

# The Challenges of Delivering ECDL to a Large Organisation: La Poste - France

## Project Background

La Poste, France's national postal operator, was established in 1576 as the first formally commissioned postal service in Europe. La Poste is responsible for all national parcel and mail services in France's 27 regions. In addition to mail services, the organisation now also provides banking services to 11.7 million customers. In 2008, La Poste and its subsidiaries reported a 980 million euro turnover. La Poste is the second largest postal carrier in Europe, behind only the German postal operator Deutsche Post, and handles approximately 28.5 billion documents annually.

Due to the new competition rules introduced by the European Commission in relation to state bodies, La Poste has had to significantly reshape its business model to take account of new competitors entering the French postal market (as was the case in many other European Member States, La Poste previously maintained a state-wide monopoly for the delivery of all mail services in France). In accordance with the new competition laws, La Poste was listed as a public company on the French stock exchange on 23 March 2010.

## The Challenges Facing ECDL France in Securing La Poste as a Customer

The primary issue with targeting La Poste as a potential ECDL client was the sheer size of the company. Understanding the regional, local, and central command structure - and at what point it might be most beneficial to present the ECDL programme - required a considerable period of research. During the period 2002 – 2008, ECDL France distributed several letters and brochures promoting solutions based on La Poste's specific ICT-related problems. International case studies that demonstrated the positive impact of ECDL in large commercial organisations were used to supplement ECDL France's proposal, and to highlight the benefits that ECDL training and certification would bring to La Poste's staff.

While La Poste represented a massive commercial opportunity if ECDL were to be adopted, ECDL France knew that this could only be realised if ECDL, and its benefits, were tailored specifically for and presented to the right people, and in the right manner. This meant that ECDL France needed to understand as much as possible about La Poste: its staff; their working environment; the activities of the subsidiaries; and the vacancies that were being advertised by the company's recruiters. Once this information had been collected from various sources, it was possible to understand more clearly who, within the management structure, ECDL France should approach.

## The Selling-In Process

In August 2008, ECDL France received the first indication from La Poste that it would consider a proposal for the delivery of ECDL training and certification to its staff. This opportunity arose when ECDL France were invited to deliver a presentation on ECDL to La Poste's management team. While this preliminary opportunity proved to be a significant success, it is important to understand that a sales-based presentation at this point would have been inappropriate. The certification had to be presented on its merits, focusing on ECDL as a solution-based measure. It was at this meeting that the La Poste representatives were to decide whether the ECDL programme met their expectations.

At the same time as being introduced to ECDL, La Poste was being introduced to other competing certifications: MOS (Microsoft), B2i and C2i (French Government ICT certifications). ECDL France was successful due to its comprehensive understanding of La Poste's requirements, and due to the flexibility to tailor the delivery of the certification in areas of ICT that were immediately relevant to the millions of day-to-day transactions being carried out within La Poste's administrative offices. ECDL France believes that a comprehensive understanding of the customer's needs is paramount to the successful delivery of the programme.

### **Timelines for the Selling-In and Delivery Processes**

August 2008 - Presentation entitled: 'General Presentation on ECDL to Develop Interest in ICT Certification'. Delivered by M. Olivier Goulas, ECDL France.

August 2008 - May 2009 - The decision to formally proceed with ECDL was taken and contacts with IT, HR, and the La Poste internal training services were exchanged.

Sept 2009 - Meeting in Paris with the La Poste team (IT trainers, the Pedagogy Manager, and the IT Training Centre Management).

Oct 2009 - ECDL France established and completed a series of reports for the various members of staff and management, using a pilot with 20 candidates to establish the basic elements of success.

Nov 09 – Dec 09 - In November 2009, following a successful pilot programme and a number of follow-up presentations in regard to sales figures, the La Poste Purchasing Department signed a contract for 500 Skills Cards.

January 2010 - Training sessions began for the internal La Poste IT trainers to develop their understanding of ECDL, and of the operational requirements for guiding candidates through the ECDL Start1 certification process in the following subject areas:

- Word Processing
- Spreadsheets
- Presentation
- Web Browsing and Communication

### **Barriers to ECDL implementation**

Based on the prior experiences of other National Operators, a cultural aversion to testing was expected from within the La Poste organisation. In addition to this, at a lower level, questions were also asked about the origins of ECDL - which in this case were quite easily dealt with. ECDL France regularly experiences the cultural issues with regard to testing within many large public sector organisations that are heavily unionised. To counter this apprehension of being tested, the benefits of learning are promoted above and beyond the aspect of testing. Once candidates are confident that they are being trained in a comprehensive manner, and 1 For a detailed explanation of ECDL Foundation's certification programmes, visit [www.ecdl.org](http://www.ecdl.org) begin to be more confident with the various syllabus items, the issue of testing normally becomes a goal, rather than an obstacle.

### **Benefits of the ECDL Programme According to La Poste>**

- Sectoral benefits – public and private sectors, education sector
- Internationally recognised

- Vendor independence (Syllabus – Skills)
- Empowers individuals

## Presentation on Automated Testing Systems (ATS) - ECDL France's Innovative Selling Points

ECDL France believes that a substantial factor in the decision to proceed with ECDL was the capability for significant reporting and statistical analysis through their Automated Testing System (ATS). ECDL France strongly believes that the initial phase of any sales (product) stage needs to be supplemented quickly and robustly with a presentation on the capacity to measure return on investment and provide statistical analysis.

The French ECDL ATS has excellent capabilities for managing candidates and statistics through delivery of detailed assessment reports. Additionally, it can be tailored for any requirements requested by the customer.



## Preliminary Results of the Project

As this project is still in progress, Skills Cards usage is expected to grow in 2011. The initial issue of candidate aversion to testing interestingly resulted in most candidates obtaining better results than they had expected. Also, La Poste's ECDL graduates are very proud of achieving certification; staff discussions have begun to centre on the positive experience that they have had in the learning and certification process. ECDL France believes that a significant testing 'taboo' was broken - after the initial pilot was concluded, a degree of healthy competition developed among staff in relation to achieving ECDL certification. To date, 1,005 La Poste candidates have completed the ECDL Start programme. While this is not an immense number of candidates in a two-year period, this project represents a triumph against the many issues that large commercial projects face, particularly those in relation to efforts to train/educate staff. In this respect, ECDL France took the following lessons from their experiences with La Poste:

- Selling a certification to a large company is possible
- The ECDL programme can and should triumph over competitors due to being less expensive and more scalable

- Testing aversions within staff can be overcome using a high profile pilot, and by focusing on building candidates' confidence - assessment of the general capacity of staff at this point is also possible
- Remaining focused on the customer's changing market and working environment is a crucial component of a project's success
- Targeted marketing and professional presentation technique in a commercially astute manner is vital