The Essential Guide to B2B International Trade

Practical guidance for SMEs seeking to expand into international markets

How SMEs Can Expand Internationally - and why they should

Comprehensive • Practical • Concise

Prepared by
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How to Use This Guide

This Guide is designed as a practical working framework for companies seeking to develop or expand international B2B trade.

- It is not an academic publication.
- It is not theoretical commentary.
- It is a structured, operational roadmap.

You do not need to read it passively from beginning to end. Instead, you should use it as a working document.

1. Work Through the Strategic Foundations First

Begin with:

- Why international trade matters for your business.
- Assessing your export readiness.
- Defining clear objectives.
- Building a structured export plan.

These sections will help you determine whether you are prepared to enter new markets — and if not, what must be strengthened first.

Do not skip this stage. Export success begins with internal clarity.

2. Move Sequentially Into Market Development

Once your foundations are clear, focus on:

- Identifying target markets.
- Locating credible buyers and partners.
- Evaluating international demand.
- Establishing communication strategies.

At this stage, you are testing assumptions and validating opportunity.

3. Treat Risk, Finance and Operations as Architecture — Not Afterthoughts

International trade introduces additional layers of:

- Commercial risk.
- Payment risk.
- Currency exposure.
- Regulatory compliance.
- Logistics complexity.

These are not obstacles — they are structural elements of cross-border trade.

As you progress through the Guide, you will build a protective framework around your export activity.

4. Use the Checklists and Appendices Actively

The appendices are practical tools.

Use them to:

- Assess readiness.
- Evaluate potential agents or distributors.
- Review documentation requirements.
- Strengthen due diligence.

Export development is not guesswork. It is structured execution.

5. Build as You Read

This Guide works best when you:

- Draft your export plan as you progress.
- Identify gaps in capability.
- Record open questions.
- Assign responsibilities within your team.

By the time you reach the final sections, you should have:

- A defined export objective.
- Identified target markets.
- Understood your risk exposure.
- Structured pricing logic.
- Clarified documentation requirements.
- Identified digital tools to support execution.

6. Return to Sections as Needed

International trade is iterative.

You may need to revisit:

- Pricing once logistics costs are confirmed
- Risk management once new markets are added
- Documentation requirements as regulations evolve

This Guide is designed to support continuous refinement.

Final Note

International trade is not reserved for large corporations.

With preparation, structure and discipline, your business can compete globally.

This Guide provides the framework. Execution depends on you.

To keep this Guide concise, many sections include links to supporting information and external resources — particularly within **The ExportersAlmanac**.

To help readers understand the nature of each reference, the following symbols are used:

- links internal to this Guide;
- external links to TradeTech Solutions sites: AEODirectory, ExpoWorld.cloud and The ExportersAlmanac;
- external 3rd party links; and
- ✉ for email addresses.

Please note that links to email addresses, LinkedIn contacts, TradeTech Solutions websites and third-party sites require internet access.

While all links were valid at the time of publication, the dynamic nature of the web means that some links may change or become unavailable over time.

Disclaimers

TradeTech Solutions Ltd. does **not provide legal, tax, financial, customs or regulatory advice**.

This Guide is intended as an introduction to international trade and highlights issues that companies may wish to consider when developing export activities.

Before entering into international agreements, readers should seek appropriate professional advice from qualified specialists such as lawyers, accountants, banks, or freight forwarders.

International trade regulations and requirements vary between countries and may change over time. There may therefore be additional considerations not covered in this Guide.

TradeTech Solutions Ltd. accepts **no responsibility for the content of third-party websites referenced in this Guide**, nor for the services provided by third parties.

Contents

Foreword

This Guide forms part of the International Trade Knowledge Centre — a collection of practical resources designed to help SMEs improve export readiness, multilingual visibility, and global digital discoverability.

International trade has changed fundamentally.

- Technology has reduced distance.
- Digital communication has accelerated decision-making.
- Supply chains have become more interconnected.
- Markets that once felt remote are now accessible.

Yet despite this transformation, many businesses still hesitate to engage internationally. The reasons are familiar: perceived complexity, uncertainty about risk, concerns about payment security, unfamiliar regulations, and lack of internal confidence.

In our experience, the barrier to exporting is rarely capability. It is structure.

Businesses do not fail to export because they lack opportunity. They hesitate because they lack a clear framework for approaching international markets in a disciplined and methodical way.

This Guide was developed to provide that framework.

It brings together the practical components of international B2B trade into a structured roadmap. From export readiness and market selection, through risk management and pricing, to logistics, documentation and digital trade infrastructure, each section is designed to help you move from uncertainty to execution.

International trade is not reserved for large corporations with dedicated export departments. Smaller and medium-sized enterprises can compete effectively — provided they approach global markets strategically, manage risk intelligently and use modern digital tools efficiently.

The objective of this Guide is straightforward: to help you understand what is required, to identify the steps you must take, and to provide a clear path from domestic operation to international growth.

This is not a theoretical document. It is practical.

It is intended to be used — not merely read.

If you apply its structure with discipline and realism, you will significantly increase your ability to evaluate, enter and grow in international markets.

The opportunities exist.

The question is whether you are prepared to pursue them systematically.

This Guide reflects the combined experience of our team in supporting businesses engaged in international trade across multiple sectors and jurisdictions. It has been developed to provide clarity, structure and practical direction in an increasingly complex global trading environment.

If you think there is anything missing in this Guide – or can be improved – just drop the ✉ editor an email. We are here to help.

Introduction

International B2B trade presents substantial opportunities for growth, diversification and resilience.

By accessing new markets, you can:

- Expand revenue sources.
- Reduce dependence on domestic demand.
- Improve production efficiency.
- Strengthen brand positioning.
- Enhance long-term stability.

However, exporting is not simply an extension of domestic sales. It introduces additional layers of complexity:

- Market intelligence requirements.
- Cultural and language considerations.
- Commercial and political risk.
- Currency exposure.
- Regulatory compliance.
- Documentation and logistics.
- Payment structuring.

Without preparation, these factors can create uncertainty. With preparation, they become manageable components of a structured export strategy.

This Guide provides a comprehensive, practical framework for navigating international B2B trade. It is designed for businesses that:

- Are considering exporting for the first time.
- Have limited export experience.
- Wish to expand into additional markets.
- Seek to strengthen their international risk controls.
- Want to modernise their export processes.

The content is structured progressively:

- You will begin with strategic foundations and export readiness assessment.
- You will move into market selection and buyer identification.
- You will then build a risk protection framework.
- Operational and financial structures follow.
- Finally, you will examine digital trade infrastructure and documentation systems that increasingly underpin modern cross-border commerce.

The emphasis throughout is on execution.

Each section identifies what you must consider, what actions you should take, and common errors that can undermine export success.

International trade requires preparation, but it does not require perfection.

You do not need to solve every issue before beginning. You need a structured approach that allows you to progress confidently while managing risk intelligently. Used correctly, this Guide will help you build that structure.

The International Trade Knowledge Centre

This guide forms part of the International Trade Knowledge Centre, a collection of practical resources designed to help SMEs improve export readiness, develop multilingual digital visibility, and access modern trade infrastructure.

1. Export Visibility Is Not Marketing.
2. Multilingual Visibility.
3. 10 Practical Steps to Increase SME Export Visibility.
4. Guide to Online Indexing, Rankings & Traffic Analysis.
5. Using AI to Generate Structured Export Content.

☞ **See the ExpoWorld Resource Library.**

PART I - Strategic Foundations of Export Growth

Overview

International expansion is not a reaction to short-term opportunity. It is a strategic decision.

Before you consider specific markets, buyers or logistics, you must understand why you are exporting and what you expect to achieve.

Too many businesses approach international trade opportunistically — responding to a single enquiry, attending a trade fair without preparation, or reacting to domestic market pressure. Without a structured foundation, this often leads to wasted time, misallocated resources and avoidable risk.

In this section, you will establish the strategic basis for international growth.

You will examine the real drivers of export success, challenge common misconceptions, assess whether your business is genuinely ready to compete internationally, and begin building a structured export plan.

International trade is not complex because markets are inaccessible. It is complex because it requires preparation. The objective of this section is to ensure that your international development is deliberate, disciplined and aligned with your business capabilities.

Successful export development today requires not only market preparation and operational capability but also digital visibility in international markets.

If you invest time here, every subsequent step will be more effective.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Define clear strategic reasons for engaging in international trade.
- Identify common misconceptions that may distort decision-making.
- Assess your company's current export readiness.
- Evaluate internal strengths and capability gaps.
- Determine whether product or service adaptation is required.
- Begin constructing a structured export plan.

1. The Global Opportunity

International trade has become more accessible than at any point in history.

Digital communication, online procurement platforms, international logistics networks and structured payment systems have reduced many of the traditional barriers to entry. Buyers increasingly search globally for competitive suppliers. Public procurement platforms are open to cross-border participation. Supply chains are international by design.

For many businesses, remaining domestic is now a strategic limitation rather than a default position.

Exporting allows you to:

- Expand revenue beyond domestic demand cycles.
- Diversify customer risk.
- Increase production volumes and efficiency.
- Strengthen brand credibility.
- Access new innovation ecosystems.

However, opportunity alone does not guarantee success.

International trade rewards preparation and punishes assumption.

You must recognise two realities:

1. Competition is global.
2. Buyers expect professionalism, clarity and reliability.

Your objective is not simply to sell abroad. It is to compete effectively in structured international markets.

The opportunity is significant. But it must be approached strategically.

2. Why Engage in International Trade?

Businesses engage internationally for different reasons. Your motivation will shape your approach.

Common drivers include:

- Saturation or slowdown in domestic markets.
- Excess production capacity.
- Currency advantages.
- Competitive product specialisation.
- Innovation leadership.
- Strategic growth objectives.

Before committing resources, you should be clear about which of these apply to you.

Ask yourself:

- Are you seeking growth, diversification or survival?
- Are you reacting to domestic pressure or pursuing strategic expansion?
- Do you have internal alignment on export objectives?

Exporting requires management time, financial commitment and operational discipline. If your objectives are unclear, your results will be inconsistent.

International trade works best when it is:

- Supported by leadership.
- Integrated into business strategy.
- Resourced realistically.
- Measured systematically.

Define your purpose clearly before you move forward.

3. Common Misconceptions About Exporting

Misconceptions frequently delay international expansion or create unrealistic expectations.

You may recognise some of the following:

- “Exporting is only for large companies.”
- “It is too risky.”
- “We need a perfect product before entering new markets.”
- “Language barriers make it impossible.”
- “International buyers are unreliable.”
- “The documentation is too complex.”

These assumptions are usually based on outdated information or isolated negative experiences.

In reality:

- Smaller firms often adapt faster than larger competitors.
- Risk can be managed systematically.
- Perfection is not required — competitiveness is.
- Language can be addressed through structured communication and digital tools.
- Documentation follows clear procedural rules.

The greater risk is often inactivity.

If you allow misconceptions to dominate decision-making, you may surrender market opportunities to more prepared competitors.

Your task is not to eliminate risk entirely. Your task is to understand and manage it.

4. Export Readiness Assessment

Before entering international markets, you must assess whether your business is operationally and strategically prepared.

Export readiness is not about enthusiasm. It is about capability.

You should evaluate:

- Management commitment.
- Production capacity.
- Financial resilience.
- Pricing competitiveness.
- Documentation capability.
- Risk management procedures.
- Communication readiness.
- After-sales support capability.

☞ See: Appendix One - Export Readiness Check List to conduct a disciplined internal review.

If weaknesses exist, they do not prevent exporting — but they must be identified early.

Complete it honestly. Involve senior management. Identify gaps. Assign responsibility for closing them.

Entering international markets without readiness assessment increases cost and risk unnecessarily.

Preparation does not eliminate uncertainty. It reduces avoidable error.

5. Company Capability Profiling

Beyond readiness, you must understand your competitive position.

Check Your Own Company Profile

You will see that we recommend that you check out potential partners, buyers, suppliers and competitors. It is likely that they will do the same to you. Therefore, you should carry out a check on yourself and decide if anything can be or needs to be improved e.g.

- Your profile in your Official Company Registry.

  ☞ See: Trade Profiles – Company Register.

- Your Credit Profile with a Credit Reference Company or Agency.

  ☞ See: Credit Reference Company or Rating Agency.

- Your Profile in Kompass (and other Business& Industry Directories).

  ☞ See: Kompass Business Place

  ☞ See: General Company Directories

  ☞ See: Industry Specific Directories

- Have you checked and optimised your SEO?

  There are a number of free and commercial services that will do this for you.

  ☞ See: PageSpeed Insights (a free Google service).

  ☞ See: Online Support Tools & Guides.[1]

- Do you have any Industry Certifications (e.g. AEO Status, ISO standards)? If so, make sure that these are publicised on your marketing collateral and in your directory profiles.

- Do your email addresses reflect your business domain? If you use a generic email address such as @gmail.com, this will provide a negative impression to potential buyers. It makes your company look “small”.

Ask yourself:

- What differentiates your product or service?

[1] You can find plenty of advice on how to improve the SEO of your website on the internet. It is not within the scope of this Guide to cover these points. If your webmaster is not sure how to proceed, we would suggest beginning with Google’s “Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Starter Guide”. – You can also search for relevant videos on YouTube.

- Do you compete on price, quality, innovation or reliability?
- Can you scale production if demand increases?
- Are your lead times competitive internationally?
- Do you understand your cost structure at export scale?

International markets amplify both strengths and weaknesses.

A domestic reputation does not automatically translate internationally. Buyers abroad evaluate you based on:

- Clarity of offering.
- Responsiveness.
- Professional documentation.
- Payment structure.
- Supply reliability.

Profile your capabilities objectively.

If necessary, conduct internal workshops to:

- Map strengths.
- Identify bottlenecks.
- Clarify value proposition.

Exporting is not simply extending sales territory. It is positioning your business competitively in unfamiliar markets.

6. Competitor Comparative Analysis

You are unlikely to be the only supplier in your chosen market.

Before investing in market entry, you must analyse:

- Who already serves that market.
- Their pricing range.
- Their delivery times.
- Their product positioning.
- Their certifications and compliance standards.
- Their digital visibility.

Many international markets are highly transparent. Pricing, product specifications and customer feedback are often publicly accessible.

Do not assume you are competitive — test it.

You should be able to answer clearly:

- Why would a buyer choose you over an established local or international supplier?
- Are you offering cost advantage, technical superiority, niche expertise or service flexibility?

To identify your international competitors, we have divided the process into three main steps:

1. **Country Analysis.**
   See where your overseas competitors are based[2].

2. **Identify your Foreign Competitors**
   Who are they?

3. **Foreign Competitor Profiles.**
   Find the names and details of your competitors, then check their trading profile and credit status.

4. **Online Competition.**
   Check the quality of your competitors' (both domestic and international) websites.

Country Analysis

Where are your competitors based? These three ITC services will indicate which countries are providing your international competition:

- Identify those countries which are home to your competitors.

  ITC's Trade Map provides - in the form of tables, graphs and maps - indicators on export performance, international demand, alternative markets and competitive markets, as well as a directory of importing and exporting companies. Trade Map covers 220 countries and territories and 5,300 products of the Harmonized System. The monthly, quarterly and yearly trade flows are available from the most aggregated level to the tariff line level.

  ☞ See: Trade Map

  ☞ Click here to register to the Trade Map service.

  ☞ See: Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System 2012 (HS 2012)

- Identify those countries which are providers of ***potential*** competition.

  ITC's Export Potential Map is a ***free*** tool that turns economic analysis into practical trade information.

  Searching by Product or Country, Export Potential Map showcases results from the ITC export potential and diversification assessment methodology that identifies:

  1. Products, markets and suppliers with (untapped) export potential.
  2. Opportunities for export diversification.

  ☞ See: Export Potential Map

[2] You will see we indicate a number of resources from the ITC. The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the only development agency that is fully dedicated to supporting the internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Established in 1964, the International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations.

Competitor Identification

Having identified which countries are offering (actual and/or potential) competition, you can then move on to the next stage of identifying specific actual and potential competitors in those countries. Search the country and product(s) of interest:

- **ITC's Trade Map** – see above, also provides the names of importers and exporters of specific goods.
- **ITC's Global Trade Helpdesk** allows you to search by country and product of interest. The search results provide detailed information about imports, market dynamics, tariffs, regulatory requirements, potential buyers and more.

  ☞ See: Global Trade Helpdesk

- Search the **Kompass Directory** by country and product**.**

  ☞ See: Kompass Business Place

Foreign Competitor Profiles

Finding the company profiles of your foreign competitors is straightforward. To find the names of competitors in a specific country, check out:

1. Exporters of the products that interest you listed in ITC's Trade Map.

   ☞ See: ITC's Trade Map

2. Kompass' free website search.

   ☞ See: Kompass free website search

3. Request a Credit Report.

   ☞ See: Rating Agencies for alternative service providers

To check your competitors' online profile, see the next section.

Online Competition?

Know the web addresses of your competitors? There are a number of tools that you can use to analyse the websites of your competitors - some are free, most require a subscription (in which case they usually offer a free trial period).

The insights these tools provide can help you to improve your own website and digital marketing campaign. In doing so, be sure to:

- **Analyse your actual competitors.**
  There's no use in trying to punch above your weight and take on major companies who have made major investments in their website and website support services.
- **Focus on metrics first.**
  Take a data-driven approach to analysis first. Try to pick out as many metrics before trying to break down the "why" of their marketing.

- **Turn analysis into action.**
  Make sure the data you uncover translates into some sort of action.

☞ See the tools available: Online Support Tools & Guides - Competitor Analysis.

If you cannot articulate your advantage, refine your offer before entering the market.

Competitor analysis is not a one-time exercise. It should continue throughout your export development.

7. Product and Service Adaptation

Very few products transfer internationally without adjustment.

You may need to consider:

- Regulatory compliance standards.
- Certification requirements.
- Labelling and packaging rules.
- Voltage, safety or technical specifications.
- Cultural preferences.
- Payment terms expectations.

Adaptation does not necessarily mean redesign. It may involve:

- Documentation modification.
- Packaging adjustments.
- Local representation.
- Translation of technical material.
- Minor product variation.

Failure to adapt appropriately can result in:

- Regulatory rejection.
- Delayed shipments.
- Damaged credibility.
- Increased returns.

Research requirements early — before committing to contracts.

8. Constructing Your Export Plan

An export plan is not a lengthy academic document. It is a structured working blueprint.

Your export plan should define:

- Target markets.
- Target customer profiles.
- Entry channels.
- Pricing logic.
- Risk management measures.
- Resource allocation.

- Timeline milestones.
- Performance indicators.

Keep it concise and operational.

- Assign responsibility within your team.
- Define measurable objectives.
- Set review dates.

Exporting without a plan often results in reactive behaviour.

Exporting with a plan allows controlled progression.

End of Part I – Brief Summary

Before progressing to market development, ensure that you:

- Have defined your strategic motivation.
- Have assessed readiness honestly.
- Understand your competitive position.
- Have identified necessary adaptations.
- Have drafted a structured export plan.

International growth begins with internal clarity.

In the next section, you will move from preparation to market identification and buyer development.

PART II Market Selection & Buyer Acquisition

Overview

Once your internal preparation is complete, the next stage is market identification and buyer acquisition.

In the past, international expansion often began with trade fairs, distributor visits or government-led missions. Today, international buyer discovery is increasingly digital.

Procurement platforms, online B2B marketplaces, structured trade databases and direct digital outreach now provide immediate visibility into demand.

This does not eliminate the importance of physical engagement. It changes the sequence.

You should validate markets digitally before committing significant travel or representation costs.

This section will Guide you through:

- Identifying priority markets.
- Using digital tools to locate buyers.
- Leveraging procurement platforms.
- Evaluating online opportunities.
- Structuring your approach to market entry.

International expansion is no longer constrained by geography. It is constrained by preparation and targeting discipline.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify and prioritise target markets systematically.
- Use digital platforms to locate international buyers.
- Evaluate B2B marketplaces critically.
- Identify international procurement opportunities.
- Structure early-stage market validation.
- Determine when physical engagement becomes appropriate.

9. Targeting International Markets

Global opportunity does not mean you should target all markets simultaneously.

You must prioritise.

Your market selection criteria should include:

- Demand indicators.
- Competitive landscape.
- Regulatory accessibility.
- Tariff exposure.
- Logistics feasibility.

- Currency stability.
- Political risk.
- Ease of communication.

Begin with structured research.

Use:

- Trade statistics databases.
- Industry reports.
- Public procurement data.
- Competitor export footprints.
- Digital search analysis.

Look for:

- Markets importing your product category.
- Gaps in local supply.
- Over-concentration of competitors.
- Favourable trade agreements.

Identifying Potential Overseas Markets

The following services from the International Trade Centre (ITC) [3] may help you identify those countries which offer the greatest potential for your company's products and services:

- ITCs Trade Map – Discover which countries are importing products similar to your company's.

  ☞ See: Trade Map

- ITC's Trade Competitiveness Map - How do products from your country rank against overseas competition?

  ☞ See: Trade Competitiveness Map

- ITC's Export Potential Map - Are your products considered to have greater export potential?

  ☞ See: Export Potential Map

- ITC's Global Trade Helpdesk - Start exploring opportunities by choosing: (a) The country of interest and (b) the product of interest.

  ☞ See: Global Trade Helpdesk

Excluding Countries from Consideration

You may also exclude countries from consideration due to:

- Onerous Tariffs and\or Non-tariff barriers.

[3] The International Trade Centre is owned by the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation – and uses the data available to these 2 organisations to provide the information services indicated here.

See: Blacklists & Embargoes

- Transport costs making your products non-price competitive.
- Someone else is already trading under a brand similar or the same as yours. Check with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

See: WIPO Global Brand Database

- Low credit rating

See: Trade Profile – Country Ratings

- How difficult is it to do business there? Is there a high degree of corruption?

See: Trade Profile – Corruption Perceptions Index

Avoid spreading effort too thinly. Shortlist 3–5 priority markets. Focused targeting produces better results than global diffusion.

10. Validating Specific Countries

Once you shortlist potential markets, move from macro-level research to practical validation.

You should investigate:

- Local standards and certifications.
- Import procedures.
- Distribution channels.
- Pricing benchmarks.
- Payment norms.
- Cultural business practices.

Digital validation methods include:

- Reviewing competitor websites.
- Analysing online procurement listings.
- Examining tender histories.
- Contacting potential buyers directly.
- Monitoring sector-specific online forums.

At this stage, your objective is not immediate sales. It is confirmation that demand exists and that you can compete.

If validation fails, refine your shortlist.

11. Identifying Buyers & Suppliers Digitally

Buyer identification has shifted decisively online.

You can now use:

- B2B marketplaces.
- Sector-specific platforms.

- Public procurement portals.
- Corporate supplier registration portals.
- Industry databases.
- Professional networking platforms.
- Multilingual search.
- Structured product descriptions.

See: Country Profiles where you can find company databases and links to local chambers of commerce.

See: Industry Profiles where you can find industry specific directories and market places.

Shortlist international markets for both suppliers and buyers using:

- ITC's Export Potential Map to find the countries with the greatest potential.

  See: ITC's Export Potential Map

- ITC's Trade Map to identify those countries which export specific goods.

  See: ITC's Trade Map

- ITC's Global Trade Helpdesk– Identify specific companies supplying specific products.

  See: ITC's Global Trade Helpdesk

If you have a number of suppliers in mind, then you may consider sending them an RFP (Request For Proposal). In these cases, you may want to use an RFP management service.

See: Supply Chain Solutions – RFP Platforms.

Kompass Directory Global Coverage

A global directory option is to use the Kompass Directory (millions of companies in 70 countries):

Search the Kompass directory[4] for companies that match your target markets.

See: the Free Web Search - or EasyList - or the Kompass EasyBusiness[5] database.

12. International Procurement Platforms

Public and institutional procurement represents a substantial and often underutilised opportunity.

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[4] If you haven't done so already, you should also register your company's profile with Kompass – this will increase your advertising "reach" to international companies.

[5] Examples of EasyBusiness Company profiles in pdf format:

- A British company
- A Dutch Company
- An Italian Company
- A Ukrainian Company

Governments, municipalities, multilateral organisations and large corporations publish tenders digitally. For examples, see:

EU Single Electronic Data Interchange Area (SEDIA)

SEDIA is the entry point for participants and experts in funding programmes and tenders managed by the European Commission and other EU bodies.

☞ See: SEDIA

ITC's Procurement Map

This is an online tool which offers information on public tenders combined with legislation on women vendors and SMEs, and sustainable standards to foster entrepreneurship.

☞ See: Procurement Map

Global Procurement Opportunities.

The opportunities do not end just in the UK or even in the EU, there opportunities to bid for contracts throughout the world.

☞ See: Procurement Opportunities for list of procurement information services as well as specific opportunities in specific countries or via multinational organisations (e.g. The World Bank or the United Nations).

Kompass Global Public Tenders

This service is based on the largest global bidding platform and helps companies identify new business opportunities through access to public and private sector bids. It also helps to create connections between professionals in the same market sectors.

☞ See: Kompass Global Public Tenders

These platforms provide:

- Transparent specifications.
- Defined deadlines.
- Clear evaluation criteria.
- Structured documentation requirements.

To participate effectively, you must:

- Monitor platforms regularly.
- Understand eligibility requirements.
- Prepare documentation in advance.
- Track deadlines carefully.

Procurement participation requires discipline, but it offers:

- Significant contract value.
- Credibility enhancement.
- Repeat opportunity.

Digital procurement access has reduced barriers for smaller firms capable of meeting compliance standards. You should note that in order to qualify for bidding for many international contracts there are standard questionnaires which ask whether you have policies in place covering:

- The use of child labour.
- The use of slave labour.
- Anti-bribery and corruption rules.

If you do not have existing policies to show your company takes these issues seriously, you can download templates from:

☞ See: Workable – "Child Labour Policy".

☞ See:VinciWorks – "Free Sample Template for Modern Slavery Act Statement".

☞ See:VinciWorks – "Anti-bribery and corruption policy".

N.B. You should ensure that all your suppliers also have similar policies in place *and that they follow these policies*. You should make these conditions of your supplier onboarding process.

13. B2B Online Marketplaces

Online marketplaces can be useful — but they must be approached critically.

In the ExportersAlmanac we list a number of B2B Market Places and Business Networks. You will see that some are very specialised and others are much more general e.g. Amazon Business and Alibaba.

☞ See: B2B Market Places and Business Networks.

You should assess:

- Whether buyers are active and verified.
- Whether your sector performs well on the platform.
- The level of competition.
- Advertising or premium placement requirements.

Do not rely exclusively on marketplaces.

Use them as one channel within a broader strategy that includes:

- Direct digital marketing.
- Procurement monitoring.
- Targeted outreach.

If you find a market place that does suit you, before committing to using the service, do make sure that you check out all the services terms and conditions (especially with regard to: liabilities and payments) and ensure that you are happy with them.

14. Trade Promotion Agencies & Support Networks

Even in a digital-first environment, structured institutional support can accelerate progress. There are a number of resources which exist to help promote and support international trade; as well as providing (in some cases) direct trade leads.

☞ See: Trade Leads & Promotion Agencies for more details if you think these could be of interest to you.

Also, you may engage with:

- National trade promotion bodies.
- Bilateral chambers of commerce.
- Export credit agencies.
- Sector associations.

These organisations may provide:

- Market intelligence.
- Introductions.
- Regulatory guidance.
- Trade event coordination.

However, you remain responsible for execution.

Institutional support complements — it does not replace — strategic preparation.

15. Trade Missions & Industry Fairs (Secondary Layer)

Physical engagement remains valuable, particularly when:

- Complex products require demonstration.
- Long-term partnerships are being built.
- Cultural trust-building is important.

It helps if you prepare template collateral and operational and administrative procedures for participating in events.

☞ See: Trade Events see whether there are any international trade fair that makes sense for you.

To make the most of these opportunities, you should make the necessary preparations pre-event:

1. Prepare your collateral? What is needed? Introductory emails? Brochures? Price Lists? Follow-up Emails?
2. Identify and contact your targets (set up meetings)[6] – as soon as their details are available – tailor your message to them. If possible, make them personal and explain why you think meeting would be a good idea for both parties.
3. Prepare a post event follow up program – so that you can respond quickly after the event.
4. Qualify and follow up on your leads.

Virtual Trade Missions (VTMs)

Advantages

1. They are cheaper and require fewer resources.

[6] Lists of attendees are usually published in advance of the events themselves.

2. No travelling is required.
3. The Virtual Stands\Multilingual Microsites support VTMs in multiple countries without additional configuration.
4. They are a valuable, low-cost entry point into multiple markets.

☞ See the video The Case for Virtual Trade Missions.

Physical Trade Missions & Industry Fairs

Notwithstanding the benefits of the VTMs, some sales and marketing processes do benefit from, if not actually require, face-to-face meetings. If you are prepared to make the investment (tens of thousands of dollars rather than a few hundred), then attending physical events may well be the right decision for you and your company.

However, participation in either form of Trade Mission should be strategic.

Attend events only when:

- You have validated demand digitally.
- You have identified specific prospects.
- You have prepared structured materials.
- You have follow-up capacity.

Without preparation, trade fairs often produce superficial contacts rather than contracts.

16. Local Representation

In some markets, local representation may be necessary.

This may include:

- Agents.
- Distributors.
- Sales partners.
- Local subsidiaries.

If you need a local partner, you can search for possible candidates through Chambers of Commerce and Local Business Directories:

☞ See: The Commercial Contacts in the relevant Country Profile; and\or

☞ See: The Kompass Directory.

Before appointing representatives:

- Conduct due diligence.
- Define contractual terms clearly.
- Clarify commission structures.
- Protect intellectual property.

☞ See Appendix Three - Agent/Distributor Qualifications Checklist.

Local representation should be structured — not informal.

End of Part II – Brief Summary

Before progressing, ensure that you:

- Have prioritised specific markets.
- Have validated demand digitally.
- Have identified credible buyer channels.
- Understand procurement requirements.
- Have structured your outreach approach.

Digital discovery is now central to international expansion.

Physical engagement enhances validated opportunity — it should not precede it.

PART III Communication, Multilingual Visibility & Lead Conversion

Overview

Identifying markets and locating buyers is only the beginning.

International trade is built on communication.

Buyers must be able to:

- Understand what you offer.
- Evaluate your credibility.
- Assess your professionalism.
- Trust your ability to deliver.

In digital environments, these judgments are often formed before you have any direct interaction.

Your website, digital presence, responsiveness and communication clarity are now central to export success.

Multilingual visibility has become a strategic competitive factor. Buyers frequently search in their own language. Procurement platforms operate in multiple languages. Online comparison of suppliers happens instantly.

If your business cannot be found, understood or evaluated easily, you will be excluded before you are considered.

This section focuses on:

- Cross-border communication discipline.
- Multilingual visibility strategy.
- Digital marketing fundamentals.
- Artificial intelligence as a support tool.
- Converting enquiries into structured negotiations.

International trade rewards clarity and responsiveness.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Structure effective cross-border communication.
- Understand the strategic value of multilingual visibility.
- Strengthen digital credibility.
- Use AI tools responsibly in export development.
- Manage and convert international sales enquiries.
- Move from initial contact to structured negotiation.

17. Cross-Border Communication

When engaging international buyers, clarity is critical.

You should ensure that:

- Product descriptions are precise.
- Technical specifications are complete.
- Commercial terms are explicit.
- Response times are prompt.
- Documentation is structured.

Ambiguity creates risk perception.

International buyers often assess suppliers based on:

- Email professionalism.
- Speed of response.
- Clarity of quotation.
- Consistency of documentation.

Your communication should demonstrate:

- Competence.
- Reliability.
- Transparency.

Delays, incomplete answers or vague pricing undermine credibility quickly.

18. Multilingual Digital Visibility

Multilingual visibility is no longer optional in many sectors.

International buyers frequently:

- Search in their own language.
- Compare suppliers digitally.
- Evaluate websites before initiating contact.
- Download technical material online.

If your content is available only in one language, you reduce discoverability and may weaken buyer confidence.

You should also note that improving your Foreign Language SEO is not simply a matter of translating the published content of your website. You should also:

1. **Use language-specific meta tags:** Make sure your website's meta tags (title tag, description tag, and header tags) are translated into the language you want to target. Use relevant keywords in the meta tags to improve your website's visibility in search results.

2. **Create language-specific URLs:** Use language-specific URLs for your website pages to make it easier for search engines to index your content.

3. **Build language-specific backlinks:** Build links to your website from other websites in the language you are targeting.

4. **Localise your content:** Adapt your content to the local culture and customs of the language you are targeting.

5. **Use structured data markup:** This helps search engines to understand your website's content.

Make sure that you track and analyse visitors to your site. Google Analytics 4 (GA4) is the starting point for most webmasters. Again, there's plenty of advice on the internet and in YouTube covering the use of GA4.

☞ See: Google's own "Introduction to Google Analytics" as a good starting point.

Effective multilingual visibility allows you to:

- Increase search exposure.
- Reduce language friction.
- Improve buyer comprehension.
- Strengthen perceived professionalism.
- Expand reach beyond English-speaking markets.

However, multilingual visibility must be structured.

Direct translation without clarity in your original content can create confusion. The quality of your primary source material determines the quality of all language versions.

You should:

- Ensure product descriptions are clear and consistent.
- Use internationally recognised terminology.
- Avoid excessive marketing language.
- Maintain structured formatting.
- Align product categorisation logically.

Translation Methodologies

In this Sub-Section, we cover the three translation options listing their practical pros and cons and practical applications:

1. Machine Translation.
2. Hybrid.
3. Human.

Machine Translation

AI-powered machine translation has come a long way in recent years, making it seemingly easier and more affordable for businesses and individuals to communicate with people who speak different languages. But as with any new technology, it is important to understand its limits.

When preparing text for translation, you should use:

- Simple words.
- Very simple sentences.
- Short sentences - no sentence being longer than 1 line in the text box.
- Bullet points to list key points you want to make.
- Short paragraphs to separate different concepts you want to communicate.

- Digits to express numbers rather than write them e.g. “1%” not “one percent”.

You should not use:

- Complex business terms.
- Cultural or sporting refences.
- Foreign words.
- Metaphors.
- Slang or jargon.
- Idioms. These rely completely on contextual and cultural understanding.

If at all possible, you should also avoid:

- Acronyms.
- Similes.
- The passive tense.
- Using the word “you”. Many languages have different forms representing not just “singular” and “plural” forms but also different degrees of formality.
- Any sentences or phrases which could be ambiguous.

N.B. If you draft your description taking the above into account, not only will the translations be more accurate, but will actually make it easier for English language speakers to absorb your message.

Pros of Machine Translations

- They are inexpensive – usually free of charge.
- They are easy and fast to use.
- They cover just about any language.
- They can be used for spoken translations as well as written text.

Cons of Machine Translations

- There are still significant limitations in translating complex text.

Practical Applications for Machine Translations

- Translating incoming and outgoing emails and DMs.
- Chats, short blogs and social media posts.
- Short, impromptu Speak & Translate exchanges.

Machine Translation Service Providers

Two major AI translation services are:

- DeepL[7]

  ☞ See: DeepL

- Google Translate[8]

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[7] DeepL currently covers fewer languages, less than Google Translate but claims to be a better translator – and provides offline services.
[8] Google Translate currently covers 243 languages.

☞ See: Google Translate

For speak & translate apps, these are available for your smart phone on both

☞ Google Play; and

☞ Apple Store.

Hybrid Translation

Hybrid translations are first translated by machines and then checked by a qualified translator.

Pros of Hybrid Translations

- They are less expensive than “pure” human translations.
- Errors, awkward phrasing, and incorrect contextual interpretation are removed.

Cons of Hybrid Translations

- It can be difficult to find translators for every language of interest.
- Language should still be kept as simple as possible to limit the time required for human checking and correction.

Practical Applications for Hybrid Translations

- Translating web pages.
- Basic, short factual documentation.
- Instruction manuals.

Human Translation

These are translations where no machine translation is involved. A native-speaking expert will cater to cultural nuances, styling and always ensure a natural and engaging reception in a new market. Each piece of information and call to action will benefit from an international content strategy that is informed by multilingual experts who understand what phraseology will best suit their country's population.

Pros of Human Translations

- They are the only accepted versions for certain legal documentation.
- They guarantee accuracy both in terms of terminology and communication “intent”
- They can provide culturally accurate translations – so that the overall sense of the message is accurately conveyed to the reader – this is especially important when using Social Media.
- They work much better as Speak & Translate services in face to face meetings.

Cons of Human Translations

- They are the most expensive option.
- They are slower than AI based services, so they can be problematic for documents you expect to change often and with close deadlines.

- In the case of face-to-face meetings, the interpreter has to be booked for a precise time (and often location).

Practical Applications for Human Translations

- Notarised documentation – which can only be translated by certified translators.
- ***All*** legal documents. You should be aware that when translating legal terms these can be translated from a linguistic point of view but they may have no legal meaning whatsoever under another legal jurisdiction. Therefore, you may also require independent legal advice when translating legal documents.
- Formal documentation e.g. proposals.
- Key marketing documentation.
- Key face-to-face and\or video meetings and presentations.

Copywriting

Whatever solution you use, the original text is fundamental in achieving good translations. However, in the case of high-level marketing collateral where you are conveying "emotional" concepts, often the translation cannot be literal and you will need to discuss with the translator(s) what message you want to convey.

Human Translation Services - Pricing

Pricing depends upon: (a) the length of the translation (b) the languages involved (c) the complexity of the text and (d) whether it has to be notarised.

Summary

There is no doubt that Machine Translation services have progressed dramatically in quality over the past few years. They provide a perfectly adequately no\low-cost service for translating simple, basic texts in over 233 languages. However, human translators are still required when:

- More complex and culturally sensitive translations are required; or
- There is a legal requirement; or
- Face to face discussions are planned.

There are plenty of resources available over and above Google Translate and DeepL. If you need support that they cannot provide:

☞ See: Translation Services

N.B. Whichever option you choose, as explained above, it is critical that the original text is well constructed. Badly prepared text will be simply made worse once translated.

Multilingual communication increases accessibility. Structured multilingual communication increases competitiveness.

19. Digital Presence & Online Credibility

There is a wealth of zero to low-cost opportunities to advertise your products and services online to generate sales leads. In order for your potential clients to find your company, you will need to ensure that you are present ***and*** suitably profiled online.

☞ See: Digital Marketing for a comprehensive list of online services and resources to help your digital advertising and marketing campaigns.

However you decide to advertise your goods and services, we strongly advise you to follow the ICC's Advertising and Marketing Communications Code (Copyright © International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) 2024 edition). It is the benchmark for almost 50 self-regulatory codes in countries around the world.

☞ Click here to download your free copy of the ICC Advertising and Marketing Communications Code.

Google Ads

The biggest Digital Advertising service. If you are not already using Google Ads there is plenty of advice online and on YouTube covering this service and how it can help benefit your company's sales.

☞ See: Google Ads

☞ See: Google's "Easy-to-use for small businesses" as a good starting point is Google's Introduction to its Marketing Platform

Social Media

You can use Social Media exactly the same way that you use them to advertise and market your services for domestic sales – although you will have to use the relevant local languages. The main ones to consider for international B2B advertising and marketing are:

1. LinkedIn.
2. YouTube.

If you do not use these for your domestic market, then we suggest you search for introductions explaining how to use these services. Only once you are actively using these channels for your domestic market should consider extending their reach to export markets.

Business Directories

You should also consider:

- Sector-specific directories.
- Professional networking platforms.
- Industry associations.
- Online procurement visibility.

The internet has spawned many online business directories and most, if not all, traditional print directories have migrated online. The following lists of such directories on The ExportersAlmanac may contain some relevant ones for your company:

☞ See: General Business Directories; and

☞ See: Industry Specific Directories

N.B. International buyers often verify suppliers digitally before making contact. Therefore, as recommended in Part 1, you should review your own Company profile, particularly:

- Website clarity.
- Mobile accessibility.
- Product page structure.
- Technical document availability.
- Contact transparency.
- Company credentials.

Digital credibility does not require aggressive advertising. It requires structured presence and consistent information.

Advertising campaigns can support visibility, but they should follow clear market validation.

20. Artificial Intelligence in Export Development

AI is already having a major impact on the eCommerce sector and therefore on international trade; at all levels and all departments. It allows you to reduce costs, increase efficiency and extend the range and frequency of your operational and administrative activities. Artificial intelligence can support export development when used carefully.

☞ See: Artificial Intelligence, for a list of AI service providers covering a variety of services.

You may use AI tools to:

- Draft structured product descriptions.
- Analyse market data.
- Summarise regulatory requirements.
- Generate initial outreach templates.
- Support translation workflows.
- Monitor competitor positioning.

However, AI outputs must always be reviewed critically and facts checked.

You remain responsible for:

- Accuracy.
- Compliance.
- Commercial clarity.

AI is a support tool, not a decision-maker.

Used correctly, it increases efficiency and reduces preparation time. Used carelessly, it amplifies error.

21. Managing Sales Enquiries

When international enquiries arrive, structured response is essential.

You should prepare templates to:

- Acknowledge receipt promptly.
- Clarify specifications.
- Confirm volumes.
- Verify delivery location.
- Define Incoterms.
- Confirm payment terms.

Avoid issuing vague quotations.

A professional response should include:

- Clear pricing basis.
- Delivery timelines.
- Payment structure.
- Validity period.
- Reference to applicable standards.

International buyers often compare multiple suppliers quickly. A disciplined response increases conversion probability.

22. From Lead to Structured Negotiation

Moving from enquiry to contract requires:

- Clarity.
- Documentation discipline.
- Risk awareness.
- Pricing logic.

At this stage, you should begin:

- Due diligence on the buyer.
- Credit verification.
- Internal cost confirmation.
- Risk review.

Do not allow urgency to bypass structure.

Successful exporters combine responsiveness with control.

End of Part III – Brief Summary

Before progressing, ensure that you:

- Present clear and structured communication.
- Maintain multilingual visibility where appropriate.
- Strengthen digital credibility.
- Use AI responsibly.
- Respond to enquiries systematically.

International buyers evaluate you long before contracts are signed.

Professional communication is a competitive advantage.

PART IV - Risk Architecture & Payment Security

Overview

International trade introduces additional layers of uncertainty. That is unavoidable.

However, uncertainty does not prevent export growth. Poor risk management does.

The purpose of this section is not to discourage expansion. It is to provide the architecture that allows you to grow confidently.

When you understand risk, you control it.

When you structure protection mechanisms correctly, you reduce exposure without slowing opportunity.

Professional exporters do not eliminate risk. They manage it systematically.

In this section, you will build a structured risk framework covering:

- Country exposure.
- Counterparty reliability.
- Payment security.
- Currency fluctuation.
- Intellectual property protection.
- Recovery procedures.

With the correct architecture in place, international trade becomes measured and manageable.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Evaluate country-level exposure before entering a market.
- Conduct structured counterparty due diligence.
- Select appropriate payment mechanisms.
- Understand trade credit insurance options.
- Manage foreign exchange risk.
- Protect intellectual property in cross-border transactions.
- Implement recovery procedures if problems arise.

23. Risk Management as Competitive Discipline

Risk management is not defensive behaviour. It is professional discipline.

When you structure your transactions correctly:

- Buyers gain confidence.
- Banks are more supportive.
- Insurers engage constructively.
- Internal decision-making improves.

You should approach each new market with a risk checklist covering:

- Political and economic stability.
- Regulatory predictability.
- Currency volatility.
- Payment culture.
- Legal enforceability.

Structured risk assessment allows you to:

- Adjust pricing appropriately.
- Select suitable payment terms.
- Decide whether insurance is required.
- Limit exposure where necessary.

Risk awareness strengthens competitiveness.

24. Country Risk Assessment

Before committing significant resources to a new market, assess:

- Political stability.
- Economic performance.
- Currency controls.
- Trade restrictions.
- Sanctions exposure.
- Legal enforcement reliability.

You do not need to become a geopolitical analyst. You do need to avoid entering markets blindly.

Use:

- Public economic data.
- Trade statistics.
- International risk reports.
- Banking advisories.

1. Is the country subject to any sanctions?

   ☞ See: Blacklists & Embargoes

2. The ExportersAlmanac Country Trade Profiles indicate whether a country is subject to sanctions and provides Credit Ratings and indicators relating to the ease of doing business as well as the Corruption Perceptions Index.

   ☞ See: Country Profiles

If a market carries elevated risk, that does not necessarily exclude it. It may require tighter payment terms or insurance.

25. Counterparty Due Diligence

Verifying who you are dealing with is fundamental.

Before accepting significant orders, you should:

- Confirm legal registration.
- Verify company address and directors.
- Check credit history.
- Review financial statements (where available).
- Validate references.

Digital communication increases reach — but also increases impersonation risk.

Structured due diligence protects you from:

- Fraud.
- Non-payment.
- Reputational damage.

54% of European and North American SMEs experience late payments and 11% never receive payment at all[9]. Therefore, before extending credit to any buyer you should get a credit reference and rating before granting any credit. The cost of the report is a small price to pay for peace of mind.

☞ See: Rating Agencies for international credit report providers.

Counterparty verification is not distrust. It is standard professional practice.

26. Payment Structures & Security

Your choice of payment terms directly affects exposure.

Common mechanisms include:

- Advance payment.
- Letters of credit.
- Documentary collections.
- Open account terms.
- Structured milestone payments.

The appropriate mechanism depends on:

- Market maturity.
- Buyer relationship history.
- Order size.
- Risk tolerance.

☞ See: Payment Methods to review these options and decide which is best for your circumstances.

Payment Method	Buyer Considerations	Supplier Considerations
Advance Payment	**Least favourable.** May make payment and then not receive the goods.	**Most Favourable.** Does not risk shipping the goods and then not being paid.
Letter of Credit	**Most expensive option** (bank charges) and may have to block the funds with their bank. However, payment is only made when shipping documents are delivered I good order to the bank.	**Next best option**. However, this mechanism can be inflexible. Payment will only be released when the relevant shipping documents have been delivered to the bank – and the details must not deviate in content from those stipulated in the Letter of Credit.
Documentary Collection	**Reasonable balance.** Payment will only be due when the bank has confirmed that the correct shipping documents have been delivered.	**Better than Open Account**. However, the risk of non-payment still exists, although the Supplier usually holds a bill of exchange which is easier to protest than a simple non-payment of an invoice.
Open Account	**Most favourable.** Receives the goods and then pays.	**Least favourable.** Ships the goods and then risks not being paid.

As relationships develop, terms may evolve. However, early transactions should prioritise security.

Clarity in payment structure reduces misunderstanding and protects cash flow.

27. Trade Finance & Credit Insurance

Do you need working capital to finance the production of the goods you are to export? Does your bank offer trade finance facilities? Is there a government finance institution providing or organising export finance?

☞ See: Trade Profile: Export Credit & Insurance agencies.

If you do ask for trade finance, it is very likely that the bank will ask you to take out trade credit insurance.

Trade credit insurance can protect you against non-payment due to:

- Insolvency.
- Protracted default.
- Political events.

Political Risk Insurance – your buyer may well want to make payment and\or honour the contract with you, but is not able to because of their country's political or financial position.

☞ See: Trade Profile - Export Credit & Insurance: for a country's state trade credit insurance agency.

☞ See: Insurance for international commercial insurance company cover.

Trade Credit Insurance – covering any credit you may extend. These can be offered by private insurance companies and government agencies. (See the ExportersAlmanac links indicated in the previous point.)

Insurance may also support:

- Improved bank financing.
- Higher credit limits.
- Expansion into new markets.

You should evaluate:

- Policy coverage.
- Deductibles.
- Country exclusions.
- Claim procedures.

Insurance does not remove commercial responsibility. It provides structured risk sharing.

28. Intellectual Property Protection

If your product or service includes:

- Proprietary design.
- Unique technical processes.
- Brand value.
- Patents.
- Software.

You must evaluate IP exposure in each market.

Consider:

- Trademark registration.
- Patent protection.
- Contractual confidentiality clauses.
- Licensing arrangements.

In addition to taking normal precautions about releasing confidential information to third parties, you should also:

1. Make signing Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) as a standard operating procedure when exchanging confidential information with third parties[10]. They are legally binding and cover all parties' confidential information and set out what should be done with this information at the end of any relationship.[11]

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[10] If you or your potential partner(s) do not have a template NDA, you can find plenty of examples online.
[11] NDAs can be:
- Unilateral NDAs – two parties are involved but only one shares confidential information with the other.
- Bilateral or Mutual NDAs involve two parties where both parties share confidential with each other.
- Multilateral NDAs involves three or more parties, where at least one of the parties shares information with the other signatories.

2. Clearly label any copyright material with your company name, "©"[12] and the date ***before*** you distribute or share it with any 3rd party.
3. Review whether your Trade Marks, Designs and Patents are covered in any new territories you are to trade in. (Carry out a trademark search online with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to see if something similar to your brand already exists there.)

   ☞ See: WIPO's Global Brand Database

4. Weigh up the value of obtaining a patent or trademark, against the costs involved, as part of your export plan. If you are considering registering a patent or trademark abroad check with your professional trade attorney – the one who registered your trademark or patent in your home country.

N.B. IP risk varies by jurisdiction. Research requirements before market entry — not after infringement.

29. Foreign Exchange Risk Management

Currency fluctuations can materially affect profitability.

If you price in foreign currency, you are exposed to exchange movement between:

- Quotation date.
- Contract signature.
- Production.
- Payment.

You should evaluate:

- Pricing currency selection.
- Forward contracts.
- Currency clauses.
- Hedging instruments.
- Multi-currency accounts.

The main options open to hedge exchange rates are:

- **Forward contracts:** This is where a company agrees with its bank to buy or sell a certain amount of foreign exchange at a fixed price on a fixed date. (Problems can arise if the foreign currency is not bought or sold on that date.)
- **Forward options:** This is where the Buyer or the Seller has the option (but not the obligation) to buy or sell a certain amount of foreign exchange at a fixed rate.

Foreign exchange risk is manageable — but it must be acknowledged. Even if you think that your FX provider is giving you the best deal, why not check this out with other FX providers?

☞ See: FX Providers

Ignoring currency exposure can eliminate margin unexpectedly.

[12] As we do in this Guide.

30. Dispute Resolution & Recovery

Despite preparation, disputes may arise.

You should:

- Include clear contractual terms.
- Define governing law.
- Specify dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Clarify jurisdiction.

If payment delays occur:

- Follow structured reminder processes.
- Escalate formally.
- Consider collection agencies where appropriate.

Preparation improves recovery outcomes.

Debt Collection: Your buyer hasn't paid? You didn't take out credit insurance? It's bad news but not necessarily the end of the road. It is possible to sell your "bad debt" to a Debt Collection agency.

If this is a problem you are facing, check with a domestic or an International Debt Collection Service Providers to see if they can help.

☞ See: Debt Collection Services

Professional exporters assume that some disputes will occur. They manage them without destabilising operations.

End of Part IV – Brief Summary

Before proceeding, ensure that you:

- Have assessed country exposure.
- Conduct counterparty due diligence.
- Structured payment terms appropriately.
- Evaluated insurance options.
- Understood currency risk.
- Protected intellectual property.

Risk management does not restrict growth.

It enables controlled expansion.

PART V - Operational Execution & Logistics

Overview

Once markets are identified, buyers engaged and risk structured, execution becomes critical.

Operational performance determines whether international trade strengthens your reputation — or damages it.

Logistics, documentation, packaging and supply chain coordination must function smoothly. Delays, incomplete paperwork or poorly structured quotations can undermine otherwise strong commercial relationships.

You do not need to manage every operational detail personally. You do need to understand how the system works and ensure that it is coordinated professionally.

This section provides a practical overview of:

- Logistics planning.
- Freight coordination.
- Documentation discipline.
- Packaging and compliance.
- Digital supply chain tools.

Operational reliability is a competitive advantage.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Structure logistics planning effectively.
- Understand the role of freight and customs intermediaries.
- Identify core export documentation requirements.
- Align packaging and labelling with compliance standards.
- Use digital platforms to improve operational coordination.

31. Logistics & Supply Chain Planning

International logistics is more complex than domestic distribution, but it follows structured principles.

You should consider:

- Transport mode (sea, air, road, rail).
- Transit times.
- Cost implications.
- Insurance requirements.
- Customs clearance processes.

Early in negotiations, clarify:

- Delivery terms (Incoterms).

- Responsibility for freight.
- Responsibility for insurance.
- Import clearance obligations.

Logistics decisions directly affect pricing and risk exposure.

Operational planning should begin before contracts are finalised — not after production is complete.

32. Preparing an International Quotation

A quotation is both a commercial and operational document.

It should clearly define:

- Product specification.
- Quantity.
- Unit price.
- Incoterms.
- Delivery timeframe.
- Payment terms.
- Validity period.

Before issuing a quotation, confirm:

- Production capacity.
- Raw material availability.
- Freight cost assumptions.
- Compliance requirements.

Inaccurate quotations create avoidable disputes.

Cubic Meter (CBM) Calculations: To calculate a transport quote, freight forwarders will ask you for the nature of the goods to be shipped and the freight volume of the shipment. These CBM Calculator Tools are provided to you, free of charge, by IncoDocs[13]. Best of all, there's no login or signup required!

☞ Seafreight Calculator: Easily calculate volumes and weights for FCL and LCL shipping.

☞ Airfreight Calculator: Optimise your air shipping by understanding volumetric weight and actual weight.

☞ Parcel/Courier Calculator: Ensure accurate calculations for your smaller shipments.

☞ Roadfreight Calculator: Simplify your land-based shipping logistics.

☞ Railfreight Calculator: Accurately plan and calculate volumes and weights for rail shipments.

The IncoTerms pricing formula you decide to quote will also determine what you should pay for and what service your Freight Forwarder should provide.

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13 ☞ See IncoDocs

Once you have the answers to the above, you are ready to contact a local Freight Forwarder.

N.B. Whichever pricing formula you choose, it is important that you calculate the Landed Cost of Imported Products. This allows you to see how price competitive your products or services are, whether you have to directly pay all the import costs or not - you really do not want any nasty surprises.

☞ See: IncoDocs step-by-step Guide to help you calculate your landed costs.

Clarity at quotation stage reduces operational friction later.

33. Freight Forwarders & Customs Intermediaries

Most exporters work with professional freight forwarders.

A Freight Forwarder is a third party who helps organise and coordinate shipments on behalf of businesses by contracting with one or more carriers to transport the goods. Therefore, they should be responsible for all aspects of getting your goods from your premises to wherever they should be delivered.

Their role may include:

- Transport coordination.
- Customs documentation.
- Cargo booking.
- Liaison with shipping lines.
- Regulatory compliance support.

Select freight partners based on:

- Experience in your sector.
- Geographic expertise.
- Service responsiveness.
- Transparency of pricing.

Transporting your products is clearly a requirement for export deliveries – and for many products the cost of delivery is a key price element.

The sooner the goods arrive, the sooner you get paid, so speed is essential. However, faster transport may cost more. The procedures, routes and rates vary with the transport mode -- truck, rail, air or sea. Use international freight forwarders to ship exports. They can:

- Compare the costs, lead times, and transit times for each transport option; select the best option; and make the booking.
- Prepare the required documentation.
- Handle the packing, marking and labelling.
- Transport the goods from the factory to the foreign destination.
- Obtain cargo insurance.
- Arrange to clear the goods through customs on arrival.

Their fees can then be factored into the final price.

If you do not have a Freight Forwarder:

- You can find international logistics companies and\or national logistics companies in the relevant Country profile.

  See: Logistics for: Competitive Quotes and International Logistics Companies

  See: Commercial Contacts – Logistics Companies for Competitive Quotes and National Logistics Companies in specific countries.

- Ask for a quote from Freightos and its subsidiary WebCargo (even if just for comparison purposes).

  See: Freightos – shipments.

  See: WebCargo – for aircargo.

- Ask for a quote from Freight Forwarder Services (again, even if just for comparison purposes).

  See: Freight Forwarder Services

N.B. You remain responsible for accuracy of documentation, even when intermediaries assist.

A strong logistics partner improves reliability and efficiency.

34. Authorised Economic Operators (AEOs)

In some jurisdictions, Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) status provides:

- Simplified customs procedures.
- Reduced inspections.
- Faster clearance.

While not mandatory, understanding customs facilitation programmes can improve competitiveness.

See: TradeTech's AEODirectory for more information. (You can check whether the countries involved have AEO schemes, and if so, whether your freight forwarder has AEO Accreditation.)

If your export volumes grow significantly, consider whether enhanced customs status would provide advantage, in which case, if your country has an AEO Program, then you should consider qualifying for AEO status.

35. Cargo Insurance

Cargo insurance protects against:

- Loss.
- Damage.
- Theft.
- Transit disruption.

Responsibility for insurance depends on Incoterms.

Even when not contractually required, you should assess:

- Exposure value.
- Transit risk.
- Insurance coverage gaps.

Insurance is relatively inexpensive compared to potential loss.

Risk transfer through insurance supports stable growth.

If you are responsible for insuring the value of the shipment, and your Freight Forwarder does not cover this service, then you can request quotes from a local or international insurance company.

☞ See: Insurance – Cargo Insurance for International Cargo Insurance Providers.

36. Core Export Documentation

Export documentation varies by product and destination, but typically includes:

- Commercial invoice.
- Packing list.
- Bill of lading or airway bill.
- Certificate of origin.
- Insurance certificate (where applicable).
- Inspection certificates (if required).

These will depend upon a variety of factors e.g.:

- The nature of the goods or services you are exporting.
- The exporting country.
- The importing country.
- The payment terms.

Documentation must be:

- Accurate.
- Consistent.
- Timely.
- Aligned with contractual terms.

Errors can delay clearance and affect payment.

☞ See Appendix Four – Typical Export Documents for an overview of common export documents.

For destination-specific documentation requirements, consult official customs and trade authority resources.

37. Packaging, Marking & Labelling

Packaging is not cosmetic. It affects:

- Product protection.

- Compliance.
- Customs clearance.
- Brand perception.

You must consider:

- Transport durability.
- Climate exposure.
- Regulatory labelling standards.
- Language requirements.
- Safety markings.

Failure to comply with labelling regulations can result in rejection or fines.

Review requirements before production.

☞ See: Packaging & Labelling.

38. Supply Chain & Digital Coordination Platforms

Modern export operations increasingly rely on digital coordination tools.

You may use platforms to:

- Track shipments.
- Manage documentation.
- Coordinate with freight providers.
- Integrate accounting systems.
- Share compliance documentation.

Digital tools improve:

- Visibility.
- Traceability.
- Speed of communication.
- Error reduction.

Operational digitalisation enhances professionalism and reduces friction.

There are a number of platforms which help you manage your supply chain.

☞ See: Supply Chain Solutions for: Export Documentation Systems, Inventory Platforms, Supply Chain Platforms and Supply Chain Software.

End of Part V – Brief Summary

Before progressing, ensure that you:

- Have clarified delivery terms.
- Selected appropriate logistics partners.
- Structured accurate quotations.
- Understood documentation requirements.

- Reviewed packaging compliance.
- Considered digital coordination tools.

Operational discipline transforms export opportunity into reliable performance.

PART VI Financial Architecture & Pricing

Overview

International pricing is not simply your domestic price with freight added.

Export transactions introduce additional cost layers, currency exposure and timing considerations that must be incorporated systematically.

Before assessing competitiveness, you must first ensure that all incremental costs are identified and covered.

Failure to account for hidden or indirect costs is one of the most common causes of export underperformance.

This section focuses on:

- Structured cost identification.
- Pricing under different Incoterms.
- Banking and foreign exchange implications.
- Tariffs and non-tariff barriers.
- Tax and reporting considerations.

Financial discipline does not make you uncompetitive. It ensures sustainability.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify and quantify all export-related cost components.
- Structure pricing under different delivery terms.
- Integrate banking and FX considerations into pricing.
- Understand tariff and regulatory cost impact.
- Protect margin while remaining competitive.

39. Identifying Export Cost Components

Before issuing export prices, you must identify all incremental costs.

These may include:

- Additional packaging requirements.
- Freight and insurance.
- Export documentation preparation.
- Customs brokerage fees.
- Bank charges.
- Compliance certification.
- Product adaptation costs.
- Payment risk mitigation (e.g., insurance).
- Currency hedging costs.

Some costs are visible. Others are indirect.

For example:

- Extended payment terms affect working capital.
- Production adjustments increase unit cost.
- Smaller initial orders reduce economies of scale.

You should calculate:

Total Export Cost = Domestic Production Cost

- Export-Specific Incremental Costs.
- Financial Risk Costs.

Only once this structure is clear can pricing decisions be made responsibly.

40. Cost Calculations & Margin Discipline

You should evaluate:

- Direct cost per unit.
- Allocation of overhead.
- Minimum acceptable margin.
- Sensitivity to exchange movement.

Avoid:

- Reducing price without cost clarity.
- Competing solely on price.
- Assuming freight costs are static.

Export pricing must be sustainable.

Short-term discounting may secure initial orders, but persistent under pricing damages long-term viability.

41. Incoterms & Pricing Structure

Delivery terms determine cost allocation and risk transfer.

You must clearly understand:

- Which party arranges transport.
- Which party pays insurance.
- When risk transfers.
- Who clears customs.

Different Incoterms result in different pricing structures. The main options for export prices are

C&F Cost & Freight (to a named overseas port e.g. Singapore). This includes all FOB costs, plus all transportation costs to the foreign port. The buyer pays the cargo insurance, import duties and taxes to clear customs.

CIF Cost, Insurance & Freight (to a named overseas port e.g. New York). This includes all C&F costs, plus all cargo insurance. The buyer pays only the import duties and taxes to clear customs.

DAP Delivery At Place. The seller is responsible for the delivery of the goods to the named destination at the buyer. The costs of carrying out all the necessary import formalities are expressly excluded. These costs – including all import duties, taxes incurred when importing to the country of destination - are borne by the buyer.

DDP[14] Delivery Duty Paid (to a named place of destination e.g. DDP Sydney). This includes all CIF costs, plus any applicable import duties, taxes and other costs to clear the goods through customs.

Ex-Works The buyer has to organise (and pay for) transport from the factory, insurance and any applicable import taxes and tariffs.

FAS Free Alongside Ship (at a named port of export e.g. Liverpool). This includes the EX-Works price, plus your costs to transport, unload, and deliver the goods alongside the departing vessel or aircraft.

FOB Free on Board (at a named port of export e.g. Felixstowe). This includes the FAS cost, plus the cost to load the goods onto the carrier. The buyer pays for cargo insurance, transportation to the destination, and any applicable import duties and taxes.

☞ See: Logistics IncoTerms for further information regarding international pricing and payment terms.

Before agreeing to a delivery term, confirm that:

- You understand associated cost exposure.
- You can manage operational responsibility.
- The term aligns with your risk tolerance.

Pricing and Incoterms must be aligned.

42. Banking & Foreign Exchange Considerations

Export transactions involve financial timing.

You must consider:

- Currency of quotation.
- Currency of cost base.
- Payment timing.
- Bank charges.
- Exchange rate volatility.

If you quote in foreign currency while your costs are domestic, exchange movement can alter margin significantly.

[14] We would suggest that for exports you should go no further than CIF.

You may evaluate:

- Forward contracts.
- Currency clauses.
- Natural hedging.
- Multi-currency accounts.

Work with your bank to understand available instruments:

- Currency Accounts.
- Export Finance.
- Foreign Exchange

Banking, Finance and FX services are usually provided by locally based organisations – and therefore outside of the scope of this international Guide. However, there are a few institutions which offer cross-border services. If they could be of interest to you:

☞ See: International Banks and Finance

It is important to be aware that Bank, Country and Currency Codes are used extensively in international trade and it is important to use them – and use them correctly. Mistakes can result in delayed payments.

☞ See: Bank codes.

☞ See: Country and Currency Codes.

Financial planning reduces volatility impact.

43. Tariffs & Non-Tariff Barriers

Tariffs may:

- Increase landed cost.
- Affect competitiveness.
- Influence market selection.

You should verify:

- Applicable tariff classification.
- Duty rate.
- Preferential trade agreements.
- Rules of origin.

Non-tariff barriers may include:

- Technical standards.
- Certification requirements.
- Inspection procedures.
- Labelling compliance.
- Quotas.

Failure to account for these may render pricing unrealistic.

Research tariff exposure before market commitment.

ITC's Market Access Map - Review barriers to trade with the countries you are considering.

☞ See: Market Access Map

ITC's Lega Carta - Offers a global picture of the multilateral rules that may impact your products when exported to particular countries.

☞ See: Lega Carta

ITC's Rules of Origin Facilitator - A global resource on tariffs, trade agreements and rules of origin designed with SMEs in mind. The tool enables you in a few clicks to find out import duties in foreign markets applicable to your product, available duty savings, detailed rules of origin, and certification procedures.

☞ See: Rules of Origin Facilitator

ITC's Global Trade Helpdesk – Shows relevant mandatory requirements for importing specific goods into specific countries.

☞ See: Global Trade Helpdesk

☞ See: Customs & Non-Tariff Barriers for information provided by (1) the key international organisations and (2) commercial service providers providing detailed information services.

44. Tax & Reporting Considerations

Export transactions may involve:

- VAT treatment differences.
- Zero-rating conditions.
- Export declarations.
- Local reporting obligations.

Ensure that:

- Documentation supports tax treatment.
- Accounting systems reflect export transactions clearly.
- Reporting obligations are understood.

N.B. In certain importing countries[15]. depending upon the characteristics of your export contract, and whether it is with an individual or a locally registered organisation, for fiscal purposes you may have to register in the importing country.

Your Accounting Software: Can your existing accounting software cope with the foreign currencies you will be dealing in? If not, you may have to upgrade the software licence or move to another provider.

☞ See: Accountancy Software.

[15] Fiscal representatives for processing VAT or GST are not only required for EU countries but also Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Japan, South Africa, Australia and South Korea. – More can be expected to be added to that list.

This Guide does not provide professional advice. Consult professional advisors for jurisdiction-specific guidance. Therefore, we suggest that you contact, as appropriate:

- **Your Accountant**.
- **Your Freight Forwarder** (They can complete declarations with both domestic and foreign customs authorities).
- **Your Fast Parcel Operator** (They transport parcels and freight internationally within a specific timeframe. This may include customs clearance. A number have been approved by HMRC to move goods under simplified memorandum of understanding.)
- **Your Customs Agent or Broker**. (They ensure goods clear through customs, and may act as a direct or indirect representative. This may include lodging import/export customs declarations to Customs Authorities and facilitating the payment of import duties, VAT, excise duty etc. on behalf of importers and exporters.)

Tax errors can create unnecessary financial exposure.

45. Competitiveness & Market Positioning

Once all cost components are identified and structured, you can evaluate competitiveness.

You should analyse:

- Market price benchmarks.
- Competitor positioning.
- Customer value perception.
- Payment terms expectations.

Competitiveness does not always require lowest price.

Buyers evaluate:

- Reliability.
- Quality.
- Compliance.
- Communication.
- Financial stability.

Price must reflect value and cost reality.

A sustainable export business balances competitiveness with disciplined margin control.

End of Part VI – Brief Summary

Before progressing, ensure that you:

- Have identified all export-specific costs.
- Structured pricing under correct delivery terms.
- Assessed currency exposure.
- Verified tariff and compliance costs.
- Evaluated competitiveness realistically.

Financial clarity enables controlled expansion.

PART VII Digital Trade Infrastructure & Documentation

Overview

International trade is undergoing structural digital transformation.

Governments, customs authorities, banks and logistics providers are increasingly shifting from paper-based processes to digital documentation frameworks. Electronic invoicing, digital signatures, structured data formats and platform-based document exchange are becoming standard practice.

Many of these developments are explained in greater detail in the Knowledge Centre paper ☞ *Guide to Online Indexing, Rankings & Traffic Analysis*.

This transition significantly reduces:

- Transaction costs.
- Processing delays.
- Administrative errors.
- Physical document handling risks.
- Payment bottlenecks.

For exporters, digital trade infrastructure is no longer optional. It is rapidly becoming an operational requirement.

Businesses that adopt digital documentation processes early benefit from:

- Faster clearance.
- Improved traceability.
- Stronger compliance.
- Lower administrative burden.
- Enhanced professional credibility.

This section explains the core elements of modern digital trade infrastructure and how you can align your export processes accordingly.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Understand the global shift toward digital trade documentation.
- Identify core digital document types.
- Apply correct trade classification codes.
- Integrate eInvoicing and eSignatures into export processes.
- Evaluate digital trade platforms.
- Recognise emerging technologies shaping international trade.

46. The Global Shift Toward Digital Trade

International trade documentation has historically relied on physical paperwork.

Today, regulatory authorities and industry bodies are actively promoting:

- Electronic customs declarations.
- Digital certificates of origin.
- eBills of Lading.
- Electronic invoicing systems.
- Digital document exchange platforms.

The United Nations and the International Chamber of Commerce ("ICC") are heavily involved in these developments. To find out more see:

☞ The UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records 2017 (MLETR)

☞ Digital trade

☞ The ICC Centre for Digital Trade & Innovation.

The objectives are clear:

- Reduce fraud.
- Improve transparency.
- Accelerate processing.
- Lower administrative cost
- Improve cross-border data consistency.

For exporters, digitalisation reduces:

- Courier expenses.
- Manual duplication.
- Lost document risk.
- Delays in payment due to documentation errors.

Adapting early to digital systems strengthens operational efficiency.

47. Trade Classification & Codes

International trade relies on structured classification systems.

Correct coding affects:

- Tariff determination.
- Regulatory requirements.
- Statistical reporting.
- Trade agreement eligibility.

You must ensure accurate use of:

- Product classification codes.
- Industry classification references.
- Customs tariff codes.

Incorrect classification can result in:

- Overpayment of duties.
- Delays.

- Compliance penalties.

Codes are used extensively in international trade documentation. These main ones can be found on the ExportersAlmanac:

☞ See: Bank, Corporate, Industry & Product Codes

☞ See: Country, Location & Currency Codes.

Of these:

Bank & Currency Codes
BICs, Fedwire and IBANs are the most important codes used in international trade to identify banks, branches and bank accounts for the routing of payments. Currency codes are important in ensuring you get paid in the correct currency. – Make sure that these are correctly included in your invoices.

Economic Operator Registration and Identification (EORI) numbers
If you are trading with, or thinking of trading with, the EU, you will need an EU EORI[16] number for:

- Customs declarations to move your goods into EU.
- Correspondence and rulings from EU customs.

☞ See: Economic Operators Registration and Identification number (EORI).

Industry Codes
Industry Codes are particularly important when searching international directories for potential partners – and ensuring that your company is also correctly classified.

☞ See: Industry Codes

Product Codes
Product Codes are particularly important elements for completing import and export documentation. They determine if any tariffs or quotas will apply to the trade. Any mistakes in these codes can result in: delays, fines or the incorrect imposition of tariffs.

☞ See: Product Codes

☞ See Appendix Two – Online Reference Resources for official reference resources.

Structured coding improves clarity and reduces risk.

48. eInvoicing

Electronic invoicing is increasingly mandated or encouraged in many jurisdictions.

Benefits include:

- Faster processing.

16 ☞ Avalara can help you if you need help in applying for an EU EORI number.

- Improved tax compliance.
- Reduced administrative workload.
- Enhanced audit trails.

When exporting, ensure that your invoicing system can:

- Generate compliant commercial invoices.
- Align with destination requirements.
- Integrate with accounting systems.
- Maintain digital records securely

The Standards and Specifications governing the exchange of eInvoices are mainly based on:

☞ PEPPOL (**Pan-European Public Procurement OnLine).**

☞ ICC Genesis is ICC's new digital trade tool streamlines the invoice self-declaration process between countries which have concluded a Free Trade Agreement.

There are many, many e-Invoice solution providers. However, if you are still looking for a provider:

☞ See: eInvoice Solutions.

Digital invoicing improves payment cycle efficiency.

49. eSignatures & Digital Authentication

Digital signatures allow contracts and documentation to be executed securely without physical exchange.

They provide:

- Legally recognised authentication.
- Speed of contract finalisation.
- Cross-border enforceability (subject to jurisdiction).

There are three categories of eSignatures:

1. Simple Electronic Signatures.
2. Advanced Electronic Signatures (AdES) is an electronic signature that has met the requirements set forth under EU Regulation No 910/2014.

   ☞ See: EU Regulation No 910/2014

3. Qualified Electronic Signatures (QES) guarantee the authenticity, integrity and non-rejection of electronic documents. It is also possible to use the Portable Document Format (PDF) signature format:

   ☞ See: EU/EEA Trusted List Browser. This provides the list of qualified trust service providers established in the European Union.

   ☞ See: The specifications of the PDF format necessary for the development of further verification products and digital signature generation.

Before relying on digital signatures, confirm:

- Jurisdictional recognition.
- Platform security
- Audit trail integrity.

See: eSignature Solutions for international providers of eSignature Solutions.

Digital authentication reduces transaction friction significantly. Just like in the physical world, you need to be sure who you are dealing with legally represents the company you are contracting with.

Corporate identity: There are potentially 5 sources for checking a company's identity:

1. For most countries you can check their registration details online in the official company register.

   See Trade Profile – Company Register.

2. Check their website.

3. You can also check their entry in Kompass for further details; if it is registered with Kompass.

   See: Kompass

4. You can request a Credit Report.

   See: Rating Agencies.

5. For EU based buyers, you should also check their VAT and EORI numbers – (which you will need in any case for commercial and customs documentation).

   See: VIES VAT number validation

   See: EORI/REX/CD validation

Please note, that fraudsters are very capable of producing credible, false credentials. The more sources you can cross-check the better.

Personal Identity: It is advisable to **c**heck the identity of the contact person – do they in fact represent the company you are dealing with?

1. Are they a director?
2. Are they listed on the website?
3. Can they be reached via the company's switchboard?
4. Do they have a company email address?
5. Is their LinkedIn profile validated?
6. Are you sure that you are not dealing with an Avatar?

50. Digital Documentation Platforms

Modern trade increasingly uses platforms that:

- Store export documentation.
- Facilitate document sharing.
- Track shipment status.
- Integrate with customs systems.
- Coordinate supply chain data.

Contractual documentation is one area which causes problems and misunderstandings between potential partners. To reduce these issues to a minimum is to use ICC model contracts and clauses. These have been drafted by legal experts from across ICC's worldwide network, providing balanced, neutral templates. (As with any models, they should be checked before signature by a lawyer to ensure compliance with relevant local legal and regulatory requirements.) Unlike many other organisations' models, ICC models do not favour any industry sector, geography, or category of parties (such as sellers or buyers).[17]

☞ See: ICC model contracts and clauses

☞ See: Legal & Accounting Resources – Template Contracts for further suggestions for standardised, neutral contracts.

If you're happy with the legal support that you are receiving, that's good. If you're looking for something more, then the following may help:

☞ See: Legal & Accounting Firms for links to major international legal firms.

☞ See: Commercial Contacts – Law Associations & Firms for links to national law associations and firms in each country.

Digital platforms improve:

- Traceability.
- Visibility.
- Efficiency.
- Error reduction.

They also support compliance with evolving regulatory digital requirements.

Adoption should be structured and aligned with your operational scale.

51. Emerging Technologies in Trade

Emerging developments include:

- Electronic Bills of Lading.
- Blockchain-based documentation systems. (Distributed Ledgers – DLT)
- Smart contracts.
- Interoperable customs data systems.
- Integrated trade finance platforms.

The tamper-proof and decentralised nature of DLT makes it useful for breaking the silos that constrain international trade. Many projects that were at an exploratory level in 2019 have matured and reached the production stage.

☞ See: the WTO and Trade Finance Global's video "Blockchain & DLT in Trade: Where do we stand?"

[17] Should they be needed (hopefully not), included in this documentation are options for dispute resolution include renowned ICC Arbitration or litigation in national courts.

The potential benefits of DLT can be summarised as follows:

- Elimination of content conflict between documentation covering the same shipment.
- Faster border crossing processing.
- Faster payments.
- Total transparency and clarity – to all aspects of the documentation.
- Increased use of artificial intelligence to facilitate processing and administration.
- Better statistical analysis – in real-time.

These technologies aim to:

- Reduce fraud.
- Increase transparency.
- Shorten transaction cycles.
- Enhance security.

While not all systems are universally adopted, digitalisation momentum is clear.

Monitoring these developments ensures you remain competitive and prepared for regulatory evolution.

End of Part VII – Brief Summary

Before concluding, ensure that you:

- Understand digital documentation requirements in your target markets.
- Apply correct trade classification codes.
- Integrate eInvoicing where required.
- Use secure digital authentication tools.
- Evaluate digital platforms for operational efficiency.

Digital infrastructure significantly reduces transaction cost and administrative friction.

Businesses that modernise early gain efficiency advantages.

PART VIII Conclusions & Strategic Recommendations

Overview

International trade is no longer limited by geography. It is shaped by preparation, structure and execution.

Throughout this Guide, you have examined the key components of successful international expansion:

- Strategic clarity.
- Export readiness.
- Market prioritisation.
- Digital buyer identification.
- Multilingual visibility.
- Structured communication.
- Risk architecture.
- Operational coordination.
- Financial discipline.
- Digital trade infrastructure.

Each element contributes to a coherent export framework.

International growth does not depend on scale alone. It depends on discipline.

52. Key Conclusions

Export success increasingly depends on four interrelated factors:

- Export readiness.
- Product and market alignment.
- Digital visibility in international markets.
- Access to modern trade infrastructure.

To achieve these four pillars, it is necessary to recognise the following:

1. **International trade is accessible, but not automatic**.
   Digital tools have reduced barriers, but preparation remains essential.

2. **Strategy must precede opportunity**.
   Opportunistic exporting without structure increases risk and cost.

3. **Digital visibility and procurement platforms have transformed buyer discovery**.
   Businesses that are discoverable, understandable and credible online gain measurable advantage.

4. **Risk management enables growth**.
   Structured due diligence, payment discipline and currency awareness reduce exposure without restricting opportunity.

5. **Pricing must be grounded in complete cost awareness**.
   Cover all export-specific costs before evaluating competitiveness.

6. **Operational reliability is a competitive asset**.
   Documentation accuracy, logistics coordination and compliance discipline build long-term trust.

7. **Digital documentation is becoming the global norm**.
   Early adoption reduces transaction cost and improves efficiency.

International trade is manageable when approached systematically.

53. Strategic Recommendations

To move forward effectively:

1. Formalise Your Export Plan

Do not rely on informal intentions.

Document:

- Target markets.
- Entry strategy.
- Pricing framework.
- Risk controls.
- Resource allocation.
- Performance indicators.

Review regularly.

2. Prioritise Digital Market Validation

Before committing significant physical resources:

- Validate demand digitally.
- Analyse procurement platforms.
- Evaluate competitor positioning.
- Strengthen multilingual visibility.

Digital preparation reduces wasted expenditure.

3. Implement Structured Risk Controls Early

Do not wait for payment issues to arise.

Establish:

- Counterparty verification procedures.
- Payment term Guidelines.
- Currency exposure policies.
- Insurance evaluation processes.

Preventative structure is less costly than reactive correction.

4. Integrate Financial & Operational Planning

Ensure that:

- Pricing reflects real cost.
- Delivery terms are understood.
- Documentation processes are standardised.
- Digital tools are used effectively.

Export success depends on coordination between commercial, financial and operational functions.

5. Embrace Digital Trade Infrastructure

Global regulatory and industry momentum is moving toward:

- Digital documentation.
- Electronic invoicing.
- Secure digital authentication.
- Platform-based coordination.

Adopting digital processes early reduces administrative burden and increases competitiveness.

6. Treat Exporting as a Long-Term Capability

International trade is not a single transaction. It is a capability that develops over time.

- Measure performance.
- Refine markets.
- Adjust pricing.
- Improve processes.
- Expand gradually.

Sustainable international growth results from continuous improvement, not rapid expansion without structure.

Final Reflection

The opportunities in international B2B trade are substantial.

- Markets are interconnected.
- Buyers search globally.
- Digital systems reduce friction.

However, opportunity alone does not generate results. Structured preparation does. before implementing any such Export Plan, you should assess:

- Are you committed to exporting? – If not, it's better not to start.
- What external support will you need – and who will provide this?
- Do you have adequate resources - finances, personnel, production facilities?
- What do you expect from export markets? – It is helpful to have clear goals.
- How much do you expect to invest? – And do you have the resources?
- Have all the key people in your business agreed? – You'll need the support of your team.

If you need professional advice or training on any aspect or at any phase of your Export Plan, then do speak to the appropriate professional(s). Check out the following where you can find links to relevant organisations providing consultancy and training support.

☞ **See:** **Support Services for your exports** - for international support services.

☞ **See:** **the ExpoWorld Resource Library.**

If you apply the framework outlined in this Guide with discipline and realism, you will significantly strengthen your ability to compete internationally.

- The tools are available.
- The markets are accessible.
- The decision to proceed systematically is yours.

Finally, if we are missing anything here which would help you, please just ✉ email our helpdesk and we'll do our best to find the answer for you.

Appendices

For your further reference:

Appendix One - Export Readiness Check List

This checklist is designed to help companies assess their readiness to engage in international trade. Not every section will be relevant to every business, but reviewing each topic will help identify areas that may require further preparation.

Several topics referenced in this checklist are explored in greater detail in the International Trade Knowledge Centre resources accompanying this Guide.

☞ See the ExpoWorld Resource Library.

Use the "Status\Notes" space provided to indicate whether each item has been addressed and to note any actions required.

If several questions any section remain unanswered, your company may need to refine its export strategy before proceeding further.

Strategic Foundations of Export Growth

Question	Status\Notes
Why are you looking at export markets?	
Are you seeking growth, diversification or survival?	
Are you reacting to domestic pressure or pursuing strategic expansion?	
Do you have internal alignment on export objectives?	

Table 1 – Strategic Foundations of Export Growth

Question	Status\Notes
Company Profile Check List	
Have you checked your profile in your official Company Register?	
Have you checked your Credit Profile?	
Have you checked your profile in Kompass (and other Business Directories)?	
Have you reviewed your website and carried out an SEO audit?	
If you have industry certifications, are these publicised in your marketing collateral and on your website?	
Are your business email addresses linked to your business domain?	

Table 2 - Company Profile Check List

Question	Status\Notes
Competitor Comparative Analysis	
Have you analysed your competitors – actual and potential?	
How do your products and services compare?	
Will your products need to be modified for export markets to respond to local market requirements, regulations or competition?	
What advantages do you think your offering has in the particular overseas market?	
How will you position your product?	
Have you drafted an export plan?	

Table 3 - Competitor Comparative Analysis

Market Selection & Buyer Acquisition

Question	Status\Notes
Have you identified any potential overseas markets?	
Have you chosen the countries you would exclude?	
Have you identified any potential overseas Buyers or Suppliers?	
Do any of the international procurement platforms interest you?	
Do any B2B Online Marketplaces interest you?	
Have you approached any Trade Promotion Agencies or Support Networks?	
Have you identified any trade missions or industry fairs that are of interest?	
Are you considering any local representation? Would this be required for your goods or services?	

Table 4 - Market Selection & Buyer Acquisition

Communications, Multilingual Visibility & Lead Conversion

Question	Status\Notes
Do you have multilingual collateral to promote your products and services?	
Do you use Google Ads for domestic sales? Would you consider using Google Ads for foreign sales?	
Do you use Social Media to support your domestic sales? Would you consider using Social Media for your international advertising & marketing?	
Have you registered your company with the Kompass Directory?	
Have you registered with other online business directories?	
Have you assessed and optimised your digital export visibility?	
Are using AI to help your export marketing development?	
Are your products and services clearly described online using internationally recognised terminology?	
Do you have templates and procedures in place to respond to export enquiries?	

Table 5 - Communications, Multilingual Visibility & Lead Conversion

Risk Architecture & Payment Security

Question	Status\Notes
Have you assessed the country risk of your potential new markets?	
Have you carried out checks on your potential buyers?	
Have you chosen your payment terms and structure?	
Will you need trade finance and credit insurance?	
Do you need to ensure that you have Intellectual Property protection?	
Do you have any foreign exchange exposure?	

Table 6 - Risk Architecture & Payment Security

Operational Execution & Logistics

Question	Status\Notes
Have you decided how you will export your goods?	
Do you have export quote formats ready?	
Have you chosen a freight forwarder?	
Are they an Authorised Economic Operator?	
Are you responsible for cargo insurance? If so, how will you cover this?	

Do you have templates for all the core export documentation that you will need?	
Will you have to adapt your packaging, marking and labelling?	
Do you use a supply chain or digital coordination platform?	

Table 7 - Operational Execution & Logistics

Financial Architecture & Pricing

Question	Status\Notes
Have you identified your export cost components?	
Have you quantified your export cost components?	
Have you decided which IncoTerms you will quote?	
If you have foreign currency exposure, have you decided how you will manage or hedge it?	
Have you identified any relevant tariff or non-tariff barriers for the countries you are targeting?	
Have you identified any relevant tax and fiscal reporting considerations that apply?	
Have you considered your competitiveness and market positioning taking your export prices into account?	

Table 8 - Financial Architecture & Pricing

Digital Trade Infrastructure & Documentation

Question	Status\Notes
Have you digitised your administration and operational procedures?	
Do you use e-Invoicing?	
Do you use and accept e-Signatures?	
Do you carry out digital checks on potential buyers?	
Do you use a digital documentation platform?	
Do you use any Distributed Ledger based services?	

Table 9 - Digital Trade Infrastructure & Documentation

Strategic Recommendations

Question	Status\Notes
Have you formalised your export plan?	
Have you prioritised digital market validation?	
Have you implemented structured risk controls?	
Have you integrated financial and operational planning?	
Have you implemented your digital trade infrastructure?	
Will you treat exporting as a long term capability?	

Table 10 - Strategic Recommendations

Appendix Two – Online Reference Resources

TradeTech's ExportersAlmanac provides the following reference resources:

Bank, Corporate identifiers & Tax Codes, Industry and Product Codes

☞ See: The ExportersAlmanac.

Blacklists and Embargoes

☞ See: Check whether a potential partner is subject to any such order. If in doubt, please seek advice.

Country & Currency Codes, IATA Codes and UN Locations Codes

☞ See: The ExportersAlmanac.

Customs and Non-Tariff Barriers

☞ See: The ExportersAlmanac for information provided by the key international organisations and (2) commercial service providers providing detailed information services.

Glossaries

☞ See: 2 comprehensive Glossaries covering eCommerce and Trade and Trade Finance.

Packaging

☞ See: The international standards used in packaging.

Standards Bodies

☞ See: International bodies which issue standards affecting international trade.

Appendix Three - Agent/Distributor Qualifications Checklist

Consider these factors in evaluating prospective overseas representatives. Their significance varies with the products and countries involved and the needs of the company seeking a representative.

Sales Force	
Number and location of sales staff.	
Would the rep need more staff to service your account?	
Would it be willing add staff?	
How are their sales staff compensated?	
Are any incentive or motivation programs offered?	
How are their sales staff trained?	
Would it pay or share costs of locally based or dedicated online training if needed?	

Table 11 Sales Force Check List

Sales Performance	
Sales volume for the past five years.	
If sales are growing, why? If not, why not?	
Sales goals for next year; based on what assumptions?	
What sales volume does it foresee for your products?	
Based on what?	
Is this adequate?	

Table 12 Sales Performance Check List

Territorial Coverage	
Current territory served.	
Is that the coverage you need?	
How does it serve more distant areas within its territory -- resident staff, branch offices?	
Would it be willing to strengthen coverage in areas you consider important?	

Table 13 Territorial Coverage Check List

Companies/Products Represented	
How many and whose/products does it currently represent?	
Is this a manageable level?	
Would you be the primary supplier?	
What priority would you receive?	
Would your products fit well in this mix?	
Do you compete with any of the companies/products represented?	

Table 14 Companies/Products Represented Check List

Customer Profile	
What end-use sectors does it mainly sell to?	
Are these the right targets for you?	
Who are its key accounts?	
What share of sales do they represent?	
Do they make sense for you too?	

Table 15 Customer Profile Check List

Facilities and Equipment	
Communications facilities and preferred methods -- phone, fax, cable, E-mail, other?	
Warehouse and stocking capacity?	
Is there enough for you, if you need it?	
Customer support facilities/capabilities. Can it install and service your products if needed?	
Training facilities/capabilities.	
Can it train users if needed?	

Table 16 Facilities and Equipment Check List

Localisation Capabilities	
Can it translate your sales literature and ad copy if needed?	
Can it alter the packaging or the product itself if needed to meet local requirement or tastes?	

Table 17 Localisation Capabilities Check List

Market Development Capabilities	
Market research -- Does it conduct or use market research in decision-making?	
Can it help you assess your market potential?	
Promotion -- Does it promote itself and the products it represents?	
What promotional literature is used for this?	
What promotional media are used?	
How are the results measured?	
How much is spent on each method?	

Table 18 Market Development Capabilities Check List

Appendix Four – Typical Export Documents

The Standard Documentation Requirements that you can expect are:

1. **ADR Certificate**
   ADR certification is required when transporting hazardous goods within Europe. ADR stands for "Accord européen relatif au transport international des marchandises Dangereuses par Route", which is French for a European agreement concerning the international carriage of dangerous goods by road.

   ☞ See: What is ADR?

2. **Air Waybill**
   This is a negotiable bill for the goods that are shipped on a plane.

3. **ATR Certificate**
   An ATR certificate is a customs document used for trade between countries in the European Union (EU) and Turkey. The certificate allows specific types of items to be imported duty-free between the two parties.

4. **Certificate of Analysis (COA)**
   A document certifying that specific goods have been subjected to specific testing and have yielded specific findings. Food products, wines and spirits, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals are among the most common items for which a certificate of analysis is issued.

   ☞ See: Quality Control & Certification for a list of companies providing these services.

5. **Certificate of Free Sale**
   A certificate of free sale is sometimes called a certificate for export and a certificate to foreign governments. It is evidence that goods like food items, cosmetics, medical devices, or biologics are legally free for sale in the open market and have no restrictions. The goods have approval from the regulatory authorities in the country of origin.

6. **Certificates of Origin**
   This document includes information about the country from where the goods originated. The certificate of origin comes into use when it has the signature of a semi-official organisation, like a chamber of commerce or a consulate officer.

7. **CIM consignment note**
   A CIM consignment note gives details of the goods being transported by rail.

8. **CMR**
   A CMR consignment note is a document used for the regulation of road freight transport. (An eCMR is simply a digital version of the paper CMR.) The document has been adopted by most of the European states with the purpose of regulating legal issues concerning road freight transportation.

   The following details must be included in the CMR document:

   - The name and address of the transport company, as well as the consignee.
   - The date and location where the document was completed.
   - The description of the transported goods and the packaging method.
   - The weight of the goods; the charges associated with the goods.
   - The information regarding dangerous goods.

9. **Commercial Invoice**
   The commercial invoice for international trade looks very different from the commercial invoice you use for domestic.

   Export commercial invoices and invoices are likely to cover:

   - Order number
   - Purchase order number
   - Customer reference number
   - Banking and payment information
   - Detail, value, and quantity of products or goods.

10. **Dangerous Goods Forms**
    These forms are required to ship dangerous goods.

11. **e-ADs**
    Under EMCS[18] a movement of excise goods is documented at every stage through an electronic Administrative Document (e-AD), for duty suspension goods, or through an electronic Simplified Administrative Document (e-SAD) in the case of duty paid movements.

12. **Export Licence**
    Export licences may be special national requirements for some controlled goods, such as firearms, medicines, plants and animal products.

13. **Fumigation Certificate**
    A fumigation certificate is an approval document issued by the licensing authority to indicate that shipment and shipping materials have been properly fumigated. The certificate typically contains details about the fumigation of imported goods such as the purpose of treatment, the type of fumigants used, and the temperature range that was applied.

14. **Import Licences**
    Certain goods require the importer to obtain a licence or certificate from various UK government departments. This includes animals, plants, agricultural products, medicines, chemicals and weapons.

15. **Inland Bill of Lading**
    This document is for the export of goods between the exporter and the shipper of the goods. This document includes the name of the delivery state for goods. It is also a receipt to confirm that goods are not in the warehouse and successfully picked up for delivery.

16. **Ocean Bill of Lading**
    There are two ocean bills of lading to export your goods by ocean vessel. A straight bill of lading is not negotiable and is signed by a specific consignee. A negotiable bill of lading is a document to prove that the ownership of the product or good is successfully transferred to another person and forwarded to the bank of the buyer.

17. **Packing List**
    An export packing list is a crucial international trade document for freight forwarders, banks, and customs officials. A freight forwarder requests an export packing list because with the help of the information included in the packing list, he will know about the bills of lading for the shipment.

[18] The Excise Movement and Control System is a computerised system for recording and monitoring the movement of excise goods (alcohol, tobacco and energy products) in the territory of the EU.

Furthermore, a customs official needs an export packing list to know what they should check.

Typically, packing lists include the following details:

- Items in the shipment.
- Packages net, gross weight, and dimensions.
- Special safety instructions for delivery of the goods.

In case of any damage or loss of cargo and disagreement between the carrier and exporter, the company files an insurance claim on the bases of the packing list.

18. Transport Order

A transport order is a document which indicates the completion of an agreement between the ordering party and the carrier. In essence, the transport order is an instruction to move goods or materials from a source storage unit to another within a specific time.

19. Phytosanitary Certificate

The Phytosanitary Certificate (PSC) is a government-issued certificate for the exporting of plants, plant products, or other regulated items. PSCs are provided to show that consignments meet the importing country's phytosanitary import criteria. (ePhyto is short for "electronic phytosanitary certificate".)

20. Proforma Invoice

A proforma invoice is a quote provided by the company to the buyer in an international transaction. A proforma invoice is necessary for the international prospect, which is vital for calculating financing, opening a letter of credit, applying for import licences, etc., and documents used in international trade.

A complete proforma invoice looks like a commercial invoice, which includes the following details.

- The details, like who is the buyer and seller in the transaction.
- Complete information on the goods or services, like the price and quantity for international trade.
- The source used for payment.
- The delivery details of the goods or services, like the location and source of delivery.
- The currency used for payment.

N.B. Make sure that you add the expiration date of your proforma invoice.

21. Proof of insurance

You may need to insure the goods, and you may also be required to provide proof of insurance to your customer, particularly if you are passing on the costs.

22. Shipper's Letter of Instruction (SLI)

This document comes into use to process the export with a freight forwarder. Depending on your terms of the sale agreement, the SLI includes all the necessary information required for successful transport of an international trade. The SLI includes a limited Power of Attorney, providing authority to someone to complete the shipment on your behalf.

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For further information, resources and digital trade infrastructure:

- ☞ See: **TradeTech Solutions Ltd.**
- ☞ See: **AEODirectory**
- ☞ See: **ExportersAlmanac**
- ☞ See: **ExpoUK.cloud**
- ☞ See: **ExpoWorld.cloud**

Ian Dunning

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Kenniscentrumbronnen

Aanvullende richtlijnen over exportzichtbaarheid, meertalige digitale aanwezigheid en digitale handelsinfrastructuur zijn beschikbaar in de **ExpoWorld Resourcebibliotheek**.

De Resourcebibliotheek biedt een overzicht van alle publicaties van het **Kenniscentrum**, samen met korte beschrijvingen van elk document.

Aanvullende resources worden periodiek toegevoegd. Nieuwe publicaties verschijnen in de Resourcebibliotheek zodra deze beschikbaar zijn.