



## Canadian Rep Looks To China

Last fall the front page of one of Canada's major newspapers, *The Toronto Globe And Mail*, asked the question: "Can you understand this?" The answer that followed was: "If not, you better learn in a hurry!"

What that relatively simple question and answer referred to were the Chinese letters in large type across the top of the page.

The daily newspaper went on to carry several articles about China, including:

- A users' guide to conducting business in China.
- Developing an effective China strategy.
- How China's economic/business empire continues to grow.
- The growth of high-tech in China.

This all underlies what Tom and Gord Jopling, Mechanical Sales

Company, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, have experienced during three trips to China — two MANA-sponsored study missions and one additional trip they conducted on their own.

In recounting his experiences and thoughts that followed his three trips to Asia, Tom Jopling notes, "The great benefit to us by beginning our experience on a MANA-sponsored trip was the fact that we got our feet wet. As a result, during succeeding trips we lost our fear of doing something new. By that I mean the normal concerns you have, like: Where are we going? How do we communicate?"



Tom Jopling (seated), president, Mechanical Sales Company, goes over a recent proposal from a Chinese manufacturer with Gord Jopling, sales rep.

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Where are we going to stay? How do we contact manufacturers? That was all taken care of by MANA. In addition, that first trip brought a lot of Chinese people (i.e., manufacturers) to us. Certainly more than we could have ever contacted on our own. I'm not saying all the contacts turned out well, but we were allowed a period of time to evaluate our contacts."

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#### **MANA Study Mission**

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The Joplings followed that first MANA venture with a trip on their own. "We completed extensive touring, revisited many of the manufacturers we had initially met and made many more contacts." Following that trip, MANA announced its second study mission, which the two reps decided they would also take part in. "This time, however, we decided to extend our stay and joined the study mission over there. Overall, we spent about a month in China."

Jopling points out that the study mission was especially beneficial in that it brought many more manufacturers to them than they could have contacted on their own. "In addition, we had never been to Guangzhou. Following the study mission, we stayed on, confident

that we could conduct additional business on our own." While Guangzhou didn't result in the type of contact he was looking for, Jopling notes, "We did get a surprise when an individual contacted us saying he wanted to buy product from Canada. That really shocked us. We quoted him, and he also wants a quote on business for next year."

He adds that his trips to China have also laid the groundwork for a solid relationship with a North American principal that manufactures product in China. "This allows us to have North American pricing and warranties and relieves us of any responsibility for establishing a buy/sell arrangement."

Just as important as establishing relationships, Jopling explains that his experiences in China have reaffirmed his agency's philosophy of avoiding buy/sell arrangements. "What we've done in this area is to go back to something we learned in our CPMR training. That is to make a plan, establish relationships and then obtain an agreement with a principal. That's the process we've always followed. What this allows us to do is to operate, by definition, strictly as an independent rep."

From his perspective as the only Canadian rep that participated in the two MANA study missions, Jopling says, "We were placed in an advantageous position in that we were the only ones. No one else who represents principals country-wide in Canada was there. As a result, we learned a lot we could put to use."

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#### **Benefits of Local "Feet On the Street"**

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As a side benefit to his China

trips, Jopling explains that his time spent there has taught him the benefits of having someone local available to smooth the way. "We established a relationship with a young lady who was one of our translators. We've even had her come over here and taught her all about our business. She is continuing with her education but also does some work for us. When we are in China she travels with us and does some translation for us. While she doesn't go out in the field looking for product, she will visit someone and explain what we are looking for and how we conduct business.

"Among the lessons we've learned from this experience is that anyone looking to conduct business in another country needs someone they can trust. That's important in terms of being able to communicate and explain what's really going on. Too often in another country when you think something is 'black,' when it's translated, it's really 'gray.' That can really affect the business relationship. Also in China, when someone nods, you think that means agreement or understanding. The thing is, everyone nods all the time there. But having her with us allows us to gain a full understanding concerning what has been communicated.

"Having someone familiar with the culture, language and habits is extremely important, especially when a foreign language is involved. It allows you to cut down on potential mistakes. In addition, the fact that you're making the extra effort to invest your time with someone local is a definite sign of good faith."

Overall, Jopling notes he feels very optimistic about his experiences in China and will go back again if given the opportunity.

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