

## Women Get Ready, Get Set and Go Global

&nbsp;by: Laurel J. Delaney, MBAToday, women are starting businesses at twice the rate of men and becoming a major force both in the traditional and the new global e-business marketplace. In November, The National Women's Council's Interagency Committee on Women's Business Enterprise prepared and presented to the 2000 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Conference a case study (<http://www.nwbc.gov/oeecd.pdf>) on successful public and private initiatives for fostering entrepreneurship among women. It notes the significant role women have played in the recent economic prosperity and affirms the fact that "countries with high levels of economic activity and with the highest start-up business rates are the ones where women are well-engaged in entrepreneurial activity." More intriguing still, small businesses owned by women and minorities are focusing more intense efforts on exporting than those owned by non-minority men. The U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) Office of International Trade, in a statistical report released last year, indicated that "America's small businesses are big players in international trade — and their role is growing rapidly." Export data analysis (<http://www.sba.gov/library/oitreport/oitnov99report.html>) shows that 97 percent of U.S. companies that export are small businesses and women own 40 percent of all small businesses (<http://www.sba.gov/news/speeches/alvarez112900.html>). Wanna Grow? Go Global! Women account for 30 percent of the businesses that export more than half of their products. "Women-owned firms participating in the global marketplace grow more rapidly than women-owned businesses that are primarily domestic," SBA Administrator, Aida Alvarez said. "They are more apt to develop a new product or service and expand domestically. At the SBA (<http://www.onlinewbc.org/>), we have several programs in place to help women-owned businesses take advantage of the outstanding opportunities available through international trade." Achieving Success a Woman's Way Could it be that businesswomen go globetrotting with their products or services more readily than men do because they adapt more easily to foreign countries and cultures? "I think women [have a] natural ability to embrace their work and their businesses as a natural extension of their own family," says Cherie Piebes, IBM's Global Small Business Program Director for the Alliance Marketing and Women Entrepreneurs market (<http://www.ibm.com/smallbusiness/women>). "Research has indicated that women tend to manage from a centralized focal point, while men manage from a hierarchical stance." A more personalized style of business interaction makes women uniquely equipped to succeed on the international front, where quality personal relationships are key to success. Even though we realize that the ability to stick to a complex business agenda will win our colleagues' confidence and respect, the emotional sensitivity and the capacity for relationship building that is largely attributed to women can be useful in any business negotiation. National Foundation for Women Business Owners (<http://www.nfwbo.org>) researchers put it more succinctly: "The fact that we are women, with different challenges and perceptions in the workplace . . . can finally be turned to our advantage, judo style." Listen and You'll Understand What really enables a woman entrepreneur to go global? Here's what two dynamic global businesswomen have to say. "It has been my experience that doing business in any part of the globe is all about listening," says Deb Armstrong, President of majority woman-owned Kendallville, Indiana-based, A-1 Production, Inc. (<http://www.a1production.com>), a producer of bushings, hydraulic fittings and machined parts. "Maybe this is why women are the ones working more diligently to increase business overseas. While we listen and observe, we also see that we must be flexible to do business in other parts of the globe, be patient with others and most of all accept and embrace the differences in people," Deb notes. "Producing a product or service at a good price also helps!" Relationships Seal Deals What else brings success to women conducting business overseas? I asked Ms. World Trader of The Year (awarded by the state of Minnesota in 1985) to see if her opinion differed. "Building trusting, quality relationships--something especially women excel--in has been the key to international success for me," says Yvonne Halpaus, Director of Sales and Marketing for QNET LLC (<http://www.ce-mark.com>), a quality assurance and international trade consulting firm specializing in CE Marking and ISO 9000/EN 46000/QS 9000 with affiliated offices in California, Wisconsin and Tokyo. She elaborates further: "In the past, when I traveled throughout the world to sell machinery, I prepared in detail to understand the market I was visiting--including the Arab world. I read about the culture, their way of conducting business, visited with our international bankers to obtain economic reports and forecasts. While conducting business, I always made sure to ask questions and not jump to conclusions based on Western viewpoints. I tried to study situations through local viewpoints. Combined, this gave me an edge in negotiations. I seemed to understand or at least be willing to try." Deb Armstrong jumps in to add: "I would have to say that to me, another reason why we succeed more so than men in the global marketplace is because we are open to differences in methods, practices and meeting people's diverse needs. Because of my success with global trade (from 1997 grew exports to 10 percent of company's total sales) and the changes made in the company, I was promoted from Senior Vice President to President in 1999." Who Says Women Aren't Allowed? This is all great and fine, but what about certain parts of the world where the perception is that women aren't allowed to participate in business dealings--then what? "When my top sale in the Middle East was valued at \$2 million, management stopped asking if they were doing the right thing sending a woman to the Middle East," says Yvonne. "It became a mute point." Whatever Your Business, The World Is Yours It's clear that whether you run a service or manufacturing enterprise, the wide-open world of global marketing is the businesswoman's natural habitat. If you haven't already gone global, you can start by visiting a few of these one-stop-global-shops that cover everything from how to start your business to how to operate in the global marketplace. Although most of the Web sites are designed for businesswomen, much of the featured content will be of interest to all entrepreneurs. AT&T Women in Business (<http://www.att.com/wib/index.html>) Advancing Women (<http://www.advancingwomen.com/index.html>) Businesswomen in Trade (<http://www.infoexport.gc.ca/businesswomen/menu-e.asp>) Forum for Women Entrepreneurs (<http://www.fwe.org/>) Global Funding Community (<http://www.seekingcapital.com>) Online Women's Business Center (<http://www.onlinewbc.org/docs/market/index.html>) Organization of Women in International Trade (<http://www.owit.org/>) The Enterprise Development Website Women and Enterprise Development (<http://www.enterweb.org/women.htm>)

## About the Author

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