

Letters from Your Colleagues

Market Information/Intelligence (MI/I): How Do We Deliver?

We all know that businesses have told us that they want *market intelligence*. We now have to decide how we are going to deliver the product.

By definition, the competitive advantage of the TCS is being positioned in the field. We work closely with the ITCs, the provinces and industry associations — but we are the folks outside of Canada. Do we want to dilute this very valuable advantage by also spending our resources on trying to deliver a service at home? This seems to be the direction we are taking in the MI/I field.

The whole issue was driven home when, at this post, our Commercial Section was given a very interesting presentation on the plans for the whole MI/I machine. While the technical considerations were well thought out the more basic philosophical questions did not seem to have been addressed. Namely, is it efficient to expect Trade Commissioners to divide their resources between gathering information/intelligence in the field and disseminating it in Canada.

Wouldn't it make more sense to make the MI/I readily available to Canadian companies through a combination of an online system and "hubs" throughout the country? This is indeed the approach taken by the U.S. Department of Commerce through its National Trade Data Bank (NTDB) - which is available to all U.S. companies directly through a modest subscription or free of

charge at local municipal and university libraries. It can also be made available through local Chambers of Commerce and industry associations. The NTDB includes all kinds of MI/I from U.S. posts abroad as well as statistics, country profiles, etc.

In this case, to use an old metaphor, the horse is at least being led to water - it is his call if he wishes to drink. In Canada, we seem to think that we have to hog-tie the horse and force feed it with MI/I!

In this writer's opinion, we should make our very valuable MI/I readily accessible to all Canadian companies. However, they must at least be willing to make the initial step of subscribing to an information service or going to their local library or Chamber of Commerce office. If they can't do this, then they really haven't any business getting into the international marketplace.

P.S. It is interesting to note that a college in Rhode Island has taken the Department of Commerce system, added value to it and is marketing it to organizations which can act as information "hubs" for companies in their region. One of these organizations is the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. It seems a shame that our national Chamber of Commerce has to go to the U.S. for this service when Canadian Trade Commissioners are busy collecting MI/I at the posts.

Chris Thornley, Boston

BBQ, A Great Success*

Mike, yesterday's event could not pass without a congratulatory note to you and your TOO staff for a job well done. Yes, the weather cooperated but it was the venue, format (relaxed, no speeches etc.) and organizational touches (particularly Dave Smith's catering, also the all-in cost structure) which made it one of the best get-togethers in a long time. Great Effort.

Brian Oak



*As part of the TCS Centenary celebrations, TOO organized a barbecue on June 29 at Maple Island. Approximately 200 members, TCS associates, and spouses attended the event. The barbecue also afforded the opportunity to say farewell to our colleagues who departed last summer. Another barbecue was planned for September 22 to welcome members returning to Ottawa.