

Antoniak's Secretariat is pinning much of its hopes on its website service called 2010 Commerce Centre for contractors and communities seeking Games-related opportunities. In a province where 95 per cent of all businesses are small (50 employees max) the challenge is to get them to figure out how to partner, bid and finance being a supplier. In the past, a few B.C. companies such as Culinary Expressions, Kootenay Knitting and Supergraphics scored as suppliers to the Olympic Games in Salt Lake City and Athens. But Games' suppliers are a very competitive international crowd accustomed to tough, anti-corruption scrutiny and global attention, warns Gordon Goodman, a member of the provincial Legacies campaign. "Many internationally experienced companies [from abroad] will be at the table seeking [2010] bids," and VANOC will take no risks on flimsy partnerships nor offer any special consideration to B.C. firms, Goodman told a Vancouver conference last year. The 2010 Winter Olympics will be wide open to free enterprise.

Case in point is the 2010 Commerce Centre website. It was originally created for free by Vancouver-based Telus, before Telus lost its bid to be the prime telecommunications supplier and a lead advertiser at the Games. The winner? Montreal's Bell Canada, whose bid topped \$200 million. Months later Telus was still licking its wounds and the website it built was still woefully short on advice on how to bid. Most of its links were to familiar government regulations and trade fair schedules, the government's outdated May 2004 strategies and a few Games-related construction announcements. The Secretariat and the government are fervently hoping that VANOC, all its contractors and Olympic teams, IOC advertisers and suppliers ranging from NBC to Coca Cola, Visa, Nike and General Motors will eventually post their huge personnel and material needs on the Commerce Centre website (*2010commercecentre.gov.bc.ca*). As of February 2005, VANOC was the only one to do so. "It is early. I remain optimistic," says Antoniak.

The state of Utah did too little to train local suppliers to win procurement contracts for the 2002 Salt Lake City Games and it lost big dollars, but Antoniak points to Sydney's success in 2000. Almost 80 per cent of the 2000 Summer Games procurement was met by Australian suppliers. But Vancouver isn't Sydney – Australia's economic engine, headquarters to most of the country's 50 banks and two-thirds of Australia's Asia-Pacific companies, and the arrival point for 60 per cent of all Oz-bound business travelers. Vancouver bidders will face intense competition from all over North America for 2010 contracts.

"The next six to eight months we'll be doing specific strategizing," said Antoniak. "But I think we're on the right track now. Athens was very impressed with how far ahead our thinking is."

Judging by other analyses, the government may be sidetracked, thinking too hard and doing too little. The year 2004 "is to do the planning, 2005 is to get your approvals and the next two years to get the project up and running – or by the latest at 2008," Games consultant David Hughes told business and government leaders in Vancouver last May. The key to generating new business is to define and build on unique local strengths resistant to offshore, low-cost competitors, Telus VP of government relations Gary Wilson told the same conference. "Just building infrastructure will not work. Every Olympic site built fabulous infrastructure, and economic activity post-Games did not proceed at the pace suggested by that infrastructure."

It takes six to eight years to seize an opportunity and spread it through the economy, says Hughes, a partner in North Vancouver's Community Vitality Enterprises, a business development promoter. Getting municipalities and firms to collaborate for Olympic procurement "has been a slower process than we expected," he said in December, although an Olympic sponsor recently funded Vitality's move into three communities. "I'd like to see more from the Secretariat too... more on the ground" in the way of helping municipalities use Games contracts as a lever for local development.

Annette Antoniak also acknowledges a potential crisis looming in skilled trades needed to build the sports facilities and everything else. The Games no longer represent the job stimulus they did when B.C. planned its Olympic bid four years ago. The economy has taken off and "all the 2010 numbers have become a small component of the overall job opening predictions for B.C.," according to economist Roslyn Kunin. There may be enough entry-level service people for the Games, but skilled managers and skilled trades to build the facilities will become highly expensive. "We now have less than five years [to the games] and it traditionally takes four years to train an apprentice," says Kunin. "I'm getting worried that we're playing catch-up already. I hope that like the tip of an iceberg, there's a lot more below the surface that is evident. But I don't see it yet."

And finally, there is the business community's role in turning the 2010 Games into a business opportunity for B.C. Aside from Bell Canada, which recently donated \$1 million to city social programs in Vancouver's shabby Downtown Eastside, private sector