

Communications with the trade commissioner should be by telephone, fax, e-mail or courier. Mail service to Mexico can be slow, and months could pass before two or three two-way communications were completed by that means. In spite of recent improvements, Mexico's phone lines are still unreliable, and faxes are sometimes lost in transmission. This leaves e-mail and courier as the preferred methods of communication.

Companies making inquiries should also be aware that complex questions can take time to answer in the Mexican business environment. Trade commissioners do not have ready access to the type of information considered commonplace in Canada. Corporate disclosure and public accountability by government agencies are only vague concepts. Information is often considered proprietary and is jealously hoarded. Thus, personal contacts are a much more important research tool in Mexico than they are in Canada. Even then, Mexican executives are often out of their office for a large part of the day. For all of these reasons, it is best to do as much research as possible before leaving Canada and to allow ample time for information collection.

VISITING MEXICO

Personal visits to Mexico are essential for a company to finalize its market entry strategy. Several trips are usually required. Before embarking on a move into Mexico, Canadian companies should be sure that they are prepared for the major investment of time and money that is required. Mexican business is conducted on a relatively formal basis and developing personal relationships can take time. Companies that have succeeded in Mexico almost always comment that the venture took longer and cost more than they expected. This kind of long-term commitment requires the full support of senior management. It also takes patience and perseverance to develop business relationships in Mexico's relatively formal business environment.

Canadians visiting Mexico are well received, but some of them have ruined a good first impression by failing to follow up. This can cause serious harm to Canada's reputation in Mexico, and it can also hamper the progress of more serious exporters. Moreover, the failure to follow good business etiquette can reflect badly on the trade commissioner who arranged the contact, and can impair his or her ability to use personal contacts in the future. As the company proceeds with its Mexican market entry strategy, it should keep the trade commissioner informed of its progress.

Understanding the Mexican business culture and learning to operate in that environment is an important success factor for prospective exporters. When visiting Mexico, company representatives should be on time for appointments, and formally cancel any that they can't keep. A follow-up letter to the Mexican contact is always appropriate, and a copy to the trade commissioner will help to promote a team relationship. Further information about the cultural aspects of doing business in Mexico is included in the Export *i* Mexican Knowledge Base.