

Shipping and documentation

The Internet hasn't done away with the physical movement of goods or the documentation that goes along with them. It can, however, let you transmit documents electronically, which is much faster than moving the information around on paper and is just as secure. Internet tools and systems can also give you better control of your shipping logistics.

Rather than trying to deal with document transmission or logistics management yourself, you'd likely be better off to obtain the service of an ASP specializing in this area. These companies can help you with the online implementation of processes like freight forwarding, securing insurance and clearing customs.

Getting paid

An e-business exporter can, of course, receive payment by any of the traditional methods. Retail customers, though, tend to pay by credit card.

However, sometimes credit card payment is not possible or advisable. In this situation, you might consider using the services of a company that, for a transaction fee, obtains the customer's payment and then remits it to you. These specialized businesses often integrate their payment systems with services such as:

- creation of online storefronts including catalogues, stock control and order processing;
- fraud protection;
- multilingual and multicurrency support;
- letters of credit; and
- online, real-time transaction processing.

Providing customer support

Support for your customers is crucial to ensuring repeat business. You can do this, of course, through traditional methods such as telephones, faxes and the postal system. However, fast response to customer concerns is so important that you might be wise to invest in *electronic customer relations management* (eCRM). Several ASPs specialize in this area and may provide the services you need more economically and effectively than an in-house solution.

E-business solutions can give you a competitive edge in the export market through more efficient communications, cheaper ways of marketing your product or service, better customer relations, lower distribution costs and more effective ways of finding business opportunities. E-business has great potential, and you owe it to yourself and your company to look into it. It may be exactly the export strategy you've been looking for.

Protecting privacy and personal information

Canada's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) sets the rules that a business must abide by when it collects, uses or discloses personal information in the course of commercial activity. These rules will be fully in force as of January 1, 2004 and Canadian companies must comply with them from then on. Organizations subject to a provincial law that has been deemed substantially similar to the PIPEDA will be exempt from its requirements for all intra-provincial transactions. You can obtain more information about privacy issues from the Web site of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada at www.privcom.gc.ca.