

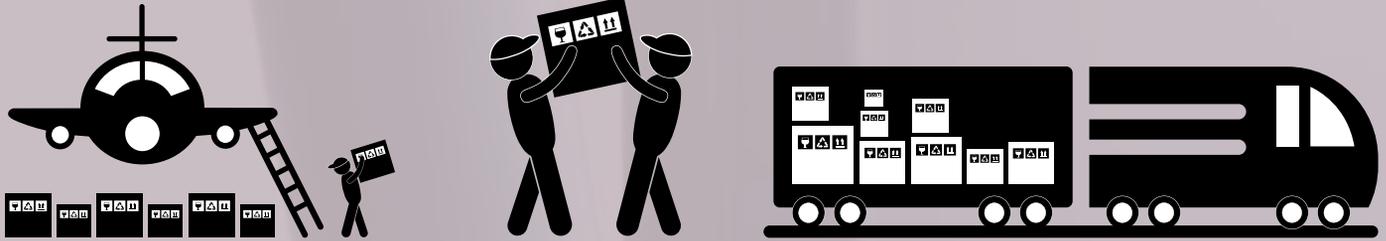
THE BROKER ADVANTAGE

By Diane Labbé Deegan

How a customs broker can add to the success of your next event

Let's say you're planning a meeting in Canada featuring some international exhibitors. By holding your event in Canada you're excited about the prospect of easily attracting worldwide attendees. You then think: "But my association is based in the United States. How do I get my registration and exhibitor material across the border?" More importantly, "how will my US sponsors and exhibitors" send their material?





The good news is that the Canadian government, in an effort to encourage meeting planners to hold their events in Canada, has made provisions to ensure a smooth customs process. Whether you hold your convention at one of our modern venues in Montreal, Toronto, Quebec City, Halifax, Vancouver or Calgary these provisions can apply to you.

WORKING WITH A CUSTOMS SPECIALIST

The first step to planning a meeting in Canada is to have your event officially registered with the Canada Border Services Agency. If you are wondering how to go about doing that, I recommend you reach out to a licensed customs broker who specializes in meetings and conventions. These professionals will literally hold your hand through the steps. How do I know? Well, after 23 years working for a customs broker based in Canada specializing in meetings and conventions, I am proud to have guided roughly 2,000 groups to this incredible meeting-friendly destination, many of whom held their very first event outside of their native country. I consider our profession to be an extension of our coast-to-coast, roll-out-the-red-carpet style Canadian convention and visitor's bureaus who are always ready to make your event successful!

There is nothing more pleasing in our logistics world than watching an event flourish in Canada when the seeds of the meeting planner's thoughts were: "Can I take this meeting outside of the USA or Europe?" When the client tells you what a joy it has been holding their meeting in Canada and that they will definitely return, there is no greater professional success story (for me anyway)!

SMOOTH TRANSITION OF GOODS

By registering your event with the Canada Border Services Agency, you can request the right to obtain the privilege to allow your registration and exhibitor material to clear customs right at your chosen venue. This means your goods will not be held up at the point of entry into Canada. This process facilitates the time-sensitive nature of your registration, exhibit material and has a number of advantages such as reduced costs, faster border crossings and quicker set-up at the facility.

The word "customs" does not always conjure up glamorous images when planning a meeting. We, the brokers, try and get our message out there, that, by working with a professional, having a meeting in Canada can be easy!

I will attempt to demystify our role. For a typical customs broker, this scenario rings true: You are at your desk on a wintry Monday morning working on the meetings you have been officially appointed for and the phone rings...

"Hi this is Mary from San Jose, California, and I am shipping exhibit material to Canada and they say I need a customs broker." In this example "they" happens to be their carrier who has to follow the rules set forth by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency as well as the Canada Border Services Agency. The Canada-United States border, officially known as the International Boundary, is the longest international border in the world shared between the same pair of countries. Our role is to know what rules have been set forth by both these agencies as well as their OGD's (other governmental agencies). Of course, for overseas events there are other rules that we must be aware of as well. Depending on what type of materials will be shipped (for example:

gaming software, computers, food, plants, tires, tote bags, carpets, alcohol) we must obtain permits from OGD's to ensure compliancy and timely customs release, both entering Canada and returning to the U.S. or overseas afterwards.

PRIOR PLANNING IS KEY

By appointing a customs broker in the planning stages of your meeting the scenario above would not have occurred because we would have known about "Mary" with advance preparation. It would have been our role to offer our expertise to her well before her goods left the USA and we would have prepared her with the necessary customs forms to have her goods clear into Canada. We would have reviewed all her documentation and given her the thumbs-up to send her exhibitor material across the border.

What a customs broker will do for a meeting planner is provide technical expertise to any company sending advertising, exhibit, sponsorship or delegate material to your event from any country around the world. We will remove the customs and shipping portion from your desk and place it on ours. We will help you, the organizer, obtain maximum customs privileges from the international events and convention services program implemented by the Canadian Border Services Agency. Their recognition letter will provide many important privileges to allow the flow of your exhibitors' materials into Canada be smooth.

Your customs broker is the compliance expert so you don't have to be! ■

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