

Harmony in the Cacophony

Outcome and quotes from some of our focus groups



We admit there's been a lot of clatter about the PMI in the last six months, especially the new services list. As with all good government initiatives, we've gone out to our clients, via focus groups, in a supreme effort to diagnose our proposed list of services. We've sat around tables with more than 40 companies — arguably a limited sampling of our clients — bared our chests, and told them they could say whatever they wanted about us. We even communicated with the spirits of the companies John Larke assisted back in 1894 (that was the weirdest bid tender I'd ever seen!). We gave them carte blanche. Some positive and not-so-positive quotes from the focus groups are listed below, intertwined with the quality attributes that emerged from those discussions.

SPEED OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT/ RESPONSIVENESS:

Clients expect posts to acknowledge their requests within three to seven days, even if only to say they cannot perform the service requested. Where delays are anticipated, the posts and clients should discuss a reasonable time for reply.

KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL AND CANADIAN BUSINESS:

Trade Commissioners should be able to combine their knowledge of Canadian business with that of the local business community. They must work closely with their locally engaged commercial officers to ensure clients receive the benefit of posts' collective local and Canadian business knowledge. Trade Commissioners must be open, frank and honest with regard to political, business and security risks, and in dealings with certain partners.

"There was a local employee in (Latin America) who was a former employee of Procter and Gamble. He knew the ins and outs of the local food regulations, the packaging, the distribution, everything. He was excellent."

AWARENESS OF THE MARKET/SECTOR:

Clients expect Trade Commissioners to have a basic knowledge of the market and sector, although Trade Commissioners are not expected to understand the industry as well as their clients.

NETWORK OF LOCAL CONTACTS:

Trade Commissioners should have a rich network of local contacts, or be able to point the client to where the information can be found. In addition, Trade Commissioners should accompany clients to important business meetings, particularly in the more complex markets in the Middle East and Africa.

"I took advantage of the Trade Commissioners abroad — the Trade Commissioner lends a level of credibility to our own efforts."

"The Embassy in Asia let me throw a cocktail party. It was really a thrill and an honour for contacts to be invited to the Canadian Embassy."

ACCESS TO INFORMATION:

Clients expect Trade Commissioners to have ready access to trade and industry directories covering local markets. Participants at the focus groups agreed that even the Yellow Pages in telephone directories were a source of information with considerable value for experienced exporters.

"I was in (an Asian city), and because of some unexpected developments, I went to the Embassy to talk to a Trade Commissioner. Essentially, all I wanted was to see if they had any contacts of distributors in my line of business. I understand that I didn't give them much warning. The Trade Commissioner met with me, but said that their "policy" dictated that he fax the contacts. I got the contacts alright... a week later at my office, when they were of absolutely no use to me."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

I cannot believe you can do today's job with yesterday's methods and be in business tomorrow

Nelson Jackson