



The connector

Pernille Fischer Boulter helps companies and government agencies create new business opportunities in foreign markets, then smoothes any cultural bumps along the way

The first phone call of the day comes at 4 a.m. A client from Europe has a question about an upcoming clean technology conference. Pernille Fischer Boulter answers the question, then gets up and starts to work. She won't call it quits for another 21 hours, at 1 a.m. Why the long workday? She's in Jamaica conducting a two-day trade workshop for that country's export agency. Afterward she'll return home to Nova Scotia for two days, then fly to Munich for a day, then to the U.K. to prepare for an upcoming trade mission.

It's business as usual for Fischer Boulter, 44, and her Halifax-based company, Kisserup International Trade Roots Inc. (www.kisserup.com). "It's so important that you understand the culture of the people with whom you want to do business," she says. "That's where so many companies fail." Kisserup International specializes in international trade training, export development, and consulting. "We typically have an 80% success rate at these missions."

A Denmark native, Fischer Boulter moved to Nova Scotia in 1997 knowing little about business in Canada. "My knowledge was of the European market," she says. "I had to figure out how business worked here." Boldly, she called 100 top companies in Atlantic Canada and asked them where the region was heading, how they got to where they are now, and how someone with her skills could succeed.

John Risley, the co-founder and direc-

tor of Bedford, N.S.-based Clearwater Seafoods Ltd., was among those Fischer Boulter contacted. When he learned she had run a successful IT company in Europe, spoke five languages, and knew how business in Europe worked, Risley hired her to expand his operations in the North Sea and Europe. "I may not know who Gordie Howe is, but I can more than make up for that by explaining why no one answers the phone in Munich during the last week of July—they are all on vacation," says Fischer Boulter. "Cultural diversification is the key to success. Most business propositions go wrong—even if the price and product are right—because of cultural misunderstandings."

Over the years Fischer Boulter has helped more than 2,000 Atlantic Canadian companies and government agencies connect with people in more than 45 countries; those connections have resulted in foreign-distribution partnerships worth millions of dollars. She works one-on-one with clients, mentoring them to break into new markets, overcome trade obstacles, and develop successful marketing, finance, and commercialization strategies.

What makes Fischer Boulter stand out is her dedication. "She was so enthusiastic about our business that it really gave us a different perspective," says Lori Kennedy, the owner of Louisbourg, N.S.-based Louisbourg Seafoods (www.louisbourg-seafoods.ca) (see "Gateway to Europe" on page 14). Fischer Boulter mentored Ken-

nedy last year, before and during a trade mission to New York. Under Fischer Boulter's guidance, Kennedy developed a narrative about the business that has helped her form relationships with government and U.S. markets. She also introduced Kennedy to Kimball Bernard, a master chef at the Culinary Institute of Canada in Charlottetown, who is now developing recipes for the company. "She motivated us," says Kennedy, "and showed us new ways to market ourselves."

Fischer Boulter was raised in Kisserup, Denmark, for which her company is named. She has lived throughout Europe, including in England and Copenhagen, where she received her business degree. Her husband, Keith Boulter, is an Ontario native who works in the biomedical sector; they met when both were living in Denmark and in 1998 moved to Nova Scotia so Keith could set up a biomedical plant in Bridgewater, N.S. Today they live in Deep Cove, about 45 minutes south of Halifax, with their two Labrador retrievers, Clinton and Makker. "I've learned so much living in Nova Scotia and had so many welcoming mentors," says Fischer Boulter, adding that she feels privileged to live close to both the city and nature.

Last year Kisserup opened an office in Copenhagen. Fischer Boulter's knowledge of Denmark made it easy to set up and to connect with Europe's 500 million consumers. The move has another advantage: it allows her to visit her parents,



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who still live in the town where she grew up. Already Kisserup's clients include international financial institutions and the Canadian embassy in Denmark. Fischer Boulter expects increased activity with the upcoming U.N. climate conference and CleanTech Exhibition's world premiere.

While Fischer Boulter is quick to list Nova Scotia's business strengths, she's not afraid to suggest improvements. Attracting immigrants and educating youth

is essential to the long-term success of the region, she says, particularly for rural communities. Provinces need to promote businesses in rural areas in order to secure economic prosperity and regard importing as an essential component of international trade. She recently launched an Internet tool connecting Atlantic Canadian export companies with immigrants who have experience in a particular sector and understand their original country's cultural

business etiquette. "Immigrants are an asset to local companies," she says. "We need to use [them] better."

As for her adopted homeland, Fischer Boulter raves about Nova Scotia. "It has everything I need—people, proximity, and playground." Nova Scotia also has the best time zone for international trade. "It allows us to deal with North America, Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia all in the same day."

— CORRIE FLETCHER-NAYLOR