

## RECOGNIZING IMPORTERS

By Anna McCormick

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Trade is a two-way street and we so often forget the most vital contributor – the importer. Most exporters would agree, even if somewhat reluctantly, that successful exporting often results from the efforts of a knowledgeable and zealous importer. Whereas the Department has a program to identify and recognize exporters, the importers often go unmentioned. Concerned about this lack of recognition, Ernest Hébert, when he was HOM in Athens, developed an innovative way to ensure Greek importers of Canadian products would no longer be overlooked. He founded the Canadian Business Awards for Importers (CBAI). Drawing inspiration from the time-honoured Olympic tradition, he introduced three awards: gold, silver, and bronze.

The purpose of CBAI is to recognize the importer's contribution in promoting Canadian products, which not only increase exports, but also raise our country's profile as an important player in the international arena. They proved so popular in Greece that Ernest introduced them to Denmark when he took up his current assignment in Copenhagen. All those involved in the awards since their inception 5 years ago – Stuart McDowall, Greg Goldhawk, John Grantham, and Guy Cadieux – agree that they are fruitful and worthwhile. Others have since followed Ernest's lead.

For those posts considering their own CBAI, the following is a proven recipe for success:

- ① For the sake of continuity and to avoid possible "bruised egos" among "non-winners", establish awards criteria and keep detailed records of winners and the reasons they were chosen. This ensures equal recognition over the years.
- ② Complicated distinctions between types of awards is unnecessary; what counts is that Canada formally recognizes outstanding importers.
- ③ The awards themselves can either reflect local tradition (as in Greece), with a gold medal, silver tray, and bronze plaque, or have a Canadian "flavour" (as was done in Copenhagen), namely a certificate with a gold seal accompanied by a bottle of Canada's finest. Whichever theme is chosen, ensure that the awards are inscribed in the host country's language.
- ④ An important ingredient is a suitable event – which need not be elaborate – at which to present the awards. The guest list is key. In addition to the relevant host country government officials and the press, winners should be encouraged to invite their best customers and key contacts. The gesture of an invitation to such a high profile event allows importers to indirectly thank their customers for their loyalty. Press coverage publicizes the post's work and gives awarded importers exposure in their home territory, in turn enhancing their image. In celebrating local citizens, Canada cements its trading relations with the host country.
- ⑤ Mixing the ingredients to suit your particular situation and budget, you can create an event that honours deserving importers in a way that would make them friends of Canada for life. Now you tell me: is that not well worth it? To learn more about the CBAI, contact either Greg in Athens or Guy in Copenhagen.

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