Evaluating a Potential Partner

With the right strategic partner, you can reduce your market development costs, shorten your time to market and increase your chances of profiting from the U.S. market. Ask yourself the following questions to help identify the right partner for your firm.

Step 1: Describe your ideal strategic partner.

STRATEGIC PARTNER — IDEAL CHARACTERISTICS

Technical expertise	❑ *same as you*	❑ *complementary to you*		
Marketing expertise	❑ *critical*	❑ *nice but not necessary*	❑ *irrelevant*	
Financial expertise	❑ *critical*	❑ *nice but not necessary*	❑ *irrelevant*	
Insurance	❑ *critical*	❑ *nice but not necessary*	❑ *irrelevant*	
Type of customer	❑ *government*	❑ *private*	❑ *nonprofit*	
Size of customer	❑ *small*	❑ *medium*	❑ *large*	❑ *multinational*
Size of partner firm	❑ *small*	❑ *medium*	❑ *large*	❑ *multinational*

Geographic experience *In U.S.:* ______________________

Abroad: ______________________

World class performance *Meet* ______________________ *standards.*

Awards: ______________________

Track record _____ % on-time _____% on/under budget

Quality assurance

Step 2: Focus your search on the two or three characteristics that are most important to you.

Step 3: Determine the strategic implications of Step 2 by completing the following:

Because we choose to align ourselves with firms that ______________________,

we need to prepare by:

❑ Getting testimonials from the following customers: ______________________

❑ Getting referrals from the following customers: ______________________

Step 4: Determine who and where you will target based on your answers in Step 1:

Primary partnership need: ______________________

Ideal partners: ______________________

U.S. region or city: ______________________

Step 5: Potential partners can be identified by consulting the local Canadian trade commissioner; the appropriate industry directory or journal; the local press; a federal, state or local government official; the relevant industry association; or you may meet a partner at a seminar, conference, airport, etc.

Options for Local Presence

Convenient access to suppliers is very important to Americans. Therefore, many Canadian service exporters recommend establishing some form of local presence. There are many ways to do this, some of which take minimal investment.

1. An **800 number** provides easy access for customers and allows you to follow up on potential leads from your existing offices. As well, most U.S. cities have **local mail address** services that may offer 800 numbers and mail forwarding. For example, a Buffalo operation provides a corporate address, fax and telephone, a private voice mail box and monthly access to a conference room for approximately $75 per month. You would usually have no tax or business licence obligations with this level of service.

2. **Executive suites** are very common in most U.S. cities and may include an inexpensive marketing package to help you develop a local corporate image. These suites offer economic overhead through pooled secretarial support, office space, photocopying, mail handling and telephone answering services. Telephones are answered with your firm's name and you pay a monthly rental and phone answering fee plus additional charges for specific services used or furniture rented.

Costs of these services vary by region and by size of space. You are usually free to move within the building as your space needs change. You will probably find that is more economical to open your own office once you have more than five staff on site. You will usually have to apply for a business licence and submit income tax forms.