

## **Are You Taking Your Business Internationally?**

At some point in your business' life, you might be contacted by someone in a far-away land who's heard about your business somehow (probably through the Internet). This will be your first encounter with the international market. For many businesses, once you've conquered your local area and done business by post or email with other areas of the country, dipping a toe into international markets seems like the next big step.

### **Preparing to Export.**

When you're preparing to export your products, there are quite a few things you need to do. Firstly, make them as light as possible for the purposes of international shipping. Check that you'd be able to get the things you're selling to the place where you plan to sell them without it becoming prohibitively expensive.

Next, check if there are any customs requirements -- you might find that either your own country or the target country has laws that will require you to register what you're sending and perhaps pay extra taxes. On the other hand, selling internationally may mean that you don't have to charge your own country's sales tax.

Obviously most of these things don't apply to non-physical products. One thing that you still need to be careful about, though, is currency fluctuations -- how stable is the currency you plan to start trading in? If it has problems, you might want to price products in your own currency instead.

### **Look for Niches All Over Again.**

When you're trying to sell things to international customers, you need to make sure that there is a market in each country. Something that is very useful and in-demand in your country might just cause confusion abroad -- or, likewise, something that's only moderately popular where you are might be revolutionary.

If you're not sure, you could talk to a few local businesspeople about how they think your product would be perceived, and they may be able to suggest a suitable target market for you. As always, research is key.

### **Produce Internationally, Supply Internationally.**

If you're going to start exporting, you might want to consider importing as well. If you buy in bulk, you can generally get things far cheaper from developing countries, especially the 'Asian Tiger' countries like China, Taiwan, Indonesia and South Korea. Give it a try -- you could be delighted to find that they can make your product for a fraction of what it costs you, and all you must do is a little quality control.

I understand that this approach is particularly useful for clothing products, which are labor-intensive yet can be produced cheaply and well by these countries. Note that you're unlikely to be exploiting anyone -- the country you're importing from simply has a lower cost of living. To be extra sure, shy away from offers of having things made in developing countries or dictatorships.

### Try to Be Culturally Sensitive.

When you're dealing with international customers, you need to take their culture into consideration. In some countries everyone knows English, while in others they would be offended if you didn't get your materials translated. For all you know, the name of your product might be a rude word in some language or another, or the marketing might be focusing on benefits that people from some countries are unlikely to respond to.

This is one of the reasons why you're best off selling to countries that you have some experience with. Ideally, you should have the ability to speak the language, as well as having spent some time in the country. Failing that, read as many guides as you can and see if you can meet with people of that nationality socially.

Note that you should be especially careful about dealing with countries where there is some history or possibility of political unrest, as you can lose a lot this way.

### You Are Not a Jetsetter.

Finally, remember that it's a bad idea to start flying around the world to pitch your products or meet your customers, especially in the age of the Internet when almost everything can be done from your home. Did you really get into home business to throw away your profits on expensive flights and hotels? Exactly.