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Ottawa Business Centre

Posted Monday, April 2, 2001

Minister Martin secures plans of security firms

By *Michael Hammond, Ottawa Business Journal*

Ottawa's online security technology firms could be the biggest winners as the federal government pursues its 2004 target to bring the public sector into the information age.

That was Finance Minister Paul Martin's message last week as he addressed hundreds of public and private sector delegates at the Crossing Boundaries summit at the Ottawa Congress Centre.

"Ultimately, e-government is much more than government online," he said. "We can combine access to multiple databases to provide more complete service tailored to individuals' needs. But (the question is) how we make this compatible with information security and the fundamental right to privacy."

Martin's words are music to the ears of Ottawa's online security firms such as Entrust Technologies, Chrysalis-ITS and Kyberpass Corp.

"I'm pleased to see security recognized as a priority because it's really important," says Entrust chief technology officer Brian O'Higgins. "If you look at e-commerce companies, the number one concern from their customers is security. With things like medical documents, for example, you need a high degree of security."

Robert Lendvai, vice-president of marketing for Kyberpass, says Martin's remarks reflect the government's strong commitment to online security.

"The government has had a PKI (public key infrastructure) program for some time," he says. "The potential to protect the government's transactions is a huge opportunity."

Blair Canavan, vice-president of sales for Chrysalis-ITS, agrees.

"Because the Internet itself is not inherently secure, federal governments have defined and demonstrated commitments to the highest security standards by following best practices and using products (like ours), which are federally validated."

Last week, Winnipeg South MP and conference co-chair Reg Alcock said the e-government initiative could translate into billions of dollars in contracts over time.

Most of the work, he said, could be done by Ottawa companies.

As a start, the government announced at the conference that it will commit \$120 million to the e-government initiative for the coming fiscal year. The Liberal government has committed to bringing the federal bureaucracy into the information age by 2004.

Between now and then, O'Higgins says Ottawa's security firms will be in a good position to increase the number of contracts they have with the federal government.

Both Lendvai and O'Higgins say the conference doesn't mean the government will be handing out lots of e-security transactions in the coming months, but the agenda has been set.

"The trend is ongoing," says Lendvai. "PKI as a core technology (for security) is the best technology that can be implemented. The Canadian government is really taking a look at public key cryptography."

Higgins says the existing relationships that local companies have with the government will be beneficial when new initiatives are unveiled, but he says nothing should be taken for granted.

"Every (project) is a new thing," he says. "Every (time) it's a new game. Every time they have a new project, they want to get the most for their money."

Entrust's technology was used last year and in 1999 to secure the bidding process for the federal online wireless spectrum

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Privacy

auction. Kyberpass is working with the Ministry of Health on a PKI project among others.

Chrysalis-ITS works with the Bank of Canada, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and other departments.

In the near future, the government could be issuing Canadian citizens smart cards that will include driving records, health information and all other pertinent data.

This is exciting technology, Lendvai says, but it will need a high level of security technology to implement, much more than a typical B2B site.

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