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## Breaking through in China

D.C.-area consultant  
helps broker \$150M deal

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Staff Reporter

The Chinese have a saying: first we become friends, then we do business — a concept most Americans don't understand.

For a U.S. company to break in to the \$1.3 billion consumer market in China, it takes a friend.

That's what D.C.-area resident Bart Fisher is to CBQ.com, a Dallas-based, e-commerce company, and to the Peoples' Republic of China.



**Bart Fisher**

A friend.

Fisher was responsible for a deal between CBQ and China National Software & Technology Services Corp. Because of Fisher's contacts and knowledge of China's political and social systems, CBQ was able to acquire ChinaSoft, an affiliate of the China National firm for \$150 million.

Fisher is a man who wears many hats. He is general counsel for China in the United States, handling product dumping cases. He also heads Capital House, a Washington-based merchant bank.

More than 20 years ago, Fisher says he saw the future, and it was China.

"English, Chinese and software," Fisher said. "Those are the languages you are going to need to speak in the future."

China National Software & Technology Services Corp. is a Beijing-based, state-owned tech-

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nology company with 4,000 engineers ready to provide services for U.S. companies that are feeling a shortage of talent.

That role traditionally has been filled by high-quality, low-cost talent from India. Chinese engineers — a group yet untapped — earn 30 percent less than their Indian counterparts, said Alan Tonelson, a research fellow at the U.S. Business and Industry Council.

For his part, Fisher's filling the role of matchmaker — putting U.S. companies that need engineers in touch with the Chinese organizations that can provide them.

"You must talk to the right people in China," Fisher said. "There are layers of institutions in China: municipal, provincial and finally the Party."

And, that is in addition to the language barriers and customs that are fastidiously observed.

For instance, business often is discussed over a four-hour meal, which Fisher's partner J. Patrick Dowd says can be like a "scene out of an Indiana Jones movie."

"Bart was once bit by a lobster he later ate," Dowd said, with a laugh.

However, when the meals are over, business decisions come swiftly. Ultimately, the Communist Party makes the decision — usually within days, Fisher said.

CBQ's acquisition of ChinaSoft comes just two weeks after the World Trade Organization's proposal to allow China membership was delivered to the desk of every congressman in the United States.

Fisher expects several U.S. congressman will balk at the WTO's invitation to China, especially those from states like North Carolina, traditional home to the

textile industry.

Likewise, not everyone is happy with the kind of deal Fisher has brokered.

"Shipping services overseas undermines American labor and the middle class," said K.C. McAlpin, deputy director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a public interest group that supports workers' rights. "CEOs will get their big bonuses, but the work force is the one who will pay with lost opportunities."

When Fisher hears anti-trade talk, he just waves his hand and dismisses the notion.

He said, "American businesses aren't going to miss this opportunity."