

Small business digital expansion plan

Background

In Tasmania significant numbers of small businesses are unable to integrate their online and 'offline' operations and take advantage of digital and social media opportunities. A lack of technical knowledge is cited as a major barrier to small businesses being able to expand their online presence and compete in the burgeoning digital market place.

A Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania (TICT) survey of just over 900 accredited tourism operators in 2011 uncovered major gaps in the ability of some to fully engage online. The survey showed 43.5% had only a basic web presence, with no online booking or eCommerce facilities.

A state government sponsored program, Digital Coaching, was set up to address these issues and has been an important foundation to expanding digital capacity of Tasmanian small businesses but gaps and resourcing issues remain.

The Small Business Digital Expansion Plan calls for an injection of funds to meet the growing needs of small business operators and address shortfalls in resources, training and ongoing support.

Small Business Digital Expansion Plan -- outline

The proposal is to increase investment, training and capacity of small business operators in the state to enable them to better engage with rapidly expanding online opportunities.

Under the proposal, funding for the existing state government Digital Coach program would almost double from \$280,000 a year to \$500,000 with other changes to address issues such as lack of ongoing IT support for small business operators.

The state government would match investment from each eligible small business, dollar for dollar, in \$500 increments up to a total of \$5,000.

Combined, that would unlock up to \$10,000 for each eligible small business for:

- Development/upgrade websites
- Enabling (and/or expanding) e-commerce facilities to support online booking and purchasing
- training in web technologies and maintenance
- ongoing technical support

An independent panel would assess EOIs from small business operators with the state government urged to support and encourage Tasmanian IT providers, where possible, to apply for contracts.