

OPENING INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN TRADE

by Maria Cino

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We all know some dynamic entrepreneurs in our daily life and a growing number of them are women. There is no disputing the economic impact women have on the U.S. economy. According to the Office of Advocacy of the Small Business Administration, in 1997 the number of women-owned businesses increased 89 percent over the last decade to an estimated 8.5 million. Women-owned businesses generated \$3.1 trillion in revenue, an increase of 209 percent between 1987 and 1997, after adjustment for inflation.

Women-owned businesses currently provide jobs for 26 percent of the workforce and they generated \$2.3

trillion in sales in 1996. There will be about 4.7 million self-employed women by 2005. This is an increase of 77 percent since 1983, compared with a 6 percent increase in the number of self-employed men.

With all the compelling evidence to prove the value of women to our overall economic growth and stability, it's no wonder that there are also a significant number of women-owned businesses that are engaged in international trade. As you've heard previously, the President has asked Congress to grant him Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), or "fast-track," and I recently took a group of women entrepreneurs to a White House briefing to hear directly from President Bush, U.S.

Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman why TPA is good for the U.S.

At the briefing, the business representatives heard how U.S. businesses are losing opportunities in world markets due to lack of U.S. participation in trade agreements. For example, of the more than 30 trade agreements in the Western Hemisphere, the U.S. participates in only one. Let me cite an example of how U.S. businesses are adversely affected: A U.S. tractor-maker wanting to export to Chile must pay a \$25,000 tariff; if that company moved its factory to Brazil and exported a tractor to Chile, it would have to pay a \$15,000 tariff. However, a Canadian company exporting a tractor to Chile pays no tariff at all because Canada has a free trade agreement with Chile. That's why the U.S. must secure more trade agreements that will allow our companies to compete on a level playing field.

Secretary Veneman emphasized that "one of the most important tools we have in the struggle to remain competitive is Trade Promotion Authority. With TPA we can enter into agreements to eliminate trade barriers and roll back trade-distorting subsidies."

More than 100 women participated in the event and several of those women are clients of the U.S. Department of Commerce and are inspirations to business-owners, regardless of gender. You may have read of some of their successes in previous issues of Export America.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Commerce

Secretary Evans and Director General Maria Cino meet with (L to R) Margaret McEntire, Maureen Russell, Sarian Bouma, Carole Sluski and Jill Dohner.

These women all traveled to Washington to hear President Bush explain why TPA is important to promoting trade and democracy worldwide.

These five women are all clients of the agency I lead, the U.S. Commercial Service. Part of the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration, the U.S. Commercial Service has a global network of international trade experts who help U.S. companies, particularly small and mid-sized businesses, succeed in global markets.

As President Bush, Ambassador Zoellick and Secretary Veneman explained, TPA is a tool that will enable more U.S. entrepreneurs—people like the five women with whom I met with – go global. Ambassador Zoellick emphasized that free trade is good for American consumers and businesses, “because when Americans can shop the world for the best prices and highest quality goods, American consumers and producers win. TPA is a critical part of the President's ability to negotiate good trade deals that will open markets, increase choices and lower costs for American farmers, workers, consumers and businesses.

FOUR COMPANIES, A WIDE WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES

The five women that came to Washington represent four very different companies, but they all believe that the global marketplace holds great opportunities for smaller U.S. companies.

■ Candy Bouquet International is a franchise firm that manufactures and sells decorative candy arrangements similar to floral arrangements. Margaret McEntire founded the company in 1989 in her garage. Today, the typical Candy Bouquet store is a full-scale chocolate and candy retail operation, although some operate successfully as home-based businesses. Some franchisees operate exclusively as Candy Bouquet, others run this franchise in

conjunctions with a floral shop or other retail outlet. Candy Bouquet has over 510 franchises in 48 states and 35 other countries in 2001. Ms. McEntire participated in the Commercial Service's Women in Business Matchmaker trade mission to South America and the Women's Economic Summit of the Americas in Buenos Aires.

■ Sarian Bouma, the CEO of Capitol Hill Building Maintenance, is a success story of a self-made entrepreneur who built a successful business when there was nowhere to go but up. Bouma was born in Sierra Leone and came to the United States in 1974 to attend college. After a failed marriage she was forced to leave college and accept welfare in order to take care of her infant son. Today she runs Capitol Hill Building Maintenance, Inc. directing cleaning services for over 2 million square feet of space, employing almost 200 loyal staff members and generating over \$1.75 million in annual sales. She participated in the Canada/USA Business Women's Trade Summit in 1999 and in a women's trade mission to Africa in October 2000, where she made a number of sales.

■ R. M. Waite's Maureen Russell got into the building materials business in 1975, when she went to work for a local materials distributor. But her greatest challenge came ten years ago when she bought R.M. Waite, a small roofing and building materials distributor based in Oakland, California.

Russell participated in a Market Entry business training program at the San Francisco U.S. Export Assistance Center, part of the Commercial Service's Global Diversity Initiative. The six-month course, which prepares women- and minority-owned firms to sell their products and services internationally, covered the basics of international trade, like distribution channels, finance, transportation, e-commerce and documentation.

Now, 80 percent of R.M. Waite's exports go to Asia, generating approximately \$2 million this year.

■ Carole Sluski, President of Petrochem and her daughter Jill Dohner, the company's Sales and Marketing Director, traveled from Lockport, Illinois to attend the event. Petrochem, a client of the Chicago U.S. Export Assistance Center, currently sells its oven chain lubricants in the United States, England, South Africa, Spain, Argentina, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Saudi Arabia. Like Maureen Russell, Sluski credits the U.S. Commercial Service's Global Diversity Market Entry Program for helping her take Petrochem global.

ENTREPRENEURS DON'T HAVE TO GO IT ALONE

Clients like Sarian Bouma and Maureen Russell tell us the most important resource we have is our worldwide network of trade experts. The U.S. Commercial Service has 160 international offices and 105 more across the U.S. We're there when U.S. companies need us. Also with our web site, www.usatrade.gov, we can be anywhere—day or night. No matter what stage of export readiness your company is in, our network of trade specialists can provide the export assistance you need. Our services will help you choose the best market for your company, design a strategy to help you get your businesses there and protect your interests once you've started doing business globally.

The time is right for women entrepreneurs to take their businesses global. We should know; we've been helping them get there for more than 20 years. ■

For more information on the U.S. Commercial Service, or to find the office nearest you, please visit www.usatrade.gov.