

The export strategy of Lowe Martin reflects his belief. Lowe Martin is an excellent sheet-fed general printer, but is taking only what it does best to the United States. The high-tech front end and digital imaging (DI) capabilities of the firm allow it to compete exceptionally well in the high-tech marketplace. As a result, its ideal export target market is any concentration of scientific and engineering firms. Once it has identified a concentration of such in a given geographic area, Lowe Martin will set up a U.S. office and sales rep.

As a rule, Canadian printers cannot supply general printing needs in the United States from their Canadian center of operations because of U.S. competition. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Lyle Henderson, president of Henderson Printing, in Brockville, Ontario, is successful in exporting general printing due mainly to being located in close proximity to the Canadian-U.S. border. However, even with proximity to U.S. markets, Henderson has run into the perception among U.S. buyers that there is "a wall at the border." This perception has two parts: first, the U.S. buyers believe that Canada is a faraway and foreign country and second, international trade is too difficult. As an example, Henderson approached a U.S. buyer just 50 miles from Brockville and learned that the buyer was working with a general printer in the United States over 150 miles away. The buyer admitted that the distance made it difficult to work with the present printer. When Henderson explained that he could complete the work in Brockville, the first reaction of the buyer was that Brockville was too far away. Once the buyer learned that Henderson Printing was much closer than his current vendor and that international trade was not difficult, the buyer decided to hire Henderson.

Auty Printing, in contrast, is a successful exporter because it has exploited its niche in printing promotional material. This does not mean Auty has given up on expanding its product line. Brian Auty plans to expand into the U.S. in-store custom signage market by making an investment in innovative signage technologies that will allow him to present new and significant benefits to U.S. buyers.

If a Canadian firm is planning to get into a U.S. market, it should plan to be the best supplier in that market. A good indication of whether or not a firm can be a market leader is how well it serves its own markets. Randy Pope of Lowe-Martin believes that a firm currently serving only 2% of its local market niche will probably not be successful when expanding or exporting. The firm should excel in its local marketplace before it attempts to expand to the highly competitive U.S. market.