He majored in International Trade at Choongang University, Seoul, South Korea, and obtained his Master’s degree in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the KDI School of Public Policy and Management. He served as an FDI specialist in Invest Korea’s Brussels office in 2006, and as a Director of KOTRA’s Buenos Aires office in 2007. Since 2009, as head of Invest Korea’s High-Tech Investment Promotion Team, he attracted many global high tech companies to invest in Korea. In January 2012, he was appointed as Director General of KOTRA’s office in São Paulo, Brazil. Since then, he has opened the Korean overseas investment support center and Korea logistic center in São Paulo.

KOTRA was established in 1962 as South Korea’s trade promotion organization by the Korea Trade Promotion Agency Law (Law No. 1059) and expanded its functions to include investment promotion in 1998. KOTRA is currently pursuing its twin mandates of trade and investment promotion to enhance national prosperity and competitiveness. The Board of Directors consists of 7 members (President, Controller, Senior Executive Vice President for Management Support, 3 Executive Vice Presidents (for SME Support, Strategic Marketing, and Business and Trade Information), and the Commissioner of Invest Korea. There are 7 External Directors. KOTRA spent about US$ 265 million in 2011 and has about 1050 employees (659 Korean staff and 391 local staff). KOTRA has opened an extensive worldwide network of overseas Korea Business Centers (KBCs). Today, KOTRA operates 120 KBCs in 82 countries.

KOTRA annually assists more than 20,000 companies, more than 99% of which are SMEs, as KOTRA essentially assists only SMEs.

- What KOTRA programs specifically support SMEs in their internationalization efforts? Do the services provided in the framework of these programs combine with each other, or with other KOTRA programs?

KOTRA supports SMEs through overseas market surveys, overseas marketing programs (sales, business trips and trade missions, through a KOTRA office that acts as an SME branch office -the “Jisahwa” program- that has a Korean pavilion at trade fairs), investment assistance (through providing information on investment procedures and processes, and on the investment environment, recommending law firms, and so on), and discovering relevant overseas business partners (joint ventures - J/Vs, merge and acquisitions - M&A).
All services are provided separately, but the Jisahwa program (a branch office service) is a package service that includes overseas market surveys, marketing support, and investment assistance.

- **What is the procedure according to which SMEs are selected for assistance? What specific criteria are taken into account?**

  All SMEs are entitled to apply for KOTRA assistance after completing the membership subscription process via the KOTRA website. There is a selection process for the Jisahwa program, trade missions, and trade fairs, which is based mainly on regional marketability. Any SME may apply for the services over the web, the application being reviewed by the relevant KOTRA overseas office in the country where the SME is applying for the services. Each overseas KOTRA office analyzes the SME’s capacity, marketability, and trade barriers, for potential conflicts with other Korean products. Once the SME has been accepted by KOTRA, it pays the fee and the service gets under way.

- **Does KOTRA perform sectoral or geographical targeting in supporting SMEs?**

  KOTRA performs sectoral or geographical targeting in supporting SMEs by organizing industry-specific trade missions, such as auto parts or marine equipment, or by sending trade missions to specific regions, such as Central and South America, the Middle East or Africa. With a struggling global economy, KOTRA is focusing on emerging countries, such as the BRIC countries, to increase export volumes and expand overseas markets.

- **What are the main challenges faced by SMEs when venturing abroad? Are these challenges different to the ones facing larger firms?**

  In contrast to larger firms, SMEs face many challenges due to a lack of resources like manpower, finance, and so on. The major difficulties associated with overseas marketing activities or establishing a business abroad for SMEs are a lack of market information and qualified labor with regional market experience. KOTRA endeavors to resolve these difficulties for SMEs growing their business in overseas markets by serving as a global business platform.

- **What role do the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) play in the internationalization process for the SMEs?**

  By utilizing information and communication technologies, KOTRA organizes cyber business conferences between Korean and overseas businessmen to help Korean SMEs develop business opportunities, thus overcoming geographical distances and promoting the internationalization of SMEs. KOTRA has built the KOTRA Online Payment Service (KOPS) to facilitate payment between Korean exporters and foreign importers. KOPS is a service that enables credit card payment for export goods. The exporter’s payments are deposited within 5 days. In addition, for cumulative transactions of less than US$50,000, the Korea Trade Insurance Corporation (K-sure) can automatically link with the unsettled bill compensating program. Payments to export companies are thus received safely and promptly.
How does KOTRA evaluate the impact of the services provided to SMEs?

Due to the physical limitations involved in evaluating the full impact of services provided to SMEs, KOTRA evaluates growth in export volumes and the number of first-time exporters among SMEs receiving services from KOTRA for a specific region, through statistics from the Korea Customs Service (KCS). KOTRA also conducts customer satisfaction surveys - “happy calls”- to evaluate the quality of services provided to SMEs. For this reason, KOTRA provides all-round supports not only pre- but also postevent, in order to boost the impact of services to increase the number of successful cases.

Please comment on three successful cases of internationalization of SMEs that received support from KOTRA?

There are many cases, but, recently, a Korean firm received its first order and decided to open a store in Brazil. The company in question is a sports mask manufacturer and visited São Paulo last April as part of a KOTRA trade mission, where it spotted a good market opening. It soon signed up for KOTRA’s Jisahwa service. In September, KOTRA supported its advertising campaign at São Paulo’s Salon Duas Rodas show and, in November, it dispatched its first shipment to the tune of US$32,000 while participating at the Brazil Cycle Fair. It now plans to open a shop in the Jardim Paulista, the heart of Brazil.

Can coordination of export and investment promotion policies be an effective means to foster the internationalization of SMEs (for example, through the development of local providers to multinational firms established in the country)? And the coordination between export promotion and other policies such as innovation promotion?

In the case of Brazil, global car makers need to comply with Brazilian government policies (Inovar-Auto), maintaining at least 60% of local contents. So it’s important not only to perform export promotion, but also to support Korean (auto parts suppliers/exporters) SMEs’ investment in Brazil. In fact, many Korean auto parts manufacturers supplying for original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) in Brazil are seriously considering localizing, and KOTRA is supporting them with investment environment surveys, factory locations, local hiring, and so on.

On the other hand, KOTRA does export promotion associated with other policies, such as technology innovation, as there is a limit to helping SMEs expand their business in overseas markets by focusing solely on export promotion. For example, KOTRA’s São Paulo office helps create a consortium composed of Korean and Brazilian companies, and research institutes to conduct joint R&D to develop 5G communications. It will help Korean companies that have participated in the development to find opportunities to export their products to Brazil.