

The Marketing Trip:

Trade Commissioners Can Open the Doors

An introductory trip to a new, potential market abroad is a costly part of the start-up of an exporting program. In order to make it work effectively for the company and its representatives, it is essential to:

1. Do your homework: research the target market from your close-to-home resources (libraries, databases, seminars, news coverage, word-of-mouth).
2. Set realistic objectives: you cannot, in four days in Monterrey, expect to corner the Mexican market. You can learn what the market and business culture are like, by getting a sense of people, places, activities.
3. Create a schedule that will ensure that you will accomplish something, but keep it loose enough to allow time to respond to opportunities that arise on-site.
4. Maintain a frame of mind that is open and receptive, without losing sight of your absolute needs and approaches. The most valuable thing you can learn in a new market, such as Mexico, is the general business culture; the details will fall into place once you know how to deal with the people.

Of these four points, the first and last are things that can only be determined by each individual: if you live and operate a business in an isolated community, your direct research resources may be more limited than in a major centre, necessitating a longer period of time to complete adequate preparation. And attitude and temperament are in the hands of their owners.

But trip strategies and scheduling must be dealt with by everyone, whether a wealthy company with a good budget of time and personnel to travel, or a small operation where every penny invested today may have to come out of next month's projected earnings.

We will explore in this newsletter many individual aspects of setting up a successful marketing trip to Mexico. To begin with, we offer here a broad introduction to the Canadian exporter's best friend, Canada's Trade Officials in Mexico.

On a first trip, an essential stop for Canadian business people considering opportunities in Mexico should be the Canadian Embassy or the Trade Centre closest to the identified market. In Mexico, the Embassy is in the capital, Mexico City, and there is a Trade Office in Monterrey. Experts there can offer locally produced

material (much of which you may have acquired as part of your basic research, but perhaps updated since then), and a local "take" on the contents of that material, insights into the day-to-day workings of the market you are investigating, and some familiarization on the new environment you are encountering.

External Affairs and International Trade Canada has available over 40 sector-specific studies on Mexico, and more studies will be published in coming months. Once you have reviewed those relevant to your business, available in Canada from InfoEx, you may have detailed questions to put to the Trade Commissioner you meet in Mexico or Monterrey.

These officers can give you good advice on business practices, as well as offering market intelligence and helping you develop a good business strategy or work plan in Mexico. They can offer you a reality check on things imagined or an analysis of your objectives.

The Trade Commissioners can also introduce you to key business contacts: local agents, distributors, lawyers or potential partners whom you may wish at some point to contract as your representatives or liaisons in Mexico.

Trade officials can discuss local protocols, regulations, laws and business customs. Must you wear a jacket and tie in sweltering heat? How will a business woman dressed in slacks be received? Should you offer small gifts from Canada when meeting potential counterparts for the first time? Is there any prescribed "form" (as in Japan) for the presentation of business cards? Do you make small talk, or get straight down to business? If you do not speak Spanish, can you expect to meet English-speaking business people everywhere?

This, and solid information on a wide variety of markets, is some of what you can anticipate from your trade representatives in Mexico. Make them your first call (by appointment if possible; it's your time) and take advantage of the special skills they offer. They know where you've come from, and they know where you're going.

Access

Access, the monthly newsletter of the new Access North America (ANA) program, will examine opportunities for Canadian businesses in Mexico, introduce some Canadians already operating in the Mexican market, profile specific sectors, and notify readers of forthcoming events related to doing business in Mexico.

Your feedback will be welcomed; correspondence should be sent to **Access**, BCT, External Affairs and International Trade Canada, 125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ont., K1A 0G2, or by fax, (613) 992-5791.

For further information on the program, or a copy of a brochure on Access North America, contact InfoEx at 1-800-267-8376 (In Ottawa 944-4000).

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