

After-sales service is also important. Product life cycle is comparatively shorter in Japan and a Canadian exporter has to be more in touch with the Japanese market than may be necessary elsewhere.

The following are some of the common qualities that Japanese companies seek in their potential business partners:

- long-term commitment to a business relationship
- quality conscientiousness
- prompt delivery
- after sales service capabilities
- marketing support
- training for sales people
- constant communication
- user-friendly and labour-saving qualities

Preparation and Presence: Exporters to Japan will need, in the initial stages, to study the market for their products and the situation of competitors and to examine and evaluate distribution options. As their plans become firmer, they must be prepared to modify their product to local preferences, have manuals re-done in Japanese and produce promotional and similar literature specific to the Japanese market.

A permanent market presence is indispensable. Japanese customers, regardless of the product or service involved, simply will not deal with a supplier who does not have a local office able to deal immediately, in Japanese, with enquiries regarding technical matters, servicing, delivery problems, ordering and the like. In most cases, this need can be met through the appointment of a capable agent or distributor. There are, however, other options which could include setting up a local representative or sales office, establishing a joint venture, licensing production, etc.

If the choice, as it is in most cases, is to export through an agent or distributor, establishing a strong relationship with the Japanese partner is critical. Corresponding frequently and responding to correspondence promptly, while necessary, is far from sufficient. Distributors will generally expect their foreign suppliers to travel several times a year to Japan to discuss products, markets and strategies. Failure to do so is likely to be taken as indicative of a lack of seriousness.