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Length of experience is a much more important factor. International trade is both a difficult field of activity and one which almost anyone may enter. As a result, the casualty rate is quite high during the first years of activity. Only the fittest survive. Length of experience is therefore a definite sign of competence that should not be overlooked when selecting a trading house.

To the foregoing objective factors — market and product expertise, type of services offered, size, length of experience — which are fairly objective and easy to assess, two subjective dimensions should be added: reputation and motivation to serve.

Reputation is important. It is surprising to observe that manufacturers sometimes engage the services of a trading house without taking a fraction of the precautions normally used in choosing agents in their domestic territories. In addition to their lack of knowledge about exporting, these companies would place blind trust in a trading house about which they are ignorant. This would not be to the advantage of either party, nor to the overseas buyers.

Motivation, on the other hand, is not a dimension which can be checked with other parties. The individual manufacturing firm must assess for itself whether a trading house is strongly interested in carrying its products — in investing the time, energy, and money required to develop the sale of its products abroad. The motivational aspect will be most realistically assessed in direct discussions with the head of the trading house or trader who is taking charge of the products to be sold. Level of motivation will be reflected in questions about the products, visits to the plant, response to manufacturers' requests, etc. Motivation can be expected to increase when the personalities of trader and manufacturer prove compatible, and such a "fit" may be the best sign that a profitable business relationship can develop. The motivation and enthusiasm of the trading company will mirror the attitude of the manufacturer and the quality of their working relationship.

3. A list of trading companies should be drawn up on the basis of the above factors. Names of eligible companies can be collected from the DRIE directory, from the Council of Canadian Trading Houses' membership list and from the AMCEQ in Quebec. Trading houses accredited by the Council are highly recommended. If their reputations were questionable, accreditation would not have been granted. Nevertheless, although such accreditation does provide a certain guarantee, manufacturers are well advised not to stop their investigation at this point. Other sources of information to be considered are rating services such as Dun and Bradstreet, suppliers (past and present)