

## For Small and Rural Businesses, the Time to Export Is Now

Traditionally, small and medium-sized businesses, particularly those located in rural areas, have been less likely to export. But now, with overseas markets growing and the demand for U.S. products and services high, there are many unexploited opportunities for these companies.

BY CARRIE BEVIS

**S**mall and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in the United States, not only from an economic standpoint, but also as an object of inspiration in the culture at large. President Barack Obama acknowledged this role in May, when he proclaimed Small Business Week, noting that “small

businesses embody the promise of America: that if you have a good idea and are willing to work hard enough, you can succeed in our country.”

The challenges facing SMEs, though, are formidable—especially for those that are looking to break into exporting. But with foreign

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Only 3.9 percent of small businesses in the United States are exporting, according to the International Trade Commission, a significantly lower number than many of our competitors. Smaller companies, particularly those located in nonurban, rural areas, can benefit from the wide variety of export services offered by the U.S. Department of Commerce to begin, or expand, sales overseas. (Main Street, Galena, Illinois; photo © Solange Zangiaco/iStock)

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## The Time to Export is Now

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consumers making up 95 percent of the world market, so SMEs have a world of opportunity. And today, the federal government, energized by the National Export Initiative, is helping to give SMEs the resources to seize those opportunities.

### Markets Near and Far

In 2009, according to the Census Bureau, SMEs comprised 97.6 percent of all identified U.S. exporting companies and accounted for 32.8 percent of all export value. The exporters were located in every state, with California, Florida, New York, and Texas having the highest number of exporters. Those four states accounted for 36.7 percent of total U.S. export value in 2009.

Where are most exports headed? According to a survey by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the top export destinations in the world are the United States, followed by China and India, which are the two fastest-growing developing nations.

Although China and India are large and diverse, U.S. SMEs have found that two of the best export markets are just over the border in Canada and Mexico, with our North American Free Trade Agreement partners. In 2010, SMEs exported \$40 billion worth of U.S. goods to Canada and \$39 billion to Mexico.

There are many reasons that certain countries are export destinations of choice. In May, the *2011 National Export Strategy* noted that, apart from proximity, cultural and socioeconomic similarities are significant factors in determining where to export. Thus, not surprisingly, Canada and the United Kingdom were the top export destinations in 2009 for U.S. SMEs.

### Room to Grow

Although those numbers are encouraging, U.S. SMEs, compared to their counterparts in other developed economies, have plenty of room to grow when it comes to exporting. According to the

International Trade Commission, only 3.9 percent of U.S. SMEs exported in 2011. In contrast, 8 percent of European Union SMEs exported. This differential holds in other countries. For example, 8 percent of Canadian SMEs export. And in Australia, although a smaller percentage—4 percent—of SMEs export, the rate still exceeds that for U.S. SMEs.

Those figures suggest that many U.S. SMEs have yet to take advantage of the worldwide consumer base, while other nations' businesses are busy seizing those market opportunities.

### Local Delivery of Services

One way of helping SMEs achieve their export potential is by better coordinating the export promotion services already offered by multiple federal agencies. This effort received a big boost in early 2010 when President Obama announced the National Export Initiative, with his goal of doubling U.S. exports by the end of 2014.

The International Trade Administration is at the forefront of delivering export counseling and assistance services to U.S. companies. It does so primarily through the more than 100 U.S. Export Assistance Centers (USEACs) that are located across the country. The centers employ trade specialists from the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS), which is a unit of the International Trade Administration. The specialists work closely with their counterparts in other federal agencies, such as the Small Business Administration and the Export-Import Bank of the United States, as well as with state and local economic development agencies.

### One-Stop Shop

USEACs serve as one-stop shops for SMEs lacking the resources and contacts available to larger corporations by helping the businesses plug into a global support network. According to Bill Fanjoy, director of the USEAC in Arlington, Virginia, "I make sure that when a small enterprise contacts my office, they are assessed

The International Trade Administration is at the forefront of delivering export counseling and assistance services to U.S. companies.

## FROM FROZEN SHEEP HEADS TO PRAIRIE DOGS, RURAL OFFICES HELP EXPORTERS COMPETE

for export readiness, put in touch with exactly who can help them, and made aware of the resources and programs that we offer to them, many of which are free.”

As an SME prepares for international trade, its regional USEAC will track the company’s progress to help ensure a smooth transition into exporting. “Local USEACs can help turn small firms into big players on the global field,” said Fanjoy.

In 2010, the USFCS counseled more than 18,000 U.S. companies and helped approximately 5,500 (about 30 percent) to export for the first time, to enter a new market, or to increase their market penetration. The overwhelming majority of those firms were SMEs.

### Getting the Word Out

One of the challenges that USEACs face is how to increase awareness of their services to SMEs. A study conducted for the Department of Commerce in 2009 revealed that more than a third of SME manufacturers were unaware of export assistance programs available to them.

This lack of knowledge is common with companies located in rural areas. As a result, the specialists at the USEACs, which are usually located in urban areas, continuously conduct outreach to potential exporters located in outlying areas. For instance, although the USEAC in Arlington, Virginia, is located in a metropolitan area, its trade specialists regularly travel to rural towns throughout southern Virginia to increase contact with companies that may have export potential.

### Ongoing Effort

The combination of top-notch counseling with continuing outreach is a key element of the Obama administration’s export promotion push. Those efforts certainly contributed to the 17 percent growth in U.S. goods and services exports that was posted in 2010.

Many of the U.S. Export Assistance Centers (USEACs) are small offices that serve a wide territory mainly made up of rural communities. The specialists at these offices must be flexible, resourceful, and willing to accommodate the needs of a diverse clientele. Recently, three of them spoke with *International Trade Update* about their work: Carey Hester, director of the Missoula, Montana, USEAC; Cinnamon King, director of the Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USEAC; and Heather Ranck, director of the Fargo, North Dakota, USEAC.

According to Ranck, the USEACs play a greater role in rural areas. “We become a precious resource to businesses because we can connect companies to resources that are perceived as distant, through our amazing network.” Hester added that “often, small rural companies are less familiar and less trusting of trade, thus requiring more support from their Commercial Service contact. We really have to sell the idea of exporting to these companies. I am the face of the federal government to a lot of the companies out here.”

Personal contact is very important, according to Ranck. “Our work with clients is very relationship based. You have to drive out to visit them, learn about their company, and build trust before you begin export assistance. A lot of our clients become our friends.”

King emphasizes that trade specialists at the USEACs need to be ready to handle a wide diversity of businesses. “Being in a stand-alone office, you need knowledge of everything. One day I have to figure out how to get a load of frozen sheep heads to Mexico, and the next how to ship prairie dogs to a pet store in Japan!”

Hester agreed: “It’s the diversity that keeps this job so new and fun for us; it’s never boring.”

All spoke of the extra time and personal attention that their work demanded, but agreed that seeing the significance of their work makes it well worth the effort. According to Ranck, “There are companies that I know wouldn’t be exporting if it weren’t for us, and as a public servant that generates a great feeling of pride.”



Heather Ranck (right), director of the U.S. Export Assistance Center in Fargo, North Dakota, with other government trade specialists promoting U.S. exports at Nampo Harvest Day, an agricultural trade show held in South Africa in May 2010. Export assistance is important to rural companies, according to Ranck. “We can connect [them] to resources that are perceived as distant.” (U.S. Department of Commerce photo)

# Swift Response by ITA Team Secures Open Market in Taiwan

The International Trade Administration engages with Taiwanese officials to overcome shipping restrictions for a U.S. exporter.

BY STEVE WILLIAMS



Air Products' facility in Hsinchu, Taiwan. The U.S. company benefitted from help offered by the International Trade Administration's Trade Agreements Compliance Program. (Photo courtesy Air Products)

**F**or U.S. companies seeking to access international markets, expanding overseas often provides numerous benefits, including increased sales and an expanded global reach. However, trade barriers imposed by foreign governments can present significant obstacles or even prevent businesses from entering export markets entirely.

That experience recently occurred to Air Products, a U.S. exporter of specialty gas in Allentown, Pennsylvania. For more than 25 years, this medium-sized company has provided high-purity specialty gases to high-tech manufacturers in the semiconductor, flat panel display, and photovoltaic industries. Since 2001, Air Products has been shipping high-purity nitrous oxide, helium, and hydrogen in bulk quantities to Taiwan in high-pressure tube trailers that are built to U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) standards.

## Potential Loss of Sales

The company's difficulties began in early 2009, when authorities in Taiwan temporarily halted a shipment of gases secured in tube trailers by claiming that the trailers were no longer acceptable for transporting the specialty gases within Taiwan. Taiwan would only allow bulk gases shipped in trailers that complied with a unique Japanese national standard. This decision would lock Air Products out of its lucrative market in Taiwan with a potential loss of \$50 million in annual sales.

"Taiwan's mandatory technical requirements unnecessarily limited U.S. access to this market," noted Joe Wereszynski, an international trade specialist with the International Trade Administration (ITA) who worked on this issue. "Many other countries accept the U.S. DOT standards and consider these standards as conforming to a high level of safety."

## Engagement and World Trade Organization Leverage

Wereszynski and Simon Kim, another international trade specialist in ITA, were briefed on the situation by officials at the American Institute in Taiwan and were asked if ITA could assist in resolving the problem. To Department of Commerce officials, the problem seemed like a possible technical barrier to trade, a type of situation addressed in trade agreements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that lay out obligations that all WTO members must comply with. They concluded that one of the agreements, the WTO's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, could be used as a framework for discussion.

This agreement, which Taiwan is obliged to comply with as a WTO member, requires that a WTO member's product mandatory standards, also called technical regulations, be no more restrictive of trade than necessary to achieve the government's legitimate purpose and that positive consideration be given by the government to accepting the mandatory

product standards of other WTO members, provided the standards adequately fulfill the safety objectives of their own regulation.

Within one month, Wereszynski, Kim, a team of other experts from ITA's Trade Agreements Compliance Program, and representatives of other U.S. government agencies worked with Air Products to develop an action plan for resolving the barrier. They then met with Taiwan's authorities, reminded them of Taiwan's obligation under the WTO's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade to avoid overly trade-restrictive technical regulations, and asked Taiwan to consider a more trade-facilitative alternative. They also engaged Taiwan's regulatory authorities in the discussions by raising the implications of their regulatory policy on trade and by posing questions to see if Taiwan's tube trailer requirements might be made consistent with the provisions of the WTO agreement.

In addition, Ira Kasoff, then deputy assistant secretary for Asia in the Department of Commerce, also addressed the issue with Taiwan's authorities during a trip to Taipei in April 2009.

### Regained Market Access

Several weeks later, Taiwan officially accepted both the U.S. DOT and Japanese standards for the transport of gas. As a result, Air Products regained market access in one of its most important foreign markets.

The provisions of the WTO agreement were crucial in resolving this matter. "It provided additional leverage in urging the authorities in Taiwan to formally accept the DOT-approved tube trailers as they had in the past," noted Wereszynski.

The swift response from the team at the Department of Commerce helped to prevent major disruptions to Air Products' business and to successfully remove this trade barrier. Now all U.S. exporters of tube trailers built to DOT standards have access to Taiwan's market.

According to John E. McGlade, chair, president, and chief executive officer of Air Products, in a letter to the Department of Commerce, the role of the ITA team was crucial to this successful effort. "Without the expert advocacy skill of [ITA's] staff, it certainly appears that this business opportunity may have been denied us.... We appreciate [ITA's] assistance in protecting our business opportunities."

Trade policy advocacy is among the key strategies deployed by ITA to expand and defend market access for U.S. goods and services overseas.

According to Michael Camuñez, assistant secretary for market access and compliance, "We employ such trade policy advocacy to resolve trade barriers and leverage our bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. This government-to-government action helps ensure that our trading partners live up to their commitments and was particularly effective in this instance."

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*Steve Williams is a team lead for operations in the International Trade Administration's Market Access and Compliance unit. Joe Wereszynski, an international trade specialist in International Trade Administration's Trade Compliance Center, and Lisette Bez, an International Trade Administration intern, collaborated in the writing of this report.*

## THE WTO AGREEMENT ON TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE

Standards-related obstacles to trade are the nontariff barriers (NTBs) most frequently reported to the ITA by U.S. exporters. The World Trade Organization's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), which was first introduced in 1979 under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and later amended and annexed to the agreement that established the WTO in 1994, is an international agreement applicable to all WTO members. It seeks to ensure that governmental product standards and conformity assessment procedures—including labeling, packaging, testing, and certification requirements—do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade, and therefore are not more trade-restrictive than necessary. Through the agreement, WTO members are also committed to heightened transparency requirements, meaning that they will notify other members of such standards-related measures and will allow comment on them at an early stage of development.

The effect on trade from regulatory-related NTBs can be quite harmful. Governments can use standards-related measures as effective and efficient means to protect health, consumer safety, and the environment. But when they are overly burdensome, discriminatory, or otherwise inap-

propriate, such measures reduce competition, stifle innovation, and create technical barriers to trade.

The International Trade Administration's Trade Agreements Compliance Program is an instrumental part of the U.S. government's systematic effort to monitor, investigate, and ensure foreign government compliance with international trade agreements and other market access obligations. Since 2000, the program has addressed more than 600 foreign standards-related trade issues. Thus far in 2011, the program has initiated 39 standards-related trade barrier investigations, 11 of them on behalf of small and medium-sized enterprises, and has successfully reduced or removed 17 obstacles to U.S. exporters and workers.

The program provides a one-stop trade complaint center that makes it easy for U.S. firms to obtain U.S. government assistance in reducing or eliminating foreign trade barriers that obstruct their market access abroad. To access the complaint center, visit [www.export.gov/tcc](http://www.export.gov/tcc) and click on "Report a Trade Barrier," or call the Trade Information Center, tel.: 1-800-USA-TRAD(E) (1-800-872-8723), and ask for trade barrier assistance.

# September 2011

## September 7-8

### Arizona Export Compliance Summit

Scottsdale, Arizona

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=17176](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=17176)

This two-day conference will provide a comprehensive review and update of the compliance challenges currently facing technology exporters, manufacturers, brokers, and freight forwarders, particularly in the aerospace, electronics, and security industries. There is a fee of \$495 for both days; one-day options are also available. For more information, contact Eric Nielsen of the USFCS, tel.: (520) 670-5808; e-mail: [eric.nielsen@trade.gov](mailto:eric.nielsen@trade.gov).

## September 13-16

### Defence & Security Equipment International 2011

London, United Kingdom

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=31404](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=31404)

Certified by the Department of Commerce, this trade fair is one of the world's largest fully integrated defense and security exhibitions covering land, naval, and air systems. The USFCS office in London will organize roundtables with prime contractors in the United Kingdom, an ambassador's reception, preshow outreach, and export counseling on the show floor. For more information, contact Deborah Semb of the USFCS, tel.: (202) 482-0677; e-mail: [deborah.semb@trade.gov](mailto:deborah.semb@trade.gov).

## September 18-24

### U.S. Industry Program at the IAEA General Conference

Vienna, Austria

[www.buyusa.gov/austria/en/iaea.html](http://www.buyusa.gov/austria/en/iaea.html)

The Department of Commerce is organizing a series of promotional activities for U.S. companies and organizations in the nuclear energy industry during the 54th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Registration for this event is now closed. For more information, contact Marta Hausteine of the USFCS, tel.: +43 (1) 31339-2205; e-mail: [marta.hausteine@trade.gov](mailto:marta.hausteine@trade.gov), or Jason Sproule of the USFCS, tel.: (949) 660-7105; e-mail: [jason.sproule@trade.gov](mailto:jason.sproule@trade.gov).

## September 20

### Import/Export Workshop

Sacramento, California

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=32233](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=32233)

This morning workshop will cover the basics of exporting, including creating an international marketing plan, using resources to find customers, learning the basics of shipping internationally, and ensuring payment and reducing risk. For more information, contact Anthony Hill of the USFCS, tel.: (916) 566-7011; e-mail: [anthony.hill@trade.gov](mailto:anthony.hill@trade.gov).

## September 20-23

### Liderevmash 2011: Woodworking and Furniture Show

Kiev, Ukraine

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=30553](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=30553)

This show, which occurs every two years, focuses on equipment for the timber, woodworking, and furniture industries. The USFCS office in Kiev will organize a product literature center, which will allow participating companies to display their product catalogs and price lists. There is a fee of \$350 per company to participate in the center. For more information, contact Myroslava Myrtyalo of the USFCS, tel.: +380 (44) 490-4064; e-mail: [myroslava.myrtyalo@trade.gov](mailto:myroslava.myrtyalo@trade.gov).

## September 21-23

### EP China 2011

Shanghai, China

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=30929](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=30929)

China is investing heavily in the power generation sector, and a U.S. pavilion at this major trade show will provide participating U.S. companies the opportunity to promote their products and services to thousands of potential buyers. In 2009, the show attracted more than 400 exhibitors from 20 countries and 26,900 visitors. For more information, contact Juliet Lu of the USFCS, tel.: +86 (21) 6279-8780; e-mail: [juliet.lu@trade.gov](mailto:juliet.lu@trade.gov).

## September 21-25

### International Building Fair

Prague, Czech Republic

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=17134](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=17134)

This event includes five trade shows that focus on different sectors of the building and construction industries. In 2010, the fair featured 812 exhibitors from 20 countries and attracted more than 75,000 trade visitors. The Department of Commerce is organizing a catalog fair for U.S. companies. For more information, contact Hana Obrusnikova of the USFCS, tel.: +420 (257) 022-436; e-mail: [hana.obrusnikova@trade.gov](mailto:hana.obrusnikova@trade.gov).

## September 26-28

### PACK EXPO

Las Vegas, Nevada

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=31031](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=31031)

This show, which participates in the Department of Commerce's International Buyer Program, will focus on the latest developments in packaging and processing technology. More than 1,600 vendors are expected to attend, with more than 25,000 domestic and foreign attendees. For more information, contact Vidya Desai of the USFCS, tel.: (202) 482-2311; e-mail: [vidya.desai@trade.gov](mailto:vidya.desai@trade.gov).

See additional  
trade events at  
[www.export.gov](http://www.export.gov)

Here is a list of selected international trade events of interest, including ITA-sponsored events and upcoming international trade fairs. The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS) maintains a comprehensive listing of industry shows at [www.export.gov](http://www.export.gov). A fee may be charged for participation in some of these events. For more information, see the full event listing on the Web or contact the staff person listed in the event description.

# On the Horizon

October 10–15

## India Education Mission

New Delhi, Chennai, and Mumbai, India

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=31789](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=31789)

This Department of Commerce trade mission is open to representatives of U.S. graduate programs, four-year undergraduate programs, and state study consortia whose members are accredited by one of the seven regional accrediting bodies. It will include one-on-one appointments with potential partners, embassy briefings, student fairs, and networking events in New Delhi, Chennai, and Mumbai, three of the top cities for recruiting Indian students to the United States. For more information, contact Matt Baker of the USFCS, tel.: (520) 670-5809; e-mail: [matt.baker@trade.gov](mailto:matt.baker@trade.gov).

October 12–16

## Frankfurt Book Fair

Frankfurt, Germany

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=31085](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=31085)

This show is one of the world's most important venue for publishers, booksellers, agents, librarians, translators, authors, and suppliers dealing with publishing rights, licenses, and international property rights. It is expected to attract more than 7,300 exhibitors from 100 countries and 299,000 trade visitors. For more information, contact Volker Wirsdorf of the USFCS, tel.: + 49 (69) 7535-3150; e-mail: [volker.wirsdorf@trade.gov](mailto:volker.wirsdorf@trade.gov).

October 21–23

## International Tourism and Travel Show

Montreal, Canada

[www.export.gov/eac/show\\_detail\\_trade\\_events.asp?EventID=32330](http://www.export.gov/eac/show_detail_trade_events.asp?EventID=32330)

This show is expected to attract representatives from more than 100 countries. Officials from U.S. travel destinations will have an excellent opportunity to increase their location's exposure, to create numerous contacts, and to learn about the newest travel and tourism trends. More than 35,000 visitors are expected to attend, with 98 percent intending to purchase their vacation in the coming year and 35 percent likely to purchase a vacation at the show itself. The USFCS will be organizing a U.S. pavilion. For more information, contact Sue Bissi of the USFCS, tel.: (514) 398-9696; e-mail: [sue.bissi@trade.gov](mailto:sue.bissi@trade.gov).



## Featured Trade Event

# Eco Expo Asia 2011

October 26–29

Hong Kong, China

[www.elcaminocitd.org](http://www.elcaminocitd.org)

Eco Expo Asia, an international trade fair on environmental protection, is a Department of Commerce–certified trade show. This year, the show's theme is "Green Tech for a Cleaner World." The show focuses on air quality, energy efficiency, green building and transportation, water quality, waste management and recycling, and ecofriendly products. It will be an excellent platform for U.S. green manufacturers, service providers, and suppliers to gain access to the growing Asian environmental industry.

Eco Expo Asia will be held at the AsiaWorld-Expo at Hong Kong International Airport. In 2010, it hosted 266 exhibitors from 19 countries. More than 8,000 visitors from 62 countries and regions attended, including 44 buying missions that represented 644 companies and 922 delegates.

U.S. companies can participate in Eco Expo Asia at a special reduced rate through the Green Export Enabler Program (GEEP). GEEP is an initiative of El Camino College Center for International Trade in El Camino, California. It is funded by the state of California and in 2009 was awarded additional funds by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Market Development Cooperative Program to assist exporters of clean technology.

For a participation fee of \$1,000, companies receive a 100 square-foot booth, discounted roundtrip airfare, four nights' stay in a hotel (for first-time exhibitors), networking events with Hong Kong and Chinese officials, a one-day trade mission to Guangzhou, and business matching services with the opportunity to meet with potential Chinese buyers.

After the show, U.S. firms can continue their China visit by joining the North America Technology Investment Mission to Guangzhou, Nanjing, and Wuxi on October 30 through November 1. It is one of several events conducted under the Pacific Bridge Initiative that was signed in November 2010 by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service.

The registration deadline is September 15. To register, visit [www.elcaminocitd.org](http://www.elcaminocitd.org) and click "Register" at the event listing. For more information, contact Kerry Bonner of El Camino College, tel.: (310) 973-3161; e-mail: [kbonner@elcamino.edu](mailto:kbonner@elcamino.edu).



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For more information and news, visit ITA's Web site at [www.trade.gov](http://www.trade.gov) or contact the Office of Public Affairs, International Trade Administration, 1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20230; tel.: (202) 482-3809.

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According to Francisco Sánchez, under secretary of commerce for international trade, "It's not enough for the federal government to offer exceptional information and expert export assistance services to U.S. companies. We must also work to spread awareness about what we can offer U.S. businesses, especially small businesses." It is an

effort that will help make exporting an attainable goal for more and more U.S. businesses in the years ahead.

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*Carrie Bevis is an intern in the International Trade Administration's Office of Public Affairs.*

## RESOURCES FOR EXPORTERS: HOW TO ACCESS THEM

U.S. companies looking for export counseling and assistance can turn to the Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center (TIC). Located in Washington, D.C., the center operates a toll-free 800 number that takes calls from companies with questions about almost any aspect of trade. Contact the center at 1-800-USA-TRAD(E) (1-800-872-8723).

The International Trade Administration also maintains the federal government's export Web portal at [www.export.gov](http://www.export.gov). The Web site offers a wide variety of resources to help exporters, including listings of upcoming trade events, links to local offices, and videos on trade topics.

Among the newer online resources is a series of Webinars. Currently 25 of these one-hour seminars are available for downloading by U.S. companies that have registered on the site. The Webinars focus on topics such as export planning, navigating regulations, and obtaining market-specific profiles.

Another resource for export assistance is the network of more than 100 U.S. Export Assistance Centers. The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service also has commercial officers and counselors at more than 75 overseas locations, usually working from a U.S. embassy or consulate. Links to those offices can be found on [www.export.gov](http://www.export.gov).

