

Women-led and women-owned small and medium-sized businesses are certainly in that category.

Another reason for beginning with our largest trading partner and closest ally is that it makes sense for new exporters to start off in a market that is relatively close to home and that has relatively similar business practices.

It is an opportunity for our companies to gain valuable exporting expertise before going global.

And I have every expectation that they will do so.

Because the products and services being offered by the Canadian businesswomen with us today are world class! They represent everything from aerospace to automobiles and from petroleum products to the new leading-edge environmental industries.

They are manufacturers of computer software and other information technology products, of food and drink, of health aids, toys, paints, pharmaceuticals, paper, promotional products, clothing, jewellery, artwork and much more.

They are experts in management consulting, taxation, transportation, communications, education, film distribution, estate planning, strategic alliances, government relations, talent management and other services.

And many of them have put deals in place already.

In fact, later today we will have the opportunity to witness the signing of contracts and strategic alliances in areas as diverse as cross-border freight shipping, specialty papers, media products, promotional products, printing and others.

But, believe me, there will be more. We have found that following similar trade information sessions, fully 55 percent of the group go on to make their first sales in the United States within a year to a year and a half.

And as we agreed when we met last summer, Mr. Secretary - when you led a delegation of small and medium-sized businesses to Ottawa - the success of trade missions is in the follow-up.

To that end, your department here in Washington along with the Small Business Administration and my department in Ottawa have agreed to work together on a Canada-U.S. Women's Trade Summit to take place at York University in Toronto in May 1999.

In fact, I had a very productive meeting yesterday with Mrs. Alvarez of the Small Business Administration, and, like you, Mr. Secretary, she is very supportive of this initiative.