

2012 ABORIGINAL PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESS ED OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER ABENAKI ASSOCIATES, NEW BRUNSWICK



Established in 1984, Abenaki Associates is one of Canada's longest operating IT companies with offices in New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia. Abenaki Associates is proud to be one of the first *Authorized Sage Software Resellers in Canada*, and to this day, is the *only Aboriginal-owned Sage Reseller* providing Sage Accpac ERP and Simply Accounting by Sage training and installation across Canada. Abenaki currently has a staff of eight employees providing training, installation, and support for our customers across Canada, with associates providing additional support for special projects.

Abenaki focuses equally in capacity development for First Nations in Canada, and offers a suite of software solutions aimed at enhancing service delivery and efficiency within First Nations. Abenaki offers training and capacity development in Fixed Asset Management and Community Membership, Social Assistance and Housing, to name a few.

The Beginning of Abenaki's Journey

The company's first major contract was with First Nations in the Fort Frances area in northwestern Ontario. Abenaki had a request to train over twenty-four First Nations staff in Basic Computer Skills. That presented a problem challenge for the company; because they didn't have twenty-four computers and didn't know how to get them there (Fort Francis is over 2000km from Ottawa). In the end, Abenaki managed to rent computers from local rental company, and also rented a cube van, loaded it with the computers and drove for two days to Forts Frances where they successfully delivered capacity building training to First Nations people in the area.

Fort Frances demonstrated a need to expand to different parts of Canada, and be able to deliver training at major centers in Canada. Abenaki contacted an employee at Eaton's in Ottawa and asked if they would be willing to explore the possibility of using Eaton's fully stocked computer labs across Canada. The request was approved, providing they could sell IBM computers, MS Software to Abenaki's clients. This was an instrumental partnership for the company's growth, because it gave Abenaki a national presence. About the same time Abenaki negotiated with Basic Software Group (BSG) to become a Reseller for Accpac Accounting Software for First Nations across Canada. The Basic Software Group was eventually sold to Computer Associates and then to Sage Software.

One of the most interesting contracts was with James Bay Cree First Nation, QC. Abenaki visited the community for an evaluation, and subsequently signed a contract in Montreal. The contract included major installation of networks, IBM servers, and workstations all operating MS-DOS, and MS-DOS Software from Microsoft and Corel.

Other large installs/projects included Samson Cree Nation (over 200 computers), including an automated voting for the Council, and the United Steelworkers who wanted to automate searching their arbitration cases, Abenaki installed a private network that connected all of their offices across Canada.

Transforming Challenge into Opportunity

Fort Francis demonstrated a need to provide on-site training, and also training at any location. From the experiences in Fort Frances, Abenaki realized that mobile training would be instrumental to their success in

offering IT capacity building services for First Nations. Abenaki now has three mobile computer labs that they can ship anywhere, which can be set up in minutes (Fort Francis took one full day to setup). To date, Abenaki has trained over 20,000 people since 1984.

Abenaki Associates were early Cloud Pioneers. In the early '90s they had launched several news services with the help of the Globe and Mail on-line. These were purely text based searches and completely customisable. One of Abenaki's most frustrating experiences in the past 25 years was moving from Window based software to Cloud Based Software. This type of software allows a business the potential to reduce IT operational costs by outsourcing hardware and software maintenance and support to the cloud provider. This will enable a business to reallocate IT operations to focus on other IT goals. In addition, the application is hosted centrally, so updates can be released without users having to reinstall new software. So far, Abenaki has moved their First Nations Management Housing Software into Cloud, and will be moving other applications soon.

Future Goals

Abenaki has been a long established leader in Canada's IT sector, and will continue its growth and innovation. In the near future, the company plans to expand and develop more Cloud based management tools for First Nations. They will also focus on providing training and tools to large and small on-reserve businesses. Training will expand to cover more topics, and they will focus on expanding their presence in the social media market.