



# EASING YOUR COMPANY INTO THE EXPORTING PROCESS

This is primarily directed to those of you who have never exported anything or who have only exported to just one or two neighboring countries. Given the state of your country's domestic economy, it just might be beneficial for you to find some new markets.

In fact, there are some countries that are expanding in population and have had some growth. A number of developing countries need machinery, equipment, consumer products, communications equipment, technology, food and medical equipment, as well as a variety of business services. In addition, the current weakness in the U.S. dollar certainly does provide some incentive for American companies as well as for those countries that have some linkage to the U.S. dollar.

Yes, for companies that have never exported, there may be some logical reasons for this. Some companies may have products or services that are not needed by anyone outside of their own country or they may feel that their domestic market is large enough to allow them to achieve their sales objectives. Others may feel that they do not have sufficient financial resources to support an export effort.

However, it is the feeling by a number of people, including myself, that there may be some type of psychological barrier that prevents one from taking that first step to exporting. There may be a basic fear of the unknown or, someone may have heard about some bad experience that another company may have had.

Thus, the objective of this column is to offer a few ideas as to how to

**THERE MAY BE SOME TYPE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIER THAT PREVENTS ONE FROM TAKING THAT FIRST STEP INTO EXPORTING.**

take that first step and ease your company into a foreign market. No, there is no need to jump into signing up for a trade show or for joining an overseas trade mission. The problem with these types of platforms is that they put immediate pressure on you to show, discuss or even demonstrate your product. There is really no time to develop a total understanding of the prospective buyer's business, needs, issues of concern, etc. In addition, there is very little chance to have much personal interaction with the prospect. What you often end up doing is giving away many brochures, repeating the same sales message, collecting a huge number of business cards, etc. You then need to return to your home country and then try to figure out how to follow-up and close the deal with those prospects that may have shown some interest.

This can all be a very frustrating

experience for someone who has never done this type of thing in the past. In fact, I have known many trade show participants who did not even bother to follow-up on their return home. So, let me offer an approach that allows you to take a more relaxed approach and one that gives you the opportunity to have more time with a prospective customer.

Three weeks ago, I was able to make 14 business development calls in Italy. Given the association that I belong to in Florida, and the relationship that my town has with a city in Italy, would it be possible to show the people in the similar association in that Italian city that we might be able to be of some help to selected organizations in their city? Contact was made with the association in that city in Italy. They then took it upon themselves to set up the individual meetings for me in that province.

The initial focus of each of the meetings was on getting each of the organizations to discuss the issues, problems and potential opportunities that they felt would be of value to their organizations. How do they see themselves moving forward? The next issue was to determine if they had ever done any business in North America and if so, to what extent. Would they, in fact, like to expand their business within North America?

Upon completion of each meeting and with the relevant information acquired, what was offered was the suggestion that I would evaluate each of their situations and then determine whether or not there is something that can be done to help them further expand their businesses in North America. Of the 14 organizations visited, 12 stated that they would appreciate some assistance. Back in the States, I can now create strategies as to how each can further develop their positions in the North American market.

The outcome of my visit to Italy





was much more than I had originally expected. Why? Simply because someone from the States had come all the way there to listen to their hopes and dreams for their businesses. What is the reaction of anyone whereby you indicate that you seriously have their best interest at heart be it psychological, physical, financial, functional, spiritual, etc.? When the total focus is on the prospect and you then show that you truly understand their objectives, frustrations, hopes and dreams, you are now in the process of building a relationship. This focus has to initially be on them and not on your product or service.

Remember, the objective of this article is to show you how to initially create a more personal, less product focused, meeting for you and a prospective foreign customer. What does this require? First, you need to identify a market in this world that might just be interested in something that you have to offer. Secondly, it would be helpful to identify someone

who has a connection with anyone in that market. Many cities and even small towns have various types of

associations in various foreign markets. I am attending the Italian Association dinner in my small Florida town next week. I will share my recent Italian experience with the members of that Association. Perhaps some of those members have other connections in Italy.

Establishing these types of relationships can be of great help in that they can identify those individuals in those foreign markets who might be able to set up appointments with the members of those organizations that you are targeting.

In summary, use the various trade, business or cultural associations that are available to you. If your city has a Sister City Association, find out which foreign sister cities with which you have a relationship. Some foreign governments may have business associations, trade offices and consulates in or near your home city. Your home state may have overseas business offices in various cities in the world. In other words, use whatever sources you have available to you



to begin to build some relations in a targeted foreign market.

At this point, none of this has cost you anything, except possibly a dinner at an association meeting. Once you have some contact information, begin to connect with those people in the foreign market. Someone may be able to set up meetings or make other introductions for you. If not, set the meetings up on your own. These become your business development meetings. Keep in mind, the objective is to acquire certain key information from the prospects that will eventually allow you to determine where and how you might be of some help to the prospect. That should be the primary objective of that first meeting with them. Do not rush into making a presentation about yourself or your product or service. Take some time to

think through the specific benefits that you can bring to this prospect. Can you quantify these benefits to this individual prospect?

These things can be thought through upon your return to your home country. What will be your strategy in order to acquire the business from this prospect? How will you communicate the benefits that your product or service will bring to this foreign prospect?

As you can see, this type of approach to exporting is to allow you to create a more hospitable environment for you and a prospect. First of all, they will be quite impressed that you have come to meet with them to discuss their situation. Secondly, it gives you a much greater amount of time for you to understand their particular situation.

It allows you the time to begin to

actually get to know the prospect. And finally, it gives you sufficient time to determine exactly where and how you can be of help to them.

Yes, there are situations where I have taken companies to a trade show and put companies into trade missions that I have led. However, if you are going to try to develop some export business whereby you would like to have more control over the situation and whereby you can actually get to know the customer and understand that customer's specific needs, then I strongly recommend the approach outlined in this column. **mt**

**Dr. Charles Steilen** has spent 45 years as an international marketing professor, consultant and trainer. He spent 30 years as marketing faculty at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. During those years in Asia, he was a consultant to the Hong Kong government's Trade Development organization. Dr. Steilen is now helping U.S.-based companies understand of international marketing. For more information, [cfsteilen@gmail.com](mailto:cfsteilen@gmail.com).

## MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE STARTS HERE.

ARE THE HYDRAULICS USED IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS? ✓

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM AN ENERGY EFFICIENT FORMULA WITH ALL SEASON HVI PERFORMANCE? ✓

DO YOU NEED AN OIL WITH HIGH DI-ELECTRIC STRENGTH? ✓

**MARYN** MARYN INTERNATIONAL | Lubrication Solutions.