

Cross-border selling

Winnipeggers join all-female trade mission to Washington

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Helen Hafke, vice-president of DataSense Inc., fits the profile of many women business owners in Canada. She does not export. Only three per cent do.

But for her, that's about to change as she heads to Washington, D.C., next Tuesday with nearly 150 women as part of Canada's first international trade mission for businesswomen.

Winnipegger Kathy Drysdale of Pro-Image Pro-Systems is also participating in the four-day mission, headed by International Trade Minister Sergio Marchi.

"We've been looking at exporting software and training manuals, but this is a little sooner than we had thought," Hafke said yesterday.

"With software, you hit the market at the time it's open or you miss it completely ... someone gets there before you do. This was an open door and we jumped."

Arrangements have already been made for her to sit down and talk with several distributors and direct marketers, she said, adding her company designed a software package for direct marketers that allows them to track sales, clients and inventory.

Avon recently approved the software for distribution among its 70,000 sales representatives.

"I'm very excited about going. I almost have to pinch myself and say this is happening to me."

It will also be an opportunity to network with other Canadians, as well as an opportunity to learn, she said.

Workshops will cover such topics as: developing an export plan and strategy, managing the U.S. business culture, partnering, legal issues in today's marketplace and international business financing.

"It's a great time savings. We also get to get our name out there."

Nicki Dewar, a trade commissioner with the International Trade Centre in Winnipeg, said two million jobs in Canada are sustained through exports to

the U.S., yet 50 per cent of Canadian exports are achieved by only 100 firms.

The Canadian government's aim is to double the number of exporters by the year 2000, Dewar said.

The trade mission is focusing on women involved in information technology and telecommunications, consumer products, environmental technologies, agrifood and seafood products, professional and business services, cultural industries, health-care products and biotechnology.