

Today's trade commissioners are also engaged in more than traditional trade promotion activities. More and more, they are called to identify foreign partners for Canadian firms, to promote direct foreign investment in Canada, to promote tourism to Canada and to identify foreign technologies of interest to Canadian firms.

Our Trade Commissioner Service has been playing a major role in Canada's performance on international markets. John Larke was the first of the many trade commissioners who have been contributing significantly to the well-being of Canadians.

As we consider the future of the Service, we must ensure that it provides the support that business people need in a world that has become overwhelmingly complex. Indeed, that is what this conference is all about — to listen to what the business community has to say regarding the need for the Service to change to better address your requirements.

Over the last months, I have also been listening to what our clients have had to say through meetings I have held with small- and medium-sized enterprises across Canada, through a series of consultations with our Centres of International Business Studies, through the formalized consultative processes of the International Trade Advisory Committee (ITAC) and the Sectoral Advisory Groups on International Trade (SAGITs), as well as a number of other venues.

The message that I have heard has been consistent and clear: do less, but do what you already do, better. I am being told that there are too many programs, run by too many players, and that you want more market intelligence — on a timely basis. You are also asking us to be more responsive to the needs of small- and medium-sized enterprises.

As a result of these consultations, I have already taken some preliminary steps that fall into three broad areas.

First, we are undertaking a number of improvements to the way we collect and disseminate market intelligence and market information. We have put into place an electronic Bulletin Board Service that allows exporters access to the latest international market information via a personal computer and a modem. We are also developing a Market Intelligence Messaging System for broadcast faxing of trade opportunities.

A second set of measures relates to providing greater cohesion and focus to the support role played by governments. There is a need for better co-ordination of international business development activity, among both federal departments and the provinces.

Accordingly, this year's International Trade Business Plan will include the input and international business activities of all provinces, as well as 18 federal departments and agencies that are already part of the process.