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When complete, the market information section will include market profiles and market summaries on 48 sectors and sub-sectors, covering everything from advanced manufacturing technology to tourism. It will also contain industry directories and directories of trade fairs and of professional conferences. Each market profile will consist of five chapters: (1) background information, key market trends and long-term dynamics, (2) customers and competitors, (3) opportunities and market access issues, (4) regulatory issues, and (5) key government and industry contacts in Canada and Mexico.

The Knowledge Base will be an important tool in improving our level of service to the client. It brings together in one place virtually all the information a company needs to develop and implement its market strategy. In addition to providing the user with the factual information on the market, through the reference material, the business issues, and the business planning tools sections, it will contribute to the exporter's knowledge and expertise on *how* to do business. It delineates not only what business opportunities there are but how to position the firm to take advantage of those opportunities.

The Knowledge Base makes full use of the latest information delivery mechanisms including the Department's InfoCentre Bulletin Board and FaxLink. Access is at one's fingertips – and is available in seconds. In addition to facilitating continuous updating, the format reduces the need for printed material, making it environmentally-friendly.

The Open Bidding System (OBS) is itself a delivery mechanism. Through partnering, the OBS now includes a Mexico section for NAFTA eligible tenders. Within 48 hours of their publication in Mexico, NAFTA tender notices are posted on the OBS.

The quality and consistency of the information contained in the Knowledge Base is ensured through the use of *research templates*. Developed with input from experienced exporters, their purpose is to guide researchers and writers. The templates allow us to standardize the preparation of documents, defining both the research process and the level of quality required in the information. They simplify and accelerate information gathering and they ensure that everything is covered and nothing is duplicated.

Before being added to the Knowledge Base, information is validated by public and private sector organizations in both Canada and Mexico. It then goes through a careful process of quality control and production before it is finally released. As a result, market profiles and other reference materials are distributed to industry with the confidence that the information is complete and accurate.

The Knowledge Base will be launched officially in September with approximately 50 percent of its development completed. The first CD-ROM version will also be available at that time. The Knowledge Base will be fully operational by March 1997. The hard part is almost done: the structure of the system, or the "sausage machine" as Prospectus refers to it, will be completed in June, and all that will be left will be the production and updating of the information flowing through the system.

Although still in the pilot stage, the Knowledge Base has caught the attention of other trade divisions. The concept and system can be applied to any country or regional market. For those who want to get involved right now, we are looking for a marketable name for the Knowledge Base. Your suggestions are welcome – please contact Guy Salette at 995-8804 or via E-mail.

THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS:

The Second 'I' in 'MI/I'

While the Knowledge Base will be indispensable to Canadian business, it will also be important to the trade officer in the field. Its availability enables the trade officer to concentrate on the *market intelligence part of MI/I* rather than on time-consuming market information requests that the client can now obtain independently. It will allow us to get out of the market information business.

Having additional time to gather market intelligence, for which the post is uniquely positioned, is a more efficient use of mission resources. Will we be ready to respond to the tough, complex questions which will come from a better prepared clientele? Will we be equipped to give in depth counselling a more sophisticated clientele will demand? Like the proverbial two edged sword, a better prepared client means we must be better prepared.

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