

## Doing business in France

### **Canada has a positive image.**

Canada benefits from a very positive image in France. Canadians are perceived to be more human in business relations than Americans. Quebec enjoys a romantic image and Quebecois are always very welcome as "long lost cousins coming back home." The French tend to view Canada as Quebec and often forget that Canadians may not speak French, and are North American in their lifestyle.

### **Don't forget the French are patriotic.**

Foreign companies are often concerned by the degree to which there are protectionist attitudes in France. North American companies are more easily the targets of criticism, especially those that operate in sectors considered as "strategic". Canadians may be surprised by the range of sectors, such as paper manufacturing, that can be defined as strategic in order to justify some measure of protection from imports or foreign investment. The press may be quick to latch onto a foreign company making redundancies, but buyers will not be overly influenced by "buy French" arguments.

### **The ability to speak French is a 'must'.**

Knowledge of languages is not very wide spread. As a result, one has to speak French to do business in France.

### **Personal relations are more formal than in Canada.**

- The informal address "tu" and first names must be used with great caution. Judging when to start using these informal modes of address is an art that even French people find difficult. The best way to judge is to observe the way people talk to each other in a given environment. Inappropriate use of "tu" might irritate somebody who feels in some sense superior or deserving of a mark of respect. It might also mislead French colleagues as they would take it as a special mark of affection and might be disappointed that it is not the case.
- Another aspect of the formality of relations is the strong sense of hierarchy that prevails in most French companies. As a Canadian manager one must always bear in mind the restraint that staff will have when talking to you. It is quite difficult to implement a true "open door" policy in a French firm.
- Formality is also reflected in the way people greet each other. One must always greet people with a hand shake. A manager arriving in the morning and crossing an office might have to shake the hand of 20 people before being able to sit down. If this is not done, employees will think the manager either rude or cross.
- Similarly, although colleagues can become personal friends, it will be a long time before French colleagues invite their Canadian counterparts to their homes. And when they do it, the invitation will be very formal. It is quite common for a first invitation to be to a restaurant, rather than the home, and foreigners should not interpret this as lack of friendliness.