

The Next Best Thing to Being There

Webinar technology helps spread the word about the Integrative Trade Model.

By Simon-Pierre Rhéaume

You are sitting comfortably at your workstation, headphones on, watching a seminar on your computer screen. The following question appears: *Could you explain integrative trade to a colleague? Choose one answer: (1) Yes, I live and breathe integrative trade. (2) I understand it, but couldn't explain it. (3) Integrative WHAT?*

This question kicks off a discussion in a new series of interactive webinars on the Integrative Trade Model (ITM), which was launched last November by Louis Lévesque, Deputy Minister of International Trade. Participants who choose number three are in luck, as the webinar goes on to explain the concept. The webinars are intended to help trade commissioners and their assistants around the world understand how to work in today's business reality.

WHAT IS INTEGRATIVE TRADE?

"Integrative trade" is a concept that describes all of the various ways in which companies operate to create value. Long gone are the days when international commerce was only about the export of goods and services. Today, companies need to act as exporters, investors, producers, innovators and importers.

That's why the ITM, part of DFAIT's Transformation Agenda, was developed to align the department's organizational culture with the increasingly integrated and complex global economy.

Increased collaboration among Headquarters, regional offices and offices abroad will ensure that our work culture can anticipate and respond to evolving client needs. In short, it will allow us to better serve Canadian clients while contributing to Canada's prosperity.

"We have to manage ourselves like a professional services firm," explains Lévesque, who delivered the first two ITM webinars on November 25 and December 17. "Our main resource is our employees' talent and time, and we have to ensure that we use this resource where it adds the most value."

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

In more than 150 offices around the world, DFAIT's Trade employees need to share a common vision as they work toward common objectives. Webinars are an ideal way to encourage dialogue in spite of great distances by maximizing new technologies to engage both employees and senior management.

According to feedback from some of the hundreds of participants to date, the webinars are a resounding success. Participants say they were pleased to be given the opportunity to have their say through a chat-box and live-polling questions. One person highlighted "how engaging and productive it



WEBINARS: A PRIMER

Webinar is short for "Web-based seminar." A webinar usually consists of a slide presentation delivered over the Web along with the presenter's voice and video image. It offers tools such as chat-boxes and surveys that allow participants to interact with the speaker and each other. Participants can type questions and receive answers in real time.

AN EFFECTIVE TOOL

"Training webinars allow me to pose questions to participants and engage each one in the learning process," says Gilles Potvin, a deputy director in the Trade Commissioner Service Renewal Division. "When I ask a question in the classroom, I get one or two people to answer. But in a webinar, because of the virtual anonymity, even the shy ones are often keen to answer."

TECHNOLOGY TIME SAVER

The instant-feedback feature allows an instructor to pause, review a concept if needed and then move on, confident that participants understand. This approach has enhanced courses given in the classroom, such as the Global Learning Initiative-2 course. Students who have first taken part in a webinar arrive in class better prepared, and learning is optimized.