

Personal contacts. Personal contacts (i.e. usually by telephone) are by far the most frequently used source of information. These contacts include: commercial officers in embassies abroad, International Trade Centre representatives, sector experts in industry-specific government departments (e.g. mining, agriculture), and company representatives in foreign subsidiaries (for large companies).

During the discussion, participants mentioned that personal contacts meet their information and delivery needs for a number of reasons:

- Some people felt that personal contacts can provide information that could not be made available in hard copy or electronic format. For example, they could provide advice on doing business in a certain country which might be controversial if made available through public information services.
- Personal contacts can react more easily to specific questions and situations. *"...it will depend on your individual needs and specific requirements and you need people to intuitively react to the questions, or to become knowledgeable where they are being asked questions frequently."*
- The information obtained through personal contacts is the most up-to-date of any source. *"The information changes so frequently that it's not something that can be written down."*
- In general, information can be obtained quickly and easily from personal sources. Most participants expressed a preference for simply "picking up the phone" to get the information they need.

The research also showed that different personal contacts are used for different information.

- Business people felt that the **commercial officers¹** in Canadian embassies abroad were particularly helpful for their knowledge of a country's customs and associated business practices. *"They have the answers to the questions we don't know how to ask."*
- For some industries, sector-specific experts in government departments act as

¹ These officers are foreign nationals.