You’ve been hearing some talk lately about NHLA going global and having more of an international presence. This really is nothing new. We sometimes forget that NHLA has been an international organization since its founding. With more than 160 Canadian members, NHLA has quite a head start on going global.

For Canadian firms, almost all trade is international, including trade with the U.S., their largest trading partner. Trade regulations, custom requirements, the need to translate into different languages, and fluctuating currency values — these might be new challenges for many of us, but for Canadian lumbermen, it’s business as usual.

Acknowledging that the world grows smaller every day, the NHLA board is focused on protecting the NHLA brand overseas and promoting our sustainable resource. Our strategic direction is to be the voice of the North American hardwood lumber industry in Vietnam, South Africa, Dubai, Italy, or wherever North American hardwoods are sold. We hope to expand our strong partnership with AHEC promoting North American hardwoods internationally.

We’ve been teaching the grading rules overseas for more than a decade. Today, the NHLA rules are translated into Mandarin Chinese, French, and Spanish. Recently, NHLA hired a public relations consultant based in Singapore to help NHLA tell our story to the Asian trade press. This coming year, we intend to partner with a Chinese university to teach the 14-week grading curriculum.

The NHLA board believes an educated customer is a better customer. Our 2008 convention in San Francisco is being promoted overseas as “the global gathering of the hardwood community.” We hope to invite many of our international friends to attend. Going global is not a choice we take lightly, yet we believe being visionary requires building the NHLA brand overseas for future generations of lumbermen. Our roots are in North America, yet our lumber is sold globally.

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