

A NEW LOOK AT EXPORTING

The Prospecting Visit

Previous articles have shown that, without leaving Canada and without too much financial outlay, an exporter can conduct a serious documentary search that will provide a good deal of material to complete his market study.

After looking at all the available documentation, talking to the experts in the International Trade Centres and to the sectoral and geographical experts of the federal and provincial governments, and obtaining answers to specific questions from the trade commissioners abroad, you may find that some of the matters pertaining to your target market will require a personal visit to the country — unless you have placed your marketing task in the hands of international marketing consultants or international trade companies.

The purpose of the prospecting visit differs from that of the implementation or promotional visit. It is designed to:

- confirm the information collected in the study done in Canada;
- discover new elements;
- evaluate the market; and
- determine ways of setting the operation in motion.

The prospecting visit consists of two stages, making preparations in Canada and in the target country; and making contacts.

Preparation in Canada and in the Target Country

In addition to obtaining a passport, visas and airline tickets, you must obtain solid documentation on your company and on your products, including the price (cif) at their destination (local duty and tax included). Your factory price is of no value to a prospective client.

Be prepared to answer all possible questions — on the spot.

Giving samples is ideal, providing this is possible with your product.

Distance yourself from the "Canadian" mode of thinking and adopt a "mindset" appropriate to the country you are visiting.

You must plan and organize your program as much as possible, yet retain sufficient flexibility to react to the unexpected. Seek the opinion and the assistance of the trade commissioner whom you should visit as soon as you arrive. It is essential that you develop a rapport if you are to work together effectively on a long-term basis. The trade commissioner will help you organize the final stage of your visit — before you leave Canada.

Consider the language, cultural, religious and climatic characteristics of the people whom you are visiting. Do not expect them to automatically speak your language.

Establish a prospecting plan and see it through, even if the second person you meet seems to be an ideal partner. To "sleep on it" is a wise practice even in exporting. Looking at things from a distance may help you to realize that the one who needs your products the most is not necessarily the best client, partner or distributor.

Set an agenda and a clear objective for each of your meetings. Prepare written questionnaires. Obtain complete answers to any questions you might have. It will be too late to obtain further details when you return to Canada.

Establishing Contacts

Your prospective contacts must be chosen before you leave Canada and must have received your general documentation before you arrive. Your market study will enable you to determine whom to see, and the trade commissioner will help you complete or adjust your list — again, before your departure from Canada. Before leaving home, check the reputation of your prospects with the assistance of the embassy or of Dun and Bradstreet. It may seem a time-consuming, tedious process, but with this information you will avoid trouble and will be able to take a more personalized, more effective approach to your potential partners.

Special attention must be given to sending some good, general but personalized, documentation — in the prospect's language — on your company. This documentation must specify why you excel in your field. Who should make the prospecting visit? Any open-minded manager who is thoroughly familiar with the company and its product.

(A prospecting visit can also be planned in the context of a trade mission or participation in a trade fair. I will discuss these possibilities in a future article).

Careful preparation is the key to the success of a prospecting mission.

The Program for Export Market Development (PEMD) of External Affairs and International Trade Canada offers financial support for these visits. A number of provincial programs is also available.

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