



Sell to the World

Women entrepreneurs in Atlantic Canada go global!

Vendre dans le monde entier

les femmes entrepreneurs du Canada atlantique à la conquête des marchés internationaux!



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Canada 



Why Export?

Canada benefits when its companies export. International trade brings foreign dollars into the country, creates jobs, and strengthens the economy. In Atlantic Canada, exports have increased significantly, from \$6.7 billion in 1992 to \$20.1 billion in 2004. Trade in goods and services accounts for 35.3% of our Atlantic gross domestic product.

For entrepreneurs, exporting means greater opportunities, greater revenues and a healthier bottom line. Here are some of the things that research tells us about companies that export:

- Firms that export are more productive, more profitable and more growth-oriented. Their jobs grow 20% faster and are more stable.
- Firms that export are more innovative. They are on the leading edge of new technologies, new management practices and processes, and they are more competitive globally.
- Atlantic Canadian firms that export are almost three times as likely to survive and thrive than their domestically-bound counterparts.

Pourquoi exporter ?

Les exportations des entreprises canadiennes profitent à tout le pays. En effet, le commerce international fait entrer de l'argent étranger au Canada, crée des emplois et renforce l'économie. Au Canada atlantique, les exportations ont augmenté considérablement de 1992 à 2004, passant de 6,7 milliards à 20,1 milliards de dollars. Il est à noter que le commerce de biens et de services compte pour 35,3 % du produit intérieur brut de la région atlantique.

Pour les entrepreneurs, l'exportation se traduit par de nouveaux débouchés, de meilleures recettes et un résultat net plus satisfaisant. Les recherches menées à cet égard révèlent quelques points intéressants concernant les entreprises qui exportent :

- Ces entreprises sont plus productives, plus profitables et plus susceptibles de grandir. Leurs effectifs augmentent 20 % plus rapidement et sont plus stables.
- Ces entreprises sont aussi plus novatrices. Elles restent à l'avant-garde de la technologie ainsi que des pratiques et des procédés de gestion, et elles sont plus concurrentielles à l'échelle internationale.
- Les entreprises exportatrices du Canada atlantique ont presque trois fois plus de chances de survivre et de prospérer que celles qui se limitent au marché intérieur.

What do you need to succeed in exporting?

What leads to success in exporting, other than tenacity, hard work, optimism, relentless passion and a good sense of humour? When you read the profiles that follow, you will realize that these women have a lot in common. They share the same rugged determination to grow their companies and be successful. They also share some of the skills that pave the way to exporting, such as:

- *Global vision.* Perhaps the most important thing for entrepreneurs to have is a vision of where they are going. Many of these women saw, right from the start, that selling globally would be a key ingredient of success. Whether it was because their industry itself was already international – like film and television production and Internet search engines – or because they recognized that the Canadian market was not large enough, these women knew that the border was not a barrier.
- *Relationship building.* Exporters, by definition, are consummate networkers. They understand the critical importance of making and cultivating relationships. They recognize the value of “being there” at international events, whether it is a trade mission, trade show or conference, to be seen and to be recognized as a player. They develop strategic partnerships and alliances, and devote considerable time and energy to managing their international network.
- *Business savvy.* Successful exporters will tell you to make sure your business is in good financial shape at home. Manage your cash flow. Research your market, and then research some more. Follow the key indicators in your industry. You need business smarts to play in the international arena, but you don’t have to re-invent the wheel!
- *Surrounding themselves with competence.* The most successful exporters are those who understand their own strengths, and then surround themselves with – and listen to – people with complementary skills and talents. If they don’t know how to market, they hire someone who does. If they are not strong on managing people, they find someone who is. Experts call it focusing on strengths and managing weaknesses.

Developing your exporting strategy

The greatest challenge will be to develop your export strategy. Just as your business plan guides what you do domestically, a sound export plan will become your roadmap to global success. Just as you need a business plan when seeking financing, your international partners, financial advisors and investors will all expect you to have an export plan. Some of the questions that you need to ask yourself include:

- How committed is senior management to a sustained export effort?
- Is your product or service already available in the foreign markets you are targeting?
- Does your product or service have a distinct competitive advantage?
- Which markets are best to pursue?
- What is the best entry strategy for each target market?

Where do you go from here?

No one would suggest that exporting is easy or without risk. As in business generally, the challenge is to balance risk with opportunity. How do you determine if you are ready to export? The Government of Canada has developed a number of tools that can help you find the answer to that and other export questions (See the list of programs at the end of this publication).

We hope the company profiles that follow will inspire and challenge you. These women entrepreneurs are showing that it can be done; indeed, that it must be done. Exporting has opened doors for them to profitability and international recognition. They are building and growing successful companies, creating jobs in their communities, and having fun. They are Atlantic Canadian women who are making a name on the international stage. You can too!

ISBN Number: 0-662-68965-8
Catalogue Number: IU89-4/9-2005
ACOA: 2005-08



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Imprimé sur papier recyclé

Printed in Canada
Imprimé au Canada



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Canada

AbbyShot Clothiers Limited

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Business Description

AbbyShot Clothiers Limited designs and makes clothing for science fiction aficionados who see a garment in a movie and want to wear it! The idea was born when someone in an Internet forum wondered where a person might buy a coat similar to one worn in the movie *The Matrix*. Bonnie Cook, a sewer for 20 years, helped design, produce and sell the first prototype, netting enough cash to buy material for two more. With her business partner Adam Bragg's skills in web design, AbbyShot soon established an Internet presence. In less than three years, the firm has computerized its design process, doubled its space, and tripled its staff.

Why she started exporting

Almost from the start, Bonnie recognized that customers for her movie-inspired, made-to-measure products came from fashion centres like New York, California and London, England. The firm has developed a large and loyal following, with significant repeat business. "We have a toll-free number, and customers call from all parts of the world just to chat," states Bonnie. "It's helped to develop a comfortable relationship between customers and staff."

How she reached export markets

Bonnie hired a marketing specialist who knew how to position the company's web site for its unique target market. The firm produces a newsletter, and hosts an online forum. There are conventions around the world where science fiction fans gather, such as *Dragon*con* in Atlanta, Georgia, and Cook knows that AbbyShot needs to be there. "Some people are apprehensive about buying over the Internet so it's important to have a physical presence." Bonnie also participated in an Industry Canada trade mission to New York, which gave her food for thought about penetrating that market, if and when the company moves from custom designs to bulk orders.

Exporting benefits

Given the uniqueness of its products, exporting is the only way for AbbyShot to be viable. Most importantly for Bonnie, it creates employment. "I feel good about being able to offer jobs that enable Newfoundlanders to find work in their own province."

Bonnie Cook, President

(709) 747-2323
bcook@abbyshot.com
www.abbyshot.com

Year established: 2002
Employees: 12
Years exporting: 3
Export sales: 95%
Export markets: Australia,
United Kingdom, Scandinavia,
Japan, United States



Main challenges, lessons learned

Dealing with the fluctuation of currency is an ongoing challenge, given the recent ups and downs of the American dollar. The company has also learned to be cautious in dealing with firms that handle international sales transactions. "It's been a big learning curve."

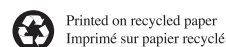
Advice for success in international markets

"Find a strong marketing person who can develop your export marketing plan. It isn't easy to do since business schools don't teach Internet marketing specifically. Keep looking. This person will be key to your growth."

Future exporting goals

In replicating and custom-making garments from science fiction films, AbbyShot has succeeded in selling its product in many corners of the globe. The next step? "We want to be the company that makes the garment you see on the big screen!"

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Art FX Inc.

Dieppe, New Brunswick

Business Description

Originally a business that made Christmas decor for shopping centres, Art FX Inc. expanded and began producing Retail Merchandising Units (RMUs). These modern-day versions of a pushcart provide a way for mall owners to entice entrepreneurs into the mall to test new products with minimal start-up costs. The first time she took the product to a Toronto trade show, "the response was overwhelming," Annette says. The company quickly became a major supplier to some of the largest shopping mall corporations in Canada.

Why she started exporting

Annette did the math. There are 300 shopping centres in Canada and 3,500 in the United States. "That put things into perspective for us. We needed to get our product into the US," she says.

How she reached export markets

In 2001, Annette exhibited at an international industry conference in Baltimore, Maryland. In the spring of 2002, she attended an even larger trade show in Las Vegas. "I was scheduling meetings with mall developers from around the world, getting feedback on what we needed to do to become a player in the industry. One of the most important things they told me was that I had serious competitors (all in the United States), and that if I was serious about my business, I had to have a first-rate product and be in business for the long term," she says.

Exporting benefits

Moving into the much larger American market has had an exponential impact on revenues. From the beginning, the company has focused on product differentiation, rather than price competition, and innovation has been its trump card. "There are a lot of beautiful designs out there but from a retail perspective, they don't work. The feedback we get is that our product has unique features that demonstrate our understanding of retail." For employees, an export strategy makes the company stronger. "We believe that it's going to build more stable careers for them."

Annette Bourque, President
(506) 857-2004
aboutque@artfxcorp.com

Year established: 1986
Employees: 30
Years exporting: 3
Export sales: 60%
Export markets: United States



Main challenges, lessons learned

Perhaps the biggest challenge has been to define the company's niche, especially in the huge American market. "Initially, we were trying to be everything to everyone. Our biggest lesson has been learning to accept who we are, and to stay focused on that. We are very creative and innovative custom retail designers."

Advice for success in international markets

"Realize you have to be patient," advises Annette. "Don't embark on an export endeavour thinking you'll get immediate returns. The reality is that it takes time. Attend the trade shows, make contacts, get to know your industry."

Future exporting goals

Art FX is focused on securing and expanding its market share in the United States, and is now exploring European markets. It is also developing a new line of exterior carts for open-air lifestyle centres. "We think what we have is very different from what exists."

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Bejewel by Trudy Gallagher Limited

Fredericton, New Brunswick

Business Description

Trudy Gallagher turned a childhood passion for jewelry into a thriving business that now markets specialty jewelry around the world. After studying jewelry design in Quebec, she set up a Fredericton studio, and peddled her wares through parties and flea markets. She also joined the New Brunswick Craft Council. "They were the ones who told me about the Atlantic Craft Trade Show in Halifax," says Trudy.

Why she started exporting

Trudy attended the Atlantic Craft Trade Show with a goal of expanding sales throughout the Maritimes. She didn't expect to be approached by American buyers. "Attending a professional trade show like that made me realize how many things I needed to have in place – distribution system, return policies – it was a huge learning curve." Nonetheless, she walked away with several US sales.

How she reached export markets

Trudy attended ACOA export seminars, and participated in a trade mission to England and France. She travelled the trade show circuit, from gift shows in Toronto and Edmonton, to more specialized shows like Mode Accessories, Canada's only trade show devoted to fashion accessories. "ACOA has been fantastic with me, a wonderful source of information and encouragement," she says.

Exporting benefits

For Trudy, exporting has meant that she is recognized around the world as an artist. "It's a designer's dream. Having international recognition is wonderful." Exporting has also been good for the bottom line. "It's had a major impact on revenue," admits Trudy. "When you go into international markets, there's more money. We're selling more upscale, one-of-a-kind pieces in England."

Trudy Gallagher, President
(506) 458-2685
info@bejewel.ca
www.bejewel.ca

Year established: 1989
Employees: 12
Years exporting: 13
Export sales: 30-35%
Export markets: United States,
Italy, England, Japan, France



Main challenges, lessons learned

From experience, Trudy's greatest lesson learned has been to develop a plan before entering international markets. "I've seen far too many people jump into exporting without a plan. It's really critical to know, first, what you're capable of – how much you can produce, and secondly, to be honest about that with potential customers."

Advice for success in international markets

"Apply to ACOA and go on a trade mission," counsels Trudy. "It's one thing to think that you want to export to the US. It's another to go down there physically, to understand the culture, to see what your competitors are selling. Only then can you make a plan for how you're going to penetrate that market."

Future exporting goals

Bejewel is now streamlining company processes to ensure that it can compete internationally: reorganizing the studio set-up, developing "just-in-time" inventory, and ensuring the company is computer-literate and bilingual. It plans a major thrust into American and European markets. "We know that we have appeal overseas, and we need to get ready."

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Cellar Door Productions Inc.

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Business Description

This creative film and television company specializes in conceptualizing, financing and producing animated and live-action productions with national and international partners. Best known for its flagship animated series DOODLEZ, winner of a Gemini Award in 2003 and 2004, Cellar Door produces television programming for broadcasters around the world. From the beginning, Gretha Rose's vision has been global. "Since Prince Edward Island is located halfway between Hollywood and Cannes, we promote ourselves as being at the centre of the film and television industry!"

Why she started exporting

The first contract Cellar Door ever landed was with an international distributor. "It's the model. To have a successful company, you have to go international. You have no choice but to export," she says. Gretha admits that film and television production is a complex industry. "It takes a long time to understand how the industry works. But today, I won't develop any film property unless I know it has international sales capability."

How she reached export markets

Throughout her career, networking has been key. Gretha attends major international conferences in the United States and Europe. "It's important to attend these events, to meet people and to become known." She also works closely with Telefilm Canada, which is connected throughout the international film and television scene. The company invests heavily to have a presence in the global marketplace.

Exporting benefits

"Exporting makes us a stronger company. It shows that we can continue to create properties that recoup our investments and those of our funders." The challenge of working internationally forces the company to be innovative. "Every deal is different. Putting together the financial model is a challenge each time." Every production is incorporated separately (Cellar Door is the holding company, and owns shares in all its productions), making it difficult to sort out what percentage of company revenue comes from exports. The constant is that every production brings foreign dollars into Canada.

Gretha Rose, President

(902) 628-3880
gretha@cellardoor.tv
www.cellardoor.tv

Year established: 1997
Employees: 6 plus contractors
Years exporting: 8
Export sales: n/a
Export markets: United States,
United Kingdom, Asia



Main challenges, lessons learned

Accessing international markets is an ongoing challenge. "Living in PEI, you're really remote," states Gretha. "It's important to have a lot of face-to-face. You also need to be patient. People are very busy these days, and can take a long time to respond."

Advice for success in international markets

"Have good cash flow. Know your market well. Understand the needs of your clients. What are they looking for? What do they want? You need to do a lot of industry research."

Future exporting goals

Gretha wants to move Cellar Door from production and distribution into merchandising and licensing. "We want to exploit all the ancillary extensions of our existing properties. That means toys, books, new media games – creating super brands that sell internationally. I'm focused on developing less property, and more opportunity. Less is more."

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IT Interactive Services Inc.

Halifax, Nova Scotia

Business Description

IT Interactive Services Inc. has developed and now operates a search engine that connects consumers looking for goods and services on the Internet with companies advertising those products. By using the GenieKnows.com search engine, consumers click on listings and are linked to an advertiser's site. For the users, the service is free and seamless. Advertisers are charged a "Pay Per Click" fee, which generates revenues back to IT Interactive. GenieKnows currently provides targeted search traffic for 2,500 advertisers with one billion monthly searches.

Why she started exporting

IT Interactive Services began exporting from day one. "Because we're on the World Wide Web, it doesn't matter where we are," states Barbara. "In fact, the biggest players in this industry are outside the country. So exporting is just a natural part of our business."

How she reached export markets

IT Interactive Services has travelled on trade missions with Team Canada Atlantic to New York and Washington, D.C. "These missions work for us. They get us in front of large companies, like the Washington Post, the National Hockey League and Black Entertainment Television," says Barbara. The company invests heavily to participate in trade shows throughout the United States. "Our main purpose in attending these shows is to build relationships. If we can't be there physically, we'll sponsor. It's very expensive but you have to do it so people are constantly reminded that you're there, and that you're a player."

Exporting benefits

"Without exporting, there would be no revenue," states Barbara. "Even our large Canadian customer pays in US funds." In the IT industry, the need for innovation is constant because competitors continually develop new products and new capabilities. The firm has a well-educated staff and an in-house research department. It has also partnered strategically with Dalhousie University, sharing research facilities and resources, and hiring its students. It currently funds research in information retrieval technology.

Barbara Manning, President

(902) 431-4847
bmannings@genieknows.com
www.genieknows.com

Year established: 1999
Employees: 17
Years exporting: 3 1/2
Export sales: 95%
Export markets: United States,
United Kingdom



Main challenges, lessons learned

The main challenge for IT Interactive Services has been to keep the company financially profitable while developing partnerships and building credibility globally. The greatest lesson learned is the importance of business savvy. "Watch the key indicators," advises Barbara. "I get up-to-date financial reports daily and my budgets weekly. For a company in growth mode, in a volatile industry, that's critical."

Advice for success in international markets

"Know your market. Most of our competitors are public companies so I download their quarterly reports, and read them thoroughly. We follow the benchmarks for the industry, the percentage of our budget that should be spent on advertising, for example, that have been set by successful companies in the sector. We don't re-invent anything."

Future exporting goals

"Our objective is to expand our market share in the US, and to have a significant share in the UK and European markets," says Barbara. In the longer term, the company intends to begin exploring markets in China.

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Scotia Slate Products Limited

Rawdon, Nova Scotia

Business Description

Scotia Slate Products Limited was born almost by accident, when Debra Donovan and partner Terry MacPhee were thinking about building a house with a slate roof. They decided to go to Vermont to learn how to build one. "There are huge quarries in Vermont, and we soon realized that it's big business," remembers Debra. When the couple returned home, Debra drafted a business plan, and they bought the local quarry. The company produces high quality, blue-green slate products for interior and exterior flooring and other applications.

Why she started exporting

"We're producing a high-end product, using a unique resource," says Debra. "Our customers are involved in high-end construction. We needed bigger demographics in order to succeed." That's why they sold initially through dealers in central Canada, and from there, to the United States. "It was a natural transition to go south of the border. For companies in the Maritimes, Boston is closer than Toronto."

How she reached export markets

Debra signed on for trade missions, first to Atlanta, Georgia, then to places like Boston, Washington, D.C., New York and California. "Trade missions were the driver. They're a very good way to break into a new market. It's like putting your toe in the water to test the temperature." Debra also participated in export seminars. The company has used Export Development Canada's accounts receivable insurance, and intends to use other government services in future as strategic tools to grow the business.

Exporting benefits

For Debra, the benefits are obvious. "Exporting increases the size of your market, and increases your potential customer base. The goal of increased sales is a better bottom line. Again, it's demographics. My business wouldn't survive if I only sold in the Maritimes." A welcome spin-off has been the jobs created locally in this rural part of the province.

Debra Donovan, President
(902) 632-2989
president@scotiaslate.com
www.scotiaslate.com

Year established: 1996
Employees: 25
Years exporting: 4
Export sales: 25-30%
Export markets: United States



Main challenges, lessons learned

The main challenge was simply making the decision to go. "A lot of people have a psychological barrier to exporting," states Debra. "There's a perception of the 'unknown' that people need to get over." For Debra, exporting has reinforced the importance of quality customer service. "If it's a frustrating experience to buy from us, they'll buy from someone else. Ultimately, our goal is to help other people achieve their goals."

Advice for success in international markets

"Do your research and do it well. Research your market for its size, its quality and its potential. Then let the results, not your emotions, push you forward. Use the resources that are out there to figure out how to do what and when."

Future exporting goals

"Our goal is really to deepen and broaden our share in the huge American market," says Debra. The company has also developed a new product – countertops – and will be pursuing other markets. "That's really a global product."

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Telelink, The Call Centre Inc.

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Business Description

From its origins as a local answering service, Telelink, The Call Centre Inc. has grown to become a leading-edge call centre in North America. Owned by partners Cindy Roma and Sydney Ryan (Sydney's mother Barbara is a retired partner), this firm provides a range of services, from inbound and outbound call and data management to the more traditional telephone answering services. Telelink has more than 600 domestic and international customers, including clients in over 40 American cities.

Why they started exporting

"We started exporting out of necessity," admits Cindy. "It became evident in the 1990s that if we wanted to grow our business, the domestic market didn't offer the opportunities that exporting did." Happily, telephone rates were dropping as technology evolved, opening pathways to the rest of the world that were both efficient and cost effective.

How they reached export markets

Cindy and Sydney participated in trade missions to Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Boston. "The role that trade missions played in our decision to export was huge," says Sydney. "They allowed us to see the market, make contacts, and gave us confidence that we were strong enough to sell anywhere." ACOA has been a major supporter over the years, as has Export Development Canada, which offers accounts receivable insurance to protect companies against 90% of losses if a foreign customer defaults. "When exporting is 40% of what you're doing, you need to make sure you'll be paid."

Exporting benefits

Exporting has been a way to reduce risk. As the number of clients grows, dependency on individual contracts drops. "Exporting increases your revenues and improves your bottom line," admits Cindy. Exporting has also meant more secure jobs for staff. As well, the company has acquired its ISO-9001:2000 certification, something increasingly necessary when competing internationally.

**Cindy Roma, CEO and
Sydney Ryan, Marketing VP**
(709) 722-3730
croma@telelinkcallcenter.com
sryan@telelinkcallcenter.com
www.thecallcenterinc.com

Year established: 1966
Employees: 85
Years exporting: 4
Export sales: 40%
Export markets: United States



Main challenges, lessons learned

The greatest challenge for Telelink has been learning to manage growth. "The US is such a huge market. You have to be really disciplined," says Cindy. "You need to find your niche, and not take everything that comes along."

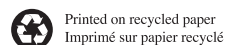
Advice for success in international markets

"Make sure you have an export development plan," advises Sydney. "We went through an extensive planning exercise with ACOA that forced us to ask ourselves the right questions. It was a level of planning that we'd never done before, and it took us a year to get our documents in place. But it really helped. We give full marks to ACOA for the process they put us through."

Future exporting goals

In a recent twist to their regular business, other call centres, mostly US competitors, are now outsourcing some of their traffic to Telelink's facility in St. John's, NL. "We're very excited about this new model. We already have over 25 agents working these contracts full time, and the potential is promising."

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We can help you get there!

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) works to strengthen the international business performance of the Atlantic region by enhancing the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to enter, explore and succeed in new markets. Among our programs are:

- The **Women in Business Initiative** (WBI) works with women to help them realize their full potential as entrepreneurs. One objective of the WBI is to increase the number of women business owners selling in international markets.
www.acoa.ca/e/entrepreneurship/wbi.shtml
- The **Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership** (ATIP) helps SMEs fully understand and capitalize on the advantages offered through international trade and investment. Key initiatives include: trade missions, sector export strategies development, trade awareness and skills development programs as well as trade graduate internships to further export strategy development.
www.acoa.ca/e/library/facts/atipoverview.shtml
- The **Business Development Program** (BDP) offers interest-free, repayable loans to cover up to 50% of eligible costs for SME startups, expansions or modernizations. In addition, loans can cover up to 75% of eligible costs related to marketing, training, quality improvements, innovation, business proposal development and consultation services. Eligible sectors include: Information Technology, knowledge-based businesses, research and development (R&D), manufacturing and processing, tourism, aquaculture and business services industries.
www.acoa.ca/e/financial/business.shtml
- **Team Canada Atlantic** (TCA) is a partnership of ACOA and the four Atlantic provinces, with support from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Industry Canada, Foreign Affairs Canada and International Trade Canada. TCA is committed to strengthening the trade and investment relationship between Atlantic Canada and the United States.
www.teamcanadaatlantic.ca
- **Canada Business Service Centres** (CBSCs) provide a comprehensive first stop for information on government services, programs and selected regulations. ACOA is the federal managing partner of the CBSCs in Atlantic Canada. To contact any of the CBSCs, call 1-800-668-1010 or visit www.cbsc.org.

Contact Information

For more information on exporting and ACOA programs, contact the ACOA office nearest you:

New Brunswick	1-800-561-4030
Newfoundland & Labrador	1-800-668-1010
Nova Scotia	1-800-565-1228
Prince Edward Island	1-800-871-2596
Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation	1-800-705-3926

To obtain export information from other federal government departments and agencies, visit the following websites:

Agriculture Canada's Agri-Food Trade Service	ats.agr.ca
Business Development Bank of Canada	www.bdc.ca
Businesswomen in Trade	www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/businesswomen
Canadian Commercial Corporation	www.ccc.ca
Canadian Heritage Trade and Investment Branch	www.pch.gc.ca
Canadian Trade Commissioner Service	www.infoexport.gc.ca
Export Development Canada	www.edc.ca
International Trade Canada	www.itcan-cican.gc.ca
Team Canada Inc.	www.exportsource.ca

Provincial government contacts:

Business New Brunswick, Export Development Branch	www.newbrunswick.ca
Nova Scotia Business Inc.	www.novascotiabusiness.com
Newfoundland & Labrador Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development	www.gov.nf.ca/intrd
PEI Business Development, Trade and Export Division	www.peibusinessdevelopment.com

ISBN Number: 0-662-68965-8
Catalogue Number: IU89-4/9-2005
ACOA: 2005-08



Printed on recycled paper
Imprimé sur papier recyclé

Printed in Canada
Imprimé au Canada



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