



Networking: The Key to Global Success

The importance of building and maintaining strong business relationships has never been more crucial than in today's global marketplace. This reality has not been lost on Canadian women entrepreneurs who are going global with strategies that emphasize relationship building through networking.

This is our third annual supplement that features pioneering Canadian businesswomen in international trade. You will be introduced to another innovative group of women entrepreneurs from coast to coast, working in industries that run the gamut from marble quarrying brewing manufacturing. Whether experienced exporters or first-timers, these women echo one theme: "If you try to do business without networking, you won't maximize your potential for growth and success."

How do they do it? They network formally and informally, both at home and abroad. Some, like **Debra Donovan**, *President & CEO of Scotia Slate Products Ltd.*, are active in their industry associations. Others, like Winnipeg-based **Fiona Webster Mourant**, *President of Manrex Ltd.*, also get involved in community organizations and Boards. "Not only is networking invaluable," she says, "but it broadens your perspective of the community."

And both **Kazuko Komatsu**, *President & CEO of Pacific Brewing Co.* in BC, and **Cathy Rose**,

President of Creative Esthetics Dental Lab in P.E.I., found their experiences on trade advisory boards to be valuable in building contacts.

Attending trade shows, accessing government resources and taking advantage of exporting initiatives like trade missions are just a few of the tactics women exporters use to tap into the right people in the right international markets.

Sydney Ryan, *Vice-president, International Sales and Marketing of Telelink*, in Newfoundland has found the Trade Commissioner Service to be "a wonderful matchmaker" — particularly for companies in non-traditional businesses that may find it difficult to connect with appropriate overseas partners.

Equally essential to success in the global marketplace is the need to follow up with contacts and develop strong relationships. "Ours is a relationship-dependent business," explains **Caroline Maria**, *President of Cinemaria*, a TV production company in Montreal. "It has involved a slow, steady, concentrated effort at opening up new doors and relationships — no matter how busy you are actually doing the work." This can often lead to strong friendships as well. As Fiona Webster Mourant has found, the relationships developed with international contacts can be very special. "We've made friends, not just business partners — and that personal side is very interesting and gratifying."

How to Build a Strong International Network

1. Attend international trade shows regularly.

These shows in your industry represent one of the best starting points to build contacts, source new customers and partners, and service existing customers. Attending trade shows in other countries exposed Kazuko Kamatsu of Pacific Brewing Co. to many new contacts and resulted in her foray into the Chinese market.

2. Participate in trade missions. Whether industry specific, gender specific or country specific, trade missions are an excellent way to build relationships, particularly after initial contacts are made. Debra Donovan of Scotia Slate Products Ltd. believes that networking with other trade mission participants from your area is also "a great way to identify people with whom you could do joint marketing, such as trade shows exhibiting in other countries, or who will put you in touch with good contacts to save you time and give you credibility going in".

3. Tap into government resources. The Virtual Trade Commissioner (www.infoexport.gc.ca) can save you time and money by informing you of events in your target market researching opportunities in your sector in that market, and locating suitable partners abroad. Utilizing the Trade Commissioner Service saved Debra Donovan of Scotia Slate from taking a fruitless trip to Europe to check out a potential new customer. Sydney Ryan of Telelink found the Program for Export and Market Development (PEMD) especially helpful in the early stages of exporting. "It provided us with the additional cash flow we needed, kept us focused on our goals and provided us with ideas and information."

4. Develop a good Web site. The Internet levels the playing field for all businesses, allowing you to network with others around the world and market your business, regardless of your size and location. Fabienne Buzon, President of the Chef's Hat Inc., invested time and effort in establishing a

strong presence on the Internet. "Remember that your corporate profile is very important in competing in the international arena."

5. Find mentors. Build an informal network of professional and personal mentors to whom you can turn to for exporting advice. "Networks are important...and they don't have to be formal," says Kathryn From, CEO of Bravado! Designs Inc. "We've forged our own way, developing extensive contacts across industries."

6. Get involved. Joining your industry association, becoming active on its committees, and serving on Boards of community organizations or trade advisory groups are all terrific ways to broaden your networks, both domestically and internationally. Cathy Rose of Creative Esthetics Dental Lab has served on a task force and trade advisory group, which helped to develop her exporting network. "All the contacts I've made have been very beneficial."



Shery Leeder (Left)
President

Kathryn From (Right)
CEO

Bravado! Designs Inc.
Toronto, Ontario

Tel: (416) 466-8652

Ext. 102

Toll free: 1-800-590-7802
(U.S. and Canada)

Fax: (416) 466-8666

E-mail:
kathryn@bravadodesigns.com

Web site:
www.bravadodesigns.com

Year Founded: 1992

Employees: 22

Export Sales: 85%

Years Exporting: 7

Export Markets: United States,
United Kingdom, Europe,
Middle East and Asia

"Being able to export is literally the only way a niche company like ours can operate and grow."

Business Description:

As designers and manufacturers of stylish women's maternity and nursing underclothes, including leopard print nursing bras and specially designed pregnancy thongs, CEO Kathryn From — along with President Shery Leeder — view exports as the lifeblood of Bravado! Designs Inc. Their newest development includes a line of nursing sleepwear in a range of styles and colours that put the old T-shirt to shame. The traditional U.S. market provided their initiation into international business, with the next step including expansion into Europe.

Exporting Tactics:

Bravado! Designs exporting philosophy can be summed up as a systematic penetration into foreign markets. "We focus on the ones that we know we can sell to well," says Kathryn. The company's strategy includes:

- ▶ Opening an office in the United Kingdom as a springboard to expansion into Europe;
- ▶ Developing strategic alliances with like-minded and product-related companies in potential marketplaces; and
- ▶ Finding good distributors who are reliable to work with and sell with the product's identity in mind.

The company has also developed 'the Bravado! Experience'. "Anyone can create a product, but we also provide marketing support and

great customer service. To maintain our high standard around the world, we intentionally focus only on a couple of markets at a time."

Networking Strategy:

Both Kathryn and Shery attend trade shows regularly. "It gives us the opportunity to get in touch with new and existing customers." And they have built their own network of professional and personal mentors to whom they can turn to for advice.

The services of Export Development Canada (EDC) have also been useful when coping with some foreign markets. "We had a relationship with a distributor that went badly wrong and he ended up defaulting on us on a major receivable. Because we had insurance through EDC, covering 90 per cent of the loss, we were able to find a solution."

Biggest Benefit:

"It's essential to understand what's going on in the markets where you export. Because we're located in Canada, we can't visit our overseas clients regularly and gain valuable first-hand knowledge of local market dynamics. We addressed this by opening our own office in the U.K. as an investment."

Favourite Exporting Moment:

Kathryn is particularly pleased with the performance of Bravado!'s U.K. office. Opened just one year ago, it has gone from six accounts to

over 120. But, despite the thrill of the U.K. success, Kathryn maintains that "every export moment is an important one."

Export Tips:

Research ranks high on the list of priorities for Kathryn. "You can't just go off blindly shipping somewhere without understanding where it is that you're shipping to." Essential questions to ask include:

- ▶ Who are your main competitors and what they offer;
- ▶ What are the price points;
- ▶ Where do people buy; and
- ▶ What is the image of similar products in the market you're shipping to?

Future Plans:

In terms of exporting, our aim is to continue to grow the U.K. operation and then systematically expand into Europe. And frankly, we can still go a long way in further penetrating the U.S. market."

Kudos:

Bravado! Designs Inc. recently won the Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award for Exporting, presented by EDC. "It was an affirmation that we're not just 'that neat business' people often refer to, but that we're doing something right in terms of building a solid company."