



Our man in . . .

“Our man” (who is just as likely to be a woman) lives and works in Oslo and Buenos Aires, in Beijing and Buffalo and in all the major cities of countries throughout the world. A Canadian trade commissioner is a member of an extensive network of trade experts whose primary responsibility is to assist exporters like you to start and expand the sale of your products and services in a new territory. The Canadian trade commissioner is a public servant who is paid by the government, but works on your behalf.

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Keeping the trade commissioner in each of your foreign markets up to date on your export activities pays big dividends in costs reduced, pitfalls avoided and opportunities seized. Knowing what you must do and what the trade commissioner can and cannot do is essential to effective exporting.

You should provide your trade commissioner, in advance, with

- a summary of your company's activities;
- your previous export experience;
- precise descriptions of your product;
- your product's major selling features;
- the type of distributor you want;
- your tentative travel schedule;
- requests for introductions to or appointments with potential agents and/or buyers;
- five to ten copies of your sales brochures.

Your trade commissioner will help you determine

- whether your product can be imported into the market;
- the normal distribution channels for your product;
- whether there is local or imported competition for your product;
- the buying practices in the market;
- the kind and quality of market support services such as banking, shipping and storage;
- import policies and restrictions;
- how to quote in the market;
- social, cultural, business, market and political conditions.

When your marketing plans are completed and the trade commissioner has been informed of your intentions, he or she can help you market your product by

- canvassing and recommending local agents on the basis of their interest in your product; (always get the trade commissioner's advice before appointing agents. Local laws differ from Canadian practice and changing an unsatisfactory agent in some countries can be very difficult, is usually costly and sometimes impossible;)
- arranging to obtain credit and other business information on agents and local firms;

The trade commissioner can be your eyes and ears and, often, a welcome helping hand in an unfamiliar marketplace.

- recommending translation, legal, advertising and other support services;
- arranging meetings for future business trips;
- receiving your mail and messages during your visits;

- interceding on your behalf when problems of duties, taxes or foreign exchange arise;
- advising you on settlement of overdue accounts;
- maintaining contact with your agent and providing him or her with support and encouragement.

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There are some things, however, that the trade commissioner cannot do for you:

- Close the sale of your product for you. (The trade commissioner *can* promote and make the sales pitch for your product, recommend agents, research the market, make appointments for you, but actually closing the deal is up to you.)
- Be present at all your negotiations when you are closing a deal. (The trade commissioner *can* recommend appropriate technical experts to help you negotiate a deal.)
- Serve as your translator or interpreter. (The trade commissioner *can* help you find good ones to use.)
- Act as your agent. (The trade commissioner *can* be invaluable in helping you select effective agents.)
- Train or supervise your agents. (The trade commissioner *can* maintain a liaison with them and encourage them.)
- Act as your debt collector. (The trade commissioner *can* advise on the settlement of overdue accounts.)
- Act as your travel agency.