

skills development. So the social security system is being reviewed to find policies that will support a strong, competitive work force . . . a work force that includes every Canadian with the ability to work.

Another colleague, the Minister of Industry, has focussed on making government investment in science and technology a more effective, strategic industrial resource. One example is the Canadian Technology Network, which is designed to encourage firms and research establishments to develop and use the sort of leading-edge technology needed to compete in today's global marketplace.

Facing global competition has become the sine qua non of any serious business plan. And the best way to find out if your company is truly competitive is to tackle the export challenge.

The arithmetic is simple. In the global market for many niche products and services, Canada often accounts for only one per cent or so of global consumption. Companies that do not export are often ignoring literally 99 per cent of their potential customers.

The process of exporting successfully is somewhat more difficult. The vast majority have to take to exporting one step at a time, pausing at each step to seek advice and information about what lies ahead.

The owners or executives of SMEs that I meet emphasize that they are always in the market for information about market opportunities and how to exploit them.

My department is in the business of offering just that kind of guidance to exporters, particularly to the small and medium-sized companies that need our help most.

For example, the focus of our program of support to fairs and missions has shifted to SMEs. Then there are the programs to provide hands-on training to new exporters to the U.S. border states, Mexico and Europe.

WIN Exports, our electronic data bank of Canadian firms capable of taking on export challenges, as well as our market intelligence and information program, are also being enhanced to better meet the needs of small businesses seeking niche markets worldwide.

Backed by a range of specialized information and trade promotion programs and services, my department's trade commissioners operate in over 100 countries.