

an interview with

Jessie Hislop

Jessie Hislop is a Trade Commissioner and the Manager of the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Calgary, Alberta. She has been posted in Milan (1993-1998) and Oslo (1990-1993).

What are the key challenges of managing an ITC?

As they do at posts, challenges vary enormously across the country. In addition to the many incoming delegations and outreach programs, our major problem in Alberta is the size and proportion of the demand. Companies here are internationally minded and think of exporting at a very early stage. And the number of referrals we get is enormous.

How do you work with the ITC in Edmonton? The Canada Business Service Centre? Western Economic Diversification? The province?

Edmonton is the senior office, and we report to the Senior Trade Commissioner there. We don't work geographically at all – we cover our sectors for the whole province.

The Canada Business Service Centre (CBSC) is an excellent partner, handling the clients and providing a lot of information. However, in a particular or a complicated case, they will transfer the call to us. As the Calgary satellite becomes stronger, it will reduce the number of inquiries that come to us – they'll give out the information, and we can concentrate on advice and counselling.

We have a harmonious relationship with Western Economic Diversification (WD), where they offer export-readiness training and development, and run seminars for companies. They also run some of our multise-

toral events. The goal is to give clients what they need.

We have an MOU with the province of Alberta that outlines priority sectors and markets. It is a very active and positive relationship. Together, we openly discuss who will take the lead on a specific project or how we can divide the work.

Would you like to share a best practice with our readers?

We have a system that helps us deal with the high demand of outreach activities. Using WINFax, we send companies four or five bullet points about trends, technologies and major projects related to the territories covered by our incoming officers. Companies find it very useful, and it helps us sell our outreach service.

Can you tell us of a touching or funny experience with your clients?

I helped a small company – a husband, wife and 12 employees – get out of a big crisis with an Italian procurement manager. We were able to work out the bugs, obtain legal advice and an agreement. The company was clever in restructuring the bid, which they won: a \$3.5 million project! This was the biggest project they had ever done. For me, it was fabulous, fun and rewarding.

W*hat is the difference between the job you do in an ITC and in a post?*

In an ITC, we have far more contact with the companies than we do at posts, and our scope is global. For example, when I was in Milan, I covered strictly northern Italy, while here the client will ask for advice on whether to do business in South America or the Middle East.

One major difference is that we have far less infrastructure and no support staff. We have no commercial assistant here – there are just three officers, so we do everything. Finally – and surprisingly enough – we are far more loosely “connected” to DFAIT than the posts are. Being part of Industry Canada's infrastructure, we are not on the same e-mail and Intranet systems as posts. The only system we share is MITNET.