

Get ready to take your firm into a whole new world

By Helena Deane

With many of Ireland's SMEs facing a fall-off in domestic sales, exporting is becoming a key survival tactic. The benefits of selling to overseas markets include increased sales and a longer lifespan for products and services, lower production costs, more productivity, less vulnerability to fluctuations in the Irish market, invaluable experience and differentiation from competitors.

Before you jump in head-first, however, it is important to prepare carefully to sell into new markets.

Here is a seven-point checklist you can follow to help make the move:

1. Determine your export-readiness

Look objectively at your business structure, processes and strategies. Assess whether

User profile

Helena Deane is one of a growing number of contributors to www.smallbusinesscan.com, the free business networking website with more than 15,000 active users on the island of Ireland. The site allows business owners and entrepreneurs to network with like-minded people and to share ideas, knowledge and contacts.

your weaknesses will negatively affect any exporting activities and how your strengths may help.

Ensure your production, storage and logistical operations can accommodate export sales. Review your business plan in line with your findings and reassess your financial requirements and projections.

2. Identify your target market

Concentrate on territories which provide you with the best prospects. First-time exporters may focus on a single country or limited number of

countries and expand from there.

Explore any strengths and weaknesses in the potential market so you can develop your export strategy around this.

3. Research your target market

Identify any regulations and prohibitions relating to exporting from Ireland. Consider the expectations within your export market in regard to standards, brand names, quality, appearance and packaging as well as usage.

Understand the market size,

growth and competitive environment. Valuable country specific information is published by the World Trade Organisation, EU Market Access Database and OECD. You may then need to modify your current product or service offering or develop a new product or service for export.

4. Network

Social media like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Xing allow Irish SMEs to identify and connect with potential international business partners quickly and cheaply.

Do not forget about more traditional networking avenues such as Chamber of Commerce events, formal trade networks, trade missions and trade fairs.

5. If you need help, ask

Talk to other businesses who have 'been there and done it' and share their experience and expertise. Liaise with organisations such as Enterprise Ireland, the Irish Exporters Association and International



Helena Deane of Business Connection Ireland: focus on territories which provide you with the best prospects

Chamber of Commerce.

Investigate whether support through a local Irish business network exists (such as in the US and Germany).

6. Form local partnerships

Having a local partner takes away a lot of uncertainty and

removes many barriers to entry – they speak the local language, are familiar with the culture, provide local market knowledge, experience and connections, as well as being able to deal with regulatory and administrative issues that they arise.

7. Harness the power of e-commerce

A commercial website can offer you instantaneous access to global markets and global advertising. However, careful planning and research is required for e-commerce. Start-

ing small and keeping it simple will help form a solid base for the growth strategy.

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