

Questions & Answers
DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL CREDIBILITY

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To help in designing your export strategy, the following ten questions and answers provide tips on quick ways to build your credibility in new markets.

1. How can I establish international credibility for my service firm?

The single greatest challenge you are likely to face if your firm is not known in global markets is being accepted as a credible provider of quality services. To build that credibility, there are three general strategies that you can use:

a) *Objective verification of your competence through:*

- Public presentations and speeches
- A competitive online presence
- Appropriate licenses/certifications for professional staff
- ISO 9000 registration for your firm's quality assurance system
- Awards to your firm or professional staff for excellence
- Publications by professional staff
- Listing of your firm in well-known prestigious directories
- Media coverage of your firm's activities
- Strategic alliances with known industry leaders
- Participation in online discussion groups

b) *Personal guarantees of your competence through:*

- Referrals from well-known contacts
- Testimonials from satisfied customers
- Industry association membership

c) *Your presentation image:*

- Your "benefits" statement
- The quality of your website and other promotional materials
- Your sensitivity to cultural factors

2. How can I develop my network abroad?

Because a strong network is so useful, it is essential you approach networking systematically. Just as you have plans for business development, you need to have specific plans for developing and sustaining your network of contacts for your target market. In order to develop a good network in your target market, you should be able to answer the following types of questions:

- In which organizations/events do we need to be visible?
- In which online discussion groups do we need to be visible?
- What kinds of referral sources do we need, and where/how can we meet them?
- Who can influence potential clients to choose us, and how can we meet them?
- Who are already “advocates” for us who can introduce us to others?

The most efficient way to develop a network is through attending international events that bring people of similar interests together: professional conferences, international seminar, etc. Once you have had a chance to make new contacts, be sure to follow up to nurture the relationship.

To make sure that your networking efforts are effective, develop a tag line so that contacts can refer business to you: “When you hear of, think of us.”

3. How should I position my service?

Usually you will position an export service similarly to your domestic positioning, which would be one of the following:

- Efficiency
- Value for money
- Quality of service
- Customization of service

If you are presently positioned based on low price instead, you may want to rethink your export positioning. It is very difficult to be profitable competing on price in an export market since you inevitably have higher costs than do your competitors in the target market.

4. How can I create an effective benefits message?

To prepare your benefits message, you need to think through how to answer the explicit question of, “What do you do?” while also answering the implicit question, “Why should I buy your service?” Your benefits message needs to be no more than three short sentences and address the following:

The service we provide ... [a concise statement that will be meaningful]

We are different from our competition ... [how you differentiate yourself]

What this means for our customers is ... [the primary benefit(s)]

Remember that the other party doesn’t really care about the “features” of your service or service firm until they are sufficiently engaged in wanting to do business with you.

5. What is important about my website?

Because your website is used as a proxy for your service delivery capabilities and your service quality, it is your primary online competitive tool. You need to make sure that your website:

- Can be found through various search engines.
- Is always “up” and accessible.
- Loads quickly.
- Is user friendly in its navigation.
- Provides immediate value to the customer.
- Supports your competitive positioning.
- Contains appropriate logos of your memberships or awards.

6. What kinds of promotional materials will I need?

At a minimum, you will need business cards and some written description of your capabilities, the types of customers you serve, and the types of benefits you provide. Depending on how you usually acquire new customers, you may also need:

- Promotional brochures
- Copies of articles you have published
- Copies of media coverage of your firm or yourself

Increasingly, customers expect to be able to learn about your company online so make sure that your online presence is updated regularly.

7. What should my promotional materials contain?

Remember that potential customers are looking for reassurance that you can successfully meet their needs. It will help to have culturally-appropriate content such as:

- Benefit messages (“here’s what our service can do for you...”)
- Competitive positioning messages (“here’s how we are different from others”)
- Testimonials from satisfied customers, including government agencies
- Capabilities of your firm
- Experience in similar markets
- Sample list of former customers
- Awards you have received or prestigious appointments
- Quality assurance certifications
- Industry association memberships
- Quotes from media coverage

Your website should contain similar information along with material that is educational or helpful to the visitor.

8. What information do I need on my business card?

Your business card is your most important marketing tool unless you only work online. The type of information it contains not only helps people contact you but also can reinforce your competitive image. At a minimum it should contain:

- Your name, along with relevant professional designations or degrees
- Your position title
- Your company's name and logo
- Your address, including country
- Your phone and fax numbers, including country and city codes
- Your e-mail address and corporate website

Depending on the market, you may find it helpful to make your business card bilingual with your main language on one side and the major language of the target market on the other.

A word of caution: A bilingual format, which combines two languages on one side of the business card, can be confusing in markets where potential customers do not speak either language as their native language.

9. Are my marketing materials of an appropriate quality?

You want to be sure that your promotional materials (including your web presence) convey a worldclass impression. To test them, you can do the following:

- a) Select sample service firms in your target market and review their promotional materials. Are yours at least as sophisticated?
- b) Show your promotional materials to colleagues familiar with the target market and ask for their opinion.
- c) Try to look at your materials as if for the first time. What impression do you get?

Be sure that your materials are grammatically correct and printed flawlessly, are easy to read, and are in colours that are appropriate for your target market.

10. Do I need to translate my materials or can I use what I have?

Unless the main language of your target market is the same as your current business language, you will need to get at least your primary promotional pieces translated. Try to hire a certified translator from the target market, familiar with your industry, as usage and idioms differ from country to country. Also, keep in mind that you need not do a literal translation but rather a translation that captures the spirit of what you are trying to convey. To ensure a quality translation, you need to pay also for the text to be "reverse translated" back into the original language to double check the translation.

There are now online sources of translation that can be excellent quality and quite affordable. For casual use or to check a term, there are free services such as *babelfish.altavista.com*. For professional paid translation, check out e-marketplaces like *www.elance.com*.