

10 tips for finding buyers in the European footwear sector

One of the biggest challenges you face as a footwear manufacturer in seeking to enter the European market is to find the right companies – along with the actual names of the people most likely to be interested in buying your product. Since buyers are approached daily by companies from all over the world, all wanting to make an appointment, many buyers in Europe make sure they are difficult to find. In this document we offer some key tips for finding footwear buyers on the European market.

1. Conduct market research to make sure you contact the most promising buyers

Before you start approach buyers, you must be sure you are focusing on the most suitable ones. This means you must look for buyers who have a specific need or demand that you can fulfil in terms of product range, quality, price, delivery time, volume etc.

If you want to have a successful first phone call, then preparation and research are a must. Step 1 in finding buyers is research. You can go about this in many ways. For instance, you can search the Internet for buyer websites and go to buyers' web shops and take a good look at the products and prices. The important thing is that you use your research to get a clear picture of the market, its segments and their characteristics, and to make a viable match between your offer and particular segment, country and type of buyer.

Make sure your market research results in specific, relevant information, such as: customer name and website, number of outlets (volume), price level, quality level, head office address, relevant contact person, financial situation (credit check).

Tips:

Learn more about the different [European footwear channels and segments](#) available to you.

Go to the Chambers of Commerce websites of the European countries you are interested in, or check the [Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry](#).

Visit fashion sites, for example:

fashionunited.nl

faz.net

textilwirtschaft.de

wikipedia.org (for instance, try using the search words '[clothing retailers by country](#)')

instyle.co.uk

- Visit brand websites to get a better understanding of the segments in which they operate, product characteristics, communication styles etc., such as:
- macintosh.nl
- euroshoe.com
- groupe-auchan.com
- metrogroup.de
- zalando.de
- terranovastyle.com
- piazzaitalia.it
- c-and-a.com

2. Look for specific developments and trends you might tap into

In addition to looking for the right market, segment and buyers, it also pays off to research the economy and culture of your target market and to look for specific challenges, opportunities, developments and trends to which your offer can provide an answer. In general, for instance, sports footwear is big in Europe, with spinoff effects on many other segments – this is a trend you need to be aware of and which you might be able to tap into, for example by slightly adapting your product, your marketing or your pricing.

Tips:

Find out about footwear products that are especially promising on the European market, such as [specialty footwear](#), [fashion footwear](#), [mass market sports footwear](#) or [performance sports footwear](#).

Learn more in general about [footwear demand in Europe](#).

Learn more in general about [footwear requirements in Europe](#).

3. Visit the right trade shows and events

Most buyers visit different trade shows and events. They do this to connect with other players, including suppliers, but also to stay in touch with trends, such as the next season's colours and fabrics. As a supplier, you, too, will find trade fairs a great place to meet buyers and to get a better understanding of market developments.

You can attend trade fairs either as a visitor or as an exhibitor. Advantages of going as a visitor first are that you can get a feel for the event, spend time talking with buyers and exhibitors, explore what others are offering and find out which halls attract most traffic (or the most worthwhile traffic) – and all that without the cost of exhibiting or the stress of running your own stand. If you decide to exhibit, make an effort to build a new collection around this important promotional event; invite new and existing buyers to your booth at the fair; and set clear marketing objectives for the event. Prepare well and when the fair is over, take time to ensure effective follow-up – as most of your trade fair business will develop after the fair, not during the event.

These are the most prominent events in the European footwear industry:

- bazaar-berlin.de
- exporivaschuh.it
- tag-it-show.com
- gds-online.com
- lineapelle-fair.it
- micamonline.com
- ispo.com

4. Use intelligence platforms to get reliable information on fabrics, brands and innovation

Depending on the nature of your export product, you can choose from numerous sites to find the latest insights on fabrics, brands and innovation. The advantage of collecting this kind of information is that it will enable you to better understand your buyers and adapt your offer to their needs and wishes. And that, in turn, will enable you to generate more business.

Tips:

Intelligence platforms widely used by European buyers include the following:

[Just-style](#), sourcing & procurement;

[Fiber to Fashion](#), an online business-to-business marketplace;

[Fashion United](#), fashion trends and agendas;

The [AEDT](#), the European association of fashion retailers, [Fab](#), the fashion association of Britain and the [NYFRA](#), the New York Fashion and Retail Association, all offer news on fashion retail developments;

[Sports Textiles](#) and the [WFSGI](#), or World Federation of Sporting Goods, covers the sports fashion segment;

[Leather Biz](#) is a leader in leather information.

5. Contact the right companies and the right people in those companies

Calling the head office of a buyer company and simply asking for the buyer who is responsible for a particular product range often results in an answer like this: "Send an email to info@... And if we're interested, we'll contact you." In most cases, you will never hear from these buyers again. To greatly increase your chance of success you need to speak – or email – directly to the right person.

The best way to do this is by means of a reference or introduction. However, if this is not possible you may need to be creative in finding out which people within an organization most likely to be interested in your offer. For instance, you may often have informal encounters with people who know the business or the organization when you are at trade events or during company visits. Use these encounters to get information, names and contacts, or to get advice on how to get the right information. A lot of people are willing to share knowledge if you ask for it in a pleasant way.

Tip:

To prepare yourself for your first contact, read our [Tips on Doing Business with Buyers on the European Footwear market](#).

6. Use your network to get an introduction

Develop your network in every way you can, by visiting trade fairs and events, exchanging information, asking questions etc. Then make use of the contacts you have. [LinkedIn](#) and – in France – [Viadeo](#) are good sources of contact information. For example, if you have a contact whose LinkedIn profile shows that he or she used to work for a brand you are targeting, ask for an introduction.

7. Make the first contact by phone – but not until you have the buyer's name

The next step is to get the name of the person you believe is most likely and most qualified to respond to your offer. Don't call until you have the right name. The best thing by far is to try to get the buyer on the phone and schedule an appointment; an email sent without him or her knowing in advance will more often than not end up in the trash bin. If the buyer requests a profile (see point 8), make sure you call back after sending it (see also point 10). Don't sit back and expect him or her to reply to your profile with an invitation for an appointment. You

need to do all the ground work and make life easy for the other party. Showing a proactive and helpful attitude can get your working relationship off to a good start.

8. Draw up an attractive, realistic and informative company profile

If you manage to get a buyer on the phone, the first conversation will often end with something like this, “Send us a company profile”. This means it is important to make sure that you do have a good company profile. It should include the following information at least:

- Your factory details;
- Certification;
- Your customers;
- Your products and details;
- Your company culture.

Don't make the mistake of trying to say too much. Keep it short and to the point, well-presented and clear, make it appealing and easy to read.

Please remember that emails with attachments coming from other countries often end up in the receiver's spam box and you'll never even know whether your message has been read or not. This makes sending a hard copy profile by regular mail a better option.

9. Focus on your unique selling point

The pace and complexity of today's markets have increasingly forced players up and down the supply chain to make deliberate choices, narrowing down their market to sometimes no more than a single segment, niche or product. European footwear buyers are flooded with offers from many countries around the world. In order to stand out, you have to make sure your offer is specific and different. Presenting a general offer that is similar to the offers presented by countless other suppliers from your country or your part of the world will not usually create business opportunities for you: suppliers suggesting they can deliver 'almost anything' will not be taken seriously by European buyers. You must have a special – and if possible unique – offer.

Your unique selling point may not be what you think it is; this is why researching the European market is so important (see above). It may be your design, the skill of your workers, your materials or production techniques, your combination of flexibility and delivery speed, or any other factor or combination of factors. Once you have identified it and confirmed that European buyers are attracted to you for the right reasons, continue to invest in your unique selling point so as to further strengthen it.

10. Keep in touch: good communication is a key to success

Good communication is the basis for all successful cooperation. The more and better you communicate with a buyer, the better you will understand one another's needs, wishes and restraints and the more you will be able to collaborate successfully.

Tips:

- Always try to respond to emails or phone calls as quickly as you can, preferably within 24 hours
- Be clear and honest about your company regarding its strengths and limitations
- Don't promise what you can't deliver, be realistic (honesty is always the best policy)
- Try and build up more personal relationships, as this will put you in a more trusted and favourable position
- If there is an issue or problem, for instance a delay in delivery or a technical problem, communicate this as soon as possible (don't delay, as it only makes matters worse)

- Work together and develop an understanding of each other
- Read our Tips on Doing Business with Buyers on the European Footwear market