

Who Should Go? French ways of thinking and negotiating practices are unlike those of Canadians. Thus the choice of who should make the trip is of utmost importance. Depending on the purpose and the organization of your firm, it would be advisable to choose the business manager or the chief of export sales for market survey or sales promotion; a competent technical expert or an engineer if technical considerations are paramount; or the head of the firm if an important contract is to be signed.

The person chosen should be briefed on the business practices, geography and history of France. A keen interest in doing business with France should be evident to the prospective client — the French respect a healthy aggressiveness and an appreciation of their market. They also appreciate adaptation to local social graces, whether this means religiously shaking hands on meeting and parting, using titles rather than names (Monsieur le Directeur rather than Monsieur Smith), or attending a two-and-a-half hour lunch. First names are seldom used.

The English-speaking Canadian businessperson is well advised to have an interpreter if a French host cannot speak English. If your French is barely passable, don't use it because it could negotiate you into a jam.

Canadians should be familiar with their business, products and competitors; have practical selling experience; have some knowledge of financial and legal matters (the Canadian trade commissioners in Paris can recommend Canadian lawyers practising locally who are proficient in French legal requirements); and be familiar with the procedures of French and international trade.

Your Product. Quality, price and presentation are essential everywhere. You should also be aware of import regulations, duties and taxes, standards (CSA approval is not automatically accepted at CSA's equivalent, AFNOR), packing requirements, local production, import and export statistics, distribution methods, and consumer habits and tastes. One of the purposes of your trip will be to determine whether any adaptations or changes to your product are necessary.

Literature. It is important that you provide sales and technical brochures. These should be in French and units of measurement in metric units.