



U.S. Commercial Service Timeline



- 1897** The U.S. Department of State establishes the Bureau of Foreign Commerce and orders distribution to the public of diplomatic, consular, and other commercial reports.
- 1903** The U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor is established, subsuming the State Department's Bureau of Foreign Commerce and the Treasury Department's Bureau of Statistics.
- 1912** The Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, the predecessor of the International Trade Administration, is created in the Department of Commerce and Labor.
- 1913** The Departments of Commerce and Labor become separate departments.
- 1927** The Foreign Commercial Service is established "for promotion of foreign and domestic commerce."
- 1928** Ms. Addie Viola Smith is appointed Trade Commissioner of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, assigned to Shanghai. Smith was the first female Trade Commissioner in the Bureau, was paid comparably to her male peers, and received constant commendations on her work and diplomacy. Despite all this, she was still regarded as handicapped because of her gender.
- 1939** President Roosevelt abolishes the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce and all other non-State Department foreign services. The Commercial officers are re-absorbed into State.
- 1979** In June 1979, President Carter signs the "Trade Agreements Act of 1979," which transfers overseas commercial programs to the Department of Commerce.
- 1980** The Foreign Commercial Service is established under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The name is changed to the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service in 1981 in order to emphasize linkage of domestic and overseas operations under a single organizational purpose.
- 1983** As trade fairs are privatized, the Commercial Service begins the Certified Trade Fair Program to provide trade fair participants with a support network, a set of standards, and official U.S. endorsement.
- 1985** The Matchmaker, one of the most popular Commercial Service programs, is launched. The program brings small- and medium-sized U.S. exporters into direct contact with foreign importers, resulting in hundreds of sales and contracts.
- 1990** The Gold Key Service, conceived in the late 1980s by the Commercial Service in Paris, becomes widely available to U.S. exporters in 1990. The GKS offers U.S. exporters custom-tailored overseas services. Today, the Gold Key Service is available in 104 countries and generates over 1000 meetings per year.
- 1992** Funding from the 1992 Freedom Support Act and USAID help create American Business Centers. The ABCs were designed to operate in the developing markets of Russia and the Newly Independent States to stimulate economic growth and create jobs in the U.S.
- 1993** The U.S. Asia Environmental Partnership is formed. Working with USAID, the Commercial Service launches the USAEP program to focus U.S. Government resources on the quickly growing environmental products and services sector, in which U.S. companies excel.
- 1994** Four pilot U.S. Export Assistance Centers open in Baltimore, Chicago, Long Beach, and Miami. Today there are 108 USEACs throughout the nation that have become the hubs in a hub-and-spoke network. The USEACs—federal, state, and local government partners—offer export counseling, market research, trade events and international finance solutions to U.S. exporters.
- 1994** The first Commercial Centers open in Sao Paulo in July, and Jakarta in November. Later, Commercial Centers open in Shanghai and Johannesburg. Commercial Centers offer U.S. firms a place to take advantage of all of the Commercial Service programs and services as well as rental office space, computers, fax and phone, and display space.
- 1995** Commercial Service Teams are created to better leverage internal resources. Today, there are 21 Teams, with 3 main focus areas: Industry, Geographic, and Outreach. Teams network within the Commercial Service to integrate International, Domestic and Global Trade Programs to best serve clients.

- 1995** A Department of Commerce grant issued to the State of Georgia helps develop Commercial Service videoconferencing tools for client use. This service allows U.S. firms, especially those in rural areas, to meet with potential trading partners without the expense of international travel.
- 1996** Department of Commerce Secretary Ronald Brown, Commercial Service employees Stephen Kaminski and Lawrence Payne, and 30 other passengers die in an airplane crash in Croatia on April 3. The tragedy occurred on a trade mission to introduce telecom, tourism, banking, engineering and construction executives to opportunities in the reconstruction program in Croatia.
- 1996** Commercial Service opens its first post in Hanoi, Vietnam.
- 1997** The Commercial Service pilots the Rural Export Initiative (REI) to increase the exports of small businesses from rural communities. Using state-of-the-art technologies and partnering with local universities and state economic development organizations, REI “pushes” trade leads to exporters and conducts trade events in rural locations.
- 1998** For the first time, an ambassadorship is offered to a member of the Commercial Service. George Mu, a senior commercial officer, accepts the position of Ambassador to Cote d’Ivoire.
- 1998** The Embassy bombing in August in Nairobi, Kenya kills many people, and blinds Commercial Service Officer Ellen Bomer.
- 1999** The first Export Assistance Center located on Native American Tribal lands opens in Ontario, California. The San Manuel tribe sees the EAC as a “future for our children.” The partnership with the tribe is one of many efforts to assist underserved groups.
- 2000** To better serve minority and women-owned small businesses, the Commercial Service launches the Global Diversity Initiative, which educates exporters by leveraging resources, technology and trade information via partnerships with women’s and minority trade organizations.
- 2001** As a result of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Commercial Service New York offices are destroyed, but thankfully all employees are safe. The Commercial Service responds to the attacks with strength -- the New York City offices are quickly relocated and Washington, DC-based employees return to work the next day.
- 2002** A customer relationship management unit is created to ensure delivery of consistent and positive customer experiences by Commercial Service clients. Through surveys and focus groups, it is discovered that customer satisfaction with Commercial Service programs exceeds 85%
- 2003** The Commercial Service internal online knowledge management system, “DOC Insider,” combines the know-how of 1,600 worldwide commercial specialists, plus country, industry and general exporting tips. The companion “Specialists Program” establishes 19 Commercial Service trade specialists as information-sharing “gurus” who respond online to more sophisticated exporting questions.
- 2003** The Commercial Service responds to the changing global economy and Free Trade Agreements by opening offices in Iraq, China, Central America and Sub-Sahara Africa. New on-line China and Middle East Business Information Centers improve online access to information. In the Middle East, Europe and Latin America, creative, market-specific programs help exporters capitalize on new business opportunities.
- 2004** The International Trade Administration consolidates export promotion – outreach, client management, project development and company problem solving – into the Commercial Service. Greater synergies, to the benefit of exporters, are built among the Advocacy Center, the Trade Information Center and Commercial Service.
- 2004** The Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee’s (TPCC) export pavilion showcases the export programs of TPCC agencies -- Commerce, the Small Business Administration, the Trade and Development Administration, Export/Import Bank and others – and offers U.S. companies valuable export assistance at major U.S. trade shows.
- 2004** A request for proposals is issued for private sector partners to help fulfill the Commercial Service mission. Federal Express Corporation is selected and the relationship produces 300 clients for the CS in the first 6 months.
- 2004** The Commercial Service collaborates with U.S. manufacturing leaders and the National Association of Manufacturers. A Manufacturing Project Team is created and numerous outreach events deliver on the theme of how to compete in a global economy.

