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BRIEFINGS

'Steady' job market predicted

Canada should see a "steady hiring climate" in the second quarter of this year, according to survey results from staffing agency Manpower. In its quarterly outlook, Manpower said there is an overall positive outlook of 13 per cent for the period that lasts from April to June. That number is derived by taking the 21 per cent of employers who said they would add staff and subtracting the five per cent who said they would cut employment, with some adjustments for seasonal variations. Most of the more than 1,900 employers surveyed said they expected staff levels to remain the same. The survey showed mining as the strongest sector for hiring in the coming quarter with a 25 per cent outlook, up 12 points from the first-quarter outlook.

Financial Post

U.S. confidence of small firms climbs

Confidence among small companies rose in February to the highest level in three years as hiring and sales expectations increased, a survey showed. The National Federation of Independent Business' optimism index climbed to 94.5, the highest since the recession began in December 2007, the Washington-based group said Tuesday in a statement. The reading compares with the average 100.7 during the previous expansion that started in November 2001. Hiring plans rose to the second-highest level since September 2008, a sign employment may pick up in coming months.

Bloomberg

BLOG WATCH

If your business is innovative and you are looking for information on financing, tax considerations, networking, and commentary on innovative B.C. businesses, there are a number of offices that can help:

- The National Research Council offers the Industry Research Assistance Program (IRAP) that can help finance innovative business ideas.
- Sustainable Development Technology Canada has an SD Tech Fund and a NextGen Biofuels Fund to support the gap between testing and the market place.
- The Province of B.C. offers funding under the Innovative Clean Energy (ICE) program to encourage development of clean energy sources and technologies.
- Another important resource is the BC Innovation Council (BCIC) website.
- The BC Inventors Society is a great place to connect with other successful inventors.
- Also important for innovative businesses is taking advantage of available tax breaks. You can claim up to 68 per cent of your testing and experimenting dollars through a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) program called Scientific Research and Experimental Development (SR&ED).

Guest blog by Sara Couper, communications coordinator with Small Business BC. Read more at vancouver.sun.com/smallbusiness

(Jenny Lee is on vacation)



ARLEN REDEKOP/PNG

Douglas Houghton stands near the Aurora at Coal Harbour Marina in Vancouver. He has developed a new camera that detects boats from several kilometres away

TECHNOLOGY | Port Moody company puts pirates in its crosshairs

Current Corporation provides camera systems to world's ships, including South Korean Coast Guard

BY BRIAN MORTON
VANCOUVER SUN

A Port Moody company that provides sophisticated night-vision camera systems for boats and ships now has Somali pirates in its sights.

Current Corporation, which counts the South Korean Coast Guard among its clients, is set later this month to start introducing its latest system, called Night Navigator SOS (Safety On Seas).

The company plans to market it for several purposes, largely to large yachts and shipping companies navigating treacherous weather conditions and other hazards in the world's oceans.

But another use for the system — developed over the past five years — is to protect ships in the deadly waters of the Indian Ocean, where Somali pirates are wreaking havoc on one of the world's most important shipping lanes.

If successful, Current's new system is timely with many shipping companies now avoiding the area or paying huge insurance premiums to enter the high-risk pirate-infested shipping zone.

"Early detection is the best implementation of any procedures that are in place," Current president Douglas Houghton said in an interview about his company, whose motto is To Save Lives and Property at Sea.

"Usually, pirates board the ship before [the ship's crew] even know they're there. Our system gives them the most response time by the earliest detection. Then, the ship can increase speed, radio for help, change course or implement on-board safety measures."

Current's new system will sell for about \$440,000, with delivery beginning in 2013.

Already, Houghton said, Current has 10 orders, all for large-yacht owners in Europe, New Zealand and Singapore.

"The new system includes a high-definition camera, a high-



ARLEN REDEKOP/PNG

Douglas Houghton's company builds advanced night-vision systems for ships around the world.

resolution thermal camera and a pulsing infrared amplification camera," Houghton said, adding that it picks up what radar can't.

"It emits an infrared beam that has the capability to penetrate weather, such as rain, mist, smog, snow and fog. It will detect the spout of a whale from two kilometres, day or night.

"The markets are anti-piracy, object detection, search and rescue and ice detection."

Houghton said the new system can detect a 10-metre small boat — the type utilized by pirates — at 14 kilometres.

"The closer we get, the more detail there is.

"Our goal was to see a man's head in the water at 1,000 metres. It's easy to see him [with the Night Navigator SOS] at 1,300 metres."

The company, which was established in 1986 as an electrical distribution company

with two employees, now markets night-vision systems from \$50,000 to \$500,000.

Eighteen years ago, it started selling night-vision goggles and monoculars to police forces in Canada as well as the Canadian Coast Guard and Fisheries and Oceans.

"We still provide that service today for the Canadian market."

Current, which now has more than 30 employees, provides imaging systems to ferry operators worldwide, luxury private yachts, offshore supply vessels, patrol boats and coastal surveillance programs.

But Houghton said his company has so far not sold systems to the world's massive freighter and tanker fleet, something the Night Navigator SOS will hopefully change.

"We [already] consider ourselves at the highest level of commercially available night

vision systems," Houghton said.

"And this [the Night Navigator SOS] goes way beyond that."

Houghton said that 95 per cent of their business is night navigator camera systems and that their strongest markets worldwide are in Europe, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia. He said sales are projected to grow 50 per cent each year for the foreseeable future and that cameras are built at their Port Moody facility, with design, software, sales and marketing handled from the head office.

About 12 years ago, he said they started to build Night Navigator systems for the high-speed ferry market, adding that they were used on the BC Ferries Pacific vessels and are now used on over 100 ferries worldwide. He said that 12 years ago, few in the shipping

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DOUGLAS HOUGHTON
PRESIDENT,
CURRENT CORPORATION

business knew about Current's products, but that today "we are lined up at our booths all day long." at global trade shows.

Meanwhile, Capt. Steve Poole, who spent 37 years with BC Ferries including 20 as a ship captain and three years as marine superintendent for North Coast operations, had a chance to try out the Navigator SOS when it was being developed.

"It's absolutely amazing," he said in an interview.

"It's technology that's second to none from what I've ever seen."

Poole said that in his years at sea, there were two people who went overboard and weren't recovered.

"With the [old] system, you couldn't see through rain or snow.

"If I had that technology [Navigator SOS] when I lost people over the side of the ship, I truly believe we would have recovered them."

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