

Organizing Your Time

Ask a seasoned exporter for the single most important factor in planning an overseas business trip and he will probably tell you that it is organizing your time. The inexperienced overseas business traveller frequently makes the mistake of either trying to do too much in a single trip or, at the other extreme, haphazardly, hopping aboard a plane with little pre-planning. Pre-organization of your trip is critical to its success and one of the first maxims of planning is to organize your time.

Experienced exporters will tell you that no overseas business trip, especially the first one, should last longer than two weeks. The veteran traveller will also tell you not to try to cover more than one or two countries in a single trip. Certainly, it is a temptation to add a country to your list because it happens to be next door to one you are visiting. Or perhaps because your ticket allows you the extra stopover. No matter. Resist the temptation!

Once you have decided what countries you are going to visit, work out a travel schedule. Find out what the most productive travel time is for the countries you plan to visit. The Canadian Trade Commissioner's offices in these countries can advise you about holiday periods and holy days. You should also check with the consulates in Canada of these countries for good and bad business periods. You would not, for example, plan a visit to the Middle East during Ramadan when business slows down considerably.

When you are making your itinerary, plan to spend at least three days in each place — a week, if it is a major market. It is a good idea to spend the first day or two on your own, walking about, looking and listening and, generally, getting a feeling for the place you are in. Visit large department stores, supermarkets, or manufacturing plants if yours is an industrial product. See what people are buying, what the product range is, where the products come from, their prices and quality. Assess the competition. Listen to the radio, watch TV and read the local newspapers. This will give you an indication of how the people live, the types of advertising that appeals to them and, most importantly, cues about how the society/marketplace conducts itself. Time taken the first day can spare

you many "faux pas" and give you a chance to get your bearings and recover from the inevitable jet lag.

Plan to visit the Trade Post sometime during your first day or two, even if you have not enlisted their aid in arranging your business appointments or receiving your mail. The Trade Commissioner has first-hand knowledge of the country and you can receive a great deal of practical advice on how the society/marketplace conducts itself. Moreover, he is then in a better position to assist you if this is required after your return to Canada.

If your travels take you to the Far East and you have spent some time observing the city in action, you will have noticed that the attitude toward time is rather more relaxed there. Whereas in Canada a 9:00 a.m. appointment means precisely that, in many other countries it may mean "around 9:00 a.m.". You may find that where you were able to schedule five or six appointments per day in Canada, you may be able to schedule only two or three overseas. Take this into account when working out your travel schedule. As well, in many of these countries, business practices are more formalized and the pace of doing business is much slower than in North America. In some countries, business etiquette dictates the wearing of a business suit, no matter how hot the weather. In others, you are expected to observe the proper preliminaries of tea drinking and exchanging small talk before you start talking business.

A final point to remember is that conducting business overseas can be very wearing on you. The combination of jet lag, strange hotel rooms, different sights, sounds, tastes and textures, all conspire to wear you out. Go easy on yourself; don't cram all your week days with business and your weekends with travel. Give yourself the occasional break to relax and rejuvenate. If you don't, the pace will tell and ultimately your trip may be less productive.

A Checklist for an Overseas Sales Visit

In exporting, there is no substitute for getting up and going to see the market for yourself. But a successful sales trip over-