



midlands world trade forum

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Quarterly News Letter

February 2003

Dear Member,

Support from senior representatives of the Government and other UK officials continues to endorse the MWTF as an organisation able to represent its members views and issues back into the "corridors of power". Recent meetings with HRH Prince Andrew, Baroness Symons and Simon Murphy MEP Labour have all prompted positive comments about the forum, and we need to continue to ensure that your voice is heard. Any business or international trade issues can be raised via our web site, using the *lobbying and representation* page.

A previous issue we have raised related to general "red tape" and paperwork. This can be a key influencer in the decision whether or not to trade internationally – if you have any examples of over-regulation, we want to hear about them !

As the Euro grows in strength against Sterling, this is good news for exporters or potential exporters, however, we need to see further movement before we can feel comfortable about our competitive position with other EC member country businesses.

The current situation regarding Iraq may be prompting people to re-think their positioning in respect of exporting or international trading. A scheduled Trade Mission to Iran, which was to have been led by the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and which was to include 25 British Companies, was a recent casualty having been cancelled when it became impossible to obtain the appropriate visas.

Our message is to carry on trading in your market places as normal - unless you are specifically advised otherwise.

Membership

- General

We are still progressing well towards our target of 300 member companies by the end of the next financial year. Current membership stands at **171** companies. As this number grows then so too does our "knowledge base", with members now spanning a wide variety of industry sectors. As a member, you can access our member database and the associated knowledge/experience using the *member information* and *member listing* pages on the web site.

Remember, our members have a wide set of business skills and experience in over 100 countries around the world, and are receptive to other members in need of help, support or advice !

- Roll out throughout the West Midlands

We continue to meet with representatives from Chambers and Export/International Trade fraternities around the West Midlands. Whilst this has been a slow process, the discussions have been received positively and we expect to see more membership intake from the Shropshire and Staffordshire areas in the coming months.

Profile on Thailand

Thailand as an idyllic location for a holiday is a concept known to most of us – but as an ideal place to do business?

Along with all the countries in South-East Asia, Thailand was rocked by the Economic Crisis of 1997 – but it has regained stability, thanks in part to its willingness to implement economic reforms, including loosening some of the restrictions on companies wishing to invest in, or trade with, Thailand. The UK is the fifth largest investor in the country, and exports some £600m worth of goods and services (imports 2 ½ times that much, however.)





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The Thai people are genuinely friendly and welcoming to visitors to their country, whether for leisure or business purposes. If you can learn just a couple of phrases - of greeting or thanks – in Thai, the response will be very positive. Many phrases are slightly different, depending on whether a man or woman is saying them – so make sure you learn the right version!

Some other aspects of culture and etiquette:

- The Thais are not a tactile people: that is, they avoid touching or “crowding” other people, and they certainly do not appreciate back-slapping or shoulder-gripping. Between themselves, Thai people greet by putting their hands together as if in prayer and bow. In business, they expect to shake hands with Westerners – but if, for example, you are invited for a meal with your Thai host at which the family will be present, it would be better to offer the Thai greeting rather than extend your hand.
- You should certainly avoid touching someone’s head, talking over someone’s head or passing an object over someone’s head. The head is the most honourable part of the body – conversely, the feet are the least honourable and it is considered an insult to display the soles of your feet to someone. Never point with your foot at anything, especially not a person. Think about how you sit! Sitting back casually with your legs crossed could lead to your foot pointing at someone – it is safer to keep both feet planted firmly on the ground.
- The Thai set store by calm, measured behaviour and quickly lose respect for a person given to outbursts of temperament, let alone temper. Talking loudly is considered impolite.
- Clothing should be light – to counter the humidity and often oppressive heat – but smart. Shorts and bare shoulders are really only for sports and the beach.
- If in Bangkok, to ensure you arrive cool and composed for your business meeting, always take an air-conditioned taxi and allow plenty of time for your journey, the congestion is horrendous! Office hours are generally between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., with an hour for lunch at midday.

This information was prepared by Chamber Translation Services, our expert for language and cultural issues in the “Ask The Expert” section of our website. Chamber Translation Services can organise high-quality translations, interpreting and language training in Thai and many other languages. Phone 0121 450 4230 for details.

Member Profile (Keith Scrivens, Keith Scrivens International)

Keith has been involved in the healthcare and personal hygiene industry for many years, holding senior positions in such companies as Smith and Nephew, Merrell & Pardoe and Lullaby (UK) Ltd.

He has been extensively involved in business development and distribution activities both within the UK and overseas.

“KSI is a trading organisation, identifying requirements and sourcing appropriate product solutions. Our main activities relate to international trade between the UK and Australia, Europe and Australia and the UK and the Caribbean.

If its in a supermarket, particularly in the store's own brand, and its not food, we probably deal with it !!

I joined the MWTF to meet and interact with people/small businesses who might need help. As the balance of membership within the forum begins to shift towards new, or less experienced, exporters, I hope to be able to offer support to them borne out of my own trading experience”

Keiths contact details are available on the web site , *member information* and then *member listing*. Search under Scrivens !

Events

Recently we have held events at Birmingham Chambers and the Black Country Museum. The themes have been very varied and included DTI presentations on the benefits and opportunities generated through good trading practice, an overview of the internet as a market research and selling tool, an interactive session with non exporters prompting them to question why they weren't – and more importantly why they could and should be trading to a much broader market place !



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Coupled to this, the Management Board of the MWTF attended a more private meeting with HRH Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, in his capacity as special representative for international trade and investment.

We have published an ongoing schedule of events, again accessible via the web site under *events*.

These aim to embrace those requirements previously identified by members, and, we feel, very much have a business support and development flavour to them. They will no doubt continue to be supplemented by other topics of interest as we progress.

As a reminder, events scheduled for the next couple of months include:

- 14th March 03 at Aston Villa FC and in association with Trade Partners UK, opportunities for UK businesses arising out of major sporting events
- 25th March 03 at Birmingham Chamber, an overview of opportunities arising with CERN – Europe's Nuclear Research Centre in Geneva
- 17th April 03 at Birmingham Chamber, an overview of the help and support available to find new markets via Trade Partners UK Export Market Research Scheme
- 24th April 03 at the Black Country Museum, a beginners guide to trading elsewhere in the EC.

Contact details are available on the web site, again under *events*.

If you need any help or further information in respect of the forum, please don't hesitate to contact Steve Bryan, MWTF Coordinator, on 0121 607 1759.