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ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU
OF CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

AND

SERVICE ACTIVITIES OF THE LONDON
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ^{1/}

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ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

The IBCC provides a forum where leaders of Chambers of Commerce can meet to discuss and seek solutions to the administrative, legal and other problems of common interest to Chambers of Commerce, and examine the means whereby the international network of Chambers of Commerce can be used to extend the range of practical services to the business community.

The developments during the IBCC's period of operation indicate that the organization has an important purpose to serve to the benefit of the Chambers of Commerce themselves and, through them, the thousands of firms who make up their membership.

The services the IBCC provides to Chambers are many and varied but one of the main ones which constantly occupies their attention is the simplification of customs formalities both in respect of carnets and certificates of origin. The IBCC worked closely with the Customs Co-operative Council on the formation of Customs Conventions to facilitate the issuing of and the use of carnets throughout the world.

ATA Carnets are international Customs documents issued by Chambers of Commerce in most major countries throughout the world (see list below) for the purpose of allowing the temporary importation of goods, whether accompanied or not, free of Customs Duties, taxes, etc. also without the necessity of raising bonds or depositing amounts for Duty and completing Customs documentation in foreign countries.

ATA Carnets are now commonly used by business travellers carrying (or despatching in advance) samples when making sales or demonstration tours; and by professional people - educationalists, engineers or entertainers fulfilling overseas engagements and taking equipment with them. Goods for showing at overseas fairs and exhibitions are specifically covered by ATA Carnets, often allowing for the goods to be finally examined by Customs at the exhibition site rather than at the frontier post.

The system is governed by International Convention under which Carnets can be issued for the following categories of goods:

- a) Commercial Samples and Advertising Film (16 mm)
- b) Goods for International Exhibition
- c) Professional Equipment, viz:
Articles for meetings for charitable purpose or to promote any branch of learning; art; craft; sport; religion; etc.; equipment for

the press; also sound and television broadcasting equipment; musical instruments; costumes; scenery; and other stage properties; cinematographic equipment; professional equipment for testing, maintaining, or repairing machinery, etc; equipment for use by surgeons, archaeologists, zoologists, entertainers, lecturers, etc, vehicles especially adapted for use in connexion with any of the above, including travelling workshops and laboratories (details on application).

Carnets may be issued for use in all countries in Western Europe as well as most countries in Eastern Europe plus Canada, Ivory Coast, Japan and the USA.

The IBCC has also been active regarding the standardization and streamlining of certificates of origin requirements and they, together with the ICC, requested the Customs Co-operative Council in Brussels to set up a committee to consider the question of the definition of "origin" in order to establish a degree of harmonization.

The IBCC has also been active in the field of disseminating information international concerning trade and has produced a report, based on a survey carried out among a number of countries, on the practical assistance given by Chambers of Commerce to importers and exporters.

Close connexions fostered between the IBCC and the Chambers of Commerce in socialist countries led to the formation of a Liaison Committee with meetings being held once or twice a year to discuss problems of common interest.

For more than ten years the IBCC has been active in the field of providing technical assistance for Chambers in the developing countries. Since 1962 there has been a programme under which executives of Chambers of Commerce in the developing countries can be received for training periods lasting up to three months in Chambers of Commerce of major industrialized countries in Europe. Training is aimed at familiarizing the trainee with the administrative organization and the day-to-day tasks of European Chambers as well as giving them an opportunity to visit industrial and commercial firms, port installations, etc.

Following consultations between the United Nations Secretariat and International Headquarters, the IBCC has also decided to encourage the creation of Chambers of Commerce in emergent countries where no Chamber of Commerce at present exists and a blue print for setting up such a Chamber was drawn up.

The IBCC played an active part in a workshop for African Chambers of Commerce organized several years ago by UNIDO and devoted to measures likely to strengthen the Chamber of Commerce movement in the developing countries. The value of co-operation between UNIDO and the IBCC, notably in providing training facilities for Chamber of Commerce personnel in the developing countries, was one of the major conclusions which emerged from the discussions.

The IBCC also attempts to foster Chambers of Commerce at a national level, partly by endeavouring to define and explain the role of Chambers vis-à-vis Governments; by trying to explain what activities Chambers can carry out in the field of commercial education and professional training; and by trying to outline the kind of activities Chambers can undertake in the field of public relations, i.e. to project to their own members what they are doing for their representative business communities.

For any Chamber of Commerce to be effective there must be a satisfactory relationship between institutions, their Governments and commerce and industry. The IBCC attempted to define certain of these requirements. For example it should be the task of Governments:

- to tell industrialists and traders what are the goals of their economic policy and how they mean to attain them;
- to ensure that Chambers of Commerce participate generally in decision-making on matters that concern the businessman;
- to encourage an active participation of Chambers of Commerce in the implementation of economic decisions.

On the other hand Chambers of Commerce ought:

- to ensure that they are fully representative of trade and industry as a whole;
- to keep constantly up-to-date on developments in the economy of their countries;
- to extend their relations with all organizations (semi-government; regional; Chambers of Commerce, etc.) in order to strengthen their role.

Obviously the role of such an organization is not static and it is necessary to keep the situation constantly under review to make certain that it is tackling current problems and foreseeing those that might lie ahead. The IBCC would at all times welcome representations or requests of any Chambers of Commerce to consider or take up problems which are felt to be of common concern.

SERVICE ACTIVITIES OF THE LONDON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Introduction

The object of this discussion paper is (a) to explain the services provided by the London Chamber of Commerce to its members which are in some way relevant to their activities in the field of manufacturing and marketing their products and (b) to explain some fields of international co-operation which may be useful to countries seeking to take advantage of them.

It is first necessary to emphasize that every Chamber of Commerce is a distinct entity differing not only from Chambers of Commerce in neighbouring countries but even from Chambers of Commerce in the same country. A Chamber of Commerce is related to a local area or town and its activities tend to be a product of its immediate environment, i.e. related to the needs of its group of members. The paper sets out in some detail what the London Chamber of Commerce does. A comparable paper produced for Chambers of Commerce in, say, France or Germany, might produce a different balance of activities.

What Chambers of Commerce can achieve for their members in the way of providing services particularly to industrialists depends on a number of factors.

Probably the most important is the relationship between a Chamber of Commerce and its own Government. In some countries Chambers of Commerce provide services which in others are provided by the State. An important pre-requisite, therefore, is for the State in consultation with its industrialists to determine what the dividing line is between State services and those provided by Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

General Functions of the London Chamber of Commerce

In general the functions of Chambers of Commerce cover:

- a) Representational matters, i.e. representing the interests of their members in relation to proposed legislation by central or local governments.
- b) Providing services of various kinds to members to assist them in their trading or investment activities.
- c) Provision of commercial documents.
- d) Specialized functions which may be peculiar to individual Chambers.

For the purposes of this note the services provided by the London Chamber will be summarized.

London Chamber Services

a) Research and Information Services

The provision of basic information is concentrated, in the London Chamber, in the Research and Information Department which operates on a world wide basis, providing information about overseas markets to members of the London Chamber and information about the home market to members and overseas enquirers alike.

The function of the Department at the present time is to provide basic information and material which enquirers can use as best suits their needs. Thus the Chamber does not offer a market research or financial survey service. It does however seek to maintain **in** its records the information on which such surveys could be based.

Within the Chamber's membership there are many specialized firms who provide this type of service and the London Chamber does not in general compete in providing services offered by its own members.

The library of the London Chamber serves two functions. It is a repository of commercial and official information available for reference by member firms of the Chamber and it is a source on which members of the staff can draw in order to service the Chamber's policy committees and to prepare Chamber publications.

A very high proportion of the inquiries received from the outside are of a very basic nature; names and addresses of importers, exporters, distributors, etc. which can be answered quite simply from the comprehensive selection of Trade Directories retained by the Department.

Next in volume, but probably the most important enquiries of all, concern the promotion of trade between members of the London Chamber and traders throughout the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. Such enquiries come under the heading openings for trade, export opportunities, import opportunities, agencies, joint manufacturing ventures, tenders and openings for manufacture under licence.

Into this sector also come all these enquiries from overseas firms asking to be put in touch with British importers or exporters of various goods, and all enquiries for agencies, sole distribution rights or stockists covering home and overseas ventures. This is where the Department acts as a kind of international clearing house. All these requests are recorded and indexed both by country and commodity, are acknowledged collated and prepared for publication in "Openings for Trade" - the publication that goes out with the five fortnightly Digests

issued by the International Division. In addition, all such requests are sent to relevant Chambers of Commerce anywhere in the world for inclusion in their journals and publications similar to our own Digests, Openings for Trade or Commerce International. In this way a world wide network of trading opportunities is maintained.

In order to answer the many requests for specialized information about particular markets the Chamber receives a very wide range of statistical information from British and foreign sources, and magazines and newspapers are carefully checked and articles of specialized or long term interest are extracted and filed. In the case of many countries the journals and reports of Chambers of Commerce provide a wealth of local material which can be valuable to the businessman investigating a potential market for his products.

Another group of enquiries covers Customs Tariffs, Government Regulations and Taxation. Because the subject is so specialized we have a section within the Department dealing only with this type of enquiry. Here we give up-to-date information concerning customs tariffs at home and abroad, the classification of goods, refunds, and rebates of Customs duty, procedures concessions, etc. Similarly, we have enquiries about Government regulations for all countries of the world, on, for example, food and drugs, weights and measures, public health, company regulations, taxation, EEC regulations, prices and incomes etc. These more complicated enquiries often necessitate the help of experts in the Chamber, such as the various trade associations who can offer a wide experience.

In addition to answering particular enquiries, the Information Department also offers a number of special services to members of the Chamber, not particularly relevant for the purpose of this discussion paper.

All the information services which have been described above are "responsive" services: they are provided in response to requests from members or other enquirers. All Chambers, however, have a major role in the active dissemination of information, i.e. "initiative" services. The information received by the Chamber - national Government and EEC documents, local government reports, information from public authorities, developments in service industries, whether private or public, which affect the interests of large numbers of members- all need to be filtered so that items of major importance can be brought quickly to the attention of the businesses which they affect.

Then this information is disseminated to members by means of a fortnightly Newsletter, never more than one A4 sheet, which deals with matters affecting the interests of members at home and is sent to all members, and a fortnightly Digest in five regional editions which deals with export markets and is available on subscription.

These two London Chamber publications concentrate on brief factual information, while the monthly magazine "Commerce International", gives scope for longer commentaries, market reports and activities on matters of current controversy at home and abroad.

In addition the London Chamber, like many others, issues a series of special publications. These fall into several different categories: reports on particular markets (including visits by Trade Missions), the text of memoranda presented to national or local government, booklets or charts explaining new requirements or regulations. In other countries, alternative methods are used - for example the German government foreign trade service (BfA) produces a series of fact sheets on different markets which can be used to answer a range of enquiries and give supplementary information as well. Compiled by a government information department these fact sheets are largely distributed by Chambers of Commerce.

In addition to the above series of regular publications and ad hoc reports, the Chamber also disseminates information at meetings and seminars which are open to all members. Full day conferences are organized at frequent intervals on a variety of subjects. Experts are invited to give talks either on matters of immediate import such as the introduction of Value Added Tax or the technicalities of other new Government legislation or on questions which affect a company's basic strategy - how to raise finance or tackling a new market at home or abroad. This year's subjects have so far included "Trading with China", "Algeria", "The German Democratic Republic Symposium" and "Facilitating International Trade", "Industrial Co-operation with Poland" and another on "Angola and Mozambique".

But the London Chamber's role in education does not stop here. It takes a long term and continuing interest in commercial and industrial training as a whole. It is currently preparing an export training programme for clerical and managerial staff in both basic and the more sophisticated exporting skills.

The Chamber has its own Commercial Education Department whose main activity is to carry out examinations on various commercial subjects. In other European Chambers of Commerce, notably Germany and France, however, the responsibility of Chambers of Commerce and Industry for commercial and industrial education, training and apprenticeship is very much greater than it is in the UK. In fact, the responsibility for this form of education is imposed on the Chambers of Commerce by law and these countries have an impressive network of education and training institutions.

It is self-evident that adequate training in the international trading languages of the world is becoming of increasing importance for international traders and here the Chamber helps by running a series of foreign language examinations.

b) Foreign Trade:

The promotion of international trade has always been one of the London Chamber's main priorities. The International Division of the Chamber is staffed by specialists responsible for providing information and advice on all aspects of trade relating to world markets. There are five divisions (corresponding to the five Digests of economic intelligence sent out twice-monthly) Asia and Pacific, Africa and the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere. In addition to providing a highly specialized service on export and import trade within the geographical market areas covered, a large percentage of staff time is devoted to arranging meetings and providing contacts and introductions around the world. Through its travel and exhibition sections the Division offers members a low-cost business travel service and organized joint ventures at overseas trade fairs.

The Business Travel Service which was introduced in January 1972 is instrumental in putting businessmen in touch all over the world. In its first year of operation it organized over 150 tours, and more than 1,000 members took advantage of one or more of the low cost schemes. The service also arranges special one day visits to major European trade fairs, often at less than half the normal return air fair.

The Chamber's Exhibition Department is a major organizer of combined British group section at overseas trade fairs, in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry. The 1973 programme covers some

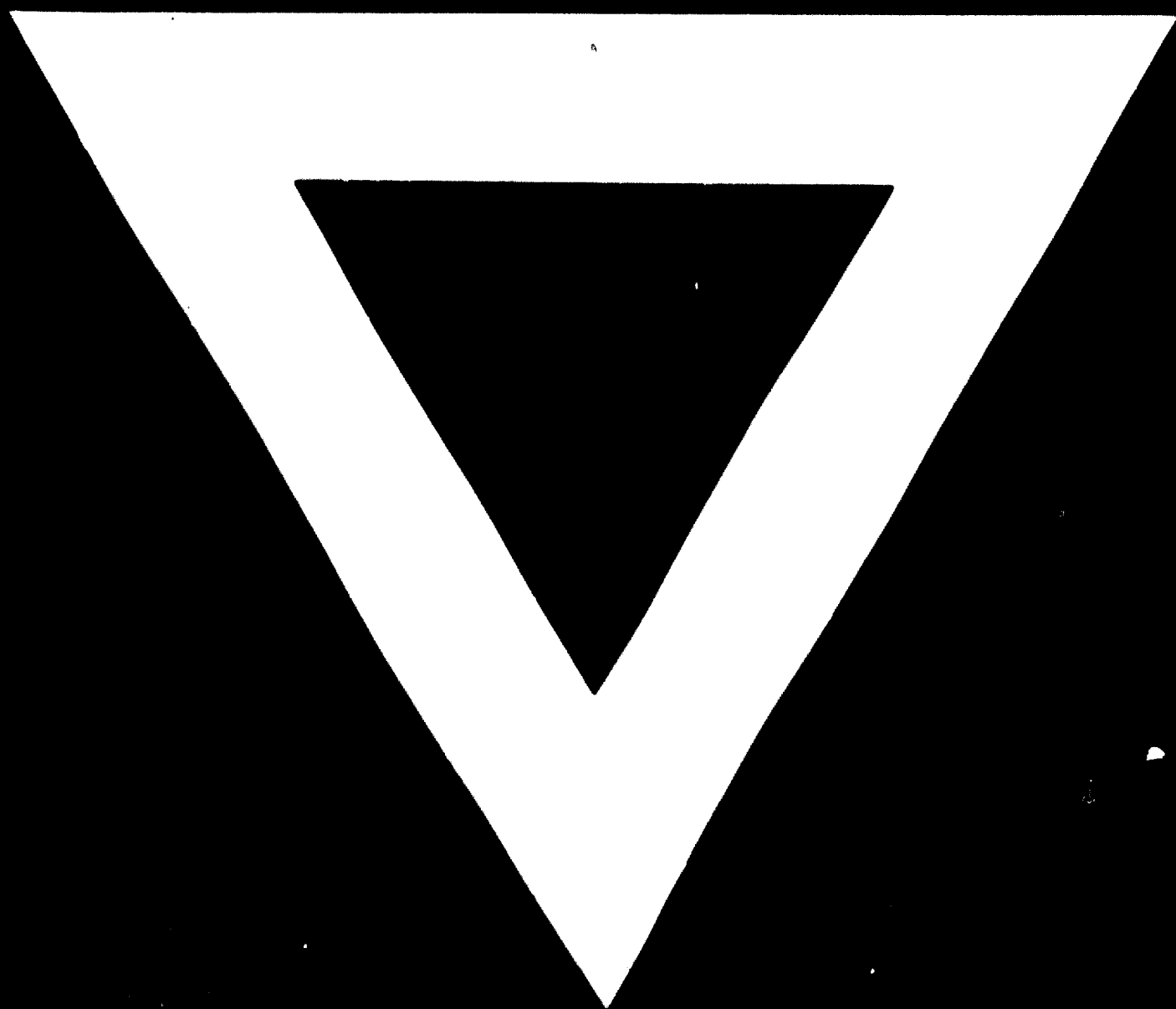
thirty Joint Ventures at exhibitions and trade fairs in many parts of the world including Chicago, Toronto, Tokyo, New York, Johannesburg, Zaire, as well as the major centres in Scandinavia and Western and Eastern Europe.

As a result of the success of these exhibitions - not only in gaining overseas contacts but in terms of hard cash and the number of contracts won by UK businessmen - it has been decided to have an even more ambitious programme in 1974.

While the Chamber is keen to increase the export opportunities open to its own members it has always followed the policy of promoting trade in both directions. It has both exporters and importers in membership and therefore takes an overall view of international trade. This has been clearly reflected in the way that the Chamber organizes its trade missions - one of the outstanding activities of the Chamber's work - importers are always included in overseas missions. Moreover it believes that "balanced" missions interested in both exports and imports have a far greater chance of success.

The Chamber pays as much attention to organizing and receiving incoming missions as it does to outgoing ones. The Chamber's outgoing missions to the Soviet Union and China in 1972, the recent importers mission to Ecuador and the "Marketing in Britain" seminar arranged by the London Chamber in Budapest for Hungarian enterprises, are just a few illustrations of how the Chamber's policy of promoting trade in both directions can work.





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