



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

Advancing Free Trade
for Asia-Pacific **Prosperity**

Explore New-Normal Model of Trade Promotion in the Post Pandemic Era

APEC Committee on Trade and Investment

April 2022



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WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT

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1 Opening Remarks

The opening remarks were delivered by Mr NIIKURA Takayuki, Director for the APEC office, Trade Policy Bureau Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) - Japan.

Mr Niikura welcomed the speakers and attendees to the workshop, which was aimed for the audience members to think of how APEC economies and municipalities can facilitate cross-border trade and investment during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The workshop was to focus on trade promotion between cities using digital technologies.

To set the context, Mr Niikura offered background on how face-to-face exchanges have been severely limited due to travel restrictions from the pandemic. This caused the cancellation or indefinite postponement of conferences, exhibitions and business missions. In response, public officials at multiple levels of government across the APEC region have launched initiatives that apply digital technologies to circumvent these challenges. Efforts include holding events virtually and supporting digital transformation of businesses.

In order to capture how economies have been pursuing these initiatives, two comprehensive surveys were conducted by METI. Mr Niikura expressed METI's hope for the current workshop to disseminate and replicate some of the success stories, challenges, and lessons learned that were identified in METI's surveys.

Mr Niikura also explained how this workshop is in alignment with APEC's priorities. The 2021 APEC Leader's Declaration¹, issued in New Zealand, reiterated the importance of connectivity. Mr Niikura quoted "digital connectivity and innovation are critical across our efforts towards an inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery" from the pandemic. This year's host economy Thailand selected the "Open Connect Balance" as the theme of this year's APEC meetings². The theme was reflected on the recent CTI/EC meetings³ discussing next generation trade and investment in the digital economy. Mr Niikura stated that the workshop was to help "connect" APEC cities and economies.

Mr Niikura then introduced the agenda of the workshop, involving the presentation of research conducted by METI and the upcoming talks by expert speakers. He then thanked the audience members for their participation. Mr Niikura expressed his hope that the workshops would fulfill their objective to share knowledge and best practices on the application of digital technologies to enhance trade and investment promotion.

2 Workshop Summary: New-Normal Model of Trade Promotion in the Post Pandemic Era

2.1 Study Presentation

The opening remark was followed by the presentation of the research effort of Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). The speaker was Mr KANEBAKO Kentaro, Assistant Director for the APEC office, Trade Policy Bureau, METI.

Mr Kanebako started his presentation by explaining how COVID-19 had disrupted the process of municipalities across APEC economies who used to establish intercity economic ties via business missions and other interactions. Some cities have successfully mitigated these challenges of the pandemic via digital technologies than others.

With this as a background, METI delegated two comprehensive surveys in which over three hundred of these cases were identified from nineteen economies. Mr Kanebako highlighted how these results revealed various categories of measures introduced by APEC economies and municipalities, which can be classified into two types. One type of such categories is those related

¹ <https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2021/2021-leaders-declaration>

² <https://www.apec2022.go.th/thailand-hosted-the-apec-symposium-on-2022-priorities/>

³ <https://www.apec2022.go.th/the-first-apec-senior-officials-meeting-19-02-2022/>

to meetings and events. In terms of technologies used, among the most popular for this type of measures was online meeting platforms. But in some cases, organizers used platforms specifically designed to host virtual versions of large-scale events like tradeshows and exhibitions. Other cases leveraged advanced technologies such as three-dimensional imaging, virtual reality and advanced computing. The other type of measures is related to trade promotion efforts other than meetings and events, including business matching, capacity building for e-commerce, marketing, and market intelligence & training. Mr Kanebako referenced some cases in which public agencies went further than the use of existing digital tools and developed in-house technologies like digital platforms that their constituent businesses could utilize

After this overview, he listed examples of common good practices found in these efforts.

First, regarding meetings and events held in online or hybrid formats, it is important to ensure that businesses are well-prepared to present themselves, as well as to provide them with information about their potential clients. Aforementioned advanced technologies like 3D imaging and virtual reality can be useful for event organizers to increase the engagement of buyers. Mr Kanebako also mentioned that the organizers' overseas offices can help facilitate connections between businesses in remote locations before and during these events. He also mentioned hybrid events' own unique advantages and challenges. A fundamental consideration for hybrid events is how to facilitate interaction between physical and virtual participants.

Second, when matching businesses and helping them network in digital settings, it is essential to collect accurate information in a clean data format about the products of sellers, their services, capabilities, as well as the specific demands of their potential partners. Mr Kanebako noted that many parties face challenges in securely collecting, storing, and utilizing this data without an outside support, and he recommended public officials to carefully find and select competitive and trustworthy private partners.

Third, in order to help businesses add e-commerce to their sales channels, two different approaches are taken; trade promotion agencies in economies like Hong Kong, China, and Chinese Taipei have established their own B2B e-commerce platforms for their clients, whereas officials in Singapore and Moscow, Russia, have provided capacity building services to businesses to sell on established private e-commerce platform

Lastly, Mr Kanebako touched on how trade promotion agencies can provide support for MSMEs during the pandemic. Officials can utilize digital technologies themselves to continue their support for these small businesses, while training them to combat COVID-driven challenges with digitally-enabled tools. Examples of techniques that agencies have taught to businesses include search engine optimization (SEO) and other digital marketing approaches.

After this run-through of general findings, Mr Kanebako moved on to introduce specific case studies; first at economy level and then at municipality level.

He first introduced how Australian trade promotion agency, Austrade, has used virtual methods in conjunction with its robust network of overseas offices to connect Australia-based startups with foreign investors and accelerators. This included a partnership program between its office in San Francisco and local technology accelerator Exit Velocity, hosting a three-week virtual bootcamp for Australian startups considering the US market.

He then discussed the B2B e-commerce platform of HKTDC, the trade promotion agency of Hong Kong, China. The platform underwent substantial updates during the pandemic. This included an integrated meeting platform that is supported by AI-enabled business matching functions. Building on its pre-pandemic exhibitions work, HKTDC successfully conducted its annual sourcing events virtually. Being the owner of the digital platform, the agency can monitor and adapt it freely, using it for various trade promotion efforts.

The next example was the United States International Trade Administration (ITA)'s efforts to mobilize existing resources at its overseas offices and their networks via digital channels. ITA re-designed its business matching events as pitch-based online events, in which companies picked by ITA had opportunities to pitch their products and services for few minutes to buyers from their niche industries in target foreign markets.

As a contrast to HKTDC's case, Mr Kanebako also mentioned Enterprise Singapore's approach to e-commerce capacity building. The agency chose to rely on locally based private tech companies to help businesses sell online via existing e-commerce platform Mr Kanebako highlighted the range of services offered on behalf of Enterprise Singapore, from logistics to e-payment and financing to platform aggregation.

On to the municipality level efforts, he first introduced a case of Global Victoria, the trade promotion agency of the state of Victoria in Australia. Taking advantage of its extensive network of overseas offices, Global Victoria succeeded in conducting thirty trade missions virtually. The agency prepared its constituent businesses via various educating and training, while assisting them with pre-mission social media marketing.

Mr Kanebako acknowledged that the case of Global Victoria may not be relevant to smaller municipalities and introduced the case of Chungcheongbuk-do in the Republic of Korea. The province is home to an economy-level medical research institution with an associated industry cluster. With supports from its economy-level partners, the province hosts the BioKorea conference, with the 2020 edition of the event moving online with 3D and virtual reality exhibition displays.

The next case study on Moscow, Russia, is another example of economy-level support, especially financial one, funneled to support local enterprises. The Moscow Export Center has partnered with various major e-commerce platforms to allow free access for Moscow-based businesses to marketing tools and featured sold by these platform

Finally, Mr Kanebako introduce the case of Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, a municipality that saw opportunities in the crisis. The city's annual Support Industries Sourcing Fair event was held in a hybrid format. This allowed multinational corporations, looking for new suppliers to fill the gap in their supply chains, attend the event online. For supporting industry manufacturers based in the city, this was a great place to connect with these large buyers. For this case, it is important to note that buyers would still eventually want to visit factories due to the difficulty of vetting manufacturing capabilities via digital platform However, this was a great first-step for these companies to establish contacts.

Mr Kanebako concluded his presentation by sharing five preliminary recommendations that were developed as part of the research effort:

- **Redefine goals and objectives of trade/investment promotion**
A wide range of stakeholders should be convened and engaged to determine mutually agreeable goals and objectives of their trade promotion efforts in the current and future context of the pandemic. This will help them base their initiatives around factors such as challenges faced by constituent businesses.
- **Economy and municipality collaboration to achieve larger goals**
For small cities and provinces, economy-scale financial and technical support is a major boon for expanding trade and investment promotion efforts. Such supports can enable these sub-economy actors to host state-of-the-art virtual trade shows and exhibitions or to purchase marketing services from major platform
- **Find perfect mix of technologies, services, and approaches for one's goals**
Officials need to keep their focus on the initially defined goals and objectives of their trade promotion efforts, rather than focusing on using new cutting-edge technologies. Also, successful application of any technological solution ultimately depends on the constant

efforts and attentions of well-trained staff at agencies as well as businesses. They would also need to take risk to be an early adopter.

- **Work with the private sector**

Private technology vendors and platformers can bring excellent expertise and support services. We can also ask more questions to our constituent businesses regarding what kinds of support are needed and what needs to be improved of the current efforts.

- **Looking ahead: More options to choose from**

In the past two years, officials searched for a perfect mix of solutions through trial and error. Moving forward, officials will have options to choose from (e.g., face-to-face vs online vs hybrid tradeshows). Officials will need to think of what realistic solutions will help them achieve their goals, based on their own financial and human asset, economy-level support, and technological savviness of the participants.

2.2 Expert Speaker Session

The following session was moderated by Mr Christopher Wood, Senior Research Analyst at Washington CORE. Each of the following two speakers delivered presentations, which were followed by a Q&A session with members of the audience:

- Dr Scott HARRISON, Senior Program Manager, Engaging Asia, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada)
- Dr Christian VOLPE MARTINCUS, Principal Economist, Integration and Trade Sector (INT), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

2.2.1 Presentation by Dr Scott Harrison

Virtual Trade Missions & Engagement: Insights From Canada

Dr Scott Harrison spoke as an expert at the conference, and hails from the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada), a not-for-profit organization created by the government of Canada in 1984 that works in the middle of government, business, academia, and the public. His presentation focused on examples and insights from Canada's experience with virtual trade missions and engagement.

Dr Harrison recalled that when the pandemic hit in 2020, one of his long-term projects was tracking Canadian federally- and provincially-led trade missions to the Asia Pacific. This led to Dr Harrison's curiosity about the role of digital technologies and platforms in trade promotion and trade missions, leading to the publication of a report on the subject by APF Canada⁴.

He discussed the example of APF Canada's government-supported "women's business missions" to Asia, in the context of lessons learned from these efforts. The first of these missions occurred in 2019 to Japan, and was in person, although all subsequent missions have been virtual.

At first, stakeholders expected these virtual missions to be less effective than in-person events, although there was a resetting or adjusting of expectations. An immediate and noticeable plus of virtual missions was that it lowered the barrier for initial contact, allowing the missions to be more inclusive and engaging. In particular, it made it easier for small companies to participate in virtual events, giving them opportunities to learn about global networks and international markets. From the perspective of organizers like APF Canada, virtual missions were also far cheaper to host.

Dr Harrison also highlighted how the online format made it easier to maintain engagement across distant jurisdictions as participants could easily continue conversations via digital channels. In one case, a post-conference networking platform was established (the Canadian Women's

⁴ Scott Harrison, Yiwei Jin, Robin Asgari. "Virtual Trade Missions: A Post-COVID Reality" 22 July 2020. <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/virtual-trade-missions-post-covid-reality>

International Network or CanWIN) as a unique and tailored tool to meet the needs for networking, rather than relying on existing social media or listservs.

Next, Dr Harrison introduced another initiative “APEC-Canada Growing Business Partnership”⁵, directly tied to trade promotion in the APEC region, especially for MSMEs. Through this program, at first, he observed difficulties in adoption of digital technologies as well as reluctance among some parties to move programming from in person to virtual. However, this was partially mitigated by New Zealand’s commitment to host APEC virtually in 2021, which encouraged members of this program to follow suit.

Dr Harrison then moved on to discuss an Indigenous peoples-led organization called INDIGI-X, which works on facilitating the connection of Indigenous professionals around the world and encouraging collaboration, economic growth and trade. In partnership with the governments of Canada and New Zealand, every year, the initiative chooses 24 delegates to participate in a four-to-six-week long virtual exchange. The participants in the effort have discovered that the digital modality, rather than originally planned in-person format, allowed for greater outreach and accessibility. Digital channels have also helped maintain momentum in a way that is less feasible with in-person missions. Furthermore, while there are costs associated with connectivity and digital access for certain organizations, these costs are far lower than flights and hotels.

Regardless of the positives mentioned earlier, Dr Harrison mentioned challenges and lessons learned by the participants to these programs. Especially when involving participants from multiple economies, like in the APEC and INDIGI-X programs mentioned, uneven availability of connectivity or computers and differing time zones can pose difficulties for events. Additionally, variable preferences for the choice of conferencing platform can also cause compatibility issues, as they all have different services, features and functionalities. A lesson from INDIGI-X and APEC programs is that scheduling multiple online meetings and events over a weeks-long period, rather than a 3-day stint for a typical in-person mission, made it easier for people to join, focus and retain information from the sessions.

As a common feedback, Dr Harrison did note that participants to these programs express that they will eventually prefer to go back to in-person meetings, given the limitations for establishing a trusted relationship without face-to-face contact. Furthermore, certain nuances may be difficult to perceive via digital communication. Despite this, they still see digital components as enhancements for trade promotion and missions today and into the future. Furthermore, while stakeholders have agreed that a hybrid model would be ideal in the future, they have yet to define what it might look like.

2.2.2 Presentation by Dr Christian Volpe Martincus Trade Promotion in a Digital World: The Next Frontier

Mr Christian Volpe Martincus spoke as an expert at the conference in his capacity as Principal Economist for Integration and the Trade Sector (INT) at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). His presentation provided a general perspective on the issue of trade promotion using digital technologies.

He discussed the traditional model of trade promotion, led by trade promotion organization (TPOs), involving several primarily offline services that aim to fill in gaps in incomplete commercial information to assist businesses in pursuing opportunities in international markets. He referenced his past studies⁶ that demonstrated the effectiveness of these programs in increasing and diversifying exports in six economies including two APEC economies: Chile and Peru.

⁵ <https://apfcanda-msme.ca/>

⁶ Christian Volpe Martincus, Jerónimo Carballo, “Is export promotion effective in developing countries? Firm-level evidence on the intensive and the extensive margins of exports” *Journal of International Economics*, Volume 76, Issue 1, 2008, Pages 89-106 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2008.05.002>; Christian Volpe Martincus, Jerónimo

However, he clarified that circumstances have shifted substantially since fifteen years ago when these studies were conducted. For example, various advanced technologies have emerged, such as high speed broadband, artificial intelligence, internet of things, cloud computing, blockchain, 3D printing, advanced robotics, and other technologies. They are substantially affecting trade in terms of the type of goods that the economies trade, the volume and the values of trade, and the trade modalities.

Furthermore, these technologies have substantially reduced costs related to information in trade, in addition to transport, logistics, and compliance costs. He also discussed the increasing amount of trade conducted via online platforms, with the number of these platforms doubling between 2013 and 2020. A study by the World Bank⁷ demonstrated how the pandemic had greatly increased the use of these platforms, with around 1/3 of firms across a sample of 500,000 in 50 economies reporting increased use of digital platforms due to the pandemic. Dr Volpe Martincus also presented a case study⁸ from Peru of the ConnectAmericas⁹ online B2B platform and the substantial increase and diversification in firms' exports to which it led by reducing costs for information and searching.

In terms of options for TPOs, he referred to the advantages of using of machine learning techniques to leverage the wealth of microdata to which TPOs have access in order to better target promotional activities. For example, such data could be used to evaluate what domestic firms are most likely to succeed in exporting, and what foreign buyers are most likely to buy from domestic exporters. The IDB is providing support to its member economies in order to apply these quantitative approaches to trade promotion, who have attested in surveys that they plan to increase adoption and application of digital technologies.

Other trends discussed by the expert included the increasing provision of dedicated services by TPOs and their overseas offices in collaboration with digital marketplaces such as Amazon, Alibaba, and eBay to help firms internationalize. He provided examples include Chile's *e-Exporta* (2020) program, Colombia's *Colombia a un clic* (2019-2021), and Peru's *Programa de comercio electrónico* (2018), which have helped hundreds of enterprises in exporting via digital channels.

In addition to the quantitative approach being useful for targeting programs, Dr Volpe Martincus also suggested that digital technologies can be used for evaluating programs --noting a gap in this practice among TPOs—in an automated manner. The IDB has been working with economies in Latin America and the Caribbean to introduce automated evaluation tools to account for this.

Q&A

Mr Christopher Wood moderated the Q&A session involving the two expert speakers, Dr Harrison and Dr Volpe Martincus. He began by asking Dr Harrison about beneficial approaches for recruiting local participants in digital trade missions. Dr Harrison replied that preexisting relationships are

Carballo. "Beyond the average effects: The distributional impacts of export promotion programs in developing countries" *Journal of Development Economics*, Volume 92, Issue 2, 2010, Pages 201-214, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2009.02.007>; Daniel Lederman, Marcelo Olarreaga, Lucy Payton. "Export promotion agencies: Do they work?" *Journal of Development Economics*, Volume 91, Issue 2, 2010, Pages 257-265. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2009.09.003>

⁷ Apedo-Amah et al. "Unmasking the Impact of COVID-19 on Businesses: Firm Level Evidence from Across the World" Policy Research Working Paper Series. October 2020.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34626/Unmasking-the-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Businesses-Firm-Level-Evidence-from-Across-the-World.pdf>

⁸ Jerónimo Carballo, Marisol Rodríguez Chatruc, Catalina Salas Santa, Christian Volpe Martincus, "Online business platforms and international trade" *Journal of International Economics*. 2022, 103599. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2022.103599>

⁹ <https://connectamericas.com/>

“absolutely vital” for transitioning to a virtual approach, meaning that local partners are essential in making these events successful. This might include the use of trade commissioner services, individual province offices, consulting firms, or individual contacts to identify participants.

Mr Wood then asked Dr Volpe Martincus about challenges in selecting and implementing digital technologies among TPOs related to topics such as workforce capacity and budgetary resources. Dr Volpe Martincus replied that the IDB is currently engaged in an effort to map the available technologies and solutions available using a survey, in hopes to help TPOs gather information about potential technological solutions that meet their purposes. He also echoed Dr Harrison in noting that specialist staff and expertise within TPOs are essential in successfully applying digital technologies, and that technology alone does not constitute a solution.

The final question was posed, from an audience member in Indonesia, to Dr Harrison and concerned hybrid trade missions conducted by Canada and what key performance indicators (KPIs) are used for evaluation. Dr Harrison clarified that APF Canada and most other examples he has studied thus far do intend to continue with the hybrid model in the future, and that selecting KPIs for virtual modalities was a challenge given that only certain business matching activities occur virtually, while the final business deals often require in-person connections.

2.3 Panel Session

The next session was moderated by Mr Peerachai ASADACHATREEKUL, Senior Innovation Manager, MICE Innovation & Intelligence Department (M2I), Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), and involved representatives of JETRO of Japan and TAITRA of Chinese Taipei. Each panelist, including Mr Asadachatrekul, offered a short presentation, followed by a panel discussion. The experts involved were:

Market Development and Trade Fair Department, JETRO, Japan

- Mr Kotaro KODAMA, Director General (Presenter).
- Mr Takashi TSUNEMI, Director.
- Mr Yusaku OSADA, Staff.

Department of Digital Commerce, TAITRA, Chinese Taipei

- Ms Lily LIN, Project Manager (Presenter).
- Ms Helena HSU, Manager.

2.3.1 JETRO, Japan

Mr Kotaro Kodama was the first panelist to offer a presentation on behalf of JETRO. His presentation began with an overview of JETRO’s activities to support Japanese SMEs, such as trade fairs, a major trade fair information database (J-Messe), and business matching services, and support for the development of internationalization strategies.

The main portion of his presentation focused on adjustments to JETRO activities made in response to the pandemic. First, the agency decided to attend as many tradeshows and exhibitions as possible if they were held online rather than being canceled. JETRO also supported Japanese companies to attend these online events through educational webinars. And in China, where the recovery from the pandemic was faster than other parts of the world, JETRO participated in on-site exhibitions.

Mr Kodama then presented detailed analysis done by JETRO of these events. According to him, the online trade fairs only led to about one-third of the contracts concluded compared to on-site events in numbers (number of contracts per supported companies). However, when comparing the negotiation closing rate (the possibility of completed contract per business meeting), online trade fairs have higher rate than that of on-site events (over 40% and 17% respectively). In the area of business meetings, one can see a similar trend with even higher negotiation closing rate for online meetings than online trade fairs. Mr Kodama, however, notes that the negotiation closing rate is higher for online events possibly because buyers do not see other options in the closed

online negotiation settings. Based on these results, he concludes that on-site events are more advantageous across various industry sectors than online events.

The next portion of the presentation highlighted the advantages and challenges related to conducting these activities online and how they differ across industries.

In speaking about advantages, Mr Kodama made it clear that one cannot expect same results from companies in different industries. For example, the machinery trade fair was shifted online with relatively few challenges, since the fair itself did not previously involve the physical demonstration of machinery, leading to good results for the online version. He also mentioned that, in the online setting, the combination of a digital catalog prepared in multiple languages with an automated matching system can allow for a continuous process to match buyers and sellers.

In the area of challenges, geographical distance still poses a challenge in the form of time differences. Furthermore, products such as textiles are disadvantaged in online business negotiations since buyers generally prefer to hold and touch the products to evaluate their quality. Mr Kodama also discussed how SMEs may struggle in adjusting to the usage of digital tools to conduct business activities.

To respond to these challenges, from the year 2021, JETRO has transformed its initiatives to maximize the benefit and to minimize the challenges of online meetings. The agency is also focusing on China, one of the largest neighboring markets with relatively small time difference with Japan, with online matching system with digital catalogs with multi-media visualization of products and services. JETRO also supports businesses to ship their product samples overseas. Finally, the agency is strengthening its marketing efforts through partners like influencers on social media.

To conclude his presentation, Mr Kodama introduced “China Hybrid Caravan Event” held in partnership between JETRO’s Tokyo headquarter and its offices in various locations in China. Product samples are displayed in physical offices of JETRO in China, attracting traffic to digital catalogs. Mr Kodama closed the presentation saying that if this experimental initiative results in good results, JETRO plans to expand the effort to other Asian economies with which Japan does not have big time differences.

2.3.2 TAITRA, Chinese Taipei

Ms Lily Lin presented on behalf of TAITRA on how the agency has promoted digital trade via its own platform throughout the pandemic. TAITRA, established in 1970, is the foremost non-profit trade promotion organization in Chinese Taipei and has a team of 1,300 specialists across five local offices and 60 branches worldwide.

Ms Lin began the presentation by introducing TAITRA’s B2B e-commerce platform, which is home to over 70,000 suppliers and more than 660,000 products across all major industries, and experiences 32.5 million visits annually. It is available in fourteen languages, including Japanese, Korean, Thai, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, French German, Arabic, among others.

In addition to its own platform, TAITRA also works with international cross border e-commerce platforms to provide companies with special offers and guidance on setting up an online shop, product display, site marketing and promotion, as well as customer service. These platforms include Amazon, eBay, newegg, Rakuten, Tiki, TradelIndia, PCHome Thai, Qoo10 and bibbli. In addition to these partners, TAITRA works with partners such as logistics providers, payment providers, and media and digital marketing service providers in order to create a “one-stop solution” for its constituent businesses.

The next portion of her presentation focused on how the TAITRA’s Mega Expo (April 2021) adapted to the pandemic by utilizing augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technology, demonstrating various parts of the virtual expo displays to the audience. This included a three-dimensional virtual display grouped by industry sector where users can explore products in certain

categories from multiple angles. Each of these virtual pavilions is integrated with TAITRA's digital platform so that users are redirected to a page where they can place an order once they click on a certain product.

The last portion of the presentation concerned a case study on TAITRA's program to respond to the pandemic, which included two main tracks:

- digital trade capacity building, digital content optimization, digital marketing and promotion, and exposure to cross-border e-commerce platform
- establishing a digital trade academy with diverse courses including those delivered in-person, virtually, and through intensive workshops.

Ms Lin then described the main functions of the digital trade capacity building track. For example, TAITRA is helping companies to optimize their digital content materials using 360 degree panoramic photography of products, and 720 degree panoramic photography of factories/production facilities, allowing for buyers to browse the products in greater detail from multiple angles. Other technologies included online showrooms, microfilms generated by AI and professional commercial photography. Once these materials are completed, TAITRA provides guidance on digital marketing such as social media marketing, video marketing, and KOL marketing to attract buyers to TAITRA's platform.

She moved on to discuss the digital trade academy track, including four fields from which companies choose based on their level of digitalization (digital transformation, digital business, digital marketing, and cross-border e-commerce). The courses are offered in physical, virtual and workshop formats. For example, the hands-on workshops taught companies how to place ads on Google, Facebook, Instagram and even Twitter.

Ms Lin then highlighted how TAITRA was awarded the "Digital Champions for Small Business" by the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Trade Centre (ITC) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). TAITRA was offered the award based on their proposal for a digital trade platform involving the two tracks (capacity building and the online Digital Trade Academy).

To close her presentation, Ms Lin highlighted the importance of mutual cooperation to optimize business content materials for constituent businesses in order to increase their commercial exposure and global marketing capacity. The feedback from this mutual cooperation can be used to further optimization of products and services.

2.3.3 TCEB, Thailand

The third and final presentation of the panel session was offered by Mr Peerachai (Mac) Asadachatrekul of the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), an agency established in 2002 to develop Meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE). His presentation focused on the digitalization of his agency's efforts in order to continue the development of the MICE sector in Thailand during the pandemic.

He began by discussing various trends under which his agency conducts its activities. For example, he set the context by mentioning Thailand 4.0, the Thai government's new economic model, as well as the economy's high penetration rate for internet and social media use. Within the context of rapid growth of e-commerce in Thailand, Mr Asadachatrekul discussed how TCEB is endeavoring to connect Thai MICE suppliers with buyers via a B2B e-marketplace called Thai MICE Connect. It is a platform that has included information on over 10,000 businesses in the MICE industry which are collected across twelve categories, including tour/travel, hotel, food & beverage, venues, and others.

The speaker then moved on to discuss the New Normal Strategy for 2022 that is designed to create seamless engagement for buyers across their journey of procuring services. This involves four steps, including: the customer initially locating the product or service; the customer seeking details about the product and making comparisons; the purchase; and the final step by TCEB, which is

designed to drive repeat engagement through customer relationship management (CRM), customer re-targeting, and data analytics to produce strategic insights.

Based on this strategy, TCEB carries out various promotional campaigns for businesses on Thai MICE Connect to introduce them to their potential clients. As an example of such campaigns, Mr Asadachatrekul played a video showcasing 10 routes¹⁰ for business events in Thailand with social-distance and hygiene practices made possible with digital tools.

Mr Asadachatrekul then moved on to discuss a range of innovations made in other areas on which TCEB focuses, such as supporting technology integration for certain large scale events categorized as “Mega Events”¹¹. As an example, he mentioned a mobile application developed for tourists to Bangkok utilizing augmented reality technology. The app was prepared for tourist to come back after the pandemic, but its online functions already reached almost 40,000 users connecting them to local businesses.

He also discussed the use of virtual display techniques for hybrid exhibitions such as “Health Tech Thailand 2021”, which included a virtual and physical track. TCEB supported the conference’s digital exhibition, including three-dimensional booths in a virtual exhibition hall, as well as chat and meeting functionality. These functionalities were maintained after the event itself has concluded, allowing follow-up connections throughout the year.

TCEB also developed a digital tool for event organizers called Biz Connect, which includes features to help connect the audience to the event through a registration portal, an agenda for the event, as well as integrated polling and surveys of participants. This also allows organizers to collect and analyze visitor data.

To wrap his presentation up, Mr Asadachatrekul continued to articulate the MICE Innovation Model applied by TCEB, which encompasses not only internal transformation for businesses through activities like e-budgeting, but also development of TCEB’s own products such as Thai MICE Connect and BIZ Connect, as well as promoting and incentivizing participation for innovators like tech startups. He also discussed TCEB’s long term plans regarding its organizational model including measures across strategy, process & products, and people, knowledge and culture aspects. He concluded his presentation by clarifying that TCEB could not have achieved these accomplishments on its own. Rather, it relied on an innovation ecosystem across tour and travel, venues, events management, business matching, crowd management, in addition to the economy governments, international counterparts, and various other components of the innovation ecosystem such as venture capital and tech companies and startups.

2.3.4 Panel Discussion

The panel discussion began with Ms Hsu discussing the advantages and disadvantages of having an in-house e-commerce platform rather than relying on the existing service of a private provider. In the case of TAITRA, the economy is driven by technology and manufacturing, which means the assets needed to establish such an in-house platform are available. Furthermore, TAITRA’s control over the platform enabled them to tailor the services offered to the needs of SMEs impacted by the pandemic, such as adjusting for the sudden surge in demand for services provided through TAITRA’s B2B e-commerce platform, as a result of the pandemic.

Mr Asadachatrekul then relayed a question, posed by an audience member from the United States, about who developed and owns TAITRA’s platform. Ms Hsu clarified that TAITRA had developed many functionalities itself, but had to outsource some activities to well-known technology partners with mature technologies

Next, Mr Asadachatrekul responded to a question posed to himself regarding the digital literacy in Thailand. He replied that TCEB aims to target various groups at different levels of digital

¹¹ <https://rfs.businesseventsthailand.com/criteria/mega-events.aspx>

preparedness, for example, traditional businesses that are reluctant or face challenges to adopt technology. TCEB tries to support these firms to use technology with knowledge resources as well as inspiration via success stories of other businesses.

The conversation continued with Ms Hsu explained that many SMEs in Chinese Taipei were also traditional businesses with few resources to adopt new technologies, thus TAITRA aims to support and encourage their usage of e-commerce through measures such as year-round training, and other services that were made free to help them through the COVID-19 crisis. From TAITRA's perspective, these skills and knowledge can help encourage SMEs to be more ambitious in pursuing international trade opportunities. On the buyers' side, TAITRA aims to align virtual trade promotion events with their procurement needs and to also improve their user experience via interface design and improvements to its AI recommendation system.

Further questions were directed to the speakers from JETRO regarding how counterpart agencies in APEC should apply digital technologies given their limited financial and human resources. A representative of JETRO responded that the agency has set up an online platform called Japan Street, an online catalog site where invited foreign buyers can browse Japanese products and participate in business negotiations with Japanese suppliers. The representative then emphasized the importance of local municipalities and economy-level organizations working together to establish such functions.

The next question to JETRO concerned balancing geopolitics with trade, to which the representative responded that his agency is constantly searching for the appropriate businesses and products to promote in respective overseas markets through JETRO's overseas offices and at the same time communicating with Japanese businesses frequently to hear their needs and business plans. Balancing these two aspects is a key for JETRO's activity.

Mr Asadachatrekul then moved on to a question to him regarding how Thai MICE Connect copes with the fact that participants may have variable levels of digital skills and literacy. He replied that TCEB aims to inspire greater engagement and participation via marketing campaigns, as well as workshops to help businesses in creating content that can be utilized on the platform and help them connect to buyers.

3 Closing Remarks

The closing remarks were also delivered by Mr NIIKURA Takayuki, Director for the APEC office, Trade Policy Bureau, METI - Japan. He thanked the speakers and audience for providing their expertise and perspectives in exploring the new normal model for trade promotion. He specifically thanked two expert speakers for providing global perspectives using examples of Canada and South American economies like Chile and Peru, and trade promotion agency partners from Japan, Chinese Taipei and Thailand for showcasing their respective efforts. Mr Niiikura highlighted the diversity of methods in which APEC economies' trade promotion agencies were responding to the pandemic, and he lauded the close collaboration between participants in sharing and refining these approaches.