

Management and Technology Education Helps Modernize Serbian Businesses and Government

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER NAME

Serbia Chamber of Commerce

INDUSTRY

Public Sector

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

- Promote economic growth and create new jobs in Serbia
- Help small businesses, state-run enterprises, and local governments understand how to use ICT to transform service delivery and operate efficiently and competitively

SOLUTION

Provide sponsors, training, and additional support with the Cisco Business Essentials course

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Provided essential ICT-related strategy and management education to more than 50 small businesses and government organizations via an initial pilot
- Helped students from a broad spectrum of organizations develop business plans to successfully incorporate ICT into their businesses
- Created a successful program and delivery infrastructure that expands to students across the country

Searching for ways to increase employment and fuel economic growth, Serbian business and government leaders wanted to modernize the country's economy. After a decade of war and turmoil, however, Serbia lagged in information and communications technology (ICT) utilization and management skills, particularly among small businesses and local governments. The Cisco® Internet Business Solutions Group worked with the Serbia Chamber of Commerce and other important stakeholders to provide an innovative ICT and management education program. Today, the program has trained individuals from dozens of Serbian small businesses to municipal governments, and is helping transform the way organizations across the country use ICT in their business.

Business Challenge

Since emerging from the situation in Kosovo in the late 1990s, Serbia has faced significant challenges, both in creating jobs for its citizens and in modernizing its economy to compete in the information age. As the country strives to become a member of the European Union, one issue that has hampered this process is a lack of ICT adoption among Serbian citizens and businesses. Today, just 33 percent of Serbians use the Internet—both in business and in private homes—and only 1 percent of citizens have broadband. While many Serbian business executives and government workers are familiar with ICT solutions, the country's IT infrastructure is inadequate, and the cost of broadband is prohibitively expensive.

"We have a great need in Serbia, particularly among small and medium-size enterprises, to increase productivity and enable much greater collaboration among export-oriented businesses," says Bojan Lalic, professor, University of Novi Sad, Serbia. "New technologies, e-business, and networking are all crucial for our economic growth, but we cannot achieve these goals without proper use of ICT."



Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG)

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Bojan Lalic, Professor,
University of Novi Sad
Serbia

While modernizing private industry is the most pressing challenge, a true economic transformation also requires changes in the way government operates. The state still plays a large role in many Serbian industries and services. To stimulate and support economic growth among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Serbian municipal governments and government agencies also needed to modernize the way they conducted business.

"State agencies have a role in not only improving their own business processes to better serve citizens, but in laying a foundation for greater technology integration among businesses," says Lalic. "In many local governments and agencies, however, we have a lack of infrastructure and a low level of ICT usage."

Compounding these problems, Serbian service providers historically have focused on the consumer market and on large enterprises, offering few solutions and programs aimed at serving SMEs.

Solution

Lalic and business leaders in the Serbia Chamber of Commerce recognized that to create a thriving national economy, they needed to change the way Serbian businesses and government organizations view and use ICT. To do this, they needed to provide business owners and government officials with not only an appreciation of the ways technology can affect business operations but also with practical skills to plan and execute technology implementations successfully. They turned to the Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) for help.

Cisco IBSG had developed a Business Essentials course for emerging-market countries as part of the Cisco iExecutive Education Program. The program was designed to help leaders and managers develop the strategy and management skills necessary to modernize their organizations. Based on Cisco's reputation as a worldwide technology leader, and the success the program had achieved in several countries, the Serbia Chamber of Commerce chose IBSG to help pilot a new initiative to address Serbia's challenges.

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Working with the Serbia Chamber of Commerce, IBSG and the local Cisco team reached out to key stakeholders in the public and private sectors and identified the ideal educational partners to deliver the program. Cisco IBSG then helped train instructors at Novi Sad University, launching a series of Business Essentials pilots.

The pilots drew participants from a broad range of organizations across Serbia, including financial institutions, IT vendors, state-controlled companies, business-graduate schools, and public sector entities. These students received extensive training in the strategic and practical considerations for investing in ICT. By the conclusion of the course, each participant developed a detailed business plan for implementing new ICT projects in their organization.

Business Results

Today, the Serbia Chamber of Commerce and its delivery partners have successfully delivered the Business Essentials course to more than 50 Serbian SMEs, state-owned enterprises, and local governments. The program has been well received. "In each of our pilots we have seen a high level of enthusiasm and dedication among the students," says Lalic.

In the first series of pilots, participants developed ready-to-implement business plans for:

- A Web portal for a municipal economic development office
- A public wireless Internet solution for a popular tourist destination
- An IP contact center for a municipal government's building directorate
- A digital management system for managing investor licenses
- An integrated hospital database and distribution system for a pharmaceutical company
- A healthcare messaging and information system for a local hospital
- An Internet-enabled workflow and purchasing system for an electrical utility

While not all of these projects have been implemented yet, the program has had a profound effect on the organizations that participated in the pilots.

"Our business requires very efficient and precise management of a large volume of information," says Ljiljana Ili, managing director of Zesium mobile GmbH, a developer of wireless and mobility software. "Clear, timely communication with our clients, buyers, and end users is essential. Our students who participated in the Business Essentials program were able to envision new projects that will apply advanced technologies to improve our business efficiency and effectiveness. The concrete business cases they developed have led to three planned projects for our company."

Building on the success of the pilots, the Serbia Chamber of Commerce and the program's delivery partners have expanded the program to reach more SMEs and municipal governments across Serbia. With the strong curriculum and delivery infrastructure developed with IBSG, they will be able to replicate the pilot's success for thousands of other participants. Over time, the sponsors believe that the program will help create a new culture of ICT usage in Serbia and promote a more consistent and modern approach to ICT investment.

"New technologies, especially ICT, will help Serbian industries expand more quickly and efficiently in the global market," says Djuro Vojnovic, director, Centre for IT and e-Business, Serbia Chamber of Commerce. "The Business Essentials program demonstrated the importance of education in the process of applying new ICT knowledge in Serbia and opened new perspectives for the course's participants."

Next Steps

The Business Essentials course and the iExecutive Education Program are part of the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute (CEI), which is being established in Central and Eastern Europe. The Entrepreneur Institute forms public and private partnerships with governments, nongovernmental organizations, and educational institutions to deliver entrepreneurial education; build a community of support across new and existing businesses; and connect participants with mentors, lending organizations, and peers using network technology.

In the coming months, Professor Lalic and the University of Novi Sad plan to work with CEI to collaborate on developing new materials tailored specifically to the needs of Serbian learners and to expand the education program throughout Serbia and neighboring countries. In addition, the Serbia Chamber of Commerce, University of Novi Sad, and CEI will cooperate to build public and private partnerships to support a sustainable program that addresses the business and government needs of Serbia.

More Information

The Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), the global strategic consulting arm of Cisco, helps Global Fortune 500 companies and public organizations transform the way they do business—first by designing innovative business processes, and then by integrating advanced technologies into visionary roadmaps that improve customer experience and revenue growth.

For further information about IBSG, visit <http://www.cisco.com/go/ibsg>



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