

Total Quality the 'A' Key in Exporting

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Total quality has become the minimum global standard, allowing exporters to count on a stable clientele.

Two heads of successful businesses, one French, the other Canadian, spoke last year to a distinct audience of Quebec business persons. Both attributed their success to constant quality research and to the certifications of their clients.

Michel Bricaud directs Bronzacier, France's leading small-to medium-size manufacturer, in terms of total quality, of gearbox yokes, 50 per cent of which are exported.

Karel Velan also has made quality his trademark. The company which carries his name has become the world's second most important manufacturer of steel valves, globe valves and check valves. Velan serves oil exploration and production companies, thermal and nuclear power plants, sectors where the quality of products is vital to maintaining output.

"...the customer wants one assurance: prove to me that your business is going to consistently give me the quality I am seeking."

The concept of quality has evolved rapidly in the past few years. It no longer refers only to making a product conform technically to the needs of the client, it must answer several requirements: cost, availability, delivery, after-sales service — all of which must be continually improved.

When it comes to choosing a supplier, the customer wants one assurance: prove to me that your business is going to consistently give me the quality I am seeking.

That satisfaction must be given to the supplier or he will take his business elsewhere.

Many enterprises now have in their possession an evaluation manual on the quality standards of their suppliers.

A European automobile manufacturer, for example, demands that all his services be subject to very strict quality control.

Three of the directives circulated to all service departments of the business are:

- The function of quality represents the client and, consequently, concerns all organizational units, from marketing to after-sales service.
- The different services of the supplier are interwoven and coordinated in the application of such matters as consultation, purchasing, methodology, etc.).
- The supplier has a "Quality Improvement Plan" keeping him informed on work flow, ongoing activities, persons responsible, and the results obtained. All divisions of the company are involved. From there, the coordination of investment plans with training is assured.

Clearly, this involves much more than simple product quality control. The client wants the assurance that all of the supplier's facilities are focussed on meeting his needs, that the supplier is constantly improving the quality of the product, and meeting new and higher standards.

Nothing Less Than 'A'

This same European automobile manufacturer is very clear: "Our objective is to have only A-rated suppliers by January, 1993." In a word, only total quality is acceptable.

This business classes — on a scale from A to D — his suppliers according to the quality of their products and services. The A-rated

supplier is "capable of developing the quality assurance procedure or of developing new products using its own resources."

For this firm, a supplier with an A rating will be actively involved in its customer's business, thereby furthering its own development.

The classification of the supplier can also bring into focus the function of cost. The client can insist on stability or even a price reduction in the long or short term to encourage his supplier to maintain his market.

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In the context of global markets and international competition, the search for total quality has become a constant preoccupation.

International standards and Canadian exporters must tackle international competition more aggressively. To succeed, will require concrete, convincing evidence that they offer not only quality products but also efficient global management of their operations.

This implies certain fundamental changes in attitude and in the way of conducting business. For instance, to obtain and keep their market, they may be obliged to open their organizations to foreign 'quality auditors'.

Only if Canadian businesses include in their operations an ongoing thrust to meet their customers' quality requirements, will the "Made in Canada" label continue to be seen on international markets.