Export-U.com (Phase 2): A Small-Business Friendly Internet Training Site

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Summary:

As first unveiled during the 2008 NASBITE Conference, Export-U.com is a free international business training website that offers streaming webinars on a range of practical trade topics. Now in its second year of development, Export-U is undergoing fundamental changes, as it matures from a simple “quick answer” site into one offering both basic and intermediate training. Now under development, the new Level-2 modules will expand on prior topics, and begin to track the content of NASBITE’s Certified Global Business Professional (CGPD) program.

The Export-U website offers:

1) **Free** basic training on practical international business topics,

2) **Convenient** access to training for those who cannot attend regular classes because of distance or scheduling,

3) **Non-boring** instruction that complements more formal training programs for CGBP certification and university business degrees.
Background:

The Export-U.com website is being developed by the University of Georgia SBDC International Trade Center in partnership with the U.S. Export Assistance Center in Atlanta. It offers a user-friendly series of streaming webinars that target new or novice exporters. Specifically, it targets people needing quick 24/7 answers to practical business questions. Development funding is being provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce under its Rural Export Initiative.

The site’s simple how-to format allows students to control the pace and sequence of each session, to access and download supporting materials, and to communicate with the instructor. A new registration protocol captures site visitor contact information, which can be shared with trade service providers nationwide.

The entire venture is the product of very close collaboration between the SBDC, the U.S. Export Assistance Center, the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

Web links to the site have been established by the Commerce Department, SBA, and several state SBDC and trade offices. Google currently lists the site in first place under “Export Webinars.”

Each month, the site receives about 70,000 hits, 2,600 visitors, and 80 – 120 registered business users. During 2009, we anticipate over 1,000 registered business users.
Current Status:

Eight of the first ten “Level I” webinars are now active, with the final two complete by July of 2009 (see below).

**1. Are You Ready:** This session of Export-U is designed for those taking a first look at international trade. It addresses some of the “Myths and Realities” of exporting, and discusses various factors that influence your chances for success. The goal is to help you determine if you are ready to take the leap from local or national marketing, to international marketing.  (Runtime: 16:50 minutes)

**2. Global Market Research:** This session explains the basics of global market “desk” research --- a critical first step toward finding profitable overseas markets. Such advance research can help you maximize opportunity and minimize risk, and insure the success of your international business venture. Our goal is to explain what you need to consider, identify some sources for the data, and how to make sense of it. (Runtime: 15:26 minutes)

**3. Secondary Research:** In this session, we explain how secondary research can help you refine your list of potential overseas markets to a manageable number – usually a short list of just the 3 or 4 top markets. Well show how you can take into account a wide range of critical “soft” data that does not easily lend itself to numeric analysis, including political, economic, and cultural conditions. (Runtime: 15:11 minutes)

**4. Costing:** In this session we complete a costing exercise to see whether your product can be price competitive in markets you have selected. We show how your final sales price is affected by the costs associated with moving your goods overseas. These include factors like shipping, duties, fees, and insurance. (Runtime: 23:26 minutes)

**5. Approaching the Market (Part A: Commerce Department):** In this session we explain how the U. S. Commercial Service (part of the U. S. Department of Commerce ) can help you approach and sell into overseas markets. We discuss how their over 100 US and 160 foreign offices offer invaluable export assistance services, including the International Partner Profile, International Partner Search, Gold Key, Platinum Key, trade leads, and sponsored trade events. (Runtime: 15:27 minutes)

**6. Approaching the Market (Part B: State Programs):** To be complete 7/09, this section will be taught by the President of SIDO, the State International Development Offices. It will explain the types of services offered by state governments and how to access them. Links will be provided to guide business visitors to their individual state programs.

**7. INCOTERMS for Shipping:** Here, we briefly introduce INCOTERMS and explain how they are used in export trade. These internationally standardized terms define the responsibilities of exporters and their overseas customers for various phases of the shipping process. They also clarify pricing, by spelling-out who is responsible for which shipping cost. Our goal is to provide a very brief introduction to INCOTERMS with references for more detailed investigation on our links page. (Runtime: 6:58 minutes)

**8. Payment Terms:** In this eighth session of Export-U, we discuss how you can get paid for your export sales. We also consider the relative merits and risks associated with several types of payment, including: cash in advance, confirmed letter-of-credit, advised letter-of-credit, cash against documents, documents against acceptance, and open account. We also touch briefly on how you can reduce your payment risks with export credit insurance.  (Runtime: 21:31 minutes)

**9. SBA Financing:** In this ninth session of Export-U, we discuss how the U. S. Small Business Administration offers bank loan guarantees to help American exporters. We also introduce the three primary SBA international loan programs: Export Working Capital, Export Express, and International Trade Loans, and consider the merits of each for various situations. (Runtime: 17:55 minutes)

**10. Trade Events:** To be completed by 7/09, this section will discuss how companies can take advantages of the marketing opportunities presented by trade shows and missions. We will cover how to select events, how to prepare for them, and how to maximize their useful outcomes. Links will also be provided to event directories and sponsors.
Each training session is taught by a trade professional with special expertise in the subject area. Effort has been made to avoid complex theoretical discussions, and to stick with straight forward business terminology.

The website employs software from Articulate Global, Inc. (www.articulate.com) to generate “Flash” compatible streaming webinars from PowerPoint presentations with synchronized voiceover narratives. The entire site was recently reworked to work with the latest “Flash 10” program using updated Articulate software. This new software improved video clarity, and offered a number of significant new capabilities which we are only just beginning to exploit.

While the site is being developed in Atlanta, it is designed for nationwide use; so the content carefully avoids a regional bias. In its first six months of electronic registration, over 450 students signed-up to take Export-U classes, from 41 states and 7 foreign countries. These included 92 registrations from Georgia, and the total continues to grow. We anticipate approximately 1,000 registered users in the first year of full operation. Judging by the many complementary phone calls and e-mails from small businesses, students, and colleagues alike, and the continuing federal sponsorship, Export-U has been extremely well received.

**Phase 2 Developments:**

Now under development, the new Level-2 modules will expand on prior topics, and more closely track elements of NASBITE’s Certified Global Business Professional (CGPD) program. We will not, however, provide a comprehensive CGBP study tool because:

- Several excellent CGBP training tools already exist, including those listed on the NASBITE website.

- Our focus will continue to be delivering practical how-to-do-it business information, while minimizing discussion of the underlying theory.
New topics to be introduced in Phase II (not necessarily in this order) will include:

- Market Data Analysis
- Global Pricing Strategies
- Budgeting for International Business
- Market Entry Methods
- Global Business & Marketing Plans
- Risk Management & Insurance
- Protecting Intellectual Property
- Product Certification & Standards
- Packaging of Cargo to Prevent Loss
- Cultural Issues

We are also in the process of revising our sign-up procedure to solicit more useful details on site visitors, and to increase the number of required fields (see below).

These changes are primarily in response to needs of the U.S. Department of Commerce, who wants to know to which trade specialists they should refer

**Additions to Export-U Sign-up Page**

(New fields shown in white)

- E-mail address: - required field
- Requested password: - required field
- First name: - required field
- Last name: - required field
- **Company Name:** (type 'none' if individual) - required field
- Address: - required field
- City: - required field
- State: - required field
- Zip: - required field
- Country: - required field
- Phone: - required field
- **Product or Service:** - required field
- **Web Site:** - optional
- **Number of Employees:** - required field
- **Annual Sales:** - optional
- **Does your product/service have 51% U.S. content?** - optional
site visitor contacts. Here, we are trying to strike a practical balance between getting the data we need, and chasing site visitors away by asking for too much information.

**Input Wanted:**

Our intent is to continually refine, expand and improve Export-U and to keep the site free.

We have recently acquired software that will allow us to improve interactivity by adding review quizzes and to publish streaming video content.

With our USEAC partners, we have also begun to establish a complementary sister site called Export University. Export University will be linked to a national web-based program of the same name sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Our current thinking is that Export-U will offer only free training programs, while Export University will deliver paid content, or will direct visitors to live paid events. Export University will be self-supporting through attendance fees, while Export-U will rely on corporate and/ or governmental sponsorship.

Clearly, these two sites are in their formative stages of development. We would welcome input from NASBITE members as to the topics, presenters, and structure. We would also welcome offers to speak from potential presenters.

**And finally, we will continue to offer to our partners and allies logs of Export-U visitors in exchange for links to the website.**