

## 3PL RALLYING CRY

**SOON AFTER PRESIDENT OBAMA** in his 2010 State of the Union Address challenged the U.S. to double its exports by 2015, he unveiled a program focusing on three areas to help get there: marketing support for small to medium-sized enterprises, or SMEs, the reform of export controls and the enforcement of existing trade agreements.

Working within a self-imposed five-year timeline, the president then formed an Export Promotion Cabinet and Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee to guide what he called the National Export Initiative.

Since then, several agencies have come together to formulate

efforts to foster international trade are bearing fruit. While a reasonable assumption, if the goal of the program is to help SMEs sell more goods overseas, much work remains to be done.

Most notably, when one nets out the value of agricultural exports from large corporations, shipments by multinationals and the ever-present boost from foreign military sales, it's clear the outbound numbers from SMEs aren't as big as they could be. Although job growth among fledgling exporters has increased, the facts indicate there is huge potential for expansion in what is still an underdeveloped segment of the economy.

The government should be commended for promoting trade, but Uncle Sam can't go it alone. The simple reality is that for SME-driven exports to impact job creation, the entire shipping community will have to get behind the NEI. In that context, it's incumbent upon U.S. third-party logistics providers to not just move the goods being sold today, but to provide pro bono services that make it easier for SMEs to find new customers in the markets of tomorrow.

Anyone involved with international business knows the trick to going global is finding motivated buyers who pay their bills. The hardest part of doing that is freeing up the time and money needed to not only travel to faraway lands, but also to adapt products to local tastes, price points, languages and regulations.

While a glamorous notion, the truth for SMEs is that the overall investment required to close an offshore deal is at least three times greater than when doing business domestically. By focusing on this alone, there's plenty 3PLs can do to reduce the obstacles businesses encounter when venturing outside the United States.

First, there's a legion of retired 3PL professionals who would be happy to provide free advice to nascent shippers. Whether they're passing on a sales lead or explaining the cultural nuances of selling in Brazil, a forum should exist whereby patriotic retirees can share their knowledge with a new generation of exporters.

Those of us still in the trade also should come together to provide complimentary training on subjects such as Incoterms 2010 and Documentary Credits. 3PLs are experts on such topics, and access to this information would help shippers avoid the pitfalls that can derail an otherwise promising enterprise.

Once an exporter is ready to travel abroad, there's even more 3PLs can do. How about something simple such as providing a corporate hotel rate or loaning a local-call-only cellphone to an American looking for clients in London?

Better yet, what if a 3PL started a "Guide & Ride" program that donates a car and driver for a half-day to U.S. executives on sales calls in Shanghai? Within their existing global network of offices, 3PLs might even consider reserving a desk and phone for U.S. exporters when they're traveling abroad. It's all basic stuff, but for a businessperson who's never been overseas, it could mean the difference between failure and a vibrant export program.

There likely are 3PLs already engaged in many of these activities. If so, one can only wonder how much more effective they would be if a well-organized national program existed. Maybe it's high time we come together and create one. **joc**

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■ By Daniel Gardner

## THERE'S PLENTY 3PLS CAN DO TO REDUCE THE OBSTACLES BUSINESSES ENCOUNTER WHEN VENTURING OUTSIDE THE U.S.

export-oriented business objectives and implement specific trade promotion tactics. In a joint effort to give SMEs the help they need, the government has done a good job of integrating entities that include the Export-Import Bank, the Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration.

Their combined achievements include enhancements to the Export Assistance Web Portal, a "Take Your Business Global" educational series, trade missions and training on how to access financing.

With U.S. exports up 17 percent since the NEI began, it seems