

Company Services and Promotional Support

The type and quality of head office support a Canadian supplier can give to an agent ranges from service requirements to more tangible items such as product samples. Planning to hire a manufacturer's agent implies that provision will be made within your company team to respond to such needs as soon as the contract is signed, and before the first potential customer is contacted.

Examples of services that you should have in place to supply an agent's needs are:

- a ready supply of order forms, quotation forms and other administrative forms;
- speedy replacement of unacceptable merchandise for a dissatisfied customer;
- a plan for sales meetings and resources;
- visits by particular company staff to U.S. customers (engineer or quality control manager, perhaps);
- direct mail research questionnaires and analysis to test market reaction to new products or services;
- a plan for a system of financial bonuses or rewards other than commissions; and
- a system of financial discount allowances (by volume and type of customer).

The following are examples of tangible support a Canadian supplier should be prepared to give a U.S. agent. These items will vary according to the supplier's product and the type of customer on the agent's call list.

- Product samples
- Merchandising racks or other aids
- Good quality company brochures (in colour, preferably)
- Export price lists
- Product specification sheets
- Packaging size and design to suit various types of customers targeted, as well as national or state regulations
- Direct mail promotional sheets, possibly seasonal, if appropriate to your industry sector
- Advertising materials, e.g. camera-ready artwork for publication in trade journals

In some industry sectors, you might require the input of an experienced agent before you spend money on company support materials, such as brochures, that should be designed for a particular type of U.S. customer.

The client's needs may be different from those of your customers in Canada.

When a manufacturer's agent sees that you, the supplier, are ready to provide the types of support listed above, the agent will feel more confident about the future success of your relationship. An agent who is motivated by a good product, properly priced, and given the necessary supplier support services, can be expected to make more sales for the manufacturer during the introductory period in the United States than the agent who receives little communication from the Canadian manufacturer once the contract is signed.

Supplier Responsiveness

Responsiveness on the part of the Canadian exporter involves more than the support mechanisms given to the new manufacturer's agent described above. Any U.S. agent who has previously represented Canadian companies will ask you about the important question of responsiveness in any relationship with a supplier. The long-term considerations include such things as:

- adaptability to shifts in customers' tastes and preferences e.g. changes in product or packaging;
- a consistent approach to the U.S. market, regardless of whether or not the Canadian market for the product is soft in a particular time period;
- a willingness to consider ideas such as co-operative advertising; and
- provision to the agent of advance warning about interruptions in supply because of plant production problems.