

ARE WE GOING TO BE 'TEST'ED ON THIS?

What do the following words have in common?

Lichens, lightning rods, wheat berries, popcorn machines, auto-parts aftermarket, Wapiti, switching systems, airport construction . . .!

By Rick McElrea

In case you haven't guessed, they all describe sourcing enquiries. They represent eight of the 130 actioned by the Trade Enquiries Sourcing Team (TEST) in a 60 day trial that started in September.

TEST is a special team within the Trade Liaison Secretariat (TOS) tasked to respond to "hot" sourcing enquiries received from posts around the world. There was a time when you couldn't get a peep out of Ottawa on a hot lead. Now, don't be surprised if you have an answer the same day on an easy enquiry – within 3 days on a tricky enquiry – 4 or 5 days, on a real challenge.

Consider the case of the missing lichens. Convinced he had a serious enquiry for a sizable purchase of lichens – that's right, the symbiotic mix of algae and fungus that grows on rocks – a Trade Commissioner asked, "can anyone find a Canadian supplier of lichens? I have a client who needs 20,000 kilograms of them." Within minutes, Marcel Laneville of TEST was talking to a small business in Northern Saskatchewan. Imagine the officer's surprise when he received a positive reply from Ottawa the next day.

Sheila Johnson (many of you were trained on WIN exports by Sheila; now she is a member of TEST) demonstrated the potential

of TEST when she was asked for names of airport safety equipment suppliers interested in bidding on an upcoming tender. She not only supplied the post with names of potential prime contractors but also supplied them with the name of a potential subcontractor – all within 72 hours. The potential subcontractor, a supplier of lightning rods, had initially expressed interest in the project but when Sheila outlined the full scope of the project, the company changed its mind. However, the company was still interested in the project, so TEST passed on the firm's name to potential primes.

Sheila, Marcel and I want to personify that old maxim "focus on service to the client", and we know who the client is. It is the trade officer: Trade Commissioners and Commercial Officers. Industry, in the minds of TEST, is the trade officer's client. Serve the trade officer and let them serve industry.

And exactly what does TEST do? When a trade officer has a solid lead from a serious client, TEST will undertake not only to find a Canadian supplier, but to find one or more who are interested in bidding. TEST will either provide that information to the post, or have the Canadian company contact the potential buyer directly, depending on instructions from the post.

A solid trade lead reflects the demand for a specific product in a

specific market for a known potential customer. "Is that not the most powerful piece of market intelligence that a Trade Commissioner can give a company . . . a specific request for its product or service?" says John Treleven, Director General, Trade Planning and Operations Bureau (TOD). The goal of TEST is to help trade officers do just that.

You will soon be hearing from TEST which is still developing procedures to answer your requests as quickly and as accurately as possible. The trial has proven that TEST can be a powerful tool, using the same databases already available to trade officers: WIN exports, capability guides, and networking with the sector expert groups.

If what you need is a general list of companies, TEST advises "please use the tools which are already available". If you have a lead that you pulled from a local database or an open tender, you might be well served by posting it on the InfoCentre Electronic Bulletin Board (IBB) (see p. 8). However, if you need a **filtered list of companies willing to respond to a solid trade lead**, send your enquiry to TEST. In other words, use the IBB for *general* dissemination and TEST for *targeted* dissemination. We are on SIGNET, and our address is easy to remember; it is "–TEST".