

A number of criteria are used by the judges in the selection process: (1) significant increases in export sales, (2) success in breaking into new markets, and (3) success in introducing new export products into world markets. Other factors considered include: level of Canadian content; range of markets; holding off strong foreign competition in overseas markets; and the level of export intensity, that is, exports as a percentage of total sales.

In the first two years of the program (1983 and 1984), out of more than 400 applicants, 29 companies received recognition. These were drawn from all regions of the country, and varied widely as to company size and industry sector. Visits were made to all but two of the award winners in the summer of 1985, and exporting discussed with 57 owners and senior executives involved in international trade.

Since the goal was to find out how these companies had achieved exporting "stardom," discovering what factors had enabled these companies — small and large, some new to exporting, others more seasoned — to turn in excellent performances during an economically difficult period was of

great interest. It was anticipated that the experiences of this group of high-performance exporters would yield interesting and useful pointers to other companies, either starting out or looking afresh at their international operations.

It is hazardous to draw on the experiences of a relatively small number of export achievers and present a recipe for success. Clearly, what works for one company or industry may not work for another. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to discern what common threads were present in the "fabric" of these award winning firms. In order to present the fullest "picture," efforts have also been made to draw out some of the success factors particular to certain types of companies (for example, small versus large) and industries (for example, high technology, engineering services). In a sense, these are the "uncommon threads."