

Team Canada at Work

Preparations for the Team Canada 1997 trade mission began immediately after the mission to South and Southeast Asia in January 1996. Guill Rishchynski, who headed the organizing team in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, explains what went on behind the scenes.

"First, the existing database of eligible companies was expanded from 1,400 to 2,200 export-ready companies." To be considered eligible to participate on the Team Canada mission, companies had to be corporate entities based in Canada that have existing export capacity. They also had to have either existing activity or an interest in the Asia-Pacific market.

Invitations to the 2,200 companies were sent out in October. "People were given more time than before to consider the invitation. We followed up with a massive telephone campaign. We received 400 positive responses — that's a 20-per-cent success rate."

Rishchynski explains that consultations held with key stakeholders such as the provinces and previous mission participants were key to creating an even more successful mission.

"We learned lessons from the first two Team Canada missions [in 1994 and 1996] in making this one even better," he says.

New initiatives added in 1997

As a result of these consultations, and at the request of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Minister for International Trade Art Eggleton, unique initiatives were instituted for Team Canada 1997.

The sharing of one plane by representatives of government, business, education and the media was one initiative that helped create a sense of solidarity, even before the participants arrived in Asia. "It fostered a sense of belonging among business representatives and politicians — of being in this endeavour together. An incredible chemistry developed that was important to the success of the mission."

Another initiative that contributed to this positive chemistry was the number of meeting opportunities between business leaders and the Prime Minister, provincial premiers and federal ministers. "There wasn't a day that passed that the official delegation and business people didn't see each other — whether at breakfasts, luncheons, signing ceremonies or workshops," says Rishchynski.

For the first time, too, the Prime Minister hosted a "Team Canada Forum" in all three countries, during which political leaders, including Minister for International Trade Art Eggleton, Secretary of State (Asia Pacific) Raymond Chan and the provincial premiers met with company representatives to discuss issues related to the mission.

Similarly, the premiers hosted two breakfasts — one at the beginning and one at the end of the mission — for the key business people from their respective provinces. Blocks of time were also set aside for the premiers to attend certain events with their business people.

Another first for Team Canada 1997 was the inclusion of education as a separate sector. Sixty people from the education field took part in the mission, including 16 college and university presidents [see article on education, p. 12].

The participation of mayors from municipalities across the country was sought to provide an intermediary role between local businesses and potential Asian partners.

Continued on page 23 — Team Canada