



Exporting expertise to the world

BY VALERIE ARLETTE

Our plane was on its final approach into Chile's Arturo Merino Benitez airport when I felt a twinge of anxiety. Would the airport be dark and foreboding?

I needn't have worried. Santiago's airport is bright and airy with large windows and great shops.

I felt right at home.

"No wonder," my neighbour said when we returned. "The Vancouver Airport Authority developed and operates Santiago's airport."

In fact, the authority, through its subsidiary Vancouver Airport Services, operates 18 airports in seven countries, including Cyprus and Jamaica as well as Chile. A year ago it signed a contract to develop, operate and manage an airport in the Bahamas.

"The Vancouver Airport Authority is a classic example of a company that has established a niche where they can manage and extract revenue because they have the expertise and know how to apply the right technology," says Jock Finlayson of the Business Council of B.C.

We need more Canadian companies to follow suit.

While one in three Canadian jobs is an export job, Canada's performance in international trade does not reflect our inherent capabilities.

According to Export Development Canada, just five companies account for 20 per cent of

Canadian exports and fewer than 2,000 of the roughly 60,000 global companies are Canadian.

How is management at the Vancouver Airport beating the odds?

By taking advantage of an opportunity.

To position airports to support a strong economic base, governments around the world began privatizing airports in the early 1990s. When YVR was privatized in 1992, it would have been easy to focus on getting its own house in order before developing outside business. But that would have meant a lost opportunity. Instead management entered the competition early, beating out heavy hitters such as the British Airport Authority in 1997 to manage and redevelop Bermuda's airport.

It parlayed its expertise to meet the specific needs of customers.

Canada was a leader in the early days of aviation with a network of airports across our large country. Vancouver airport management built on Canada's considerable aviation know-how – and added a twist. It enables airports to operate as commercial enterprises by providing a revenue stream through retail shops and

restaurants where both passengers and people dropping them off want to linger and spend money. The shopping mall approach helps airports become self-sustaining and not dependent on taxpayer subsidies.

Vancouver Airport Services helps airports attract airlines by creating an appropriate environment and applying advanced technology – from state-of-the-art instrument landing systems to fully integrated display systems for arrivals and departures to complex baggage handling systems – that complies with international airline systems and standards. It builds airports for tomorrow's world by incorporating up-to-date infrastructure. Longer runways and special passenger boarding jetways, for example, are needed to support the massive new Airbus A380.

By parlaying Canadian ingenuity and intelligence to establish a niche in the global arena, the Vancouver Airport Authority serves as a role model for companies wanting to improve their business success and grow.

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