



# ***NEWS RELEASE***

## **PRESS OFFICE**

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**Release Date:** November 14, 2000

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**Release Number:** 00-100

**Internet Address:**

[www.sba.gov/news/indexheadline.html](http://www.sba.gov/news/indexheadline.html)

## ***U.S., CANADIAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS FORGE TRADE DEALS THROUGH SBA-SPONSORED VIRTUAL TRADE MISSION***

**WASHINGTON** – Women entrepreneurs from the United States and Canada will sign trade deals on Thursday (Nov. 16) in Atlanta, Georgia, following two months of business partnership-building over the Internet through an innovative online initiative sponsored by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

The first-ever U.S.-Canada virtual trade mission, taking place from September 11 to November 16, has helped to link more than 40 women-owned businesses from the United States and Canada, culminating in this week's deal-signing ceremony with more than 20 participants.

**“The U.S.-Canada Virtual Trade Mission has been truly successful in presenting women with new business opportunities that they otherwise would not hear about,”** SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez said. **“Through innovative use of technology we are offering a new way for women entrepreneurs to cultivate trade relationships with their counterparts in foreign countries.**

**“It is especially important for women entrepreneurs today to make full use of the Internet through vehicles such as these to gain access to new markets.”**

The virtual trade mission was developed to help women-owned businesses make new trade deals and increase their readiness for and familiarity with international trade. It also was designed to allow them to expand their geographic reach and learn how to work with their foreign counterparts through the Internet.

The SBA's Office of Women's Business Ownership and Office of International Trade worked with partners and affiliates to organize the virtual trade mission and to publicize it to women-owned small businesses. TradeBuilders of Washington, D.C. developed the software for the virtual trade mission. The other sponsors included the Coca-Cola Company, Delta Airlines, King & Spalding, Eastman Kodak, Polycom, the Royal Bank of Canada, and UPS. The Canadian Consul General in Atlanta, Georgia, Astrid Pregel, also was a sponsor of the U.S.-Canada virtual trade mission, as was the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

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The initiative followed a U.S.-Canada trade mission to Toronto led by Administrator Alvarez in May 1999 and supports the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

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