

fairs would need to be assessed. As well, comparison of trade fair activity and events between companies participating with government support and those doing so independently should reveal differences in performance. The key point is that evaluation needs to be *comparative* and against a yardstick.

Governments need to know if an export assistance program contributes positively to company performance. Evaluation is concerned with systematic comparison of results of program use against goals and objectives. For users, the key question is: will the program have a measurable effect on performance? For government: will the program achieve a net benefit for the business community and economy as a whole that would otherwise not be realised? Four key issues are relevant in program evaluation:⁴³

- program rationale - does the program make sense?
- impacts and effects - what happens as the result of a program?
- objectives - has a program achieved what was expected?
- alternatives - are there better ways of achieving the results?

As various evaluation studies in Canada and other countries bear out, measuring the impact of an export promotion program on a company, or on the business community, is difficult. Let's look at the relationship of program and company. A company decides to enter a market with trade fair assistance and realizes export sales after the fair. What was the program impact on the company? Just as advertising is not the sole cause of sales, so too program use cannot be shown as the only determinant of export sales. Besides the program, other factors have come into play. For example, a substantial time lag may have occurred between program use and sales in question. During this period the demand or competitive situation in the foreign market may well have changed dramatically in favour of the company's products.

Consider another company entering the right market with assistance, but in fact was inept about foreign marketing and achieved minimal sales. Yet another company using a program to look for opportunities in a foreign market but, unable to find an agent, did not proceed. Its export interest piqued, it then focused attention on another market, making satisfactory representation arrangements and sales. In all three situations we can justifiably ask: What impact should be attributed to the government export promotion programs used?⁴⁴ No easy answer is possible.

The methodology and measurement of program evaluation is complex because the approaches used leave considerable uncertainty about program outcome and impact. There is the view that