

# Pointers

It may seem like carrying coals to Newcastle to compile a list of sales and marketing pointers for a successful business person. You could probably write the book on them yourself, but would it cover all the bases for marketing abroad? Because there are differences — some subtle, some not — between selling on your home turf and selling abroad, the following section has been included. The list is by no means a comprehensive one, but the tips included here have been learned the hard way, through trial and (more often) error by seasoned business people in their initial export marketing ventures. At the very least, this section can provide you with a partial checklist of things you know, but might overlook in the rush to export.

## Communicating Overseas

Language is the medium of communication whether it's by telephone, telex, cable, or by mail. Whenever possible, use the language of the recipient: it's courteous and gets you into your customer's office much faster. When you must use English or French, make it clear, simple and straightforward. Avoid North American idioms, colloquialisms and slang. (You know what "the bottom line" means, but your correspondent may not and may desperately try to decipher some hidden meaning from the final line of your letter.)

The letter, the oldest form of long-distance communication, may be slow, but it's sure. Both the sender and the recipient have a permanent and tangible record of what was communicated. Use letters whenever time permits and to confirm agreements and decisions reached over the telephone. The usual rules for domestic business correspondence apply internationally, but with a few added fillips:

- Make sure your letterhead clearly conveys your company name, address and postal code, your telephone and telex numbers and the word *Canada*. Not everyone knows what country Moose Jaw and Saskatchewan are in.

Whenever possible, use the language of the recipient: it's courteous and gets you into your customer's office much faster.

- If your letterhead lists branch office addresses, be sure you make clear to which address the reply should be directed.
- Unless the message can afford a leisurely ocean cruise, always ensure your correspondence abroad bears an "Air Mail" sticker on the envelope.
- Always personally (and legibly) sign your letters; your foreign customers want to know with whom they are dealing.
- If business trips keep you from the office for long periods, make sure someone is responsible for acknowledging any mail received in your absence.

When using telex or cable, note the following tips:

- Avoid the temptation to save a few pennies by using "telegrammatic" language. What you save in transmission costs won't equal the possible cost of the problems of misunderstandings. Keep it simple — it's safer and cheaper in the long run.

The letter, the oldest form of long-distance communication, may be slow, but it's sure.

- As with telephone calls, always confirm telex and cable messages by mailing a copy. It serves as confirmation and a reminder to both parties.

When using the overseas telephone, remember calls may often be answered by people unfamiliar with English or French. Speak slowly and clearly (but not patronizingly) using only standard language. You can always modify it to match the degree of fluency you perceive at the other end.

Electronic data exchange is coming but should not be used by the first-time exporter.