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Thinking of exporting to the U.S.? It pays to learn the ropes

Did you know that over the past 20 years, the New Exporters to Border States program (NEBS) has prepared more than 20,000 small and medium-sized Canadian companies for export success in the U.S.? Although NEBS is available to business people across Canada, the program continues to be most active in Ontario, where it began in 1984. At least six times a year, new and

potential exporters from Ontario get expert advice through visits to one of Canada's busiest border crossings, at either Buffalo or Detroit.

During this two-day mission, participants typically visit a U.S. customs office and a fulfilment warehouse; they attend a one-on-one interview with a trade commissioner at the Canadian Consulate General and receive a briefing on export financing. They also hear from a customs broker, a freight forwarder, an immigration specialist, an accountant, a banker and a manufacturers' representative.

The recruitment of Ontario companies to the NEBS program is handled by Ken Campbell, an international marketing consultant at Toronto-based Ontario Exports Inc. (OEI), the export development agency of the Government of Ontario. "For Canadians to be successful in the U.S., they need to understand the nuts and bolts of doing business across the border," Campbell says. "NEBS is an ideal way to learn the ropes. It's a tightly-packaged export overview given on-site by experts in the field."

"Participating in the NEBS program was one of the most valuable things I've ever done as a person running a small business," says Martin Black of Baxter Creek Tools. Before attending NEBS, Black found that shipping costs from his facility in Angus, Ontario, to the U.S. were simply too high to fill small orders for his woodworking device. NEBS introduced Black to the solution. During a tour of a warehousing facility in Buffalo, he learned that he could reduce shipping costs by sending large quantities across the border and warehousing them on the other side. It was a discovery that Black says led to "phenomenal savings" for his company.

According to Mary Mokka, Trade Commissioner and NEBS Coordinator at the Canadian Consulate General in Buffalo, it's a formula that works. "There's nothing like hearing it from the experts. In the 20 years I've been working on this program, I've done hundreds of NEBS missions and every single time I learn something new," Mokka says. "And the price is right. It's only \$150 for two days of export education."

Even export veterans can benefit from the information provided on a NEBS mission. Thirty to 40% of the participants are experienced exporters and, according to Campbell, many of them are fervent NEBS advocates. "They tell me they wish they'd gone on NEBS before they started exporting because they would have saved a lot of time and money."

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The Ambassador Bridge, connecting Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan.

