

Key to the government's international business development role is providing Canadian companies with the information and intelligence they need to develop their export strategies. Government must bring to companies information that they cannot ignore; strategic information that is not general but targeted, information that results in changed corporate behaviour. This information extends beyond export opportunities to include market access, outward investment, strategic alliances, technology transfer, and competitiveness issues.

SMEs continuously identify market information and intelligence (MI/I) as perhaps the most valuable IBD service that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade provides, whether it's market studies available from the InfoCentre, the fax-back service or through the electronic bulletin board; private counselling from the International Trade Centres; or individualized market intelligence from the trade commissioners.

The importance of market information and intelligence to the government's IBD strategy is not new. When Canada's first trade commissioner, John Larke, was appointed to Australia in 1894, it was recognized that market information and intelligence were vital for the success of Canadian business. Over the last 100 plus years, the type of MI/I not elsewhere accessible has changed, but the government's focus on the importance of MI/I has remained constant. The advent of the Internet, and other new sources of information, will bring further changes to the type of MI/I publicly available. Government will continue to focus on seeking out that MI/I not elsewhere available.

Transactional market intelligence continues to provide companies with their initial motivation for the exploration of IBD opportunities. Thus, new initiatives in the government's IBD strategy included the creation of the Market Research Centre and the International Business Opportunities Centre (IBOC). The Market Research Centre is increasing the variety and timeliness of focussed subsector reports, in the markets and subsectors identified by the National Sector Teams as being of the most value to the private sector. IBOC has been set up to quickly communicate business opportunities provided by Canadian trade commissioners abroad to capable Canadian firms.

(a) That DFAIT and all other departments that have programs in international business development should list and define the specific market information/intelligence services that are available to SMES;

As previously mentioned in recommendation one, the Canada Business Service Centres, and the regional development agencies, provide SMEs with a single window to access information on government services and programs, including IBD, across the country.

Through its trade commissioners and the representatives from other government departments, including Agriculture and AgriFood Canada, assigned to the Commercial Divisions of Canada's missions abroad, and assisted by the new Market Research Centre, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade produces extensive MI/I reports. These are publicly available from the InfoCentre with its 1-800 number, by Faxlink, or through the InfoCentre Bulletin Board. These sources, and other MI/I services are also listed in The Exporter's Guide, which was designed for SMEs.

The advent of the information highway has provided increased opportunities to reach more innovative Canadian firms. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's WebSite, Industry Canada's STRATEGIS (which includes Contact! The Canadian Management Network on-line network and directory of resources, both government and private), the Canadian Technology Network's Internet offerings, and the Agriculture and AgriFood Canada's Agri-Food Trade Network are but four examples of government's efforts to reach more firms.

There is increasing emphasis on providing SMEs with more than a list of available MI/I services. Networking, which includes private sector contracts, is an important part of the information highway. For example, the Canadian Technology Network (CTN), jointly managed by the Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP) of the National Research Council (NRC), and by Industry Canada (IC), was set up as a dynamic network of advisors that can analyze the needs of technology based SMEs, diagnose