

The Trade Commissioner Service has 100 years of experience in opening doors to foreign markets. It knows the ropes, and can help exporters deal with the challenges of complex foreign business environments.

The efforts of my department to assist exporters start right at the beginning — when the decision to export is first being examined by an entrepreneur.

To that end, my officials work closely with the Forum for International Trade Training. The FITT philosophy is that to compete successfully in world markets, a company that wants to export has to act like a long-distance runner who trains for a marathon. To help out, FITT provides a wide range of services which can be customized to the skill and experience levels of participants. This year the program is operating in 30 community colleges across Canada, with some 1000 students registered.

FITT is a major undertaking, patterned after the government-business training vehicles that have long been in operation in Germany and Japan. As such, FITT has received federal and provincial government funding along with the support of business associations including the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Exporters' Association and the Canadian Manufacturers' Association.

This represents a degree of co-operation never before seen in Canadian export circles, and a model that we as a government seek to expand upon by bringing in even more new players and partners to work with SMEs — in particular, banks and other financial institutions.

In that regard, I, along with my colleagues the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Industry, have been holding intense discussions with the banking community to find new ways in which we can collectively further the capacity of small business to export.

I am pleased to say we have achieved good progress. For example, a promising new concept is under development by the Export Development Corporation (EDC), in partnership with Canadian financial institutions. It involves increasing operating lines of credit for smaller exporters. This concept is being designed to provide them with more credit — from their local bank — for their short-term foreign sales.

A second initiative that the EDC is pursuing, as a result of our discussions with the banking community, will engage financial institutions more actively in medium-term lending. This framework should increase a financial institution's capacity to provide medium-term credits to the foreign buyers of Canadian goods and services. This will assist Canadian exporters by