



EXPERT EXPORT GUIDES

MAKING THE FIRST VISIT TO YOUR TARGET MARKET

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In the article 'Taking your first Steps into the Market' we looked at how to identify potential clients and approach them. After you've made contact and generated some interest, what then?

Once you have a few planned meetings it is time to make that first all-important visit to your target market. It is important to plan this carefully and to allow time in your schedule to slot in other meetings/contacts that you unearth whilst in the country.

It is a good idea to try to arrange the first visit around a relevant trade show or conference. This will bring key players in your industry together and allow you to make contacts, arrange meetings during your visit. It will also give you a good feel for the movers and shakers.

This first visit will be as much a fact-finding trip as a direct sales effort, although obviously sales are the ultimate objective! On this visit it is important you gain a feel for the market and the key players for example. Talk to as many people involved in your industry as possible, whether they could be direct customers or not. Make an appointment to see the relevant trade body, perhaps the government department, your country's local embassy commercial section.

Be well prepared for the meetings. Know who you are talking to, find out as much about them and their business as you can beforehand. LinkedIn is a great tool for this. It is important you appear knowledgeable and interested in them.

At the same time ask them lots of questions. Prepare in advance the information you want to gather and create a checklist for yourself to make sure you cover everything. That time in front of your contact is precious.

Remember however you have two ears and one mouth for a reason! Listen twice as much as you talk. Listen carefully to everything that is said, and not said during the meetings. Be attentive and aware. Pick up on the little things your contact says which may point you in the right direction as to what is important to him. Learn how you can tailor your Value Proposition to his needs. Picking up on the subtleties can be the difference between success and failure.

Always ask who else you should be talking to during your visit. Ask for their advice. Your contact will like to feel important and to appear well-connected. Ask who they would recommend as a distributor/agent if that is your preferred route to market. Build up your contact list and try to see as many people as possible during this visit. The evenings are also part of your working day on this trip. Use them by inviting contacts to dinner and drinks. You often find out a lot more this way! Not to mention often making good friendships which can last for years.

Don't ignore the younger, more junior people in the organisation either. You never know where they will end up. Being friendly and interested in them can be time well invested for the future. I became friends with a young, junior engineer in Egypt 15 years ago who within a few short years was head of department and then moved on to set up his own successful business. All through that time he made sure he included my company in any tenders and even when I changed industries has helped me find the right contacts. Such contacts are truly invaluable, not to mention rewarding.

Whilst we have said this is very much an information gathering and introductory visit, be on the look-out for opportunities to secure trial orders. Ask the question 'Do you have any requirements at the moment where you could try out our product/service?'. Even a small order is a step in the right direction and can be worth their weight in gold. More on that in STEP 6.

Once you return home you will no doubt have a long list of things you promised to do for the people you met, whether that is sending extra information, samples, technical details, whatever you have said make sure you do it, quickly and efficiently. This is your first opportunity to show what a good company you are.

Always follow up, keep the contact going. Often you can have what appears to be a really positive meeting but then when you return home it's hard to get any response from the contact and things seem to stall. There can be many reasons for this, but don't be put off. Keep pressing, suggest a follow up conference call and dates for the next meeting.

In the first 6-12 months it is very important to be seen to be consistently visible in the market. Convince the customers you are there to stay and they can rely on you if they do decide to change suppliers. Avoid the 'touch and go' selling. Visit the country often. Make it your second home.

This will get your brand out in to the market, get people talking about you, even the competition! Once they are talking about you then you know they are concerned. This gives you credibility in the eyes of the customers.

The next article we look at securing the first orders and deciding upon a distributor/agent.



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