

MOUSETRAPS AND MARKETS

It's been said that if you make a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door. Many Canadian products and services have been viewed as "better mousetraps" here at home and well beyond our border.

Canadians have given the world pabulum, the paint roller, insulin, the telephone, instant potato flakes, the cardiac pacemaker and, of course, Trivial Pursuit.

As a business person, you know there are two essentials to the sales process — something to sell and someone to buy it.

Something to sell

Assess your potential as an exporter by realistically examining your products or services in a global framework. Begin by asking the following questions:

- Who already uses your product or service? Is it in broad general use or is it limited to a particular group because of socio-economic factors? Is it particularly popular with a certain age group?
- What modifications are required for it to appeal to customers in a foreign market?
- Is its use influenced or affected by climatic or geographic factors? If so, what are they?
- What is its shelf life? Will it be reduced by time in transit?
- Does your product or service involve operating costs? If so, what complementary equipment or services must the customer buy?
- Does it require professional assembly or other technical skills?
- Is the packaging particularly expensive? Can it be modified to recognize the specific demands of the foreign customer? Does the product require

special documentation? These costs must be added to the unit cost to determine whether or not you can export at a competitive price.

- What are the technical or regulatory requirements? They may differ from country to country.
- What after-sales service is needed? Is it locally available or is it up to you to provide it? If you need to provide it, do you have the resources?
- How easily can the product be shipped? Would shipping costs make competitive pricing a problem?
- Will you be able to serve both your domestic customers and your new foreign clients?
- If domestic demand increases, will you still be able to handle the requirements of your export customers?

It may take time to find the information you need to answer some of these questions. Local sources can help, including public or post-secondary school libraries, export organizations, government departments and other exporters. With their assistance, you will have a clearer picture of your company's export potential.