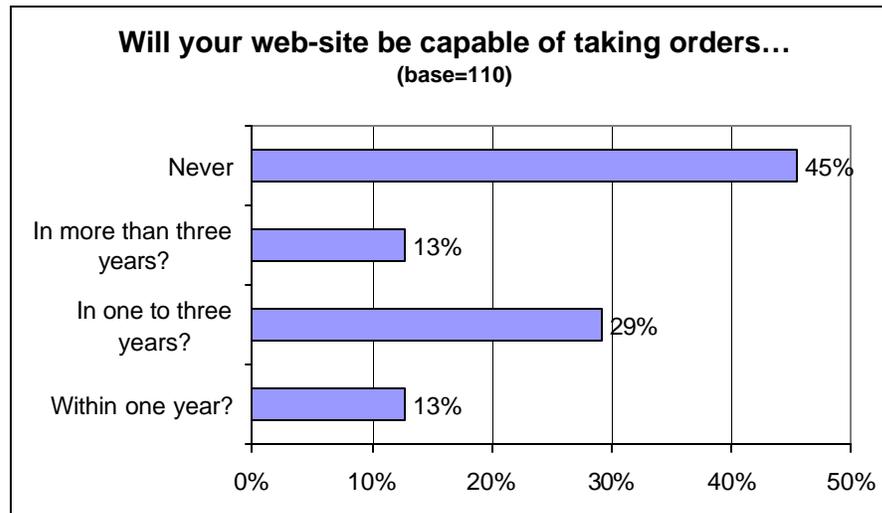
**Figure 14 – Contact through Email**



**Figure 15 – Ordering through Website**



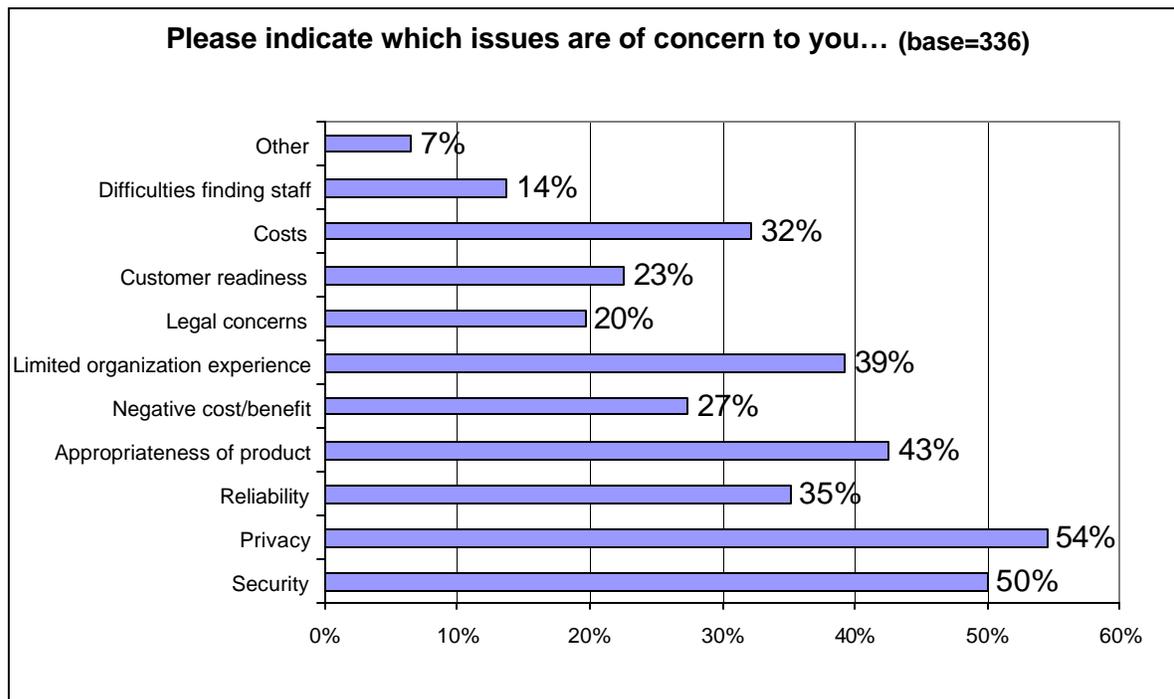
**Figure 16 – Capability of Website Ordering**



## E-Commerce – Incidence and Concerns

Organizations that have a website were asked about the concerns they had about accepting and processing customers online. Privacy (54%) and Security (50%) were the highest-rated concern. Appropriateness of their products for online sale (43%) and limited experience of their organization with e-business (39%) were next highest-rated concerns. This may indicate that with some coaching and demonstrations, these SMEs might see that almost any product can be sold in an online marketplace.

**Figure 17– E-commerce Concerns**



In 2001, 6% of Canadian small businesses were selling goods and services online, compared with 12% of medium-sized firms and 15% of large firms. The number one barrier cited by Canadian SMEs was that they believed their product did not lend itself well to e-commerce (48%)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> "Embracing E-business: Does Size Matter?" Statistics Canada (2002)

## SME Plans for Training

The second part of the IT Study concentrated on the need for training as well as the preferred timing for training. In order to provide a comparison to some independent research that was done recently in the area of SME needs for training, the following is put forward as a comparison to the PEI IT Study. This national study done by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in May 2002 ([www.cfib.ca](http://www.cfib.ca)) found the following preferences for training when they surveyed a sample of their membership.

- What types of training do you find to be the most effective? (Select as many as apply) (Responses 1357)

Tutoring with another staff member	64%
One-to-one tutoring with a trainer	53%
Workshops/seminars	42%
Classroom courses	26%
Booklets- information sheets	14%
CD-Rom training	10%
Via web	9%
None	1%

- Which organizations/institutions do you find to be the best providers for training? (Select one) (Responses 1358)

Private sector	
trainers/consultants	40%
Product suppliers	30%
Colleges, universities	15%
Other	14%
Government agencies	2%

- What skills is your business interested in improving in its employees? (Select as many as apply) (Responses 1358)

Technical skills	62%
Customer service skills	60%
Computer skills	53%
Marketing skills	44%
Business management skills	40%
Communication/writing skills	32%
E-commerce/Internet skills	24%
Other	10%

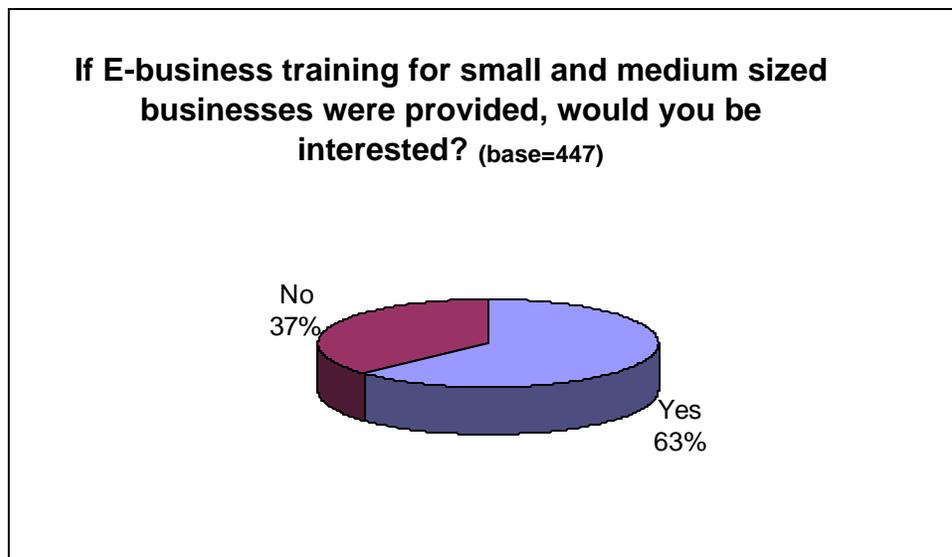
- What are some of the reasons you may have difficulty training? (Select as many as apply) (Responses 1338)

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Cannot afford employees to take time off for training	59%
Training costs are too high	45%
Institutions don't provide the specific training my business needs	38%
Employees not willing to put in time for training	27%
Employees' salary expectations after training are too high	15%
Training benefits are too low for my business	14%
Other	13%
Don't know how to provide formal training	9%

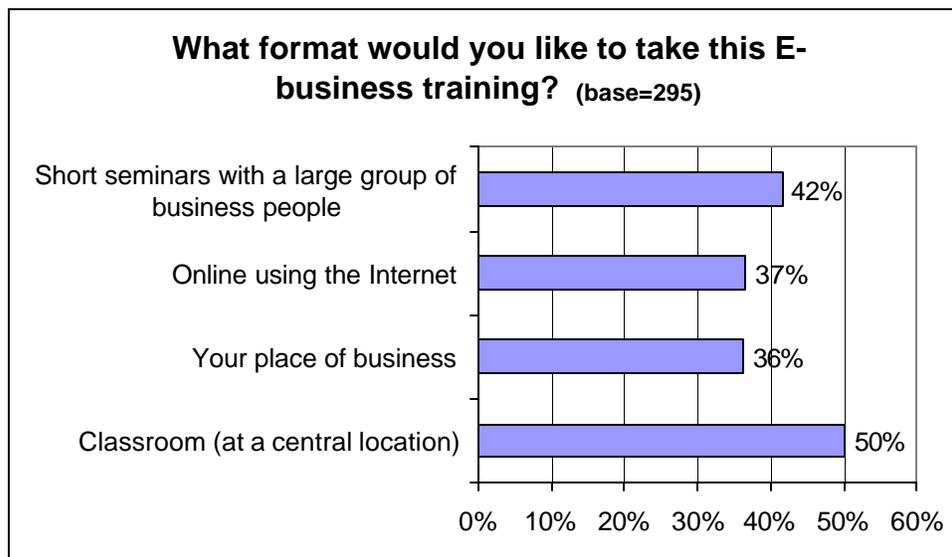
In the PEI IT Study a large majority (63%) of the SMEs that took part in the study indicated that they would like to take training in order to make their organization more accessible through an electronic business environment. This is a clear indication that the need for training is strong and that this need is presently going unfulfilled.

**Figure 18– Interested in Training**



One very encouraging and somewhat surprising outcome of this study was that 37% of respondents would take training online. Although classroom training still remains the most popular 50%, respondents did indicate that they would also attend short seminars (42%), and host the training at their place of business (36%).

**Figure 19– Format of Training**



Canadians are furthering their educational efforts through online courses, an Ipsos-Reid report<sup>2</sup> reveals. Based on 2,000 interviews via telephone and Internet, the survey indicated that 59 percent of the Canadian respondents were likely to take an online course in the future.

The Ipsos-Reid survey revealed that 26 percent have already searched the Internet for online courses, and have either taken an online course (8 percent), or have taken an in-person course that includes a significant online component (7 percent). Furthermore, 90 percent of the group that have already taken courses online said that they would recommend it to others mainly because it saved them a significant amount of time, it improved their employability, and it provided them with a means to take courses they likely wouldn't have taken otherwise.

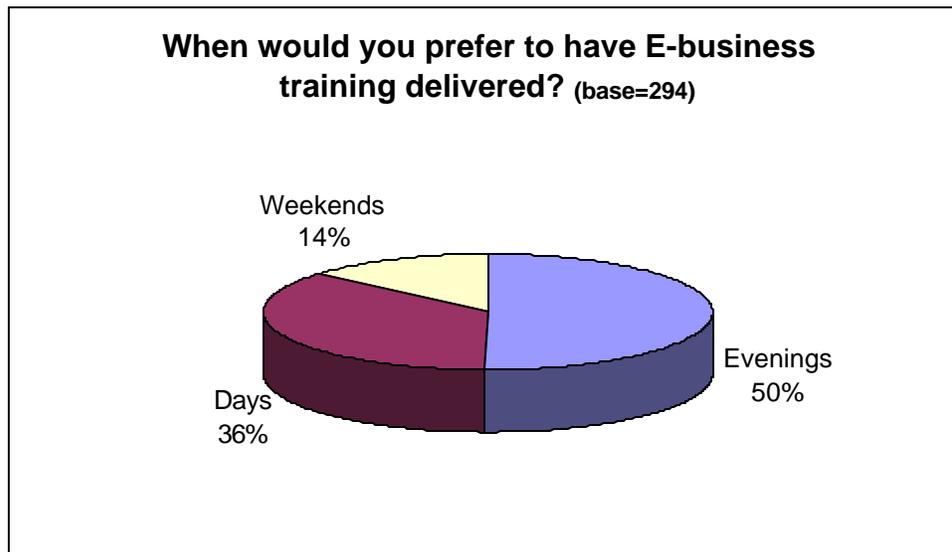
The Internet has impacted those who prefer more traditional offline education too. Almost one-quarter (24 percent) of those surveyed have searched the Web to find in-person educational courses at traditional institutions, and 82 percent indicate they would be likely to use the Internet as a background information gathering resource for traditional offline educational opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ipsos-reid.com/> (July 15 2002)

The proliferation of Internet students is evident at Athabasca University, a Canadian distance education and online university that has doubled its enrolments over a six-year period to 22,000 students per year. Athabasca University's Class of 2002 included 678 graduates, up from 542 in 2001, and four times larger than the Class of 1994's 163 graduates. In addition to degrees, in the past year the University conferred 524 advanced graduate diplomas, university certificates, and university diplomas, bringing the total number of credentials to 1202, up nearly 400 from 2001.

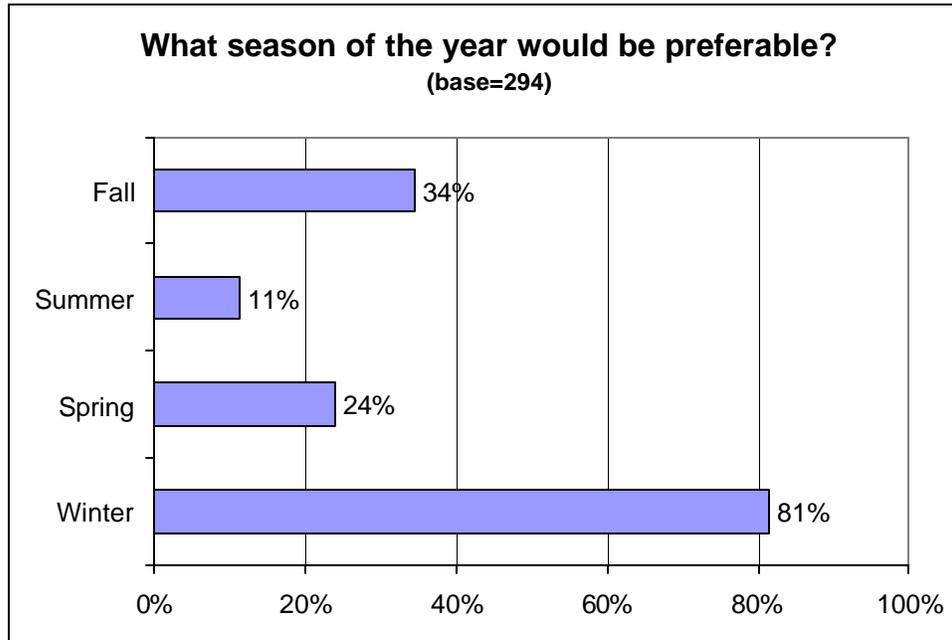
The PEI IT Study found that the most popular timing for training was also predictable considering that most respondents were small self-employed businesses; they did indicate that they would prefer to have training in the evenings (50%). The second and third choices were daytime training at 36% and weekends at 14%.

Figure 20– Timing for Training



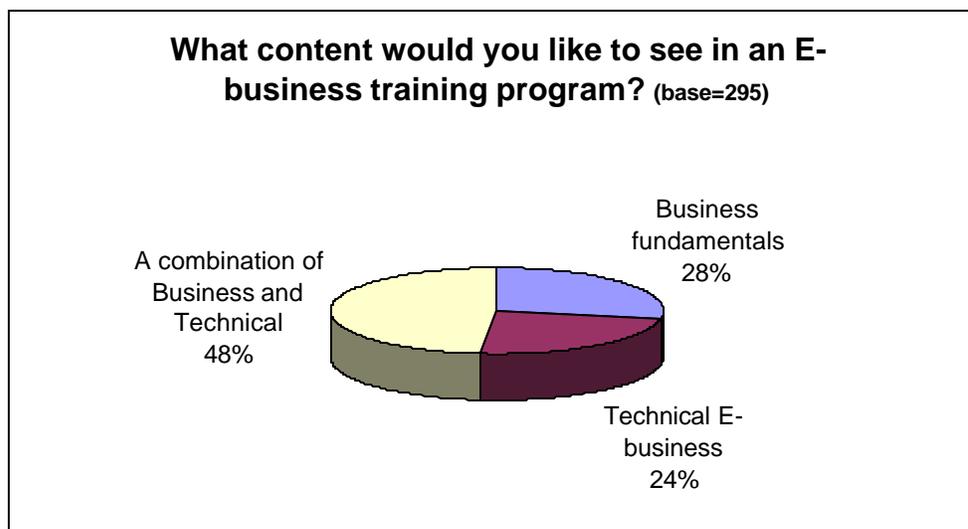
Equally predictable was the season of the year that this training should take place. Considering the seasonal nature of the PEI primary industries of fishing, farming, and tourism, the most popular season was winter at 81%. Fall was the second most popular choice at 34%, with Spring and Summer the least popular.

Figure 21– Season for Training



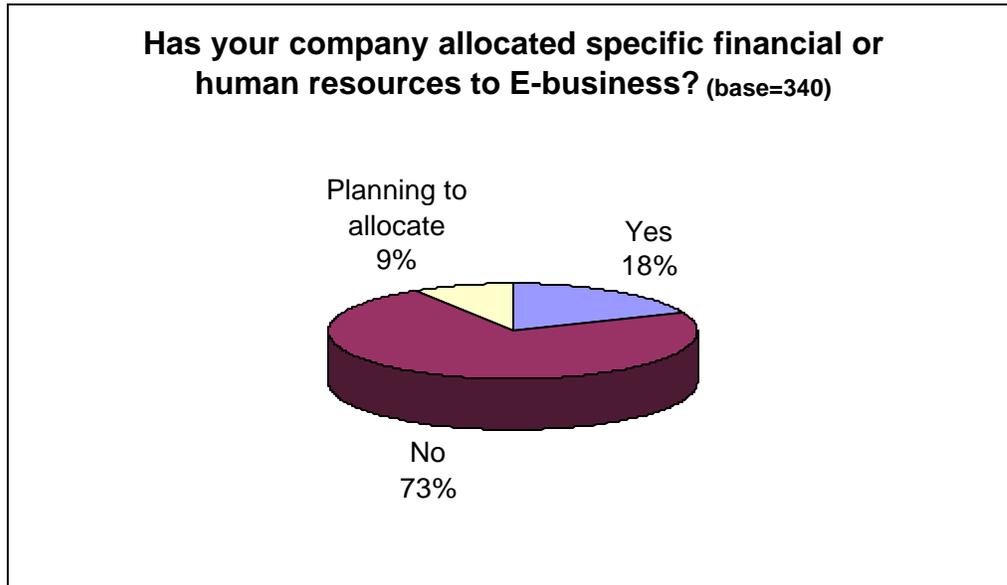
Participants in the study also indicated a very high level of interest in course focused on a combination of business and technical content (48%). Surprisingly, participants ranked technical courses last at 24%, while 28% would like to see courses that contained business fundamentals such as marketing and accounting for small business.

Figure 22– Content of Training



When asked if SMEs had allocated either financial or human resources to developing e-business capabilities, an overwhelming majority said no (73%). The remaining 27% had already allocated or are planning to allocate in order to support their e-business capabilities.

Figure 23– Funding for E-business



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## **General Comments**

In the last question on the survey respondents were asked to make comments and a total of 58 participants in the study made further comments as to the subject of e-business training and also general comments on the survey. These comments are contained in the following table.

We don't have access to high speed service - we are on Island Tel's waiting list but they have no idea as to the time frame for availability in our area.

All "e-business" is done through our head office

Although our company has a web site, it is a national initiative and is looked after in central Canada. We do not have a local site for our local business units, but are looking at the possibilities and where we fit in.

As a crown corporation our website serves as public education only...we have no product to market.

As dairy and beef farmers we do not use computers for any farm business. If our teenagers farm I can see them using it for business in years to come.

As my business is consulting, I use the Internet to do research, and to link with colleagues. I do not expect to conduct transactions related to sale of my work online, hence did not answer question 17 above. I might put up a website with published documents, links to my work and so on but this is not a priority for me.

B&B inquiries come increasing via internet.

I keep looking for new ideas to make our website more accessible (not gimmicks to make it "fancier".)

Bring it on

Course should be centralized but across a few locations to cut down some travel time. e-business is a great idea to promote the business.

E-business is not something I am excited about because it promotes less and less human contact. Sounds old fashion? Maybe, but think of what a consumer really is, and decide if personal contact is more desirable than electronic media. I prefer human contact.

Efficient web design, e-business and business fundamentals using a dial-up connection, or being accessed by others with a dial up connection.

Email Marketing is becoming our key source of marketing. We are now sending out to over 1400 email addresses our travel specials. It works.

For an incentive prize it is odd you have chose a non-pei company. I believe in supporting local business.

For Question # 2 - How many employees (on average) does your business have? - I answered between 50 and 100 because that was as high as your survey went. We currently have almost 600 employees here at On-Line Support.

Good luck with your project Brian!

Good Luck!!!!

Good questions... Good Survey

Have a great day!

High-speed internet service is essential. Many Island businesses do not have access. How did you get my name and address for this survey?

I am frustrated by the fact that I can't access high speed internet in rural PEI. Also found the process of getting a website designed very frustrating. I think there is a need for a workshop as to how to get a website designed. There must be some simple guidelines depending on the kind of business you want to promote via the web as well as guidelines as to how to pick a web site designer.

I assume you got my name from a student at UPEI who used me for her project. I have no problem but should have been told that we could be used for other things. Just a comment.

I can appreciate your offer to win a 500.00 gift certificate from a business supply depot, but you would probably create more excitement if you gave a gift certificate for 500.00 from a reputable, tasteful restaurant. We always buy supplies anyway; taking staff out for an evening may have been more enticing. Just a thought! I would be nice to see the profits stay local rather than head to USA. Have a great day!

I don't see a need for e-commerce with external customers, as it is not compatible with my sector of activities. However, I do have needs for internal and external knowledge management.

I have filled this out as proprietor of a consulting firm I operate. I wear other hats for other businesses, but felt this one was most appropriate. I also am President of EasTech, which of course has an interest in being a service provider for e training.

I know there are many benefits from the internet - we just don't have expertise in this area at our place of business.

I see no future for small agricultural business.

I wasn't quite sure how to answer #2 because we are a branch operation i.e. there are 3 employees here in this office but the overall company has 380.

I would be interested in any type of seminar/training that would make my job easier.

I would like to see a store set up for grocery shopping on-line. I don't know what category this would fall into. Also, I would like a copy of the results of this survey.

I would mostly be interested in learning to use internet for learning different topics (for education purposes mainly) my business is small not likely going to use a lot for my business. Find hard to get time to learn to use it.

Interesting survey. I would be interested in seeing the final results and where the small business focus is headed. Thank you.

Internet options are being used by the business and consumer population (like it or not) you either have to be onboard this technology or not. We have chosen to get onboard.

MY BUSINESS BADLY NEEDS TRAINING IN COMPUTER, (SO FAR SELF TRAINED ON COMPUTER) SIMPLY ACCOUNTING COURSE FOR MY ACCOUNTING PROGRAM, WEB PAGE INFORMATION, HOW TO SET UP AND MAINTAIN AND CHANGE ON MY OWN. ANY COURSE I TAKE WOULD HAVE TO HAVE HANDS ON TRAINING. MY BIGGEST PROBLEM IS TO FIND ANYONE WHO HAS A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF MY PARTICULAR BUSINESS. I HAVE A LOT OF FRUSTATION WHEN I GO TO PURCHASE ANY OF MY SOFTWARE OR COMPUTER EQUIPMENT, IT SEEMS YOU MUST HAVE A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF BOTH BECAUSE MANY WHO SELL PRODUCT ARE DOING JUST THAT, THEY ARE ONLY SELLING AND ONCE BOUGHT DO NOT WANT TO HELP YOU OUT ONCE SALE IS MADE. I FEEL ON P.E.I. THAT TO DO BUSINESS YOU MUST HAVE A GOOD HANDLE ON EVERYTHING, ACCOUNTING, SALES, ADVERTISING, BUYING, COMPUTERS ETC. I HAVE HAD A HARD TIME AND WOULD HAVE TAKEN COURSES HAD THE RIGHT TIMES AND COURSES BEEN AVAILABLE!!

NA

No too sure how E-Business applies to our business.

Our business is a non-profit that does advocacy and awareness type of work, therefore we do not have products that are purchased but rather receive requests for information, meetings, etc by way of E-mail.

Our business is dairy with a milk marketing board so using websites or email so sell product does not apply.

Our greatest concern with e-commerce is the degree of attempted fraudulent orders and the Credit Card company's lack of assistance in this matter. They should create a secure method of transaction for both the customer and the vendor.

Please contact me. I wish to discuss this survey in more detail with you. I'm also interested in the survey's results. Thank You! Contact me via Phone PLEASE!!

Set up as many free computer introduction courses as possible in own local area for e-mail, etc. People more likely to take course if offered locally and free of charge.

Small business owners are very busy ALL OF THE TIME. You would do well to offer in house training at the business location to allow for more participants, ie.employees and mgmt.

Some questions not applicable to a non profit (eg. we do not sell products - we provide free programs and services).

Thanks so much for providing me with an opportunity to think about e-business from this perspective!

The survey was pretty quick and straight forward questions

This service eliminates human interaction. a thing we were created for. Another thing to blame if something goes wrong.

This survey is most likely not relevant to my small family dairy and potato farm.

This survey may not have applied to us as we are a farming business. However we use simply accounting and are doing payroll, which is very helpful and quick. I'm sure we could use the internet more to keep up to date on developments in the farming business. I had some training but my husband hasn't. Maybe in the future we could learn more.

Training on maintaining the web site would be of interest. Each company has different areas where they would like some training.

Very important to have these sessions in both official languages English and French.

We are a farming business without a computer as of yet but do plan on purchasing one soon.

We are a municipality therefore some of the questions didn't apply as we don't supply a product for retail.

We are relatively new to email but have the necessary equipment to circulate its use (ie. printers, etc...) Farming partners need a bit of hands on use to familiarize themselves with Web sites that they profit from

We are very interested in this offer; we hope it will be offered during the winter months in evenings and days.

We currently have an individual working on re-designing our website. Within 3 months we should be quite an interactive site, with the ability to offer our members access to information on other member businesses, as well as provide relevant information, on-line surveys and interactive forms, and a site on which to purchase our Chamber Commemorative Coins. Our main difficulty is having a staff person maintain the site once the individual has finished the project. There is only one person on staff to maintain the site. It is ME, and as office manager, bookkeeper, and administrator, I am concerned with overextending myself with additional duties.

We don't plan to accept customer orders on-line but we would like to be contacted for our consulting and professional services.

While not practical for our firm to conduct business on-line (accounting & management consulting), it is of interest to many of our clients and therefore of interest to us.

### Focus Groups

Comments from the two focus groups were also very encouraging. These focus group meetings were held in Cardigan at the Eastech IT Centre and also in O'leary at the Futuretech West IT Centre. The following table contains the relevant comments from these meetings.

A need for HR courses, accounting courses, and database management.

Businesses are not aware of the benefits and flexibility of database management software

A need for science courses directed at the Agriculture industry (ie. Plant sciences)

A need for training courses dealing with the software used to map farmer's fields

Basic computer skills are lacking; people don't know how to effectively use a computer

A need for an intermediary computer course for individuals who have acquired basic computer skills through work but would like to optimize their use of computers – not simply a course in Word Perfect or Windows

On-line course offerings and courses being offered locally are much more feasible than courses being offered in Summerside or Charlottetown

A course that would clarify the process of buying a computer would be beneficial

People might be confusing "e-business" with "e-commerce"

Would be interested in a meeting with other businesses to see what kind of technology they are using. This might give institutions a better idea of what kind of training is needed

Could use training in POS, accounting packages, and time and attendance tracking

Would find a sharing session on maximizing the use of the Internet beneficial

E-commerce is in the foreseeable future for the company so any training in that area would be useful

Expressed a need to become more advanced with online ordering system

Interested in Student Connection program offered through Holland College

Computer training is not dictated by their head office; they are responsible internally for any computer training

Need for farmers to attend any kind of computer training it would have to be conducted in an environment that would be 'friendly' and comfortable to farmers (ie. A group of farmers together as opposed to a mix of business people).

Some of the more advanced farmers are using quite sophisticated technology to seed and fertilize their fields. This would produce a need for training as this technology becomes mainstream.

At present, the farmers guard their 'secret recipe' for the fertilizing of their fields to themselves. Once legislation is put into place to track the different kinds and amounts of fertilizers being used by farmers a need will arise for computer training in this area as well.

Stated that any course offerings should be offered locally in the evenings during the winter months,

"I don't see how technology applies to retail?"

"Hardware stores have no need for a web page"

Expressed the view that communicating with customers via the web was more of a hassle than a benefit

Would be interested in having a sit down with other business owners to see what different kinds of technology they were employing in their businesses

Expressed that any training should be offered during the winter months

## **Conclusion**

This report has presented some convincing arguments that there is a huge opportunity for a training effort to be put forth by Holland College and UPEI. It is also clear that any such training would have to be carefully timed and delivered in a variety of formats. With the recent additions of three rural IT Centres on PEI as well as the Atlantic Technology Centre in Charlottetown, access to technology and high-speed networks is higher than it has ever been in this province. The next step for both institutions will be to take the lead role in delivering the training to Island businesses and to capitalize on the ubiquity of technology within the province.

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