

SIGN OF THE TIMES

10 Kingsbridge Garden Circle, Suite #402

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www.signofthetime.ca

Fact Sheet

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Sign of the Times is the first Practice Firm in North America dedicated to assisting persons with disabilities. It is funded by Employment Ontario and is operated by the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities, a not-for-profit employment agency.

Sign of the Times is part of a worldwide network of over 5500 Practice Firms. Currently, there are over 45 practice firms in the Canadian Practice Firm Network, which is a member of the "European Practice Enterprises Network" (EUROPEN). Over 40 countries on five continents are part of the Practice Firm network.

The newly renovated Mississauga office is designed for people with disabilities. It features wheelchair accessible furniture; plenty of maneuvering space in the office and board room; Zoom text and voice synthesizer software on computers; widened doorways with electronic doors; lever-style hardware on doors; colour-contrasted doors and walls and many other features.

The idea of Practice Firms dates back to the 18th century, but it was not until around 1950 in Germany that the concept blossomed. The first Canadian Practice Firm started in Quebec in 1995.

The head office for the Canadian Practice Firm Network is in Quebec City, QC.

Sign of the Times employs three full time staff to manage the operation: a Project Manager, Technical Manager and a Reception Administrator.

A Practice Firm is a virtual company that provides real life employment experience to unemployed, yet qualified individuals who are looking to enter or re-enter the job market.

Practice Firms provide a realistic simulation of a business with all its administrative functions. They include the following departments: accounting, sales and marketing, purchasing, graphic design, web design and support, I.T. support and network administration, communications and customer service.

Every Practice firm is connected to an existing business that shares its expertise by providing a business model and advice. *Sign of the Times* is mentored by Fast Signs located at 5130 Dixie Road in Mississauga.

Eligibility criteria for a position within *Sign of the Times*:

- To be unemployed
- To have some experience or training for the position which is available
- To be actively looking for work
- To have a disability
- To be at least 16 years of age
- To be eligible to work in Canada

Participants are selected through a hiring process to work a 37.5 hour week for a maximum of 12 weeks. Participants are free to leave the program at any time – particularly when employment is obtained. They are required to devote 20 per cent of their time to actively search for employment. *Sign of the Times* hires a maximum of 16 participants and is continually accepting new applications.

Practice Firm participants conduct business with other Practice Firms. Catalogues of products and services are marketed amongst other Practice Firms who buy and sell from one another with the aim of earning a virtual profit. All business is conducted on a virtual basis with no exchange of real money.

Each year, there is a two-day trade show where all the Practice Firms from across Canada meet and market their products and services to other firms and to the general public. The event is held in different locations each year.

This year's Canadian Trade Show will be held in Sydney, Nova Scotia, October 21 to 23, 2008. Practice Firms from all over Canada will meet and market their products and services to other firms and to the general public at the Canadian Practice Firm Network's (CPFN) annual trade show. Orders placed at the annual trade show can represent between 50 and 80 per cent of a Practice Firm's annual business activities. The event is held in different locations each year.

Since opening the doors in October 2006, 117 people have participated at the Practice Firm. Twenty-eight per cent have found employment in his or her field, and a further eight per cent in a related field.

For further information, please contact Stephen Largy:

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