



Canadian business owners participate in the 2010 women's trade mission to the WBENC National Conference in Baltimore.

Women bring diversity to the world's supply chains

When it comes to doing business with large corporations and governments worldwide, women today are vastly under-represented in supply chains. In fact, WEConnect International estimates that less than five percent of government or corporate spending in any given country goes to women-owned businesses.

What some may view as a serious challenge is turning to opportunity through supplier diversity programs. First launched in the United States in 1997, and now gaining popularity in other countries, supplier diversity initiatives help ensure that corporate giants and governments set aside a percentage or dollar amount to purchase from under-represented groups such as women and other minorities.

"We've now reached the tipping point," says Mary Anderson, Executive Director of WEConnect Canada. "Corporations are embracing supplier diversity. In some cases, it's because they have to do so from a compliance perspective in global procurement opportunities. Most often, it's because those corporations already embrace diversity and they want to be more inclusive in their supply chains."

Leading the way is the United States diversity buying program managed by the National Minority Supplier Development Council, which has 3,500 corporate members. "Supplier diversity initiatives now cross all industry sectors. It's a multi-billion dollar industry in the United States," says Philadelphia-based Trade Commissioner Beth Pomper. "Each company maintains a diversity scorecard and keep records of their spend on women and minority-owned products and services. Senior management performance pay is tied to their supplier diversity success."

Worldwide, more than 80 percent of multinational corporations now require supplier diversity from tier one and tier two suppliers, including Cisco, IBM, Intel, Manpower, Motorola and Pfizer. While anyone can do business with large multinationals and governments, accessing supplier diversity programs requires certification through an internationally-recognized certification program like the one offered by WEConnect Canada.

Once you've identified the opportunities, companies and markets you want to pursue, remember to tap into the expertise and support of the Trade Commissioner Service. Trade commissioners in Canada and around the world can help you prepare to export, assess your market potential, connect you with qualified contacts and locate leads.

And when those golden supplier diversity opportunities come along? "Follow up with buyers, and follow up often," says Pomper. "Buyers are, for the most part, quite responsive. Call or email the supplier diversity manager first, then the director. Be tenacious and know how to work the system to get real results."

To connect with the TCS or register your company with the Virtual Trade Commissioner, visit www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca.

What happens in Vegas may boost your bottom line

Join our supplier diversity mission for women

Don't miss the world's largest business fair for women-owned enterprises. The annual Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) Conference and Business Fair is a must-attend event for women who want to access contracts through government and corporate supplier diversity programs. Join our trade mission to Las Vegas, Nevada from June 20-23, 2011 and network your way to success. Last year's WBENC event attracted 3,200 participants and more than 350 exhibitors, including 120 women business enterprise exhibitors.

WHY ATTEND?

Knowledge - Find out about business opportunities with Fortune 500 companies and meet many of their buyers—all under one roof.

Contacts - Network with like-minded women who want to do business, collaborate and form strategic alliances.

Speakers - From nationally-recognized business leaders to *New York Times* bestselling authors, the conference offers educational workshops and high-profile speakers with compelling messages.

Canadian delegates will also receive:

- pre-conference webinars and workshops
- on-site training workshops
- Canadian delegate briefing and networking
- invitation to the WEConnect International reception
- matching to a United States-certified Women Business Enterprise "buddy"
- support from trade commissioners on-site

For more information about the conference, visit: www.wbenc.org/wbencconf.

Are trade missions for you?

If you're thinking about joining a trade mission, do a cost-benefit analysis. Make sure you'll get some return by participating—contacts, sales leads, market information and more. After all, you're investing time and money to participate. Information about upcoming missions is regularly updated at www.canadalexport.gc.ca.

Once you decide to go, be sure to plan ahead using the Business Women in International Trade's new Trade Mission Toolkit. Packed with valuable tips and templates, this essential guide is available at www.businesswomenintrade.gc.ca.