

# A Guide to Commercial Diplomacy



International  
Trade  
Centre

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The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.

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# A Guide to Commercial Diplomacy



# About the guide

The world's only training guide for commercial diplomats explains how to promote trade and investment abroad while setting priorities for markets, industries and clients.

Drawing on first-hand field experience, the guide explores ways to network, create partnerships, build business intelligence and promote trade and investment. Practical checklists and case studies reflect the current business world of digital platforms, social networking tools and the changing profile of international business.

The guide is designed for diplomats and trade representatives from ministries of foreign affairs or commerce; trade and investment promotion bodies; business associations and chambers of commerce; and training schools for diplomats.

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## Foreword



In a rapidly changing trade landscape, those who support businesses to trade need new ways of working, new skills and new partnerships. The International Trade Centre (ITC) is proud to support the process of continuous learning and change that is the hallmark of all successful organizations.

This guide supports the efforts of senior diplomats, trade commissioners, honorary consuls, trade attachés, staff of international and bilateral chambers, private sector delivery partners and anyone who wants to deliver strategic and operational excellence to businesses seeking success in foreign markets.

ITC's first guide for trade representatives was issued in 1973 and updated in 2013. The guide remains a unique international reference, offering insight into the valuable role of national commercial diplomacy. Digital change, climate change, global trade and investment policy change continue to have a heavy influence on how companies navigate international markets, and how to best support them. This guide offers processes, tools and competencies to build knowledge and networks in markets abroad, and to deliver the opportunities for businesses to benefit from the forces of globalization.

We know that these networks abroad make a difference. Lack of trade intelligence is one of the main reasons that businesses choose not to engage in international trade, or struggle to survive when they do. Research confirms that when governments have access to a good international network of support, offering effective trade promotion and investment attraction services, export sales grow, with significant spillover benefits to the economy as a whole.

We also know that new digital platforms and private sector actors are providing new options for delivering this international network at a reduced cost, meaning that any country, working in smart ways, can compete with those that have well-established teams in many markets.

It is designed to be practical, with checklists and examples to call upon when needed. The guide forms part of an integrated offer from ITC, alongside a refreshed online course from our SME Trade Academy, and workshop modules to deliver customized face-to-face training to groups.

Our objective is to build the trade routes to sustainable and inclusive development, and that means helping governments, institutions and businesses to build more effective global networks. This guide delivers part of that promise.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arancha González'.

Arancha González  
Executive Director  
International Trade Centre



# Acknowledgements

This is the fourth edition of the International Trade Centre's (ITC) guide that supports trade representatives deployed by governments in international markets.

The first edition, *Official Commercial Representation Abroad*, was produced in 1973, and a second edition was published in 1993. This edition draws upon the insights offered and tested for the third edition, published in 2013. The content of the guide and checklists in this fourth edition were tested at a workshop for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nepal in June 2018.

John Doddrell, the principal author of this edition, has extensive experience of commercial diplomacy, having served as British Consul General and Director of UK Trade and Investment and as its Director of Strategy in London. His work is based on research and guidance from ITC, as well as his own experience.

ITC thanks the following staff for its contributions: Anders Aeroe, Annegret Brauss, Anne Chappaz, Sibylle Neuhaus, Susanna Pak, and Ann Penistan.

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