

Where Are They Now?

The women profiled in these next three pages participated in the first Businesswomen's Team Canada Trade Mission in November 1997 to Washington, D.C., along with over 120 women entrepreneurs from across Canada. A decade later, they share both the highlights of that historic trade mission and their paths to export growth since 1997.



“

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”

Kathy Kastner

CEO

The Health Television System Inc.

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Year Established: 1993

1997 Export Sales: 0%

2007 Export Sales: 60%

Export Market: U.S.

DESCRIPTION: With innovative television networks, The Health Television System Inc. (HTS) has two branded content streams, Healthtv and The Parent Channel, available 24/7 to deliver patient education via bedside TVs in over 80 teaching hospitals across North America. The content, produced by HTS and peer-reviewed, addresses after-hospital care, disease management and compliance issues. The company also installs playback equipment and provides staff training and support materials.

BACKGROUND: With experience in advertising copywriting, television production and on-camera reporting, Kathy started the business when she was an entertainment reporter and pregnant at the time. “The prenatal instructor in the hospital recognized me and asked if I could direct her to A/V support material for her educators. I thought, yes, me!”

ROAD TO EXPORT GROWTH: Kathy has expanded her company's U.S. market penetration from three teaching hospitals a decade ago to 43 today, spanning 15 states. HTS's programming, produced in Canada, is sold directly to hospitals. Kathy has a freelance U.S. rep to find sponsors and advertisers for the programs.

DOING BUSINESS IN THE U.S.: “The U.S. healthcare sector is very businesslike and upfront, with greater emphasis on customer satisfaction, marketing and return on investment.”

BIGGEST EXPORTING CHALLENGE: “Funding full-time representation in the U.S.”

GREATEST REWARD: “The overwhelming positive reaction from our stakeholders, including hospitals, the sponsors and advertisers who are primarily in the pharmaceutical industry, patients, and large American standards setting organizations in this area that recognize the initiatives I've spearheaded. This recognition as a thought leader is my greatest joy.”

LESSON LEARNED: “One of the biggest hurdles I had to overcome was apprehension that a little Canadian firm would have a chance in the big, arrogant U.S. market. The 1997 Trade Mission to the U.S. boosted my confidence enough to shift my inner view from ‘How am I going to tackle this gigantic market?’ to ‘They're going to love this product because it's superior.’ Rather than apologizing for being Canadian, I could go in proudly and capitalize on the respect that exists for Canadian products, certainly in the healthcare market.”

EXPORTING TIP: “Approach U.S. trade publications in your industry for contacts in order to source potential partners or reps.”

EXPORT PLANS: To concentrate on expansion in the U.S. “The market there has opened up well beyond hospitals and extends to insurance, HMOs, and disease management organizations so there is still much to be done that is geographically close to home.”

Reflections on 1997 Washington Trade Mission

Kathy's Objectives: To better understand marketing, business culture and legal issues in U.S.; to explore partnering as a market entry strategy; and to develop an export plan and strategy.

Results: “Absolutely accomplished! Without that mission, I don't even think we'd be in the U.S. It was that powerful. I was able to take advantage of what was offered and change my perception, course and strategy.”

Benefits: “The mission kick-started my U.S. business – resulting in a pilot in three extremely prestigious hospitals: the University of Maryland Medical System, George Washington University Hospital and Johns Hopkins. Other benefits included being exposed to an environment that encouraged collaboration among women and meeting a lawyer from Hodgson Russ (cross-border trade specialists), who has helped immeasurably in our expansion and all other aspects of our U.S. business.”