

workloads. The widespread use of fax machines has not only made posts (and others) more accessible, but has changed expectations about response times. Now, many companies expect "next day" responses to fax enquiries.

The work overload problem impacts on all parts of the network but smaller posts abroad have been particularly hard-hit, because TC cuts have had a disproportionate effect in these settings. A consequence of these trends is that the trade and investment development network has more work than can be properly handled by the staff available. Since all enquiries must be answered, it is quite obvious that the quality of response suffers (see below).

Several initiatives are underway to deal with this problem, but others seem necessary. These are:

- Contracting out
- Cost recovery
- Filtering
- Fewer events
- Teaming

Cost recovery and contracting out were mentioned above. Contracting out certain services helps reduce the workload, but the budget effect is less clear. Cost recovery was established as an expense-sharing move but, over time, has become a "nuisance factor" dissuading less serious exporters from participating in government programs. As such, it helps to filter out the less serious company. Filtering is likely to play a bigger role in the future since many TCs admit that there is too much of what they term "garbage traffic." While the acceptance criteria for financial assistance under programs such as PEMD filters out companies that are not "export-ready," those same companies still have ready access to all posts. Stories abound of companies that engage in mass-faxing to posts, with requests for information of one kind or another. Since there is an obligation to answer all enquiries, workloads are affected by companies that have done little if any preparatory export work themselves. More explicit filtering of companies will help reduce workloads so that time and effort can be spent on companies that are more committed and better prepared and, thus, have a greater chance of foreign market success. Filtering is a role that ITCs were expected to help with but, for various reasons, companies often by-pass these offices and go direct to posts. Although many agree that filtering rules are necessary, deciding how to implement such an approach is less straightforward, particularly since this is likely to impact most on smaller and newer companies—the key constituency served by government. Filtering might be more easily achieved if the emphasis is on "filtering in" rather than on "filtering out." The former specifies company actions that qualify them for export assistance (e.g. attending an export training program), whereas the latter approach disqualifies companies that do not meet certain criteria (e.g. minimum sales level).