

The LINK '92 PROJECT: Learning from Canadian experience in Europe

This is not another theoretical report on the slow but steady progress towards the Single European market. This is a practical document which draws lessons from the experience of several Canadian companies which have successfully established themselves in European markets. It is addressed to Canadian companies on the threshold of international expansion and offers them the opportunity to learn from the experience of those who have preceded them. The views expressed are those of the companies interviewed, and not the theoretical prescription of consultants.

The companies considered have all established a presence in the UK, though they believe that many of the lessons are transferable to other European countries.

The Link Project's objectives were:

- ☛ To understand how Canadian companies approached the European market.
- ☛ To identify the problems encountered by Canadian companies which succeeded in establishing a European presence.
- ☛ To identify the key success factors that facilitated the European expansion of these companies

Summary of key conclusions

- Building a European base can take longer than you expect. Be patient and persevere.
- Although closer in many respects to Canada, UK customs, markets and business ways are not identical. Most of the companies interviewed found the use of local nationals invaluable in bridging the culture gap.
- The UK is seen as an effective springboard for expansion into European markets, but your marketing or business approach may need adapting to suit local circumstances.
- Don't hold the reins too tight. Balance the need for control with the requirement of local managers to have reasonable autonomy.
- Pay thorough attention to integrating European staff into your organisation and company culture. Even relatively modest "cross-fertilisation" programmes have been found to be very effective, as well as boosting morale.

The document is divided into four main sections:

