

4

HOSPITALITY FIRST WEBSITE – FORMERLY THE TOURISM CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAM

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends:

- 1. Receipt of the presentation by Brenda McGowan, Manager, Business Development, Economic Strategy and Tourism, Planning and Development Services; and**
- 2. Adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated November 23, 2011, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report is circulated by the Regional Clerk to the local municipalities, York Region public and catholic school boards, Chambers of Commerce and Board of Trade for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the transformation of the Tourism Customer Service Program into Hospitality First, an interactive website.

3. BACKGROUND

The Tourism Customer Service Program (TCSP) piloted in 2008 was designed as an in-house training program initially for small to medium sized tourism businesses but was also embraced by larger corporations. The TCSP consisted of a Leadership Manual and three training modules built around the Character Community/Character Matters principals and included a variety of resources to assist business operators to embrace a service orientated culture and train employees on how to deliver a superior level of customer service. The nine local municipalities, the Regional Municipality of York, the York Region School Boards and the Province of Ontario have all embraced the Character Matters philosophy justifying taking this approach in creating the customer service program.

In January 2009 Regional Council received the Tourism Customer Service Program Update report which provided an overview of the program pilots facilitated with industry stakeholders and the findings from the pilot sessions. Based on the positive feedback provided from York Region tourism businesses, the academia sector, students, and recognition from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and external stakeholders from jurisdictions beyond York Region, the report also recommended that Regional Council authorize the Economic Strategy and Tourism Branch to submit a funding application to the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to take the TCSP to the next level.

This report provides an update on the successful procurement of funding and the process for the evolution of the existing Customer Service Program to the Hospitality First toolkit and interactive website.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

A need was identified to have resources in one central location that address service delivery, labour force and tourism/hospitality business development

In preliminary funding discussions with MTCU, there was an agreement around enhancing the existing needs-based customer service module to promote service quality in the market. These discussions identified the lack of a central location for the provision of resources to assist tourism businesses and address adjustments in the labour force and the sustainability of the tourism and hospitality as an integral business sector were additional factors that needed to be addressed. It was determined that the development of an innovative interactive online toolkit was required and in 2009 MTCU approved funding in the amount of \$395,102 to retain staff and commence the development of this website.

A request for proposal process was facilitated in 2009 to retain the services of the Ontario Tourism Educational Council and edCetra Training Inc., experts in hospitality training and development of an educational interactive website. An Advisory Group consisting of 17 leaders in the academia, provincial government, social service agencies and tourism businesses was established in 2010 to provide guidance to the project deliverables.

Through focus group research and industry engagement, the project became known as the Hospitality First website, a name vetted through the Advisory Committee and the MTCU funding organization. The name Hospitality First is based on the objective that the hospitality industry becomes your first choice as a career, hospitality is integral to your business sustainability and growth and hospitality delivery is a reflection of customer service excellence.

An interactive online toolkit was created comprised of three distinct components - careers, business development and customer service delivery

The Hospitality First website is comprised of three distinct components. Some of the resources are available to everyone who accesses the web site www.hospitalityfirst.ca and other sections of the site are password protected and require a simple registration process. The password protected areas provide key performance measures by tracking business engagements and the number of participants who register for the interactive customer service delivery module.

The first section positions the hospitality industry as a lifetime or second career choice, the second section provides development resources for the business owner and the third is an interactive module on how to deliver superior customer service.

The Career section promotes the hospitality industry as an industry of choice, with videos, information on the types of careers available and the educational path to reach your career goals. There is a self assessment tool, tips for writing resumes, cover letters and successful interviews.

The Business Section provides information on empowering staff, hiring foreign trained professionals, implementing reward and recognition programs, customer complaint processes and links to external organizations that can provide additional resources pertaining to legislation including The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and additional training organizations.

The third section incorporated the three training modules from the initial Customer Service Program into six interactive modules that demonstrate service excellence delivery through videos, audio, knowledge quizzes and provides a variety of supporting job aids for the employee. Upon successful completion of the customer service module, a personalized Certificate of Recognition is available for the participant or business to print. The provision of this Certificate was identified as a key benefit for students and employees to demonstrate to potential employers that they recognize the importance of how superior customer service supports business sustainability and growth and that they have the understanding of how to deliver superior customer service.

Five pilot sessions were held to vet the Hospitality First interactive modules

Given the complexity of the interactive customer service delivery module, five pilot sessions with over 50 participants were facilitated in November 2010, to ensure the content:

- Was clear, easy to follow, and relevant to the participants role
- Tools provided assisted with understanding delivering excellent customer service

- Audio, video, interactive activities and knowledge checks functioned in accordance with the web-based content.

Participants included York Region public and catholic school board educators, business owners, high school students, Seneca College, York Region Corporate Learning, Advisory Committee members and MTCU.

Pilot sessions lasted approximately 90 to 120 minutes and upon completion, participants were asked to participate in a focus group. Questions regarding the functionality, content and navigation of the module were asked. Recommendations provided from the focus group sessions were incorporated to enhance the customer service module's performance and content.

Additional outreach was facilitated with tourism businesses and human resource departments to vet the content of the Careers and Business Development modules and to identify additional resources for inclusion.

An educators' bus tour raised awareness to the potential careers in the hospitality sector

On October 29, the Region partnered with the Workforce Planning Board to host 66 York Region school board educators on a bus tour to bring awareness of the potential careers in the hospitality sector. The tour included presentations from the Human Resource Departments of McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kingbridge Centre, Canada's Wonderland and Dave and Buster's. This tour provided an opportunity to promote the Hospitality First website and commence relationship building to engage the interest of the schools boards in the delivery of the Hospitality First program through the school curriculum. Several bus tour participants participated in the focus group sessions and have expressed interest for further involvement once the website is officially launched.

Hospitality First launch and marketing activities are planned

The Hospitality First program was to be completed in 2010, however with the municipal election, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities agreed to extend the program for three months beginning January through March 2011. During this time, an official launch is proposed for late January 2011 and an aggressive marketing, media relations and promotional campaign will be undertaken to build awareness and engage business involvement.

The Hospitality First program will also be featured at the annual York Small Business Enterprise Centre annual Bridges event scheduled for February 4, 2011. Marketing activities proposed to bring awareness of the Hospitality First program and effectively reach students, potential employees, the business community include local advertising, promotions and presentations to local municipalities, the four York Region Small

Business Enterprise Centres, chambers of commerce, board of trade, school boards, social agencies, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and the new provincial regional tourism organizations. As well, outreach to the Ministry of Education to bring awareness of Hospitality First as an option for customer service training through the school curriculum will be initiated.

Going Forward

Continued management, updates, enhancements, and promotions to increase outreach and build participation and business engagement for the Hospitality First program has been identified in the 2011 York Region business development and tourism work programs.

As part of the contract with the web developer, edCetra Training Inc., they will supply training on the content management system, search engine optimization consulting, web site hosting and maintenance for a one year period after which time the hosting agreement can be renewed on terms and fees as to be agreed upon or can be transferred to a hosting facility of York Region's choice.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The Hospitality First Program supports the Vibrant Economy, Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region and Responding to the Needs of Our Resident goals identified in Vision 2026.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding for the development of the Tourism Customer Service Program initiatives to date were included in the 2010 York Region Economic Development operating budget and have been supported by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities in the amount of \$395,102. Funding for additional enhancements and outreach activities have been identified in the 2011 Economic Strategy and Tourism budget allocations.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Hospitality First web provides a variety of local municipal impacts and benefits including the provision of:

- Fundamental resources to enhance the overall appeal and image of the local municipalities as a viable tourist destination dedicated to the delivery of service excellence.
- Tools for the business community to empower staff to enhance the customer experience resulting in customer loyalty and increases in new visitation which contribute to positive economic stimulus and business growth.

- Resources supporting tourism career development, tourism business growth and encourage tourism entrepreneurship.

7. CONCLUSION

The new Hospitality First website and customer service course is another great tool for all small to medium size businesses in York Region to help provide quality customer service, resulting in business development due to the economic benefits of customer loyalty and increases in visitation. Even larger corporations who participated in the program development agreed that components of the modules would enhance their employees understanding of the importance of delivering service excellence. It will also pave the way for a stronger hospitality sector in York Region by encouraging people to consider a career or second career in the industry and helping them reach their goals. For more information on this report, please contact Brenda McGowan, Program Manager, Tourism Development at (905) 830-4444 Ext 1553 or Doug Lindeblom, Director Economic Strategy and Tourism at (905) 830-4444 Ext. 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.



Invest in York and Hospitality First Website Demonstration

Presentation to Planning &
Economic Development
Committee

Doug Lindeblom and Brenda McGowan
January 12, 2011

Website Demonstration

Invest in York



www.investinyork.ca

Hospitality First



www.hospitalityfirst.ca



Hospitality First



Project History

Ministry of Tourism – Premier Ranked Tourism Destination Research,
York Region Long Term Tourism Destination Development Strategy

Tourism Customer Service Program piloted in 2008

Advisory Committee and Industry consultations

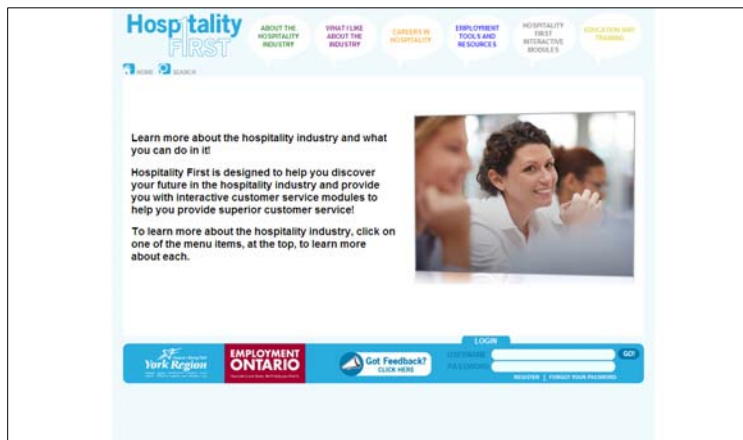
Funding partner Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in 2009

Retention of experts in hospitality training and interactive web site
development

HospitalityFirst.ca

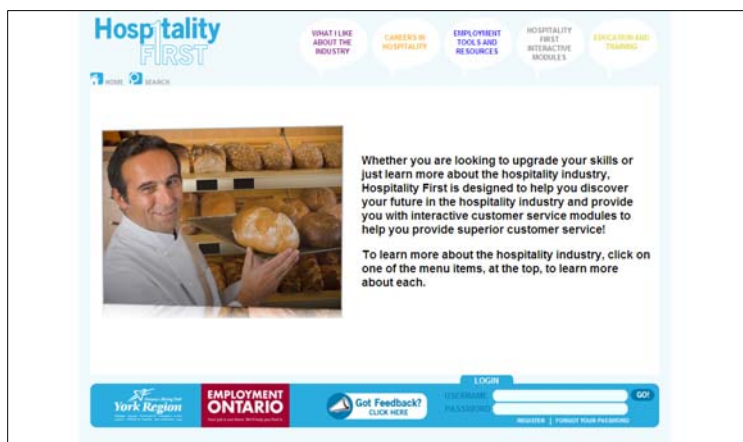
Pilot sessions and Educators Bus Tour in November 2010

Interested in Joining Hospitality Industry



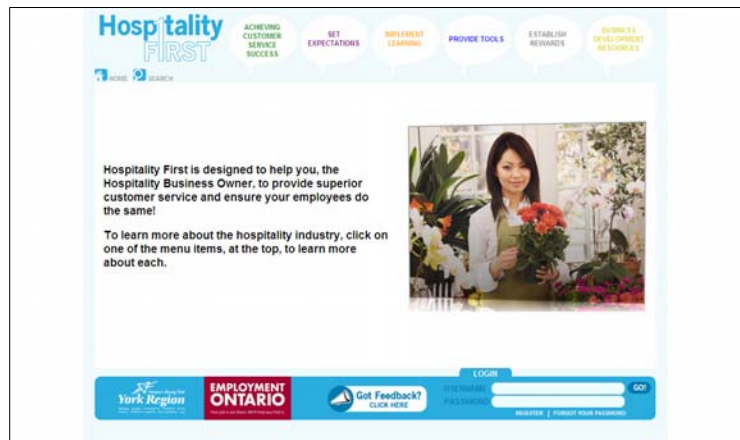
Learn More

Looking to Enhance Existing Skills



Employed

Provide Superior Customer Service



Business Owner

Live Link to Interactive Modules

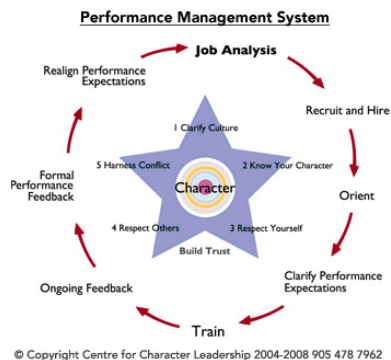
Once you have the *right people* in the *right positions* you are now ready to train them and implement learning so they have the right skills and knowledge to meet and exceed your performance and customer expectations.

The Hospitality First Interactive Modules are designed to work only with **Microsoft's Internet Explorer Version 6.0** or higher and **Mozilla's Firefox Version 3.0** or higher and uses **PDF documents** and the latest **Macromedia Flash Player**.

Please enter your **Username** and **Password** to log in or click Register.

Username:

Password:



Going Forward

Launch and Marketing Initiatives

Program Enhancements

- ❑ Ministry of Tourism – RTO 6
- ❑ Ministry of Education
- ❑ Humber College Hospitality and Tourism Program



Website Demonstration

Invest in York



www.investinyork.ca

Hospitality First



www.hospitalityfirst.ca

