

As the world economy becomes more open, the distinctions between domestic and international markets are becoming more blurred.

The development of your export capabilities is in fact an investment. It is a long-term commitment which will have an impact on all aspects of your business operations. As with any such undertaking, there will be challenges and obstacles. However, countless exporters can attest to the fact that the effort is well worth it.

In fact, many exporting firms will acknowledge that exports are the basic reason their businesses are flourishing.

Our government is committed to helping smaller companies play a larger role in exports. To that end, my department has shifted the focus of its services to meet better the needs of small and medium-sized businesses.

Backed by a range of specialized information and trade promotion programs and services, my department's trade commissioners serve in 128 locations around the world. Last year, the Trade Commissioner Service marked its 100th year of experience in opening doors to foreign markets. It knows the ropes, and can help smaller exporters deal with the challenges of complex foreign business environments.

From their 10 locations across Canada, the federal government's International Trade Centres [ITCs] can help companies identify market opportunities, develop foreign marketing plans, and get information on government support programs. They are the first point of contact with the federal government for new exporters. As part of their services, the ITCs are electronically linked to our trade commissioners abroad.

Our long-standing Program for Export Market Development - PEMD as it is known - and our support for Canadian participation in international fairs and missions are now centred on smaller enterprises. Then there are the programs to provide hands-on training to new exporters to the U.S. border states, Mexico and Europe, starting when the decision to export is first being examined.

To that end, my officials work closely with the Forum for International Trade Training [FITT]. The FITT philosophy is that to compete successfully in world markets, a company that wants to export has to act like a long-distance runner training for a marathon. In doing so, FITT provides a wide range of services which can be customized to the skill and experience levels of participants. This year the program is operating in 30 community colleges across Canada, with some 1000 students registered.