



10 Global Sales Mistakes to Avoid

The best reason for exporting a product or service is to globalize your company and prosper in the millennium. It can happen for you, but you will probably need to evolve a whole new set of business attitudes and assumptions. If you want to achieve success with your export sales efforts, then check yourself on whether you are currently committing the following ten mistakes to global sales failure:

1. "I have a variety of food products to offer."

All I need to hear is what my customer wants." An American businessman interested in exporting food items to the Orient told me that he had the resources to furnish literally any American food product that a customer wanted. I said, "That type of thinking won't work." He was taken aback, but persisted, "You don't get it. My company works with hundreds of suppliers. If your customer wants chocolate covered seaweed, we can get it for you." I responded, "You don't get it. The customers aren't supposed to lead us. We're supposed to lead the customers!" This clearly came as a big surprise to him, and maybe to you, too -- but this is the kind of thinking that succeeds.

Focus and lead your customer like they have never been led before. Have them beg for your bundle of clear-cut product or service ideas. Take them to where they didn't even know they could go in terms of satisfaction, increased sales and profitability.

2. "My product is really low in price."

Customers outside the U.S. pay attention to packaging first, quality next and price last. Set your priorities accordingly. Create a package design or service concept that speaks for itself, and quality that leaves no room for competitive comparison. From there it's only a matter of details to wrap up a sale.

3. "That looks like a good foreign lead. Let's respond to it!"

I knew of a small company who occasionally received international inquiries. They determined the importance of the inquiries by the styling of their corporate letterhead. Four-color shiny graphics received the utmost attention. Plainly designed stationery was literally thrown out. You can imagine the professional consequences of this willingness to be impressed by snappy presentations at the expense of substance. Little did they know that most large, sophisticated and extremely busy companies typically communicate on whatever piece of paper they have at the moment and generally use no more than about ten words. Ostentation is out -- making things happen is in.

4. "Let's try exporting our service to a bunch of foreign markets."

Wrong! Pick a service and pick a market. Then stick to it. You need to put on your mental blinders and ignore distractions, channel your energies, and define the territory in which you're going to play. It takes a lot of discipline to resist the scattershot approach to doing business and stay focused, but after awhile the discipline becomes automatic. Focus, focus, focus. Persist, persist, persist.

5. "I'm really interested in exporting my products but I'm not going to make any changes in it."

You must tailor your product to meet the needs of the customer. Forcing a customer to buy what you have available with little or no willingness on your part to make improvements is not just insensitive but downright hostile. Marketing has come a long way since the days of Henry Ford, who said, "The customer can have a car painted any color that he wants, so long as it is black."

6. "Let's respond to the customer's interest and then wait a couple of weeks to follow-up."

Put yourself in the customer's shoes. Would you want to be treated that way? Service brings satisfaction and satisfaction brings trial orders followed by repeat orders. Anything less than immediate and consistent service only wastes your time -- and that of your prospective customer!

7. "I know my service works well here in the States, so I'm certain it will fly overseas."

Just because your service is needed here in the States does not by any means indicate that it will be well-received in a foreign country. You must always check with either your prospective customer (let them review it at no charge) or a local foreign consulate to see if they can help you determine if your service makes sense for their host country.

8. "I can't afford a trip to visit my customers. Besides, I wouldn't know my way around."

You can't afford not to meet with prospective customers because, without face-to-face contact, there will be no business. Once you line up a potential customer, ask if you may visit them and if they would be so kind as to assist you on your first visit. You will be surprised at how gracious people really are, and how eagerly they welcome the opportunity to show you around their native land! Customers matter -- I can't repeat it often enough. The personal meeting is the best way to demonstrate your professional commitment.

9. "We appointed an exclusive agent, yet didn't get any sales."

When exporting a product, it is a smart practice to ask a distributor what they anticipate selling in the first year. Then, request that their first order be 20% of that anticipated volume, prepaid, which allows them the opportunity to have exclusivity. You should expect the balance of projected sales to be ordered during the rest of the year (preferably in quarterly periods), with each subsequent order minimally the size of their first one. This allows you to monitor and exercise good control over the distributor's sales.

10. "When our domestic sales slide, that's when we should work hard at getting foreign sales."

Going global is a commitment -- not something you work at one day and forget about the next. It's an investment in your company's future that deserves your consistent attention regardless of how well you're doing domestically. If you have patience and perseverance, then your chances of success will be excellent. If you're open to changing the way you think about global marketing, you've already made a good beginning. Now you are ready to achieve success in export markets.

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