

TradeRoots

Public and Private Partnerships for Trade

by Leslie M. Schweitzer

National Chamber Foundation, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

In our current climate, it has become even more critical for Americans to understand that we must be competitive in the global economy. The fact of the matter is that trade helps America and the world grow. Most businesses—small and large—know this. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce TradeRoots program works with lawmakers in Washington, D.C., and the rest of the country to implement policies to help small and medium-sized businesses succeed. Recognizing the importance of the connection to the world of international trade and investment, education, and cultural affairs, TradeRoots helps communities throughout the country to better understand the vast role that international trade, both imports and exports, has in their everyday lives. It means jobs and prosperity, and it guarantees the future peace and welfare of our children. The challenge is to develop practical, grassroots means to enable more small and medium-sized businesses to enter the global marketplace. As the world's most open economy and the world's biggest trader, the United States has the most at stake in fostering an inclusive globalization process and a world trading system.

To that end, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business organization with a federation of 3,000 chambers of commerce worldwide and nearly 3 million member businesses, is committed to TradeRoots, the purpose

of which is to ensure prosperity from Portland to Poughkeepsie and Phoenix to Paducah. This sustained, national grassroots trade education program is dedicated to raising public awareness of international trade and assisting America's small and medium-sized businesses to be better able to prosper and to do business in the global marketplace. Small and medium-sized enterprises account for nearly 98 percent of the membership of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and international trade is the key to growth for many of these firms.

In 1999, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce committed to a long-term strategy to develop a local approach to comprehensive international trade education throughout America. Due in part to a partnership between the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the International Trade Administration (ITA), under the auspices of a Market Development Cooperator Program (MDCP) grant, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has created the only sustained national trade education program. This partnership with the ITA has been an important part of the success of the overall program.

In conjunction with the grant, TradeRoots organized four international trade leadership programs in Washington, D.C., to train 89 chamber professionals from 33 states in providing export assistance to their clients. The focus of these intense, multi-day training courses was to educate chamber executives to help their small and

medium-sized company members to be better prepared to compete globally. The state, municipal, and local chambers were trained to respond to the needs of their members. Local chambers will now be able to assist their communities in acquiring valuable information, skills, and financing necessary to succeed in foreign markets, as well as tap into the vast array of local resources and the federal trade promotion services of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration, Export-Import Bank, and others. This group of 89 community-based trade organizations has helped to counsel and prepare thousands of small and medium-sized companies to enter the global marketplace.

"The TradeRoots program was critical to the success we are currently experiencing. The TradeRoots program enabled the Vermont Chamber to get up to speed quickly on all the available programs and services that exist statewide and nationally. The program served as a wonderful primer to learn how to make the most of our developing international program that is so critical to companies in our state."

Curtis Picard
Vermont Chamber of Commerce

As a result of the TradeRoots international trade leadership programs, strong working relationships have developed between the local chamber network and U.S. Export Assistance Centers around the country. These relationships have enabled the chambers and the local offices of the ITA

to work simultaneously to assist small businesses to navigate through the various steps of export transactions.

"The TradeRoots program provides both training and guidance as the Winchester-Frederick County Chamber of Commerce expands its international program. Every contact the U.S. Chamber of Commerce had identified proved to be helpful and responsive. Our chamber also learned how to more effectively use the resources of the U.S. Department of Commerce, particularly the Commercial Service and Virginia's International Trade Division to help businesses in our region."

Suellen Knowles
Winchester-Frederick County
Chamber of Commerce

"Thanks to the introductions made by TradeRoots, Beverly Hills Global has been able to take advantage of the numerous resources and tap into the brainpower of the talented staff of the West Los Angeles Export Assistance Center. From 'The Basics of Exporting' to 'Trade Finance and Compliance' and 'Exporting Professional Services,' the workshops have increased in popularity and experience capacity attendance. In fact, several businesses have joined the chamber as a direct result of the workshop series."

Michael Robinson
Managing Director
Beverly Hills Global
Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce

"I work closely with Roberta Brooke, executive director of the Spokane International Trade Alliance and an alumna of the TradeRoots International Trade Leadership Program. Our partnership has resulted in the development of highly innovative seminars and activities to assist businesses to export and to provide an effective counseling base. Together, we have counseled approximately 200 businesses a year."

Janet Daubel
Director
U.S. Export Assistance Center
Spokane, Washington



Maria Cino (second from left), assistant commerce secretary and director general of the U.S. Commercial Service, and Leslie Schweitzer (left), U.S. Chamber of Commerce, with panelists at the Women and International Business Conference in Los Angeles.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

In addition to the network of chambers in America, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce federation has 94 American chambers of commerce in 82 countries. These chambers provide vital "in country" resources for U.S. companies as they attempt to navigate the sometimes complex paths to business success around the world. The MDCP grant enabled the TradeRoots program to promote closer working relationships between the overseas offices of the U.S. Commercial Service, the chambers, and the state, city, and local chambers of commerce in the United States.

The TradeRoots Web site (www.traderoots.org) was launched in January 2002 as a virtual trade directory to state and local chambers as well as companies nationwide. The site enables small and medium-sized companies to access trade information that will help them enter the global marketplace. This site also gives chambers access to international trade information. Included on the site are country and industry reports, market reports, trade contacts, an export glossary, a trade library, and other useful information.

TradeRoots has also distributed approximately 600,000 pro-trade reports and publications nationwide during the two-year period of the grant. These publications include TradeRoots packets, newsletters, trade

flashes, stories of successes of real companies engaged in trade, and legislative updates on trade agreements.

In 2003, TradeRoots continues to develop local support for international trade. After the successful passage of trade promotion authority, the American public needs to be even more aware of the vastly important free trade agreements on the horizon. TradeRoots will develop and execute a long-term grassroots program in support of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. TradeRoots will expand its governors' trade education tours and work closely with the state and local chamber network to further develop and strengthen support for free and fair trade initiatives. International trade leadership programs will continue throughout the country with a special emphasis on programs for female and Hispanic business owners. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce commitment to combat the fears of globalization at home through an aggressive grassroots trade education program remains strong. International trade is the key to increased prosperity and peace throughout the world.

For more information, contact Leslie M. Schweitzer, senior trade advisor of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, at (202) 463-5511, or lschweit@uschamber.com. Visit www.traderoots.org. ■