



# Digicel Jamaica Foundation



This case was compiled by the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Guyana as part of a study of progressive Caribbean businesses.

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### Abstract

Through their sponsorship of a chair in Telecommunications Policy and Management at the University of the West Indies Mona Campus in Jamaica, Digicel Jamaica is laying the foundation for the development of local talent in a field that is strategically relevant for the company.

### The Company

Irish based Digicel, the mobile phone company owned by millionaire businessman Denis O' Brien, operates in eight Caribbean countries: Aruba, Barbados, the Cayman Islands, Curacao, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Digicel's mission, to provide customers with affordable and innovative mobile technology, has resulted in unprecedented growth rates for Digicel throughout the Caribbean region. They boast that:

*"Since our launch in 2001, Digicel has become the fastest growing mobile telecommunications operator in the Caribbean. In four years, we have become renowned for competitive rates, unbeatable coverage, superior customer care, a wide variety of products and services and state-of-the-art handsets as well as community support and development."*

With a workforce of approximately 1,000 in the Caribbean and with a large stake in the success of the region as a whole, Digicel has decided to establish The Digicel Foundation in Jamaica, one of the first Caribbean countries to receive the company.



Digicel employees, offering their time, money and leadership capabilities, form the staff of the Foundation.

### The Motivation

In corporate Jamaica, there has in recent times been talk of a declining pool of graduates available to meet the needs of businesses in the country. As such, an increasing number of non-Jamaican graduates are taking up lucrative posts in key positions in the private sector. For reasons such as crime, lack of opportunity, and others, the brain drain of local talent has been observed throughout the graduate ranks.

Against this backdrop, The Digicel Jamaica Foundation approved an application made by Professor Kenneth Hall, Principal of the University of the West Indies (Mona Campus), to sponsor a chair in Telecommunications Policy and Management. This initiative was aimed at improving the academic offerings in terms of telecommunications and developing the necessary talent pool to meet the human resource needs of the Jamaican corporate sector. More specifically, the sponsorship was intended to stimulate local development in the telecommunications industry, limiting the brain drain phenomenon (at least in one sector) and supporting the development of a telecommunication's talent pool.

Though the details of the investment have not been revealed publicly, it is touted as the largest

donation ever that the Campus has had for a sponsored chair.

According to one of several reports on the subject: *"The new Chair will be hosted by the Mona School of Business and will provide training and research opportunities at the Masters and PhD levels. It will also contribute courses or modules to existing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The programme will consist of taught courses, industry and academic seminars, and sponsored research."*

### **Taking Action**

Though the idea for the chair sponsorship was initially driven by the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies, it was enthusiastically supported by Digicel Jamaica. According to the head of The Digicel Jamaica Foundation, General Robert Neish, the process from application to the approval of funding for the chair was a smooth and relatively quick one.

One of the concerns raised by the Digicel executives regarding the funding of the chair however, revolved around whether or not the chair sponsorship would compete with other already established programmes thereby cannibalising other programme offerings at the University.

According to the research conducted by Digicel senior representatives, the only other telecommunications programme offered by the University of the West Indies was an online complementary version, run through the St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad & Tobago and supported by Cable and Wireless London.

After assessing the compatibility of the two offerings, Digicel executives were more inclined to approve the funding of the chair. The fact that the chair sponsorship was to be run in a

classroom setting as opposed to a virtual one was an added incentive for Digicel, since the programme would be the first of its kind being offered by the University. The only other concern to be resolved in the minds of Digicel executives was whether or not Digicel sponsorship of the chair would be seen as an outright branding attempt, which could deter would-be students averse to the Digicel brand from entering the programme. The reassurance of Campus representatives and top Digicel executives dispelled these fears.

In arranging the details of the sponsorship, both Digicel and the Mona Campus agreed to have a Digicel representative present on the management committee of the chair. It was also agreed that the sponsorship would cover a seven-year period, after which time the programme is estimated to be self-sustaining.

### **Business Benefits**

Significant gains are anticipated in the form of enhanced goodwill and improved customer loyalty. The long-term benefits from their investment in the Telecommunications chair will also accrue to the company. From their action, Digicel has set in motion the development of a talent pool that they can draw on to meet their future human resource needs. It is also gaining recognition as an "Employer of Choice" in the local industry.

### **Vision for the Future**

Digicel Jamaica, through the efforts of its Foundation, has indicated an intention to continue its endeavours aimed at positively contributing to national development. It is also considering expanding the Foundation's efforts to other Caribbean territories.