

Do *your* HOMEWORK



Contracts don't just fall out of the sky.

Canadians hear only about all the deals signed on the mission, and that emphasis, say many of the business members, can lead to a false impression. It seems almost too easy — merely a matter of showing up and signing a piece of paper.

The truth is that a lot of hard work goes into making these trips successful.

“Don’t think that just because you’re part of Team Canada, business is going to fall into your lap,” says Ian Howard of Ecolo Odor Control Systems Worldwide in Mississauga. “It happens, but you’ve got to be prepared before you go down. It’s a fantastic advantage to have the Prime Minister and the premiers on your side, but they only set the stage and create the opportunities. It’s up to you to take hold of those opportunities and make them pay off.”

In other words, you’ve got to do your homework. As a three-time Team Canada trade mission participant and successful exporter, Bruce Friendship of Bayly Communications Inc. in Ajax has this advice for new exporters:

“Start by networking in Canada. Talk to or meet with experienced exporters that do business in your target country. Their knowledge and experience can help you avoid common pitfalls or costly ventures. They can give you a feel for how business is done in that country and explain the cultural nuances that you must be aware of.”

Thérèse McKellar of St. John Enterprises in Ottawa offers additional advice: “You need to be aware of the risks before you can reap the benefits of exporting,” she says. “What’s good about these trade missions is that you’re going with other businesses that have already done a significant amount of work there, and they know their way around. So you learn by being with each other.”

Team Canada 1998 helped James White to follow up with clients. “Generally our clients are governments,” says the two-time Team Canada participant of Wildfire Fire Equipment Inc., of Lachine. “Being on the mission with the Prime Minister and premiers gives us access to governments in these countries, which we wouldn’t otherwise have and which we need.” White is seen here at a Chilean demonstration of his products, and signing a scholarship agreement in Santiago with the University of Chile to advance the science of forest-fire management.

