

Until now, other firms have opted to remain independent from the "big six" and develop decentralized strategies targeted toward certain market niches and based on mergers with similar firms in other provinces and countries (U.S., EC) that are in networks (e.g., BDO, Spicer & Oppenheim, Grant Thornton).

These networks respect the specific nature and freedom of decision of the various member firms more than the "big six" do. In Canada, they avoid centralized power in Toronto and are geared more to regional strategies. As a result, they receive support from the provincial authorities and from those who wish to maintain freedom of economic decision in the provinces and regions.

Niche strategies develop a strong regional presence and personalized services adapted to the needs of medium-sized businesses. They target international development in areas that have more in common with the province where offices are being opened. Quebec firms, for example, concentrate their international business development efforts in New England, France and Mediterranean Europe.

For the reasons noted regarding the supremacy of the "big six," such a

strategy would undoubtedly be impossible because the clientele is composed of large, internationalized enterprises introduced on foreign stock exchanges. However, the clientele of large firms, not situated in Toronto, comprises mainly medium-sized companies (as compared to multinationals) or small companies wishing to maintain the local representation and personalized service. This is particularly true in consulting, where medium-sized companies do not have the same needs as large enterprises. They require more follow-up and involvement by the consultants before the implementation stage.

Compared to their European counterparts, the principal asset of Canadian firms opting for this strategy is their size. It provides stature to invest in new consulting activities and to seek international alliances in those areas that may extend beyond the public accounting networks.

The vulnerability of this strategy compared to that of integrating into the networks of the "big six" has already been pointed out. Nevertheless, it corresponds with the two particularities of the Canadian context, a productive fabric of principally small or medium-sized businesses and pronounced regional characteristics. These factors create a strong strategy.