

FITT Makes Canadian Companies Fit for Exporting

by Stephen Goban and Josef Jurkovic, FITT Marketing

As any trade commissioner can attest, when international opportunities knock, it is the prepared who are generally more successful. But it's not easy for small and medium-sized companies to obtain the range of knowledge and skills they need to be successful exporters. The apprenticeship approach — learning by doing over time — is for many a too-costly means of building long-term capability. That's why the Forum for International Trade Training (FITT) has launched a series of new programs and other initiatives designed to increase the availability of trade training to Canadian business.

A not-for-profit organization established in the early 1990s and funded by business and Human Resources Development Canada, FITT is Canada's centre for international trade training, providing accessible and comprehensive international trade training to Canadian businesses, particularly small companies.

In the early years, the Forum worked closely with industry to develop a core national program, FITTskills. FITTskills provides a comprehensive, practical and hands-on body of knowledge and skills, delivered in a variety of formats through community colleges, universities and private organizations across Canada by experienced trade professionals. In four and a half years, some 2,500 people have taken more than 5,000 FITTskills courses and workshops.

New specialized training programs

Building on its development phase, FITT recently launched a series of programs and other initiatives. EnterpriseFITT provides training and services customized to the needs of individual companies. AgFITT offers specialized training for the agri-food sector, as does FITTservices for developing skills in exporting services. AgFITT and FITTservices are currently being piloted in several provinces.

In response to calls from industry for a specific professional qualification in international trade — and as part of its mandate to set national standards for trade training — FITT introduced, in October 1997, the Certified International Trade Professional (C.I.T.P.) designation. Certificate holders have met a rigorous set of requirements, including completing the FITTskills program or its equivalent and having a minimum of three years' trade experience. A KPMG industry survey found that 100 per cent of companies interviewed would, other things being equal, give preference to a C.I.T.P. in hiring and promotion decisions. The first C.I.T.P.s, graduates of Carleton University's FITTskills program, received their certificates in January during a ceremony at the Parliament Buildings.

Open to members

Together with introducing C.I.T.P., FITT has moved to become a membership organization open to individuals and organizations involved or interested in international trade. The aim is to provide a focus for the development of trade training and the practice of international trade in Canada. A variety of activities and benefits are available to members, and in June 1998, the

first national FITT conference will be held in Ottawa-Hull.

These initiatives all reflect FITT's focus on meeting industry and individual training needs. FITT's goal is to help make organizations and individuals (whether employee or entrepreneur) more effective — to ensure, in effect, that when international opportunity arrives, it coincides with preparedness.

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— Continued from page 3

forensic labs will lead to other opportunities should the country decide to build other such facilities.

Getting good mileage out of trade shows, Forensic has already delivered in such far-away places as Hong Kong, Thailand, Greece, Turkey, and Venezuela. It also has solid prospects in Germany — which will open up continental Europe — and possibilities in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

For more information on Forensic Technology WAI Inc., contact Communications Manager Donna McLean, tel.: (514) 485-6611, fax: (514) 485-6617.