

**W**est coast businessman Claude Tchao knows that communication can happen in places you least expect it. Joining the 1999 Team Canada trade mission to Japan to promote his seafood supply company, Tchao ended up signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in his capacity as CEO of Divelink International Technology Inc. Through its cutting-edge underwater communications technology, now being promoted and distributed throughout Japan, the Vancouver company is revolutionizing the traditionally silent world of scuba diving.

Incorporated in 1999, Divelink has developed the only voice-activated, hands-free underwater communications unit on the market. Unlike its competitors, which employ a push-button system, Divelink's system can differentiate between voice versus other sounds — notably the constant hissing of bubbles. "Because our machines can identify voice, it frees your hands under water, which is the most important thing in diving," explains Tchao.



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The diving community — both recreational and professional — is beginning to recognize the safety, productivity and confidence-enhancing benefits of such a device. To date, Divelink has sold 8,000-9,000 units

## Big splash in Japan

# B.C. Divelink tech

in 28 countries, including the United States, Australia and in Europe.

### Team Canada paves the way

In a previous incarnation as Stone Electronics Ltd., Divelink had already made inroads in the United States. It was through the Florida distributor that Tchao became aware that Marine Star Rays of Osaka was interested in providing Japan-wide distribution. Tchao planned to make contact with the company chairman during the 1999 Team Canada mission to Japan.

Tchao had signed up for the mission in his capacity as Chairman of Richmond-based Tri-Star Seafood Supply Ltd. From his positive experience on the 1997 Team Canada trade mission to Korea, the Philippines and Thailand, Tchao was expecting to significantly raise the profile of his Win Exports-registered company in Japan.

What he wasn't expecting was to receive so much attention for Divelink — including the signing of the MOU with Marine Star Rays — that he had no time to promote his seafood products at all.

### Team Spirit

The benefits of the mission began before the Team Canada plane even arrived in Osaka. On board, Tchao met a Canadian lawyer who ended up helping him set up the MOU with Marine Star Rays.

"There is a genuine team spirit that pervades these missions," says Tchao. "I can't begin to describe how much we've been helped by interacting with other business and government participants." Through the

lawyer's connections, Tchao is also looking into a joint-venture possibility for Tri-Star with a Toronto company.

### Mission enhances prestige

Just two weeks after the MOU signing, the Chairman of Marine Star Rays flew at

his own expense to Vancouver to finalize the exclusive distribution contract.

"It would never have happened without Team Canada," explains Tchao. "Our status as a delegate gave us the prestige we needed in order to meet the Chairman of Marine Star Rays and



to reassure him of our company and its products. By providing a professional yet informal setting, Team Canada facilitated our discussions and created a comfortable business environment. It really gave a small Canadian company the chance to gain tremendous exposure in Japan."

### Fostering relationships important

The Japanese market is not easy to penetrate. The largest barrier, says Tchao, is language. "Relationships are very important to the Japanese. You have to take the time to understand their culture and earn their trust. That means hiring translators and interpreters and making face-to-face visits. The expense is huge."

The expense is, however, worth it for a company whose product is being promoted and distributed in the country's \$7 billion diving market.

While the United States is the most accessible market for the products of Tchao's various companies, the busy entrepreneur continues to participate in Team Canada missions to push into Asia Pacific markets. His next stop was China — on the Prime Minister's

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