



ITC at SIUE Helps Amplify Southern Illinois Businesses' Footprint

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EDWARDSVILLE - Meeting the need for creative pivots and global business smarts amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Illinois SBDC International Trade Center (ITC) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville has continued to support its clients by coordinating virtual meetings, roundtables and trade missions.

Among its offerings, over the last year, ITC has hosted trade missions to South America to provide free business development opportunities for Southern Illinois clients interested in global export.

“Now more than ever the ITC is committed to finding innovative ways to support the growth of small businesses and the promotion of exports in our Southern Illinois region,” said ITC Director Silvia Torres Bowman. “At the onset of COVID, we reached out to our international partners to explore new ways to support small businesses from the region. We quickly realized that we could leverage technology that already existed to connect buyers and sellers, and at the same time, encourage other small businesses to get involved in exporting. We have now built both virtual and in-person experiences to help our clients have access to flourish in their global exporting endeavors.”

Through a virtual trade mission held in fall 2021, local business representatives had the opportunity to market and sell to South American trade participants who are skilled, qualified and have an existing business with established customers in the mining and commercial heating industries, among others. Companies had the opportunity to review customers and markets associated with commercial building automation and determine those who would be the best fit for a business relationship.

“We established solid connections with customers and gained substantial insight and knowledge on their business needs,” shared Smart Controls President David Kniepkamp, a virtual trade mission participant. “The groundwork was then set for follow-up contact, as well as relationship- and business-building opportunities with clients who were interested in the products and services we provide.”

“South America is a target destination for our ITC clients,” Torres Bowman explained. “It is a region with 397 million potential customers who collectively imported more than \$111 billion of U.S. goods in 2021. A resilient region, dubbed an “engine for growth” by financial exports, its countries remain focused on expanding and modernizing their economies, and implementing stimulus programs to confront the pandemic and reenergize their global trade.”

“The opportunity to participate in a trade mission of this magnitude would not have been possible without the help, support and vision of Silvia Torres Bowman,” Kniepkamp said. “Her dedication and insight to select country-based teams, head the research and make the virtual meetings a success confirms the professional attention that is always received at the ITC at SIUE.”

Future plans include a potential virtual and in-person trade mission next year in hopes to continue to support and enhance the experience of small businesses in southern Illinois.

The [Illinois SBDC International Trade Center at SIUE](#) serves businesses in southern Illinois by providing individualized, no-cost export advising, identification of foreign buyers, agents and/or distributors through trade leads, international market analysis, and

more. The ITC is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville as a service to the region's entrepreneurial and business community.

As a key member of the Illinois SBDC Network, the ITC delivers these important services to its clients while supporting the goals and objectives of both the [SIUE School of Business](#) and the University at large.