



One of the best-kept secrets in international business

By Peter M. Robinson

Small and medium-sized exporters are getting help from an unlikely source: the United States Council for International Business. You might even say that, for smaller companies, we're one of the best kept secrets in business.

The council is probably best known as a big-business advocacy group. Indeed, most of our members are Fortune 500 companies with operations all over the world. They value our ability to provide informed business views to U.S. policy makers, as well as to officials in the United Nations, the European Union and a host of other governments and groups.

If small and medium enterprises know us at all, it is because we represent the International Chamber of Commerce and other big international business bodies — groups that might seem pretty intimidating to those outside the top ranks of the corporate food-chain.

But there is growing recognition that small and medium companies are driving the global economy, and we are tailoring our work to reflect this. Take, for example, trade with China. Commerce Department statistics show that, from 1992 to 2004, the number of small and medium companies exporting to China surged by 511 percent, compared to 128 percent growth for large companies.

There's no denying that the threshold for going global is getting lower day by day, as companies seek to take advantage of all the opportunities provided by rich markets and production opportunities overseas. The council is increasingly working to shape policies that level the playing field for *all* companies — large and small — to expand market access for U.S. products and services.

"Terrific," you say, "but my compa-

ny doesn't have the resources to hire a lot of in-house lawyers and public affairs people, to keep track of all this overseas law and regulation. What can the council do for me?" Plenty. In addition to advocacy, we help companies of all sizes with practical tools to do business better overseas, and you don't have to be a member to take advantage of them.

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Need assistance dealing with cross-border commercial disputes? As the U.S. representative for the International Chamber of Commerce's dispute-resolution services, the council refers businesses to qualified attorneys, organizes seminars and answers questions about the dispute-resolution process. The ICC runs the world's best-known court of commercial arbitration, and those in the know count on the chamber's dispute-resolution services to save them from the time, hassle and unpredictability of litigation.

Want to get your goods to a trade show or product demonstration overseas with a minimum of trouble? You can call on the council for an ATA Carnet, a "merchandise passport" that enables temporary, duty-free shipments of com-

mercial samples, professional equipment and goods for exhibitions or trade shows in over 75 countries. ATA Carnets also let you avoid value-added taxes. The council is the U.S. association that issues and guarantees these unique international customs documents.

Confused about the terminology used in your international sales contract? Use Incoterms, the ICC's internationally accepted trade terms that help traders in different countries understand each other, clearly defining the responsibilities of buyer and seller for delivery of goods. The book that spells out these rules, entitled "Incoterms 2000: ICC Official Rules for the Interpretation of Trade Terms," is available in the U.S. only from ICC Books USA, a publishing division of the council. In addition to information on Incoterms, ICC Books USA has more than 75 titles available covering international banking, model commercial contracts and much more.

We also bring our expertise on the nuts and bolts of international trade to a wide audience through seminars and conferences. This year alone, we are organizing multiple events around the country on letters of credit, which are governed by ICC rules known as UCP 600, and on ICC arbitration, and we recently held a major conference on international tax treaties and their impact on company operations overseas.

Want to learn more? Visit www.uscib.org to get the full picture of the council's activities and services for business. We may be a well-kept secret now, but we won't be for long. ⚙️

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