

Questions & Answers
FINDING INITIAL CUSTOMERS IN EXPORT MARKETS

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To help in designing your export strategy, the following ten questions and answers provide tips on how to leverage your network of contacts to develop export markets and locate potential new customers.

1. How do I develop a reputation within a specific foreign market?

You will find that you need to focus both on international credibility building activities and on activities in the target market:

General international strategies:

- Speak at international or regional conferences attended by decision-makers from your target market.
- Publish articles in the international journals consulted by persons in your service industry.
- Win an award and publicize it.
- Provide expert advice through an industry e-marketplace or one of the free advice websites.

Strategies specific to the target market:

- Develop a clear marketing message, appropriate to the market, that answers the question, “Think of us when....”
- Adapt your promotional materials as appropriate to the target market.
- Identify people that you know who can refer you to decision-makers, potential strategy partners, or potential customers in the target market.
- Join the service industry or trade association in your target market and participate on a committee.
- Submit articles to local trade and industry media, including association newsletters, trade journals, etc.
- Arrange speaking opportunities in your target market (e.g., conferences, graduate programs, association events, etc.).

- Participate as an expert in online discussion groups on national or regional portals.

2. How do I find out which trade events would be best for me to attend?

If possible, develop an ally within the target market (perhaps a potential strategic partner) who can advise you on a range of issues. You will want to be sure to select the events you attend carefully so that you use your time and resources wisely. Other possible sources of information:

- Colleagues who know the target market
- Websites of relevant trade or industry associations
- Government trade development officers
- Trade journals and newsletters

3. How do I prepare for an international trade event?

You will want to think carefully about what your objectives – why are you participating in the event? Then support those objectives by:

- Getting a preliminary list of participants and contacting those you want to meet.
- Participating in any pre-conference online discussions or networking facilities.
- Getting onto the program as a speaker or discussant so that you are more visible.
- Modifying or translating your promotional materials as appropriate.
- Preparing media kits to be left in the media room.
- Taking advantage of your travel to meet with prospective contacts along the way.
- Making sure that you will have plenty of business cards to distribute.

4. Should I join an industry or trade association in my target market?

Joining an industry or trade association in your target market can provide you with the following benefits:

- Credibility by being listed in their directory
- Information on local issues and events
- An easy context for networking

- A way to find suitable local partners
- A way to become “known” by participating in association events

5. How can I get referrals?

Ask! It is as simple as that. Often we forget to ask our customers and others who know our service if they will refer us to others who might want to use our service. So begin by asking customers who know your services well and are most likely to want to help. Also ask anyone else interested in the success of your business – e.g., your banker, your accountant, your business mentor. If there are other domestic firms that you have helped in the past, ask them for help with referrals into your target market.

6. How do I identify who my customers could be?

You will probably find that you use the same strategies in an export market as you do in your domestic market. Here are some ideas:

- Practice active listening through your networking efforts to uncover complaints, identify unmet needs, etc., and determine who might be willing to pay for you to meet those needs.
- Ask your contacts who know the target market.
- Focus on developing a local strategic partner and then tap into their network.

7. How do I get potential customers to notice my new service?

Again, you will probably find that most of the strategies that you use domestically also work in your target market. Here are some ideas:

- Give talks about the issues that your service addresses.
- Develop some small service that you can provide so that customers can “test” your service delivery.
- Implement a demonstration project.
- Develop a media profile through articles about your service.

With the advent of e-trade, you also have the following options:

- Participate in reverse bid sites where potential customers post requests for service.
- List your firm in relevant online directories of service suppliers.
- Create links between your website and e-markets where potential customers might look for a service supplier like your firm.

- Promote your online presence.

8. What if I want to bid on foreign government contracts?

In many markets, government contracts are reserved for local firms. Generally speaking, services trade agreements exclude government procurement. You should ask your government trade officers about what kinds of contracts you could realistically acquire. The easiest way to get such a contract is as a subcontractor to a local strategic partner.

You may also wish to check various online bidding sites where governments post requests for proposal that are open to firms from foreign markets (e.g., www.worldbid.com). Your government may also have a website that matches domestic products and services with thousands of business opportunities posted by domestic and foreign corporations and governments.

9. What if I want to bid on development projects?

You will want to see if your government can provide you with assistance on:

- How to supply your goods and services to development and humanitarian projects.
- Where to find project financing and guarantees for your investments in developing and transition economies.
- How other companies are thriving in this market.

If you want to do work for an international financial institution (IFI), you need to become registered with the appropriate IFI, which you can do through the appropriate website:

World Bank	www.dgmarket.com/dacon
African Development Bank	www.afdb.org
Asian Development Bank	www.adb.org
Caribbean Development Bank	www.caribank.org
Inter-American Development Bank	www.dgmarket.com/dacon

On the websites above, you will also find listings of upcoming projects and their status, as well as downloadable bid documents. Project listings for the World Bank are at www.worldbank.org and for the Inter-American Development Bank are at www.iadb.org.

Initially, you may want to contact established firms that have won contracts and offer your services as a subcontractor. Working for a knowledgeable prime contractor can give you valuable experience and allow you to establish a track record of success so that you are more attractive as a bidder in the future.

10. How can I find out about other international bidding opportunities?

Check the website of your government's international trade department for online access to market information, business opportunities, and the ability to make service requests.