
IX. ITALY

Italy offers excellent sales opportunities to persistent and patient exporters.

Italy's industrialization has been rapid and spectacular. Since the late 1940s, Italy has gained a solid and well-deserved reputation as a producer of consumer goods (clothing, shoes, furniture, domestic appliances), chemicals, steel, sophisticated electronic goods, machinery and many other products that continue to be reliable and competitive on international markets. At the same time, Italy is resource-poor and must import most of the raw materials for industry as well as a large share of its requirements for foodstuffs — mainly cereals and meat.

When studying the Italian market, it is necessary to be both thorough and exacting. It is difficult to identify potential clients in a nation of more than 57 million with in excess of one million retail establishments and nearly 100 000 wholesale outlets. In addition, the country is somewhat polarized between north and south and there are different variables at work in each area.

Before visiting Italy, plan your objectives well. If your initial purpose is only to gather market information, it may not be necessary to make a trip. Given the proper data on your products, the Canadian trade commissioners in Milan and Rome may be able to do much of the preliminary marketing work. The Rome office is responsible for Italy from Florence south; the Milan office covers Italy north of Florence. General enquiries should be sent to both offices and the fact that such has been done should be clearly indicated in your letter.

If it is necessary to make a personal visit, carefully identify and indicate to the trade commissioner the type of contacts you wish to meet, i.e., a wholesaler/agent/distributor of the same products or of complementary products. If your marketing program envisages a licensing or co-operative venture in production, make this clear from the outset so that potential local agents can be made aware of your plans.

Trip Preparation

In preparation for your trip to Italy, a number of considerations are important.