

Fijian products to break into the Swiss market

Fiji Sun
page 24
Friday, 30 May 2003

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Switzerland is a very attractive market place - with a market size of more than seven million potential consumers and a per capita GDP of US\$3368 or 20 percent.

It is still considered a safe haven for investors, because it has maintained a degree of bank secrecy and has kept up the franc's long-term external value.

But co-initiator of the Swiss-Fiji Business Council, Daniel Zender, said something was amiss - Fijian products are not in the Swiss market.

"I have been here for the last 10 years and I know the number of Swiss products available on the Fijian market," he said.

"If Mexico can get their products into the Swiss market,

then why can't Fiji?," he added.

Mr Zender said that with the association's website, a pivotal point for promoting bilateral trade would be created to get the product to the market, and thus an information dissemination tool.

"You have to be known to sell your products," he added.

The council created its own website last year and is currently listing 25 top Fiji companies, like Tappoos, Motibhai, Punjas, Pacific Green and Makosoi Soap as potential Fijian companies to make the break into a foreign market where there is no mineral resource available.

According to the Fiji Island Bureau of Statistics, the total value of Swiss products imported from Switzerland was over \$2.6 million in the year 2000.

But he said there might be more

to the figure because the country of origin of a product was traced only to the last port of call.

"There is neither a direct flight nor a shipping link between the two countries," he said.

Products and services from Switzerland could be seen everywhere in Fiji, from the Monasavu power generation turbines, to ISO 9000 quality control services, to the meter readers of FEA.

Swiss brand watches like Omega and Rolex, Victorinox knives and many pharmaceutical products can be bought in Fiji.

Finally, the world's largest food producer, Nestle, has its head office in Switzerland.

The idea of promoting Fiji products and services more creatively in Switzerland emerged in 1993, when Mr Zender returned

from Switzerland (his homeland) after working for the government-owned Information Technology Centre (ITC) from 1987 to 1989.

"Through our website, we have a substantial amount of support from the Swiss companies, and we are hopeful that we will ultimately have the same response here, even though so far only 10 percent of the Fiji companies have written to give us a sign of support," he said.

The Fiji Islands Trade and Investment Bureau chief executive officer said one of most difficult factors that affected the decision of venturing into the Swiss market was the high freight cost involved.

Mr Zender said that people in Switzerland had a positive perception of Fiji, as being exotic and different.

"With the right niche product in a high quality packaging, some Fiji

products would definitely have a potential market in this landlocked country," he said.

Fiji might have been disadvantaged in terms of its size and economic status compared to Switzerland, but the most important thing, he said, was to "look for a market, get the right product for them and you would have the rest of it". There are many similarities between Fiji and Switzerland apart from being multiracial, multicultural and multilingual.

"Our organising committee has done the preliminary work and now it is for the Fiji businesshouses to join in and set realistic goals and come up with strategies on how to achieve these targets," he said.

For Fiji, the economic benefit is huge - an increase in foreign reserves.