



## **Opportunity Wales**

### **Background Information**

- Research conducted by NOP in April 2000 discovered that the take up of eCommerce business solutions by Welsh companies was extremely low. It indicated that the businesses were aware of the importance of eCommerce, but that they were unsure of the potential benefits and how to achieve them. This confirmed earlier DTI research findings of low connectivity levels in Wales, which in November 1999 provided the catalyst for the creation of the Better Business Wales partnership.
- The partnership, initiated by the Wales TUC, BT and HSBC Bank, with the backing of the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW), was formed to respond to the challenge of ensuring our businesses have all of the information available to them to fully understand eCommerce and quality support mechanisms to enable successful implementation. The additional partners are Cardiff University's eCommerce Innovation Centre (eCIC), University of Glamorgan, University of Wales Bangor, Prince's Trust, RNID, ELWa, WDA, Wales Enterprise and the Welsh Local Government Association representing all of the Objective 1 Local Authorities.
- The aim was to design and develop a pragmatic initiative, based on a proven approach, that

would change attitudes towards eCommerce through helping companies understand the tangible benefits it could bring to the individual business in terms of efficiencies, growth and profit.

- An application for EU funding under the Objective One programme was submitted in July 2000 and was approved by WEFO (Wales European Funding Office) in February 2001.
- The £21m initiative is co-funded with £10.7m being provided by Europe and the remainder being contributed by the Partner organisations and the National Assembly for Wales.
- A not for profit company, Better Business Wales (Holdings) Ltd, was created in December 2000 to manage the initiative with representation from the Private Sector, Voluntary Sector, Education Sector, Local Authorities, and other Public Sector bodies.
- The overall objectives of the initiative are to promote positive attitudes towards business growth, market orientation and usage of eCommerce among businesses in the Objective One assisted region of Wales resulting in increased prosperity and employment.
- Companies located in the Objective One areas of Wales will be eligible for financial support and practical services to assist them in the implementation of eCommerce solutions. The programme is to be branded Opportunity Wales or Cyfle Cymru.
- The focus of the programme will be the provision of one-to-one support to businesses from a trained and trusted e-Commerce adviser to be delivered by trusted regional and sector implementation partners. This will be based on the model designed and proven by eCIC which has realised significant benefits for the businesses supported to date in terms of growth, efficiencies and profits – and even business survival.
- Cardiff University's eCommerce Innovation Centre (eCIC) will build the knowledge base to include: adviser profiles; training materials and methodology; case studies; best practice; 'how do I?' guides; basic and complex e-commerce application guides; up to the minute industry eCommerce news, legal & tax implications, measures of success; etc.
- The gathering of this information is a core requirement necessary for the delivery of high quality training of advisers (workshops and shadowing at the customer's premises), and to provide high quality and detailed portal content for individual businesses to access directly.
- The expert knowledge within the eCIC Centre of Excellence will be disseminated across the Objective One area of Wales in the form of Satellite Centres to be located in Bangor, Haverfordwest and Colwyn Bay.
- The eCommerce Business Portal, to be designed and developed by BT, will be an electronic gateway for Welsh businesses, and will create a trusted and 24 hour environment for them to fully exploit a wealth of information on e-commerce and how they can benefit from its use. This will also be an area for businesses participating in the programme to promote their Web presence.
- A Contact Centre will be delivered on University of Glamorgan premises to manage the customer contact and information service

- Three Adviser Service pilots are already underway with twelve trained advisers providing advice in the Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, and Objective 1 Gwent areas. A North Wales pilot will also commence in December 2001.
- All other support elements of the programme will be introduced early 2002.