

# **Come to Canada, invent the next BlackBerry**

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OTTAWA -- Study in Canada and you too could invent a blockbuster like the BlackBerry.

The allure of developing a new technological wonder is among several pitches being pondered as Canada seeks to entice more foreign post-secondary students in hopes of improving the country's lagging numbers compared to other nations.

Bang Marketing of Montreal is working on slogans for a federally sponsored \$2-million national branding campaign. One of the slogans capitalizes on Research in Motion's little handheld ambassador by inviting international students to "Imagine inventing the next BlackBerry."

Two other possibilities -- "The world is my playground, I study in Canada," and "Knowledge without Boundaries" -- are also under consideration to compete with educational branding from countries like the U.K., which plugs its elite schools, and Australia, which is billed as the land of fun.

"We're putting a uniquely Canadian spin on what we have to offer," said Darcy Rollins, director of international education for Manitoba and co-chairman of a federal-provincial committee working on the marketing campaign.

"We're saying we're going to offer you high-quality education, we're going to help you realize your potential and you're going to help us help the world."

The United States, the United Kingdom and Australia are leaders in the competition for international students. Australia, which has experienced explosive growth in the field in the last few years, now draws four times more foreign students than Canada.

The Canadian Bureau for International Education reported last fall that Canada, which once ranked in the top five destinations for foreign students, had dropped to 14th place, receiving less than three per cent of the international market.

Canada has been handicapped, in part, by the fact that education is a provincial responsibility and by an identity crisis the country has on the international education stage, said Rollins.

The working group wants to develop one collective voice for international post-secondary fairs, advertising, and promotional material used by universities, embassies, consulates, and other venues that promote a Canadian education.

The brand will also serve as a needed quality-control stamp that will be attached to reputable institutions and be banned for use by "disreputable providers" that market themselves outside Canada, Rollins said.

Universities have also been individually increasing efforts to draw more international students because they bring cultural diversity to campuses and take home with them a knowledge of the country that boosts Canada's presence abroad. Some students also choose to create business arrangements with Canadians after graduation while others elect to stay in the country and become highly qualified members of the dwindling workforce.

International students also pay their own way, with tuition costs that are roughly double those of Canadian students.

The branding campaign is set to work in tandem with other new federal measures to appeal to international students, including a pledge in the Feb. 26 budget for \$25 million over two years for scholarships up to \$50,000 annually for top foreign or domestic doctoral students.

The Vanier scholarships, named after former governor general and war hero Georges Vanier, will rival the prestigious Rhodes and Fulbright scholarships that are offered for study in England and the United States, respectively, said Jennifer Humphries, of the Canadian Bureau for International Education.

The national, non-government organization is counting on the scholarships and the national branding effort to improve Canada's poor market share, said Humphries.

Statistics Canada reported in February that there were 80,000 foreign students on Canadian campuses in 2005-2006, mainly from China, India, South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong. The numbers were six per cent higher than the previous year and double those of a decade ago.

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