

CANADIAN TRADE COMMISSIONERS

Canadian trade commissioners live and work in Oslo and Buenos Aires, in Beijing and Buffalo, in fact in over 100 cities throughout the world. As part of an extensive network of trade experts, their primary responsibility is to assist exporters to get started or to expand sales in foreign markets. The Canadian trade commissioners are Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade employees working on your behalf in countries around the world.

It's a good idea to inform the trade commissioner in each of your foreign markets of your export activities. Keeping him or her up to date pays big dividends in reducing costs, avoiding pitfalls and seizing opportunities.

Before you contact a trade commissioner, here are some pointers on preparing yourself. 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 or service;
- the main selling feature of your product or service;
- the type of distributor or representative you want;
- your tentative travel schedule;
- requests for introductions to or appointments with potential agents and/or buyers;
- 5 to 10 copies of your sales brochure.

Your trade commissioner can help you determine:

- whether your product or service can be imported into the market;
- the normal distribution channels for your product or service;
- whether there is local or imported competition;

- the buying practices in the market;
- the kind and quality of market support services available such as banking, shipping and storage;
- import policies and restrictions;
- how to quote in the market;
- social, cultural, business, market and political conditions affecting sales.

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 representatives on the basis of their interest in your product or service. You are well advised to seek the trade commissioner's advice before appointing agents. Local laws differ from Canadian practice and firing a non-performing agent in some countries can be very difficult. It is usually costly and sometimes even impossible;
- recommending translation, legal, advertising and other support services;
- arranging meetings for future business trips;