

Exporting for small businesses: 10 Top Tips

📅 4 March 2016 (<http://blog.sage.co.uk/index.php/2016/03/exporting-for-small-businesses-10-top-tips/>) 👤 admin
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Thinking about exporting as a small business can seem a bit daunting – there's lots to learn, and you still have a business to run. But lots of UK businesses are making a success of trading overseas, and there's plenty of help and advice on hand. Follow our top tips to exporting with your small business.

1. Develop your networks

You don't have to be an expert to start exporting – you just have to know a good place to start. Build up your network of people who can help and advise you. [UK Trade and Investment \(UKTI\) \(http://www.exportingisgreat.gov.uk/?utm_source=Sage&utm_medium=blog&utm_content=toptips&utm_campaign=Sage\)](http://www.exportingisgreat.gov.uk/?utm_source=Sage&utm_medium=blog&utm_content=toptips&utm_campaign=Sage) is a good place to start. They have a team of local and industry specific advisors happy to share their experience and knowledge, and they can help you connect with other professionals too.

[HM Revenue and Customs \(http://www.hmrc.gov.uk\)](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk) can advise on things like licenses and taxes, while the [Intellectual Property Office \(http://www.intellectual-property.gov.uk\)](http://www.intellectual-property.gov.uk) can give you advice on protecting your IP rights. Other sources of help include your bank, accountant and lawyer.

2. Do your research

There will be lots of things you'll want to know, about markets, customers, trading options, customs, costs and much more, so make time for fact finding and research, and use your networks to help you. For example, UKTI have a series of [exporting guides \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/exporting-country-guides\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/exporting-country-guides) to countries all over the world.

Check that any facts, figures and opinions are up to date and reliable. The world is always changing and opportunities may emerge in new places at any time. Online research is a good starting point, but as you start to develop your business opportunity, it may be worth commissioning specific research relevant to your needs.

3. Develop your strategy and keep it alive

After doing your research, draw up your export plan. This should include:

- Route to market – how you'll distribute your products and services
- Business model – will you use agents, distributors, a subsidiary or sell direct?
- Marketing strategy – how you're going to promote and develop your business overseas.
- Finances – costs and income forecasts

Like any business plan, this is something you should review and update regularly.

4. Select your partners carefully

It's important to choose the right people to help you develop your business internationally, especially those in the country you're selling to.

For example, the UK has very robust regulations around bribery, and you can find yourself liable if one of your agents or partners abroad doesn't comply with the law. Build up a relationship of trust and ensure any agreements are well understood and communicated.

5. Select your market

There are plenty of opportunities for UK businesses to export. Many begin by entering established markets such as the European Union. While the USA continues to be the number one market for UK exports, it's a big place, so targeting specific states or areas can offer the same market opportunity as exporting to another country.

Growing economies around the world, including China, Brazil and India are attracting increasing numbers of UK exporters, but there's more to choosing your market than just selecting a high performing economy.

Demographics, competition, costs, distribution networks, legal considerations and taxes may all have an impact on your choice. Check out our article on key things to consider when [selecting an export market \(http://www.sage.co.uk/business-advice/growing-and-running/marketers-guide-to-exporting\)](http://www.sage.co.uk/business-advice/growing-and-running/marketers-guide-to-exporting).

6. Adapt your website

If you already have a UK website you may need to make some changes to make sure it has an impact overseas.

Think about setting up a domain for the country you're trading in and invest in a proper translation service for your content. If you sell online, you'll need to make sure your e-commerce system can handle foreign currencies, and incorporate international shipping costs.

7. Research costs and pricing

Are you planning to charge the same price for your goods and services as you do in the UK? You could be missing out on sales by setting a price that's too high for your market, or missing out on profits where the market would sustain a higher price.

Prices for common goods vary around the world, according to the market conditions, even for global companies. Check out this [guide to the cost of a Starbucks coffee \(http://visual.ly/prices-compared-worldwide-starbucks-cappuccino-grande\)](http://visual.ly/prices-compared-worldwide-starbucks-cappuccino-grande) in different cities around the globe.

You'll also need to factor in the costs of exporting your product or service to ensure you can make a good return on your export investment.

8. Prepare your pitch

As your business export plans develop, you'll be meeting lots of people, so it's important that you can explain what your business can offer, and what it can do for their business, clearly and succinctly.

Think of it as your elevator pitch, or one minute opportunity to capture their attention and explain what's great about your business.

9. Experience the culture

You can do all the research (and we encourage you to do plenty), but there's no substitute for living, breathing and experiencing first-hand the environment that you're doing business in.

Plan to visit regularly, using face-to-face meetings to build relationships and to learn about the different ways of doing business.

10. Patience, persistence and passion

Setting up your business for export takes time, resources and energy so be prepared to contribute all three for success.

Take your time to get it right and make sure it's something that you really want to do for your business. Do your research, make the right connections and pursue your dream of export success.

Looking for more advice and support to export for the first time? Join us and UKTI in our [#ExportingisGreat \(http://www.exportingisgreat.gov.uk/?utm_source=Sage&utm_medium=blog&utm_content=toptips&utm_campaign=Sage\)](http://www.exportingisgreat.gov.uk/?utm_source=Sage&utm_medium=blog&utm_content=toptips&utm_campaign=Sage) campaign – the demand is out there.

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