

360° Support

When it comes to providing assistance to Canadian companies in foreign markets, today's Trade Commissioner Service goes full circle. By Jane Rutherford

AS a trade commissioner in DFAIT's St. John's regional office, I hear from companies in the ocean technologies, aerospace and defence sectors interested in doing business outside of Canada. Where this once meant helping such firms sell their products or services internationally, today I consider other objectives they may have, such as R&D partnerships, investment interests and commercializing new technologies. It's a 360° proposition.

This is integrative trade in action. Providing services along the continuum of needs has always been a part of the department's trade priorities, and is a central component of the Transformation Agenda. Successful companies need to think broadly; so does the Trade Commissioner Service (TCS). Our value in regional centres such as St. John's—one of 17 TCS offices across Canada and 150 around the world, where some 1,000 officers provide services to Canadian businesses—is that we get to know our clients. We then work with a broad network of allies at posts, other government departments and industry associations to tailor services to them.

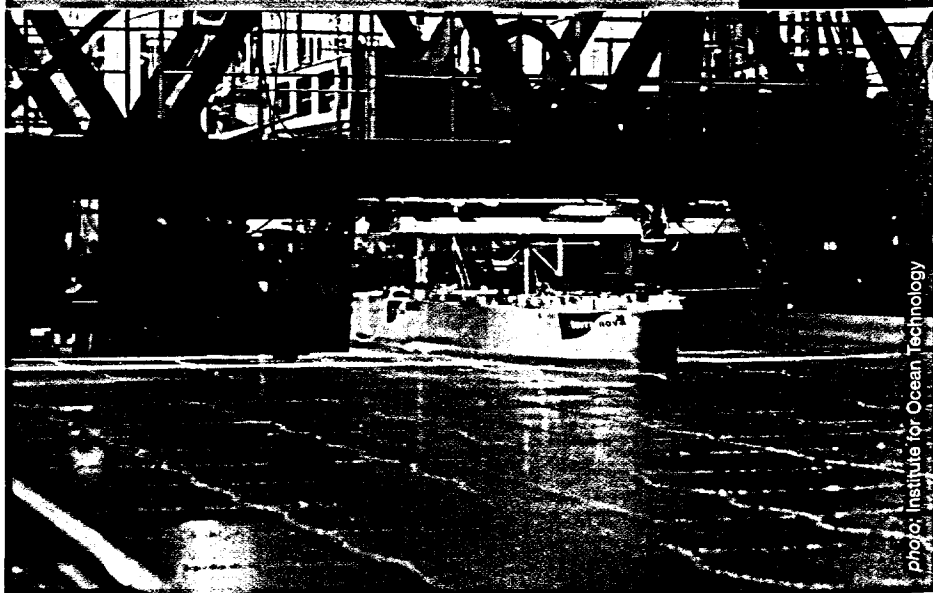
For the past 18 months, for example, I've worked closely with the Canadian Consulate in San Diego to help build science and technology, business and investment relationships between our two regions. St. John's and San Diego are home to two of North America's largest ocean technologies clusters, a concentration of companies and institutions with goods, services, research and training in marine and ocean industries. Together, we're also working in northern Mexico, also home to a significant number of marine companies and research institutes.

Partners in the "cluster-to-cluster" project now include NGOs in St. John's and San Diego, our posts in Mexico City and San Diego, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the National Research Council, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the City of St. John's. Two NGOs—OceansAdvance in St. John's and the Center for Maritime Systems and Security in San Diego—signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in mid-2007 to collaborate on business, investment and R&D.

This MOU led to a successful mission from my region in April 2008 to San Diego and northern Mexico, which was led by Trevor Taylor, Newfoundland and Labrador's Minister of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development, and included representatives from nine ocean technologies companies as well as Memorial University's Marine Institute. They met with companies, toured industrial and academic institutions and hosted forums. This resulted in connections between companies and institutions in St. John's, San Diego and Baja California in Mexico. In addition to leads and contacts, my clients have gained fruitful relationships and acceptance in the ocean technologies and maritime security network on the west coast of North America.

Relationship-building is part of our "after care," and we'll continue to work with our clients in San Diego and Mexico, although now my clients are saying, "Where are we going next? Let's try this in another part of the world!"

Jane Rutherford, a trade commissioner in the St. John's regional office, says: "Check out the Newfoundland and Labrador ocean technologies cluster map at www.oceansadvance.net. If you see a fit for a business opportunity or a joint R&D project, or know of an investor who might be interested in our innovative technology, send me an email at jane.rutherford@international.gc.ca."



The ice tank at the National Research Council's Institute for Ocean Technology is part of the ocean technologies infrastructure in St. John's, which attracts oceans-related research collaborators from around the world.

Photo: Institute for Ocean Technology