

understood, both from a company and government perspective.

Companies use trade missions when several conditions converge: when companies have export market objectives, when the mission target markets are appropriate, and when the company has some level of exporting competence, to name the main ones. As trade missions are generally organized by governments, participation may be by invitation only and requirements on the company may be stringent, thus screening out those not meeting the selection criteria. A more complete discussion of types of trade missions can be found elsewhere³².

While a fairly high proportion of exporting companies is aware of trade missions, relatively few use them, mainly due to the selection/participation criteria. Of initial interest is the fact that about two-thirds of companies going on trade missions are repeat users with experience of three or four missions³³. Another perspective of the role of missions is the fact that nearly one-half of companies would not have explored the markets visited without the trade mission³⁴.

We noted that missions are suited for exporters beginning foreign market involvement. One study of mission usage, however, reveals that less than one in ten participating companies are new while nine out of ten are experienced exporters³⁵. This, raises questions about the learning role of missions. They are supposed to make market entry less problematic for new exporters rather than subsidizing new market investigation or development for experienced exporters. New markets demand new knowledge and sometimes different skills. For example, an Exporter successful in Western Europe may find considerable knowledge gaps when entering Saudi Arabia. Research has shown that learning is an ongoing necessity³⁶. Thus, experienced exporters may very well view trade missions as an important and rather convenient aspect of new market entry. The question of the purpose and targeting of trade missions will be broached later in this paper.

A comparison of trade mission users and non-users finds several interesting contrasts. Trade mission participants with learning and contact objectives outnumbered those with performance or sales objectives by about 5 to 1. This suggests that missions are perceived to fit the early phase of export market involvement³⁷.

We know that marketing know-how and information can play a critical role in reducing the risk of market entry, and that lacking knowledge of the conditions and environment in export markets