

4.3 Information Gaps and Role of Government

In defining the role of government as a provider of information to assist Canadian exporters and potential exporters, the research showed that there is a divergence of views between small and large businesses. Whereas participants from large businesses questioned whether the government should play a role in providing commercial information, small businesses felt that there is a role for government in helping Canadian companies do business abroad. Again, these views were related to the relative resources available to different sized businesses.

Participants identified a number of potential opportunities (gaps) which could be pursued by government:

Export intelligence network. There was some interest expressed in developing a systematic means of harnessing the information gathering activities (competitive information, sales leads, contact names and numbers) of commercial officers and government sector experts. One participant raised the example of a system used by the Swedish government whereby foreign service officers are trained to gather information and convey it to a central location in their home country, where it is disseminated to relevant companies through sector-specific newsletters. Small business participants said that the information could be disseminated either by fax or through an electronic network.

Fax-back service. In recognition that the majority of small businesses are still not equipped with modems, participants suggested offering a fax-back service where interested business people could complete an information request form, fax it to a central location, and receive the required information back by fax.

➤ *"They could send out a letter with a very simple questionnaire and we could just tick off what we wanted. Then we could just fax it back and they could just send us the pertinent information that we need."*

Partner network. Several participants expressed an interest in contact information on other Canadian companies that may be interested in joint ventures to enter foreign markets. They felt that partner listings or solicitations could be made available through an electronic network.

Country briefings. A number of people mentioned that much of the information that they require on doing business in foreign countries is likely available in