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Laurel Delaney: Starter kit for Illinois businesses looking to export

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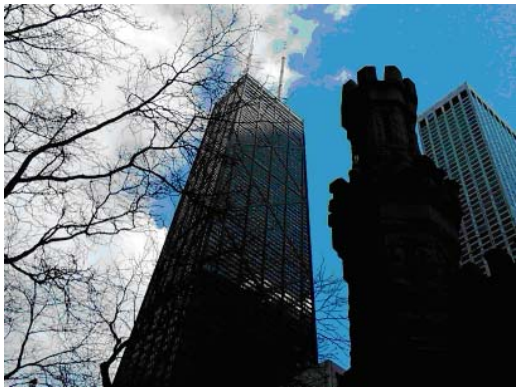

Photo courtesy of Laurel Delaney

By Laurel Delaney

Enough of the "why it's important to take your business global" — especially if it's located in Illinois! Let's move on to the first step in transitioning your business from local to global: where to turn for help. These four organizations are a great starting point:

1. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

Illinois operates nine foreign trade offices in cities ranging from Mexico City to Shanghai, China.

What does that mean for you and your Illinois-based business? Free assistance to conduct business in those nine countries! Yes, you read that right. Most people don't know about this magical gem of a resource. Here's where you go for more info.

Say you're interested in doing business in China. Email Zachary Zhao, manager of the State of Illinois China Office, and ask how your company can start to conduct business in China. Make sure you're specific about exactly what your company's core capabilities are. Mention my name when you contact Zach.

The nine foreign trade offices are in Canada, Japan, Poland, China, Hong Kong, Belgium, Mexico, India and Israel.

To further support your efforts, visit http://www.ildceo.net/dceo/Bureaus/Trade/, click on "Staff Information," download the PDF file and email the names on the list to ask for help in conducting business in specific foreign markets. For example, Iwona

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Bochenska, international trade specialist, assists companies interested in doing business in Europe, Zhigang Ren is the international trade specialist for Asia Pacific/China, and so forth.

2. Export Assistance Centers

Export Assistance Centers are located in major metropolitan areas throughout the United States and help businesses with exports. Find a local one here. We have five EACs in Illinois, and the Chicago staff is sensational.

Through email or an in-person visit, these folks assist in every aspect of the export process for Illinois businesses, from helping companies land new overseas opportunities to determining if an overseas inquiry is a scam. So reach out to them for counseling and even export financing ideas!

3. International Trade Assn. of Greater Chicago

To become a true global player in Illinois, consider membership in the International Trade Assn. of Greater Chicago. ITA/GC, a non-profit, has been around since 1977 and helps companies access the knowledge, tools and resources they need to take their business international.

Get started by calling (773) 725-1106 or email: info@itagc.org

4. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, International Trade Centers

ITCs help new-to-export companies interested in pursuing international trade opportunities with everything from information to counseling and training. Go here to find an ITC in your area.

Now that you are armed with a few best-kept secrets on Illinois resources that help small firms go global, it's up to you take action and expand your business internationally.

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***Laurel Delaney** is founder of Chicago-based GlobeTrade.com and The Global Small Business Blog. She also is the About.com Import and Export Guide and a pioneer member of the World Entrepreneurship Forum. She can be reached at (773) 381-1700 or ldelaney@globetrade.com.*

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