

A Canadian entrepreneur's winning mantra for success

Ask Tanya Shaw Weeks what it takes to succeed in the global marketplace and she will tell you to ask as many questions as you can all the time.

"Don't be shy. There's a lot of information out there to tap into that is very helpful," she says.

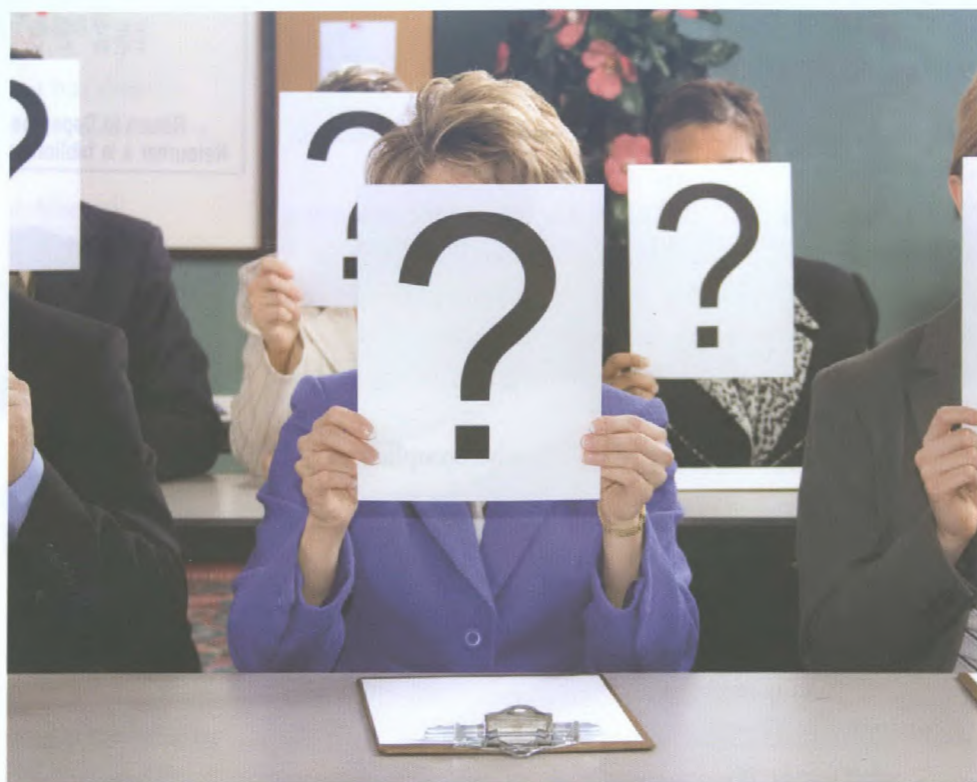
As President and CEO of Unique Patterns Design Ltd., Weeks should know. After about 10 years of exporting, 93% of her company's sales are made in foreign markets.

She established Unique Patterns in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in 1994. The company uses proprietary software developed by Tanya and engineers at Dalhousie University's ID Laboratory to provide custom-made clothing patterns to over 12,000 home-sewing customers.

It is the only company in North America offering this type of service. Unique Patterns currently exports to the United States, Singapore, Japan, Austria and England.

Across Canada, women entrepreneurs like Weeks are taking their products and services to the world. And like her, they are asking questions and seeking information to enhance their export success.

It is estimated that between 10,000 and 40,000 businesses in Canada owned by women or jointly-owned with women are exporting and this accounts for close to 40% of their total sales. Seventy-four percent of these exporters are making sales in the United States, while 60% have exported to Asia and slightly fewer have made sales in Europe.



One Canadian entrepreneur says that to succeed in the global marketplace, you have to ask a lot of questions.

These statistics are all the more impressive considering that more than half of women exporters indicate that they encounter export challenges specific to their gender. These include cultural differences and not being taken seriously as business owners.

Canadian businesswomen also encounter other challenges, including a lack of support networks, cash flow problems, obtaining information on foreign markets and dealing with foreign laws and regulations.

Weeks sought help from diverse government services to overcome some of these obstacles.

Like many entrepreneurs, she tapped into the knowledge and assistance Industry Canada and the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service. She consulted with trade commissioners

throughout the United States to identify opportunities and potential customers.

In response, both to the growing number of women exporters in Canada and the special concerns women have regarding business in foreign markets, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada developed a businesswomen in trade website at www.international.gc.ca/businesswomen.

The site includes essential tools to make exporting simpler and to provide information on potential markets, trade leads and assistance programs. Women interested in trade missions, conferences and export workshops will find the calendar of events beneficial.

For more information, go to www.international.gc.ca/businesswomen, www.exportsource.ca and www.infoexport.gc.ca. ◀

The mighty Baltics: Hear them roar

For years now, the economies of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have been firing on all cylinders.

Since accession to the European Union in 2004, these countries have posted the highest growth rates of any member country. So it comes as no surprise that American, European, Nordic and Asian companies have set up shop there to sell, invest and use these three countries as launching pads to the more than 640 million consumers in Russia and the EU.

But how are Canadian entrepreneurs doing in a region showing such promise?

Claire Poulin, Canada's Ambassador to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, concedes there is a lot of work to be done but adds that there is no better time than now for Canadians to bring their business to the region.

"For Canadian companies, some of the biggest opportunities in all these countries can be found in construction and building products (including green building products), the agri-food sector, information and communications technologies, and energy and environment," says Poulin.

Canada's top official in the Baltics says that the infusion of massive amounts of EU money, or so-called 'structural funds', is fuelling a boom in residential and commercial construction, not

to mention all kinds of infrastructure including rail, roads, information technology and the energy sector.

"Income and corporate tax rates are low, and EU and NATO accession has given these nations a boost of confidence. There are too many opportunities to ignore. After all, Canada is well perceived in the Baltics. We are seen as technologically advanced, and we are seen to offer quality at a great price. But not enough people here are getting the message. We risk losing out simply because we have not given this market enough emphasis."

In addition to being more proactive, Poulin advises Canadian entrepreneurs to contact the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service.

"We are here to help Canadian entrepreneurs. Let us give you the market intelligence you need on your sector and let us put you in touch with the right people. Our support can go a long way."

For more information, contact Irena Cirpuse, email: irena.cirpuse@international.gc.ca, Canadian Embassy in Riga, and go to www.infoexport.gc.ca. ◀



Doing business abroad?



It pays to have the right connections.

Canadians doing business abroad need reliable contacts with in-depth knowledge and local know-how. Finding the right people can be challenging. Finding the wrong ones can be costly.

We are the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service—Canada's most comprehensive network of international business professionals. With over 23,000 business contacts around the world, we can help you get connected and on your way.

So put our seasoned team of international trade experts to work for you today. And see what the right connections can do for your business.

Barbara Giacomini,
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