

Italians tend to be conservative in their business relations and appreciate a formal and polite approach. If your contact has a title (Dottore, Ingegnere, Professore, etc.) always use it. Handshakes, presentation of business cards and other trappings of the European business world are even more appreciated by Italians when they realize you are making an effort that is not normally part of the North American milieu.

Italian is the language of commerce in Italy. There are many businesspersons, particularly in northern Italy, who speak French or English but remember, as they are not their first language, idioms or rapid conversation will only confuse matters. For your initial visit, someone from the trade commissioner's office may be in a position to accompany you to assist in communications. For routine visits to established agents, you may wish to hire an interpreter.

Keep in mind that the Italian market is very competitive. Come to Italy with all the information about your product including c.i.f. prices and brochures (which are very important). If your brochures are printed in English and French only, translate at least the key sections (including technical descriptions) into Italian and append this sheet to the brochure. It is a small expense that will take your product a long way. In addition, use a freight forwarder to make a study of transport facilities (cost, mode, frequency, delivery time) to assist a potential buyer in evaluating the cost and benefits of your product. Be sure to use INCOTERMS when quoting (see "Trade Terms and Agreements" below).

The timing of your trip is very important. There are frequent trade fairs in Italy and other EEC countries and a visit coinciding with one covering your product sector will provide a unique opportunity to view the competition and obtain precious market intelligence not just on Italy, but on its neighbours as well. Also plan your trip taking into account the Italian holiday schedule. Besides the holidays celebrated in Canada (e.g., Christmas, New Year's Day, and Easter), Italy celebrates other national and religious holidays such as Epiphany (January 6), Liberation Day (April 25), Labour Day (May 1), and All Saints Day (November 1). It is especially important to note that most Italians still take their annual vacations in August, and thus many businesses are shut down for several weeks during the period from mid-July to mid-September.