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the Team Canada concept is vital in establishing a presence in a new market — something that is very difficult, he says, especially when the two cultures are so different.

“Where would you start? We would not have an idea.”

What the Team Canada 1997 participants discovered is that they could marry their strengths and help each other. Those with experience in the international marketplace could help newcomers by providing advice and sometimes introductions to potential clients. The presence of the Prime Minister, premiers and ministers served to give companies added credibility with potential customers, business partners and investors. Forming partnerships among themselves could also give the companies an added advantage.

“The networking we are doing with all those Canadian companies is as important as making contact with a potential client in Korea,” says Jean-Pierre Sauriol, President and CEO of DESSAU Inc. of Laval. He agrees that trying to do business alone in foreign countries is a difficult undertaking. “If we can find potential partners with other Canadian companies, it’s much easier for us. If they have a potential project, they’ll give us the information or we may go together on the project.”

Government support enhances credibility

Crucial to the building of relations between Asians and Canadians were the intermediary and support roles played by the representatives of the Canadian government.

Korean business people want to see Canadian government involvement before they commit to any deals, says Tae Ri Lee, President of TRL Microwave Technology Inc. of Burnaby, B.C. “Once they see the government involvement, they feel much more comfortable. It gives us a tremendous amount of credibility.”

Official ceremonies that appear to be mere media photo opportunities are extremely important to the host Koreans, explains Lee, who came to Canada from Korea in 1974. “What appears to be just a formality,” he says, “in the end really makes the sale. A nicely packaged good sells much better.”

Even companies experienced in this part of the world do not underestimate the effect of a Team Canada mission on local officials and business people. For many companies, their government’s endorsement is essential.

Agra Inc., for example, already does business in the three countries visited by the mission. But, as

President and CEO Alex Taylor points out: “A lot of the clients we

have, in fact, are governments or are corporations that are owned and controlled and influenced by governments in those countries, and, therefore, it’s very good for us to be seen to have government support, because in those countries, they like dealing, in some ways, government to government.”

Agra, based in Oakville, has 155 offices in 22 countries around the world. On this trip, the company’s subsidiary, AGRA-Monenco, signed a memorandum of understanding with Kabool Engineering and Construction of Seoul to market its AxiM project management systems and services, following up on a previous \$2-million contract with Kabool.

Even a company with a solid international presence like SPAR Aerospace Ltd. recognizes the importance of government involvement. Negotiations on its \$155-million contract with the National Research Council of Thailand to construct a remote-sensing satellite system were held up until intervention by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, at the request of SPAR, closed the deal.

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