

Trade shows and missions can be a good way to meet potential clients and discuss opportunities. Take the following steps before, during and after trade shows and missions to increase your chances of securing business:

Step 1.

Plan ahead.

- a) Analyze how the trade mission fits with your overall marketing plan.
- b) Become knowledgeable about your industry in the United States, including trends, competitors, industry structure, industry associations, etc.
- c) Develop clear targets for business development in the U.S. market, including targets for the trade mission.
- d) Develop a list of questions you need answered on the trade mission and forward the list to the trade commissioner to help with planning.

Step 2.

Notify appropriate parties that you are coming.

Maximize the use of your time abroad by writing ahead to any contacts you may have, including potential customers and strategic partners, and industry associations. Be sure to let the trade commissioner know about your contacts well in advance of the mission.

Step 3.

Plan how you will follow up before you leave Canada.

You will be returning to piles of work in the office, and appropriate follow up can get postponed indefinitely. Before you leave, draft some standard follow up letters that will help you respond quickly and designate support staff to help you follow up.

Step 4.

Take plenty of company literature and business cards.

You will want to leave behind visual reminders of your firm and its services, so make sure that you don't run short of materials.

Step 5.

Send Professionals.

Since you won't have a product to demonstrate, make sure that you send professional staff to trade shows who are skilled in "boothmanship".

Step 6.

Be prepared for long days.

The U.S. business community starts the day with business breakfasts and ends the day with business dinners, so make use of these opportunities to meet contacts away from your booth or mission. At a booth, plan to remain on your feet and in active conversation for the duration of the show. Observe the practices and exhibits of competing firms.

Step 7.

Be prepared to act.

Make sure that you maximize your time abroad, taking advantage of free time to develop new leads or make some cold calls. If other firms are ready to talk specifics, be sure that you know what on-the-spot commitments you can make on behalf of your firm.

Step 8.

Research options for a strategic presence while you are there.

If possible, you should leave the United States with names of potential strategic partners and options for establishing a local address and phone number.

Step 9.

Follow up all possible leads.

Once you are back in Canada, follow up with all parties within 24 hours. You never know who might refer business to you in the future. Don't be disappointed if you don't win immediate business at a show or mission. Plan to return regularly to the region.

Step 10.

Follow up with the trade commissioner.

Trade commissioners can only help you effectively if they know what you are doing. So help them help you by keeping them informed and up to date.