

## Catch the Export Wave: Open Markets, Resources & Support Await You

The momentum for Canadian women exporters just keeps growing. Witness the following:

- ▶ On October 29, 2003, over 400 Canadian women entrepreneurs, including many exporters, gathered in Ottawa for the release of the final report of the Prime Minister's Task Force on Women Entrepreneurs. The Task Force placed a great deal of importance on women exporting and received submissions from relevant businesswomen's groups. The Report's recommendations can be viewed at [www.liberal.parl.gc.ca/entrepreneur](http://www.liberal.parl.gc.ca/entrepreneur).
- ▶ The heavily-populated Montreal and Toronto markets are scheduled to see Women's Entreprises Centres open, offering export assistance similar to that provided by Western Economic Diversification's (WD) Women's Enterprise Initiative and by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's (ACOA) Women in Business Initiative.
- ▶ Last year, the second Canadian chapter of the Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT) was launched to advance global trade opportunities for women. The new chapter in Alberta joins its sister chapter in the east in Toronto. And Alberta even hosted the organization's Annual Conference in Calgary in September 2003, the first time this event was held in Canada.
- ▶ This spring Vancouver will host the *Women Trading Globally Trade Mission and Forum* ([www.womentradingglobally.com](http://www.womentradingglobally.com)), sponsored by RBC Financial Group in collaboration with the Global Banking Alliance for Women. Delegates from the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Ireland will meet Canadian exporters there from March 31 to April 2 to forge international business partnerships. (Additional business matching will take place in Toronto April 5.)

With the latest statistics revealing that only 9% of Canadian women business owners export, these developments are helping to create an even more supportive environment to encourage more women to expand internationally. Combine them with the support of existing services offered by the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service, Export Development Canada, WD, ACOA and women's business associations across Canada and the message is clear: there is a host of services to tap into, most of them even free or low-cost. Take the Virtual Trade Commissioner,

for example. You can log in anytime to view market information and business leads, make service requests and even update your company's details after you register at [www.infoexport.gc.ca](http://www.infoexport.gc.ca)

Even veteran exporters, like **Sylvie Boileau**, President of Dubo Electric Ltd., continue to access government resources — 15 years after she started exporting. "Everything is far more organized and structured now than when I started, so it's much easier for newcomers who want to export."

And there is more good news for women. According to experienced exporters, the gender barrier is coming down around the world.

**"Absolutely, women are becoming more accepted all over the place," adds Sylvie. "Some countries might be at level one, others at level 10 in terms of evolution, but there's no question it is changing."**

"Although there are some countries still uncomfortable dealing with businesswomen, that is changing rapidly," says **Lisa Olfman**, President & Co-Founder of award-winning Portfolio Entertainment Inc. "When you participate in international shows, for example, they are truly international — with people of all shapes and sizes, who are there to do business."

**Rosaleen Citron**, the no-nonsense CEO of WhiteHat Inc — an IT security provider — echoes these sentiments: "In preparing to export and in selling to other countries, it doesn't matter if you're a man or woman. Certainly in the North American market and increasingly in Europe, women are so much more accepted. At the end of the day, what matters most is not your gender but whether your goods get shipped to where they belong."

The bottom line: Everyone wants women entrepreneurs to succeed — both domestically and globally. As you read through the profiles of the dynamic Canadian women exporters featured in this 4th annual supplement, remember one thing — you, too, can succeed on the global stage. "We are a country that is welcomed almost anywhere!" insists Sylvie Boileau.

"At the beginning, we wasted a great deal of time and energy pursuing or quoting on everything that came our way, lured into believing these were all big projects when in fact it was often just a case of smoke and mirrors. It's important to find the right contacts and right network in order to determine the legitimate projects and the real decision-makers."

**SYLVIE BOILEAU**, President, Dubo Electric Ltd.

"It is better to charge in U.S. dollars if you are marketing to the U.S. Americans typically don't pick up on the fact there is a price break if you charge in Canadian dollars. They just see the price. You can do this easily by having an e-Commerce storefront in U.S. dollars on your Web site and setting up a merchant account with your bank."

**SUSAN SWEENEY**, Founder & President, Connex Network Inc.

### LEARN FROM THE EXPERTS

The savvy women entrepreneurs featured in the following pages have over 50 years of combined exporting expertise. Here they share some of the biggest lessons they learned while expanding their businesses beyond Canada's borders:

"Since 9/11, we have been keenly aware of the need to use a sales approach with the U.S. that is non-threatening. We talk about the favourable exchange rate and that works well."

**MICHELLE YATES**, President, MAD Creations Inc.

"It's one thing to collect your receivables in Canada. But what if a client from another country doesn't pay their bill? It can cost you more to go collect it than its original worth. I've learned that accounts receivable insurance through EDC (Export Development Canada) is a must; get it as soon as you can."

**ROSALEEN CITRON**, CEO, WhiteHat Inc.



**Pamela Baker**  
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Year Established: 1989  
Employees: 6  
Years Exporting: 2  
Export Sales: 40 %  
Export Markets: U.S. (Alaska,  
Indiana, Oregon)

**"Be sure to follow up quickly with contacts you make on trade missions."**

#### Business Description:

A First Nations fashion business, T.O.C. Legends Native Threads/Touch of Culture specializes in sportswear and ready-to-wear couture that incorporates sophisticated West Coast artwork. The enterprise occupies a retail front and two large studios where custom orders are designed and manufactured immediately. The firm contracts out larger orders. Officially registered as a school in September 2000 and accredited as a teaching institute for fashion design and sewing in January 2004, T.O.C. Legends also trains First Nations students, all of them from rural communities. Several have since started their own businesses and some have gone on to get a formal degree, simulating in a way Pamela's own career path.

#### Background:

A member of the Squamish Nation, Pamela lives on the Capilano Reserve in North Vancouver. She studied Textile Arts at Capilano College and has a degree in Fashion Design from the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. While living in the U.S., she helped coordinate fashion shows and applied that experience by starting shows for Squamish Nation members when she returned home. Encouraged by her father, who owned his own business on the Capilano Reserve for 34 years, and determined to promote contemporary native West Coast artwork, she started her business.

In her earlier life, though, Pamela had been an alcohol and drug counselor. Her understanding of the specific problems faced by her First Nations peers inspired her to start her school: "My belief is that social development creates economic development, so I'm working to assist

people who are on social assistance, as well as creative individuals who have a desire for self sufficiency."

#### Honours:

In her senior year at L.A.'s Otis College, Pamela won the prestigious Arthur Gilbert Award for an elegant burnt velvet gown featuring an aboriginal design. The dress was displayed in the Neiman Marcus department store in Beverly Hills.

#### Why Started Exporting:

Pamela first began marketing her designs in the U.S., not in Canada. "I did it backwards, but I wanted to see whether the U.S. market would buy our Native designs and whether we could ship abroad. The reception has been good. They see a high-quality product."

#### Export Preparation:

As a First Nations woman, Pamela had access to assistance through Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC) and various Native funding agencies. "When I first came back from LA, we applied for ABC marketing funds and were able to do a photo shoot of eveningwear." ABC also helped the fledgling firm attend trade shows in Chicago, Las Vegas, Seattle and Alaska, where it generated orders. In January, she also participated in the three-day Canadian Forum on Culture Enterprise in Paris, organized by the Department of Canadian Heritage to showcase Canadian arts and cultural industries. "It was awesome — from the reaction to the couture piece I was wearing to the connections I made. And Canadian Heritage was very helpful in introducing me to key people, in promoting my work and in subsidizing some of my travel expenses."

#### Biggest Exporting Benefit:

"Along with getting Native artwork out to different countries and educating people about Northwest Coast art, one of the main benefits is that the more we are able to export and also ship across Canada, the more Native people I can employ. That's always been one of my goals."

#### Greatest Challenge:

"Finding the right courier and broker to ship to the U.S., including dealing with customs regulations, has been challenging, particularly since the business has been growing rapidly and I want our products represented in 100 stores within a year."

#### Exporting Advice:

▶ **Be patient and research as much as possible.** "For example, check out various shippers and compare services and prices. Don't settle for the first offer."

▶ **Translate your marketing materials.** "If you want to be taken seriously, invest in translating your promotional literature, including your business cards, into the language of your target market."

▶ **Follow up.** "Be sure to quickly get back to the contacts you make on trade missions."

#### Future Exporting Goals:

Pamela's plans include focusing on refining her ready-to-wear couture collection to market in Europe within a year. Another goal is to set up workshops with Native organizations and to write a manual about exporting, based on what she has learned. "This will make it easier for all other First Nations people, especially those we are training here, because one day they will want to export. The possibilities out there are endless."