

# Ill-informed Americans love beer-drinking, fur-trading us

BY CHRIS COBB

The federal government might want to loosen up some grant money and send Joe (I am) Canadian on a U.S. tour.

A new survey conducted for the Department of Foreign Affairs suggests that Molson Joe's in-your-face approach to the Canadian message could be useful. Americans, it seems, just don't know who we are.

"Canadians are nice and fun, laid-back, tolerant and low-key," says the survey, completed last month by the polling firm Goldfarb.

Americans appreciate these typically Canadian traits, but say the easy-going national character has its drawbacks: We're not aggressive enough to succeed in business.

Which is probably why Canadians, living as we do in a pristine wilderness, are still so heavily involved in the fur trade. Yes, the fur trade.

"In keeping with the belief that Canada is essentially an untapped wilderness, most (Americans) believe that Canada's economy is resource-based," says the report.

Fur trading came No. 4 on a list of Canada's greatest trading strengths. First was lumber and paper, second wheat, third sporting and commercial fishing and fifth mining. Also mentioned as prime trading sectors by the Americans interviewed were tourism, beer, cars and hockey equipment.

High-tech, biotech and aircraft manufacturing didn't make the list. Some of the respondents had vaguely heard of Nortel, but mention of other high-tech enterprises drew blanks.

But it's not all negative. The Americans know about Labatt, Molson, Seagram and Moosehead. They also know that Air Canada is a Canadian company (what was their first clue?)

There is also some recognition of the Canadian invasion of Hollywood and the success of popular music artists. Many of the respondents, though not all, were aware that many of the comedians and comic actors who have made it big in the U.S. are Canadian.

"Some say that Canadians, therefore, must have a good sense of humour," says the report.

On the "famous Canadian" list are John Candy, Jim Carrey, Mike Myers, Dan Aykroyd, William Shatner, Peter Jennings, Céline Dion, Anne Murray, Shania Twain, Joni Mitchell, Alanis Morissette, Sarah McLachlan and Neil Young.

Americans also see Canada as a communal sort of country where high taxes go to finance all kinds of socialist stuff like universal medicare and welfare. In contrast, the Americans said they see themselves as individualists, often in pursuit of the "American Dream."

Foreign Affairs commissioned the survey for three reasons: To understand "the level of knowledge and emotional perception of Canada by Americans," to get a clearer understanding of border crossing issues, and to develop insights into Canada as an entity.

Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Valerie Nofle said yesterday that her department will share the study with Canadian missions throughout the United States and with other federal departments. It will also be used, she said, to better promote Canada in the U.S.

Goldfarb interviewed members of 10 focus groups in Kansas City, Dallas, San Diego, Minneapolis and Seattle. There were two focus groups in each city, one from the general population and one from the business community.

The Americans were only vaguely, if at all, aware that Canada is a partner in the North American Free Trade Agreement. They know Mexico is involved but, says the Goldfarb report, "Canada is seen as almost incidental."

Among the survey highlights:

- Wayne Gretzky is known to be Canadian.
- Lack of knowledge about Canada among Americans is partly Canada's fault. More aggressive promotion and marketing is needed.
- Canadian foreign policy? What foreign policy?
- Canada is the place for fishing and hunting.
- Many Americans believe the Queen has power over the Canadian government.
- Jean Who? Nobody could name Canada's prime minister.
- Americans are attracted by the low Canadian dollar and have a high regard for anything with a "Made in Canada" label attached.
- Canadians get cheap prescriptions and Americans can get cheap laser eye surgery in Canada.
- Those who have visited Canada had a good time. We're a melting pot, tolerant to all races.
- Canadians "like to party and like their beer."

● Canada is not a country Americans need worry about.

● Canadian immigration policy is too lax.

● Crossing Canadian borders is an efficient, pleasant experience. Longer waits would deter Americans from visiting.

The first line of the report probably says it all: "Fundamentally, Americans are not that interested in Canada."

However, many of those surveyed know that Canadians can be distinguished by the regular use of "eh" and the pronunciation of "zed."

That's two Joe Canadian can cross off his list.

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