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Export to Canada News

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Beyond Export Readiness: How Branding and Storytelling Drive Export Success



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Message from our Executive Director

Steve Tipman
Executive Director

For many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from developing countries, export readiness can be seen as completing a checklist: market research, pricing strategies, logistics planning, regulatory compliance, and distributor agreements. These elements are essential, but in today's highly competitive global marketplace, they are not enough. Export success increasingly depends on a company's ability to differentiate itself through strong branding and compelling storytelling – articulating its unique value proposition.

At TFO Canada, we work with SMEs across developing countries that have high-quality products and the ambition to export to international markets. What we often observe is that buyers are not only purchasing products. They are investing in brands they trust and stories they can share with their customers.

Branding goes beyond logos and packaging. It is the promise a company makes to its customers. A strong brand communicates quality, reliability, values, and purpose. In export markets where buyers often have numerous sourcing options, a clear and authentic brand can be the deciding factor that moves a product from consideration to purchase.

Equally important is storytelling. Today's consumers and business buyers want to know where products come from, who produces them, and what impact their purchases create – in other words, they want to know the story behind the products.



Tipman's Trade Tip: How to improve your storytelling

SMEs from developing countries can strengthen storytelling by highlighting their origin, values, impact, and people behind the product. Authentic narratives build trust and create stronger connections with international buyers – and ultimately, the end consumer.

Whether it is a women-led cooperative producing specialty coffee, an agricultural exporter adopting sustainable farming practices, or a social enterprise creating employment opportunities in rural communities, these stories add value and create emotional connections that transcend price competition.

Effective storytelling also builds credibility. Buyers are increasingly seeking transparency throughout supply chains and are looking for suppliers whose values align with their own. Companies that can articulate their journey, mission, and impact are often better positioned to establish long-term partnerships and customer loyalty.

As global markets become more crowded, competing solely on product quality or price becomes increasingly difficult. The exporters that stand out are those that combine operational excellence with authenticity and a compelling narrative.

By investing in branding and storytelling, businesses can create stronger market presence, build meaningful connections with buyers, and ultimately achieve sustainable export growth.



In this issue, TFO Canada associates and guest contributors examine why export success depends on more than readiness alone. Their articles highlight how strong branding, compelling stories, and authentic communication can help SMEs differentiate themselves, connect with buyers, and build lasting relationships in international markets.

Why **Branding** and **Storytelling** Matter in Export Markets

By **Marc Germain**, MBA - Senior Associate | TFO Canada

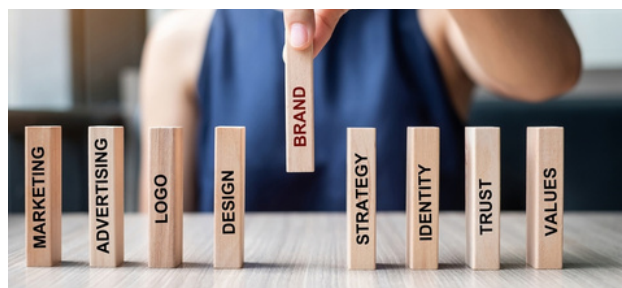
One of the most fundamental concepts in marketing is differentiation: how can we distinguish our products from those of the competition? How do our products stand out from the crowd? How can we make them better? This is a universal concept which obviously applies in a variety of business settings, but one that is particularly important when exporting to markets like Canada.

Branding and storytelling should not be treated as secondary marketing considerations; they are essential components of export readiness. A strong brand helps communicate who a company is, what it stands for, and the value it offers to buyers. It provides a consistent identity that can help products stand out in crowded markets and build recognition over time. A product may offer excellent quality, a competitive price, and the appropriate certifications, but these parameters alone are not enough to stand out in a market like Canada, which has one of the highest import-per-capita ratios in the world.

Most products compete with a wide range of products coming from numerous other countries, all trying to grab a share of the import pie. A case in point: Statistics Canada's Merchandise Trade import statistics reveal that to date in 2026, more than 80 countries have exported sauces and sauce preparations (and mixed condiments and mixed seasonings) to the Canadian market.

The question then becomes: how can my product stand out in this competitive environment?

Effective branding helps create a distinctive identity for a product in the minds of buyers and consumers.



When that branding incorporates a compelling story behind the product, it can transform it from something functional or practical into something recognizable and meaningful, giving buyers/importers and end consumers a compelling reason to choose that product over competing alternatives. One must always bear in mind that it is difficult to make consumers change their purchasing habits. Therefore, a unique story behind the product will often help achieve this. The story can highlight a variety of different aspects of the product and company: *a particular group behind its production, environmental and societal considerations, nostalgia and traditions, heritage, values, the method of material sourcing, etc.* These elements help consumers understand where the product comes from and what is behind it, while helping create an emotional attachment to the product.

Canadian consumers increasingly look beyond products to understand the companies and values behind them. This is particularly true among younger consumers in the marketplace. Consequently, a clear, simple and credible sense of purpose can be an important way to stand out. A company's purpose should be reflected not only in what it communicates, but also in how it operates and in the impact it creates.



Chanaka Kurera, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of Montreal-based Cha's Organics, shares his insight with us:

“As a purpose-driven company, authenticity and impact are the soul of our brand and our most powerful message. Staying true to our values and sharing them through honest storytelling is the deepest way to connect with our core consumers and build lasting loyalty”.

In the same vein, as Joe Buttigieg, Managing Director of Global Appetite Inc. in Mississauga, Ontario points out:

“For SMEs, especially those entering new international markets, a strong brand story can be just as important as product quality. The most successful brands do not simply sell products; they communicate meaning through their origin, heritage, values, and the consumer need they address. When a brand can clearly tell its story and explain why it matters, it creates a memorable presence that resonates beyond price and builds lasting consumer trust and loyalty”.



This is particularly relevant in a market like Canada, where the consumer market is multicultural and competitive. Consumers are also increasingly attentive to product origins, sustainability, health, ethical sourcing and social impact.

Canadian consumers are often receptive to products with distinctive cultural identities and compelling origins, but they also expect claims to be clear, credible, and supported by evidence. Storytelling can attract interest, while product quality, certifications, transparency, traceability, and reliable performance are what ultimately create trust.

Canada's multicultural diversity also requires companies to adapt their brand communication carefully in the country's two official languages: French and English. The message on the packaging should go beyond literal translation

and carry the same values and emotional meaning in both languages.

For SMEs, branding should therefore be integrated into the export strategy from the beginning rather than added after decisions about packaging, pricing, and distribution are made. A coherent brand story can support premium positioning, strengthen presentations to buyers/importers, reduce dependence on price competition and give them a more persuasive message to communicate to their customer base.

Ultimately, effective export branding begins with an authentic purpose and gains strength through a clear and compelling story.

[Explore the full article](#)

Beyond a Good Product: How Your Story Can Build **Buyer Trust**

By **Jean-Philippe Vézina**, Guest Contributor | Founder of Movez Coaching and AfroFood International Alliance

A strong product can still be invisible.

Many export-ready SMEs have quality products, certifications, production capacity and compelling origins. Yet when an international buyer visits their website or LinkedIn page, a basic question remains unanswered:

Why should I trust this company enough to continue the conversation?

For exporters, this matters because the first meeting increasingly happens before anyone enters a meeting room. A buyer may first encounter your company through a website, digital catalogue, LinkedIn profile, marketplace listing or short video. That digital presence is already telling a story. The question is whether it is telling the right one.

Buyers Are Not Looking for a Biography

Commercial storytelling is sometimes misunderstood as adding emotion to a product: the founder's journey, the family history, the community behind the business.

Those elements can matter. But an export story is not your entire company history. It is the **strategic selection of information and evidence that makes your value, credibility and ability to deliver easier for a buyer to understand.**

Consider this composite case, based on situations I have encountered working with food entrepreneurs.

Julie is a Montreal coffee roaster whose "Discovery of the World" concept introduces customers to coffees from different origins. She sells to restaurants, cafés, hotels and specialty retailers. At a trade show, she meets Elonge, a Cameroonian coffee producer.



Elonge could start with the story of his family, his land or the quality of his beans. Instead, he starts with Julie's reality.

"When I buy coffee, I'm not just buying beans. I'm buying risk."

For Julie, a new supplier means questions about quality, supply, flavour consistency and ultimately her own reputation with customers. Elonge understands this. His message focuses on stability, consistency and transparency. His materials clearly present the coffee's origin, altitude and flavour profile, but also his production standards and the story of the land where his father planted the first coffee trees.

The story is not there to make the brochure more emotional. **It gives meaning to the commercial evidence.**

Even more importantly, Elonge gives Julie a story she can use. His marketing materials help her present the Cameroonian coffee not as another product on the shelf, but as a distinctive premium experience she can introduce to her own customers.

The coffee eventually becomes one of her best sellers.

Julie does not simply gain a supplier. She gains greater confidence in the product, a clearer way to position it and better tools to sell it. That distinction is at the heart of effective trade storytelling.

The Five Elements of a Credible Export Story

Elonge's approach illustrates five questions every export story should answer:

- **Origin:** Where does the product come from, and why does that origin matter?
- **Problem:** What buyer concern are you helping solve?
- **Proof:** What demonstrates your ability to deliver—standards, certifications, capacity, customers or results?
- **Difference:** Why should the buyer choose you over comparable suppliers?
- **Promise:** What can the buyer expect from the relationship?

The key is balance.

Origin without proof can sound romantic.

Proof without context can become a list of specifications.

Strong storytelling connects both.

Put the Story Where Buyers Look

Now imagine if Julie had met Elonge online rather than at a trade show. Would his digital presence have created the same confidence? That is the test SMEs should apply to every digital channel.

A **website** should establish credibility quickly: who you serve, what you offer, your capabilities, certifications and a clear next step.

LinkedIn can demonstrate expertise and activity through production processes, market knowledge, partnerships and the people behind the company.

A **digital catalogue** should make the offer easy to evaluate by combining specifications and certifications with concise product stories.

Video can make invisible evidence visible by showing facilities, production methods, quality processes, teams and product use.

Marketplace or **supplier profiles** should make essential information easy to compare and verify.

The principle is simple: **do not make the buyer assemble your credibility for you.**



From Story to Exchange: The M.A.R.C.H.E.™ Export Framework

The progression between Julie and Elonge also illustrates what I call the **M.A.R.C.H.E.™** Export Framework—six steps that can move an international buyer from a market need to a commercial exchange.

M — Market Need: Elonge recognizes Julie's sourcing risk before pitching his coffee.

A — Alignment: By speaking about stability, consistency and transparency, he demonstrates that he understands her priorities.

R — Relevance: He shows how his production practices, standards and origin create distinctive value for her market.

C — Confidence: Clear production standards and information give Julie reasons to trust his ability to deliver consistently.

H — How You Deliver: Elonge makes it easier for Julie to source, position and communicate the coffee by providing information and marketing tools she can actually use.

E — Exchange: With the value understood and the risk reduced, the commercial transaction becomes a logical next step.

[Explore the full article](#)

PROGRAM UPDATES

Research and Market Intelligence

New Market Information Paper: Cocoa and Chocolate in Canada

Looking to expand into Canada's growing cocoa and chocolate sector? TFO Canada's new Market Information Paper on Cocoa and Chocolate in Canada provides practical insights for cocoa producers and chocolate manufacturers from developing countries. The publication explores market trends, buyer requirements, sustainability considerations, market access requirements, and entry strategies to help exporters better understand opportunities in the Canadian market.

Available in English, French, and Spanish

[Click here to learn more](#)



New Research Highlights Export Opportunities in the Andean Region

TFO Canada has completed a comprehensive **Local Market Research** Synthesis across Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru under the **COMPETE** project. The research identifies products with strong export potential for the Canadian market and highlights growing demand for healthy, sustainable, and authentic products.

Key opportunities include organic and specialty foods, fresh and exotic fruits, specialty coffee, cocoa products, luxury camelid-fibre textiles, and artisanal products with protected designations of origin. The findings provide valuable guidance for SMEs seeking to align their products, packaging, and certifications with Canadian market demand.

TRISEG Identifies Export Opportunities Across 16 Countries

Through the **TRISEG** project, TFO Canada is conducting market research and institutional assessments across 16 partner countries to identify high-potential export value chains and better understand the needs of SMEs and Trade Support Institutions. The findings will guide future project activities and help identify opportunities aligned with Canadian market demand.

Capacity Building & Skills Development

Helping SMEs Strengthen Their Export Readiness in the Andean Region

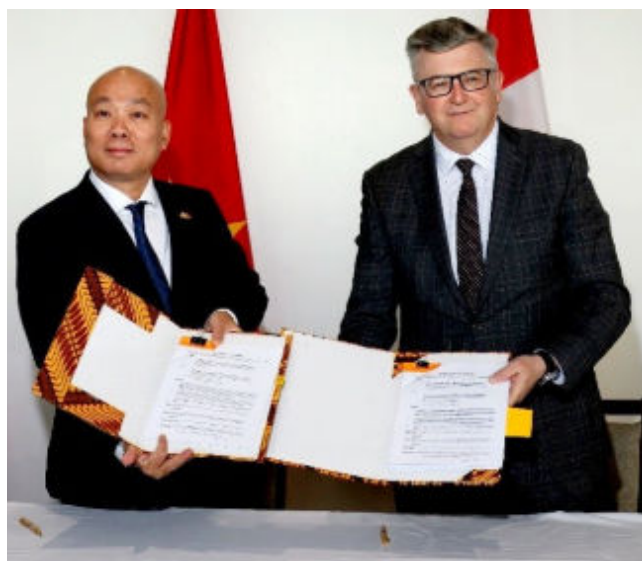
Following the launch of the COMPETE project across Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia, TFO Canada has rolled out its flagship **"Exporting to Canada"** seminar series to help SMEs prepare for the Canadian market.



The seminars cover key topics such as Canadian consumer trends, regulatory requirements, food safety standards, bilingual labelling, sustainability practices, and gender-inclusive business approaches. Through these practical sessions, entrepreneurs are gaining the knowledge and tools needed to better understand market requirements and identify opportunities in Canada.

A total of 292 business owners, including 166 women-led SMEs (WLSMEs), have already benefited from the training, strengthening their knowledge, technical capacities, and ability to develop tailored export readiness roadmaps for the Canadian market.

Partnerships



TFO Canada and VIETRADE Strengthen Trade Collaboration

TFO Canada and the Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency (VIETRADE) have signed an implementation agreement under the TRISEG (Trade for Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth) project. The partnership will strengthen trade support institutions and help SMEs, particularly women-led and underrepresented businesses, improve access to Canadian and international markets while contributing to more resilient and inclusive supply chains.

[Read more](#)



Building Stronger Trade Support Networks Through COMPETE

Strong partnerships are essential to supporting SME growth. Through the COMPETE project, TFO Canada has engaged more than **10** partner organizations across Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, including Trade Support Institutions, financial institutions, women's business organizations, chambers of commerce, and Canadian partners. Together, they are helping connect women-led and small businesses with local networks, expertise, and financing opportunities.

Project Advisory Committees in each country continue to provide insights that help ensure activities remain practical, responsive, and aligned with local needs.

Coffee for Communities Recognized in Sustainability Spotlight

The Coffee for Communities project has been featured in the Coffee Association of Canada's Sustainability Spotlight series. This five-year partnership between TFO Canada, Tim Hortons, and Global Affairs Canada supports coffee-farming communities in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Indonesia.

The initiative aims to strengthen the resilience and profitability of coffee-farming communities through sustainable agricultural practices, safer and more inclusive working conditions, and community-led investments. The project is expected to directly benefit more than 56,000 coffee farmers and 210,000 community members.

[Read more](#)




OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMES

Interested in expanding your business and accessing new opportunities in the Canadian market?

TFO Canada is preparing to launch new participation opportunities through its TRISEG and COMPETE projects. Eligible SMEs may have access to capacity-building activities, technical assistance, market intelligence, and market access support tailored to their needs.

TRISEG

Calls for applications will be launched through partner TSIs in participating countries following completion of the current assessment phase.

[Learn more about TRISEG](#)



TRADE FOR RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH (TRISEG)

TFO CANADA MISSION
TFO Canada is a leading international trade and investment promotion organization. We are committed to helping Canadian businesses expand globally and to helping developing countries attract foreign investment and create jobs.

EXPECTED PROJECT IMPACT
Through the project, participating countries will have increased sustainable economic growth and employment opportunities. The project will also help to improve the business environment and trade infrastructure in participating countries.

PROJECT SUMMARY >>>
The project is a 5-year initiative to support the economic growth of SMEs in participating countries. It will focus on providing technical assistance, market intelligence, and capacity-building activities to help SMEs expand their businesses and access new markets.

PROJECT DURATION
TRISEG is a 5-year project funded by Global Affairs Canada and the Government of Canada.

INNOVATION
The project will also support the development of innovative products and services that can help SMEs compete in the global market.

COMPETE

Additional support and participation opportunities for SMEs and women-led businesses will be announced through local project partners in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

[Learn more about COMPETE](#)



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH MARKET PARTICIPATION AND ECONOMIC AND TRADE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN-LED SMES IN THE ANDAN REGION (COMPETE)

TFO CANADA MISSION
TFO Canada is a leading international trade and investment promotion organization. We are committed to helping Canadian businesses expand globally and to helping developing countries attract foreign investment and create jobs.

EXPECTED PROJECT IMPACT
Through the project, participating countries will have increased sustainable economic growth and employment opportunities. The project will also help to improve the business environment and trade infrastructure in participating countries.

PROJECT SUMMARY
The project is a 5-year initiative to support the economic growth of women-led SMEs in participating countries. It will focus on providing technical assistance, market intelligence, and capacity-building activities to help women-led SMEs expand their businesses and access new markets.

PROJECT DURATION
COMPETE is a 5-year project funded by Global Affairs Canada and the Government of Canada.

ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

Reflecting on Five Years of Impact: TFO Canada Impact Report 2021-2026

As we conclude our 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, we are pleased to share a special edition of TFO Canada's Impact Report, showcasing five years of meaningful results achieved through inclusive trade, strategic partnerships, and sustained support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and trade support institutions (TSIs) across developing countries. This report highlights the people, partnerships, and programs that have helped create new economic opportunities, strengthen trade ecosystems, and foster sustainable growth around the world.

Discover the stories, results, and lessons learned that demonstrate the power of inclusive trade to drive lasting impact.

We extend our sincere thanks to our partners, funders, and stakeholders whose collaboration and commitment have made these achievements possible.

[Read the report](#)



TFO CANADA

From Impact to Scale
Advancing Inclusive Trade Through Mutually Beneficial Partnerships and Measurable Results

5 YEARS OF IMPACT (2021-2026)

MEET OUR NEW TEAM MEMBERS



HANNAN MUHARRAM

Program Manager - Monitoring,
Evaluation and Reporting



JASMINE VALLVE

Project Manager



MONICA GARCIA

Project Officer



FEDERICO CHAUX

Project Officer



MICAELA COSSIO

Program Officer - Trade Information
and Communications

Learn more about
the team



Success Story



Weaving Tradition into Global Opportunity: Jute Land Bangladesh's Journey to International Markets

In Gazipur, Bangladesh, where jute has long been part of the country's cultural and economic fabric, Jute Land Bangladesh saw an opportunity to do more than create handcrafted products. The women-owned and women-led enterprise set out to bring Bangladesh's rich tradition of craftsmanship, sustainability, and innovation to customers around the world.

Yet turning that vision into international success was not easy.

Although Jute Land Bangladesh had already begun exporting, breaking into highly competitive markets such as Canada presented a new challenge. As a relatively new supplier, the company faced difficulties establishing credibility and gaining buyers' confidence in a market with countless sourcing options.



As Managing Director Protima Chakraborty explains:

Before working with TFO Canada, one of our biggest challenges was entering and building trust in the Canadian market. As a new supplier, it was difficult to gain buyers' confidence and establish credibility.



To help overcome these barriers, Jute Land Bangladesh participated in the **Women in Trade for Inclusive and**

Sustainable Growth (WIT) project, a trade facilitation initiative implemented by TFO Canada from 2019 to 2025. Through trade fairs and business networking activities, the company gained opportunities to engage directly with international buyers and better understand market expectations.

These experiences exposed Jute Land Bangladesh to global craft trends, consumer preferences, and international requirements, helping the company better align its products with market demand and strengthen its positioning in export markets.

Jute Land Bangladesh's strength lies in its ability to combine traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design and international market requirements. Each product is handcrafted with a focus on quality, sustainability, and authenticity, qualities that increasingly resonate with consumers seeking handmade and ethically produced goods.

[Read more here](#)



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TFO Canada is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded in 1980 whose mission is to catalyze economic growth through sustainable and inclusive trade partnerships for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries. TFO Canada assists SMEs and Trade Support Institutions (TSIs) from developing countries to access international markets through information, advice and contact services.

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