



# SOUNDING BOARD



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE GREATER VANCOUVER BOARD OF TRADE AND ITS MEMBERS | OCTOBER 2017 | VOLUME 57 / ISSUE 9 | BOARDOFTRADE.COM

## New program launched to help small businesses export

**ECONOMY** | Trade Accelerator Program now accepting applications from local companies ready to grow

BY GREG HOEKSTRA

**B**usinesses in B.C. now have access to a new program that can help them export their products and services.

The Trade Accelerator Program (TAP) will provide small and medium-sized businesses with access to some of Canada's top exporting advisors, resources, and contacts, while giving them hands-on training on how to start trading globally.

The program was first unveiled in Toronto in 2015, where it has seen tremendous success. In just two years, TAP has already helped more than 150 Canadian companies start exporting.

Thanks to the support of the Province of British Columbia, TAP will now be available in B.C. through the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade and the BC Chamber of Commerce.

"The Province is committed to helping B.C. companies develop



export capacity, and helping create jobs in all regions of the province to support a sustainable, shared economy," said Bruce Ralston, Minister of Jobs, Trade and Technology.

"By bringing the Trade Accelerator Program to British Columbia, the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade is helping companies

expand their reach into new markets."

"We would like to thank the Provincial Government for recognizing this enormous opportunity to strengthen B.C.'s economy and help businesses tap into new markets," said Robin Silvester, President and CEO of the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and 2016-17

Chair of the Board of Trade.

"One in five British Columbian jobs is tied to exporting, and there exists a direct linkage between exporting, job creation, and increased productivity," added the Board of Trade's President and CEO Iain Black. "By investing in TAP, businesses in our region and across the province will

benefit."

TAP was originally created by the Toronto Region Board of Trade and national sponsor RBC. After two years, the program is now rolling out nationally. To date, TAP participants have recorded an average growth of 70 per cent in international sales within one year of finishing the program.

TAP will be the first offering by World Trade Centre Vancouver, a subsidiary of the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade.

The program is now accepting applications from B.C. businesses for its first cohort, which is scheduled to begin in early November. There is no cost to participate, but space is limited.

Is your business ready to tap into new markets? Are you looking to start exporting and take your business to the next level? If so, apply for TAP today! **SB**

To learn more about the Trade Accelerator Program, or to apply to participate, visit [tapbc.ca](http://tapbc.ca).



### The future of TransLink

CEO Kevin Desmond returns to the Board of Trade's stage this month to talk about our region's transit plans

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### Destination BC CEO Marsha Walden on the economy and tourism

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### Director spotlight

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### Celebrating Small Business Month

Meet four B.C. business owners who are stepping up their game and going beyond borders 6-7

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# 2 EVENTS AND SPEAKERS

## TRANSPORTATION | The future of TransLink

CEO Kevin Desmond returns to Board of Trade stage for his second annual address

Transit and transportation are vital for a strong economy and critical to the livability and affordability of our region.

As our economy continues to grow, we will need to accommodate another one million people and a half-million new jobs over the next 30 years. And every one of them will need to move in, out, and within our region efficiently, affordably and sustainably.

TransLink is Metro Vancouver's regional transportation authority, responsible for planning and delivering public transit — including SkyTrain, SeaBus, West Coast Express and a fleet of buses — that is used by almost 500,000 people every day as well as regional cycling infrastructure, and major regional roads and bridges.

Planning for the future is already underway with the Broadway and Surrey rapid transit projects in development, launch of the Mobility Pricing Independent Commission, TransLink's new Mobility Solutions Studio and much more. Amidst a backdrop of a booming regional economy and a new provincial government, TransLink is strategically




TransLink CEO Kevin Desmond will speak at GVBOT on Oct. 17.

planning and developing innovative solutions that will shape the future of our communities.

On Oct. 17, TransLink CEO Kevin Desmond will return to the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade for his second annual address to our region's business leaders. In his remarks, Desmond will provide an update on the major investments in Metro Vancouver's transit and transportation network, and will detail the organization's exciting future and how it is taking action to meet the needs of the region's growing

economy and population.

Desmond is an experienced executive with a career built in the public transportation industry. Prior to joining TransLink, he was the general manager of King County Metro Transit serving the Seattle metropolitan region. He also previously served as a senior executive at Pierce Transit in Tacoma, Washington, as well as New York City Transit. **SB**

 Tickets for this event are on sale now at [boardoftrade.com/translink17](http://boardoftrade.com/translink17).

## TOURISM | An economic engine for B.C.

Destination BC's CEO talks shop on Nov. 8

British Columbia's tourism sector is a powerful economic engine that draws visitors to our province and supports residents, creating \$15.7 billion in revenue, more than 127,000 jobs, and contributing \$7.4 billion to B.C.'s GDP.

On Nov. 8, join the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade for a special presentation by Marsha Walden, CEO of Destination British Columbia, for an inside look at the influence of B.C.'s tourism sector. Following her keynote, Walden will be joined on stage by a panel of industry experts for a discussion on "The Power of Tourism."

As an industry-led Crown corporation, Destination British Columbia works collaboratively with tourism stakeholders across the province to coordinate marketing at the international, provincial, regional, and local levels. Destination British Columbia works to market our province domestically, nationally, and internationally as a tourist destination.

In addition, the organization also promotes the development and growth of the tourism industry, with a goal of increasing



Marsha Walden

revenue, employment, and economic benefits for all British Columbians.

A life-long British Columbian, Walden's career spans corporate leadership roles in marketing, strategy, transformation, operations, communications, and social responsibility. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of British Columbia, loves to travel, and takes full advantage of family life in our extraordinary province.

Don't miss this look at one of our province's key sectors. **SB**

 Tickets are on sale now at [boardoftrade.com/walden](http://boardoftrade.com/walden).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

See our full events calendar at [boardoftrade.com/events](http://boardoftrade.com/events)

Is there a speaker you'd like to hear from or topic you'd like explored? Make a suggestion at [boardoftrade.com/suggest](http://boardoftrade.com/suggest)

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2017

Women's Leadership Circle

#### The Principles of Good Governance with the Institute of Corporate Directors

7 – 9 a.m.

Coast Coal Harbour Hotel  
1180 W Hastings Street

**Elizabeth Watson**  
President and CEO, WATSON Inc.

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2017

CEO Series

#### Role for B.C.: Reducing Global Emissions and Improving Quality of Life

11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**Mark A. Salkeld**  
President and CEO,  
Petroleum Services Association of Canada

**Presenting Sponsor:** Petroleum Services Association of Canada

**Preferred Media Partner:** Business in Vancouver

### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2017

CEO Series

#### TransLink of the Future

11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Sheraton Wall Centre — Pavilion Ballroom  
1088 Burrard Street

**Kevin Desmond**  
CEO, Translink

Moderator

**Natalie Obiko Pearson**  
Bloomberg News

**Presenting Sponsor:** Stantec

**Supporting Sponsors:** Boyden, Hatch,  
The University of British Columbia

**Preferred Media Partner:** Business in Vancouver

## 4th Annual Greater Vancouver Board of Trade Show

Tuesday, October 24, 2017

[boardoftrade.com/tradeshow](http://boardoftrade.com/tradeshow)

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017

Thrive Series

#### Whistleblowers — From troublemaker to hero

7 – 9 a.m.

Pinnacle Hotel Harbourfront  
— Tuscany Room  
1133 West Hastings Street

**Sandy Boucher**  
Grant Thornton

**Shane Troyer**  
Grant Thornton

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**Gold Program Partner:** British Columbia Securities Commission

### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2017

#### Cyber Security: Protecting your business in a digital world

7:15 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Fairmont Hotel Vancouver  
— Pacific Ballroom  
900 West Georgia Street

Keynote

**Danny Timmins**  
National Cyber Security Leader, MNP

Session 1

#### Understanding the Risks and Prevention

Session 2

#### Financial Response

Session 3

#### Reputation and Legal Response

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# ECONOMY | Historic resolution adopted at national meeting

Chambers from across Canada unite in opposition to Ottawa's proposed tax changes

BY GREG HOEKSTRA

Members from hundreds of business groups across Canada passed an emergency resolution on Sept. 24 at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce AGM, in response to the federal government's proposed tax changes.

The historic and unprecedented resolution, which was adopted with 98.8 per cent approval, calls on the government to extend its 75-day consultation period for the proposed tax changes and bring in an independent commission to review the full impact of the new regulations.

The resolution was introduced just one day after Finance Minister Bill Morneau spoke at the AGM in Fredericton. That speech failed to quell fears from business leaders that the proposed tax reforms could have crippling effects on small and medium-sized businesses from coast to coast.

"In speaking with our network of more than 200,000 businesses, it is the farmers, mom and pop shops, and entrepreneurs who invested everything into their businesses who are most scared of the government's proposed tax changes," said Perin Beatty, President and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. "The government has not answered their concerns today. It has left them high and dry, wondering how they will survive if the weather or the economy takes a turn for the worse."

"Businesses have a right to be heard. The government's process on this issue needs to be stopped and replaced with genuine consultations," he added.

The extraordinary measure

prompted the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade's President and CEO, Iain Black, to send a Special Message to Members from Fredericton, outlining our organization's response and next steps. Below is the content of that message.

## A Message from President and CEO Iain Black

Greetings from Fredericton, New Brunswick, where I am with GVBOT's Policy Manager, Iqbal Ahmed, for the 2017 AGM of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, of which we were a founding member in 1925.

Here, business concerns that warrant national attention, discussion, and support are debated and, in partnership with the Canadian Chamber, subsequently walked into the halls and offices of our parliament buildings in Ottawa over the coming year.

As we often do, we led or co-sponsored a few resolutions on matters important to Greater Vancouver — this year including ports, YVR, and the Fraser River — which can be found in a news release on our website. (With thanks to our many policy committee volunteers and colleagues in other B.C. chambers, these resolutions passed.)

But this has been an unprecedented, historic weekend and, through your direct efforts and involvement, your voice is being heard.

To explain, this is a fairly structured affair, with the mechanics of the business policy discussion determined months in advance. But, for the first time in anyone's memory, this year an issue warranted a "special resolution" and an urgent debate.

The issue, of course, is the government's proposed tax changes that stand to impact millions of small businesses across Canada,



GVBOT President and CEO Iain Black adds his name to a petition at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce AGM in Fredericton, NB, on Sept. 25. The petition calls on the federal government to 'rethink tax changes.'

At issue are the accepted, legitimate, and legal mechanics that have for decades defined the sacrosanct relationship between government and small business



in all sectors of the economy and in all regions.

On the strength of the nearly 24,000 emails to B.C.'s MPs that you have generated using our website ([boardoftrade.com/taxchanges](http://boardoftrade.com/taxchanges)) we were one of four speakers to the delegates representing 450 chambers of

commerce and boards of trade, and 200,000 businesses from across Canada. My remarks were limited to one minute, and thus I focused on only two (of a possible dozen) points of concern.

First, I focused on how the advice and analysis of the accountants, advisors, and financial planners of hundreds of thousands of Canada's small business owners are in stark contrast to the assertions of the government, specifically including the prime minister and the minister of finance. In short, these trusted specialists have repeatedly and emphatically stated that the federal government's assertions and assessments about who is impacted are arithmetically inaccurate; they are factually incorrect; they are, simply, wrong.

Second, I moved the focus from tax impacts and financial

arguments to one of philosophy and the very culture of entrepreneurship in Canada.

At issue are the accepted, legitimate, and legal mechanics that have for decades defined the sacrosanct relationship between government and small business. If the federal government continues down this path, what we risk compromising is business's ability to "do what we do": meaningfully fund the local soccer team, hockey team, rotary clubs, hospital, hospice, soup kitchen and food bank. Thus, these changes not only threaten the "golden goose" of Canada's economy, but are also poised to undermine small business's role as cornerstones of Canada's communities.

The resolution opposing the tax changes passed almost unanimously. It urged the federal government to:

1) Extend the unreasonably short consultation period beyond 75 days (noting that the last such changes of this magnitude, forty years ago, involved a two-year consultation period); and

2) Refer the entire conversation on tax modernization and simplification to a non-partisan Royal Commission.

Our news release covering our other efforts here on the East Coast is now available online at [boardoftrade.com/ccagm17](http://boardoftrade.com/ccagm17).

As for next steps, we will launch another social media effort shortly that shares some of your stories, and following that, we will share our formal submission to the minister of finance, shaped by your experiences and input.

From Fredericton, please know that we are buoyed by your ongoing and growing support for our advocacy efforts on your behalf. **sb**

Learn more about the government's proposed tax changes and our #HitThePauseButton campaign at [boardoftrade.com/taxchanges](http://boardoftrade.com/taxchanges).

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## A FUTURE WITHOUT WASTE

A Circular Economy Within Reach



### Opening Keynote

Dr. Cady Coleman, Scientist and Retired NASA astronaut. Coleman having seen Earth from a unique perspective, shares her vision for a world that works together to accelerate the transition to a circular economy.



### Afternoon Keynote

Tristram Stuart, international award-winning author, campaigner and TED Talk speaker. Stuart spearheads environmental and social impact campaigns to change society's attitude towards wasting food.

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# SOUNDING BOARD

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**ABOUT THE PUBLICATION**

Sounding Board is the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade's official publication, distributed to all its Members, as well as all subscribers of Business in Vancouver newspaper. Sounding Board is published 11 times per year by Business in Vancouver Media Group in partnership with the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. The newspaper is read by business leaders and elected officials across B.C. and beyond, with a conservatively estimated total readership of 37,500.

**ABOUT THE BOARD OF TRADE**

The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade is Western Canada's most active and influential business association. We accelerate business success through our advocacy and public policy initiatives, our four Signature Programs for professional development, and our 100+ events each year, which educate and connect our region's business community. We engage with decision-makers to develop our region as a vibrant hub for commerce, trade, travel, and free enterprise. And we've been doing it with tangible results, for more than 130 years.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

OUR PURPOSE is to support sustainable prosperity throughout the Greater Vancouver region.

OUR VISION is to be an active, innovative, trusted, credible business organization, known for influencing decision-makers, and educating, connecting with, and engaging our communities.

OUR MISSION is to provide leadership, information and connections, and public policy support that help ensure the Greater Vancouver region is competitive and the preferred Pacific Gateway for trade, commerce, and travel.

WE ARE informed, respectful, principled, collaborative, and professional.

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## LEADERSHIP | Tapping into new markets

### Chair Anne Giardini on Small Business Month and our new Trade Accelerator Program

BY ANNE GIARDINI

Vancouver has been a hub for enterprising business people for as far back as we can trace.

Indigenous groups of the Northwest Coast have been trading with each other for many thousands of years. Clans would meet to strike deals, agree on prices, and exchange goods such as fish, meat and fur. A network of trails for trade in eulachon grease led from the coast deep into the interior of B.C. Trade was, as is today, important for the economy and for the connections between communities.

The very first contact with European arrivals in 1778 included trade in sea otter pelts – which later found their way to buyers in China.

By the 1800s, an enormous range of businesses was flourishing in B.C. Early directories evidence a thriving economy, with thousands of listings — for accountants, boarding houses, boat builders, carpenters, dressmakers, hotels, insurance agents, undertakers, and watchmakers and many more trades and enterprises.

It was in 1887 that a group of 31 local businesspeople banded together to form the Vancouver Board of Trade, including merchants, lumbermen, bankers, and manufacturers. Just one year earlier, our fledgling city had been destroyed by the Great Fire of 1886. Undaunted, Members of the Board of Trade resolved to work cohesively as a business community to rebuild the city, create a local economy and promote trade and commerce.

Today, the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade is still doing just that. The world around us has



Anne Giardini, O.C., Q.C.

changed dramatically, but the mandate of our organization remains much the same — to support sustainable prosperity for businesses across our region and help ensure Greater Vancouver is the preferred Pacific Gateway for trade, commerce, and travel.

October is Small Business Month in British Columbia and we've chosen this month to launch the Board's new Trade Accelerator Program, which aims to ensure this region's small businesses have the skills they need to successfully export products and services abroad.

It's often said that small businesses are the backbone of British Columbia's economy. But in fact they are even more essential; small businesses are at the very heart of this region's prosperity.

Close to 400,000 small businesses operate in our province today. Collectively, these enterprises represent 98 per cent of all businesses in British Columbia. What's more, most of those businesses (79 per cent) are classified as micro-businesses with fewer than five employees.

British Columbia has a successful relationship with entrepreneurialism. We lead Canada

in terms of the number of small businesses per capita. More than one million British Columbians either own a small business, or are employed by one.

We believe that one way to strengthen B.C.'s small businesses is to ensure they have the tools, resources, and knowledge they need to expand their horizons and begin or continue exporting. Doing so can open up a world of possibilities for local businesses — both figuratively and literally.

As you will see on pages 6 and 7 of this month's *Sounding Board*, a number of Board of Trade Members have already started exporting and are realizing very tangible benefits. In today's interconnected world, even small businesses can transcend borders. The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade can show you how.

Our new Trade Accelerator Program (TAP) is now accepting applications for its first cohort, with workshops scheduled to begin in early November. The program is completely free for participants, but space is limited to 25 businesses per cohort, so interested businesses are asked to apply and tell our team a bit about your company, your products or services and your exporting goals.

If you are reading this and you have ever considered taking the leap into exporting, I encourage you to apply. What you learn might just take your goods and services further than you've ever imagined.

You can learn more about the program, and fill out an application, at [tapbc.ca\\_sb](http://tapbc.ca_sb)

Anne Giardini, O.C., Q.C., is 2017-18 Chair of the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. She is a corporate director and Chancellor of Simon Fraser University.



[boardoftrade.com/tradeforum17](http://boardoftrade.com/tradeforum17)

# Trade Forum 2017: Opportunities in an Uncertain Global Economy

Friday, October 27, 2017 | 7:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Presenting Sponsor:	Event Partner:	Preferred Media Partner:	Presented in partnership with:
 Bennett Jones	 WESTJET	 BUSINESS VANCOUVER	 WORLD TRADE CENTRE VANCOUVER

# LEADERSHIP | The importance of relationships and reputation

## Q&A with new GVBOT Director Radha Curpen of Bennett Jones LLP



Radha Curpen

**Describe what you do in 10 words or less.**

Strategic advice on permits, operations, crisis, regulators, and indigenous communities.

**Where is your hometown and how did it shape you as an individual?**

I was born in Mauritius and my family immigrated to Canada when I was a teenager. We lived in Winnipeg and I was very integrated in the Francophone community in Saint Boniface, as I pursued my education in French and sat on some non-profit boards for the advancement of French.

**What was your first job?**

I was a sales clerk at a clothing store. This opportunity helped me develop my confidence when dealing with people. I learned to be responsible, accountable, and how to sell and market.

**What is the most important lesson you learned from your parents?**

How to embrace change, thrive in new environments and the importance of relationships

and reputation. How to pick yourself up after you've fallen — and learn from it. And they taught me a great deal about how to facilitate discussions on issues that can polarize people.

**Why did you join the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade?**

I want to serve in a leading role in strengthening the economies of Vancouver and B.C., both in the industries of today and of tomorrow. I want to help the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade support innovation in our region — it's through innovation that we will develop a better future and a better society.

**What qualities make someone successful?**

Someone who places a high value on relationships and connections. Someone who can quickly adapt to a new environment and embrace change. Someone who can also learn from their mistakes.

**How do you think our region be different 10 years from now?**

Vancouver will realize its full potential as a gateway to the Pacific and to Asia and as a

place that provides the ingredients for people from all over the world to succeed. No-where else in Canada imports people and exports products and knowledge the way we do in Vancouver.

**What were you like in high school?**

I immediately got involved in the Francophone community. Soon after my family arrived in Winnipeg when I was 16, my high school asked me to write an essay about Canadian citizenship. It was submitted to City Council where it was chosen for an essay competition.

**What hobbies occupy your spare time?**

Reading, hiking, understanding different cultures.

**What is your favourite restaurant in Greater Vancouver?**

Il Giardino on Hornby Street. The food is delicious, it is family owned and the service is exceptional. The restaurant is Tuscan-inspired and there's a vibrancy to it that makes it one-of-a-kind.

Italian Rivera are breathtaking. Rome is so spectacular and full of history and physical reminders of history and art.

**If you could be anywhere else right now, where would you be?**

Right where I am.

**What does a perfect day look like to you?**

Finding a creative solution to a problem, spending time with people who are important to me, read, hike and watch a great movie – all in a day!

**If you retired tomorrow, how would you keep busy?**

Continuing to find solutions to challenges faced by people and organizations.

**What is the secret to happiness?**

Not pursuing it. **SB**

Radha Curpen is the Managing Partner of Bennett Jones' Vancouver office. She is also Co-Chair of their Aboriginal law practice.

The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade is fortunate to have 36 of our region's top executives and business leaders on its board of directors. For more information on these exceptional individuals, visit [boardoftrade.com/directors](http://boardoftrade.com/directors).

# WE FOR SHE

Step it up for gender equality

November 17, 2017 | Vancouver Convention Centre East

The 2017 **WE FOR SHE** Forum will be one of North America's largest gatherings of women's organizations, companies, experts, business leaders, advocates and young women. Our goal is to advance equality and grow the Canadian economy by championing gender diversity in leadership as a business imperative.

Now in its fourth year, this year's forum will build on the WE FOR SHE Call to Action plan as well as focus on the top issues facing gender equity.

**Speakers include:**



From left to right  
Siri Uotila • Diane Ko • Karina LeBlanc • Philip Grosch • Kirsten Tisdale • Pamela Jeffery • Kory Wilson • Lori Mathison

See a full list of speakers at [weforshe.ca](http://weforshe.ca).

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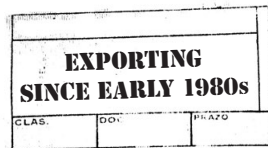


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## THINKING OUTSIDE THE BORDERS

As World Trade Centre Vancouver launches a dynamic program for companies exploring or enhancing exports, we asked four Members of the Greater Vancouver of the Board of Trade about preparing to sell abroad. The Trade Accelerator Program, a joint initiative of WTC-V and the Government of British Columbia, is now accepting applications from small to medium-sized enterprises like these at [tapbc.ca](http://tapbc.ca).



We manufacture the world's finest-quality, most energy efficient, longest-lasting hot tubs.

Aaron Thomas  
Vice-President Operations,  
Beachcomber Hot Tubs  
Established 1978

### How did Beachcomber start exporting?

The first country we exported to was the United States because of the proximity to our manufacturing headquarters, and the market size of the United States. We now export to over 30 different countries across the globe, and are currently looking to expand further into Asia, Australia, the Middle East, and South America.

### Did you experience any obstacles to exporting effectively?

When we first started, in the 1980s, there wasn't the same level of resources as today, with groups like Export Development Canada offering support and tools easily accessible online. We were primarily on our own to understand the requirements of international trade, customs and duties, and had to learn through experience.

### Faced with that challenge, what's the most important thing you learned?

It was the amount of lead time needed to fulfill complete product shipments, as we rely on marine and rail services to ship to many destinations overseas. Aligning distributors' needs to shipping timelines requires extensive planning. We have also learned the importance of

## Beachcomber Hot Tubs



understanding the cultural values and local business practices in foreign markets in building successful, lasting partnerships.

**Do enough B.C. companies consider exporting as an option?**  
Yes, but weighing the benefits versus challenges stands as a

hurdle for most. You can't just start shipping into foreign markets. You need a strategic plan and dedicated resources, and have to be able to identify a reliable customer base and build relationships with distributors — or set up your own distribution channels — to succeed.

### What's your immediate target for export expansion?

Asia, particularly China, represents a massive growing market with a high level of affluence and culture of consumerism that is looking for the luxury home health products that we manufacture. The perspective on Canadian product quality is very high there, and it's definitely a market we will build a greater focus on in the future.

### What advice would you give to companies considering exporting?

Educate yourselves and engage with resources such as Economic Development Canada and Export Development Canada that exist to support your success. As well, build strong relationships with experienced customs and freight brokers who can help you navigate international trade rules and requirements. **SB**



## Export Ventures Group

We innovate and optimize the distribution of goods, services and capital through our diversified holdings and partnerships.

Alice Chen  
Founder and CEO,  
Export Ventures Group  
Established in 2010

### How did you start exporting?

We cemented our footing in international trade initially through exporting Canadian wine to the Greater China Region. It was a cost-prohibitive endeavour for wineries to set up their own export department and yet the export market is too big to ignore. As such, we pioneered the outsourced agency model and became the de facto in-house export department for Canadian wineries looking to export and handled all marketing, sales, and logistics details.

### Why China?

My first pick is always the Greater China Region due to sheer market size, B.C.'s geographic proximity to it, as well as my language and



cultural fluency. I would suggest exporting first to your country of origin or where you have a trusted partner on the ground. Running a business is challenging already; adding the export layer brings even more complexities to the picture.

**What challenge did you face when starting to sell internationally?**  
Accurately positioning ourselves

in the supply chain based on an honest SWOT analysis. I believe each of us is uniquely suited for just one of these positions. Vertical integration in international trade often leads to lost of focus and inefficiencies across time, cost and network.

**What's one lesson you wish you had learned before starting to export?**  
Making sure the export market for

your offering is big enough to make the exercise worthwhile. While we had attained 8 per cent of the Canadian total dollar of wine exports to China at the peak of this business, the total Canadian wine imports market share over there was still too small to make it a sustainably worthwhile exercise.

### How could an initiative like the Trade Accelerator Program, which provides access to public and private sector expertise, have helped when you were starting out?

When I started, there was not a single "go to" resource for exporting. I had to cobble together knowledge gleaned from FITT (Forum for International Trade Training), Small Business BC and countless coffees with anyone remotely related to exporting in order to design and implement an effective export model. It would have been great to be part of TAP, which offers a practical framework (versus academic knowledge) and a peer group to encourage and keep you accountable.

### What has your experience taught you?

Certain markets change rapidly. We were caught off-guard in 2013

when the Chinese alcohol import market took a nose dive after anti-extravagance social policies got enforced. The market that made us dissipated overnight. We quickly responded to requests from our clientele to assist with overseas direct investments and orchestrated a successful pivot into cross-border mergers and acquisitions. Agile adaptation is a must when working with fast-changing markets.

### Do you think enough B.C. companies consider exporting as an option?

No. Most absolutely should consider exporting, whether they are a product, service or technology/intellectual property business.

### What market is next for you?

We are currently partnered with all-star North American private equity and venture capital firms as general partners on forming funds with international capital partners who bring not only money but the export markets (for global scalability and higher-multiple exit potential) to the table. China is still a logical favourite — but we are open to all markets that make sense. **SB**





## Sinova Foods International

Our core business is to bring Canadian agri-food brands to large consumption markets in China, providing supply chain management, branding, and e-commerce operations.

**Jerry Chen**  
CEO, Sinova Foods International  
Established 2010

### Where is your current export market, and where are future prospects?

We currently export to China. We'd like to expand to Hong Kong, Japan, and other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines.

### What challenges did Sinova face in reaching a Chinese market?

Suppliers of the Canadian brands are often not export-ready. Shelf life, packaging and package design were lacking. In Asia they want products to have a high-end appearance. Asian countries are looking for imported premium

products. Furthermore, for consumers in China and other Asian countries, long shelf life is very important.

### What do you wish you knew when you started exporting?

We wish we could have anticipated peculiarities of our target markets. In China, for example, chocolate goods are popular for four months; in Canada they sell year-round. Taxes and duty can make products very expensive. Australian food importers to China have 30 per cent less duty because of trade agreements, and a Canada-Chinese agreement is likely 10 to 15 years away. There is no quick solution, so product differentiation, marketing, and design are very important.

### How could participation in the World Trade Centre's Trade Accelerator Program have helped?

The opportunity for experienced business owners to provide lessons and mentorship would be valuable, as would solution-sharing from the public and private sectors. We know very little about other markets like Japan and Hong Kong. Learning about challenges and opportunities in unfamiliar markets would be beneficial.



### What advice on exporting can you share with other companies?

Know your products, strengths, and weaknesses. Having a plan is much better than no plan. Be willing to try new markets. Find local partners. Distribution and product development is key. Nowadays, you are not just competing with your local peers. You are competing with international

competitors. Know the consumer trends. Have a willingness to try things on the other side of the world.

### What's an example of how you refined your export tactics?

E-commerce in China is very advanced and is evolving fast. More and more customers are now importing online. We are

the main distributor to these stores. We started doing our own e-commerce a few years ago. Seven years ago, the mentality was focussed on consolidating cargo and finding trade partners. But now we have built a much longer value chain than before. Customers can buy our products in pallets or cases. Teaming up with a large platform like Alibaba allows us to market any brand that we represent.

### From your perspective, do enough B.C. companies benefit from exporting?

As far as I'm concerned, there are not many in the agri-food industry. I think Vancouver could be the centre of a food revolution. It will require aggressive effort applied to penetrating new markets through innovation. When you are an export company, people think it's very simple. That's not the case, particularly in the packaged food space. It's not a commodity. Consistency of supply, pricing, and product differentiation are key factors. You can't be a generalist. You also need to be a specialist. We have become an e-commerce company, a supply chain company, and a branding agency. **SB**



## GoFetch

GoFetch connects dog owners with Canada's fastest-growing network of dog sitters.

**Willson Cross**  
CEO and Co-Founder, GoFetch  
Established 2015

### Why do you think you're ready to export internationally?

The pet services industry is ripe for disruption. But startup is only half the battle: the second part is scale-up. The main facet that has made us successful is our ability to scale our platform across many geographies. We're a well-received brand on both the east and west coasts, and are becoming a household name in Canada. This is really the thesis behind why we want to start exporting our services to new countries.

### How are you evaluating potential export markets?

We're at the start of our international market scan. The United Kingdom, Australia and the U.S. are top on our list for



many reasons. We see a unique opportunity in healthy pet ownership trends and the similarities of consumer segments in those markets. Paradoxically, though, for every similarity in consumer segments, each market represents ten different aspects in how you do business legally, financially, operationally, in investor relations and human relations.

### What has prevented you from exporting to date?

As a business leader and day-to-day operator there are significant educational components that I personally have to think about when—and if—we move into a new country.

### World Trade Centre Vancouver's new Trade Accelerator Program equips business to export

### internationally by sharing pragmatic insight and experience. How could this help GoFetch?

I'm positive it will help us by educating the business about the levers we need to pull and become attuned to before pursuing expansion. That's the "accelerator" component of the Trade Accelerator Program. It will accelerate our learnings; it will give us the data we need;

it will give us the resources to make decisions—in terms not only of when we expand, but also where we expand to. TAP is first in its class with respect to being a platform that small businesses learn and develop on, helping companies like GoFetch understand the intricacies and nuances of exports.

### What's your assessment of the state of B.C.'s export industry, particularly in service-oriented businesses like yours?

I don't think enough businesses are exporting, and the reason for that is they haven't necessarily been given the tools to understand how easy or how hard it could be. Just figuring it out is half the battle. The thing we have going for us from a technology standpoint is that we can flip a switch and be in new markets very quickly. But there are complexities from the perspective of financial and legal matters, incorporation and so on, that are sometimes tough. TAP "figures it out" for a lot of companies. Not enough companies are ready to export, but a program like TAP can expedite their learning curve. **SB**

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