

8 tips for finding buyers on the European outsourcing market

This document gives you information about how and where you can find European buyers for your IT or IT enabled outsourcing services. Important elements are: knowing what you can offer and who to offer it to, a good online presence and personal contact. Combined with the competitiveness of your service, the number of suppliers already on the market and the economic situation in your target market, this will influence your chances of success. Even though all tips were compiled with the utmost care, they are tips and we cannot guarantee you will find buyers.

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1. Know your company and your offer before reaching out to find buyers

Before you can reach out to find clients, you need to do some serious homework. Clearly define what you offer and formulate the most important market research questions. The better your research, the more results you will get in marketing and sales. Do your market research by using social media channels like LinkedIn. You can also make use of Google Alerts, which is an automated web search service that can help you monitor the Internet for developments and activities that are relevant to your business. Results can be sent to you daily, by e-mail.

Tips:

Follow market developments in the IT outsourcing sector in general and your specialisation specifically. Create a list of key search words and use [Google Alerts](#) to stay informed.

Read [CBI market studies](#) to learn about the IT outsourcing market, trends, channels, requirements and more.

Collect, organise and update the sources of information you use for market research. A simple Excel sheet will do. You can also use Evernote to save interesting information for later reading. Also write down a summary of your research findings so you can refer back to it later or refine your research for better results.

2. Identify which buyers to target

It is important to segment and identify your target market before initiating contact, or you will end up wasting time and money on random, ineffective activities. Identifying your target market will help you decide how to advertise and make the most out of your marketing resources later on.

The first step is to create your ideal client profile. Refer to resources on the internet that offer [guides](#) or [templates](#) on how to do that. You can identify buyers based on their demographics, company size, if they have worked with (offshore) outsourcing providers before and their horizontal or vertical market, for example. Make a list of prospects that match your criteria.

The next step is to gather a complete picture of what your potential buyer wants and where they are coming from. Buyers want to know their potential outsourcing provider has their best interest in mind. You have to understand their motivations for outsourcing. For example, many European companies are interested in moving towards standard processes to adopt quality process flows that maximise their company's efficiency. Your product or service can contribute to that. Be focused on the end goal.

Tips:

Create your ideal client profile. Write down things you know about your current buyers. Then add [everything you wish to know](#) about them. Find a common ground and look for new buyers that have overlap with your current buyers.

Look at your main competitors and find out who their customers are. Look at their marketing efforts to find out which kind of marketing campaign has worked, and which has not. Use their example not to steal their customers, but to make your services and product better.

If you specialise in IT or IT enabled services outsourcing for a particular segment, start with focussing on that segment, because you have a competitive advantage due to your experience.

If you are a more experienced exporter, you can try selling directly to end users that are normally served by European suppliers. However, this requires a lot more effort, and you will have to convince buyers to buy from far-away places.

Be aware that selling directly to end users often means higher investments.

3. Work with a sales agent or other intermediary to find a strategic partner

Experts in the European IT outsourcing sector agree that working with a sales representative or a matchmaker is one of the efficient ways to enter the European market. Personal contacts and one-to-one selling have proven to be the most effective. Many companies from Developing Countries (DCs) that are doing business in Europe work with a strategic partner (usually an IT company or consultancy in Europe with an existing client base). Matchmakers and sales representatives can help IT companies from DCs to find a strategic partner.

Cold calling and launching mass email campaigns are among the least efficient ways of promoting your IT or IT enabled services in Europe. This type of promotion requires specialisation and specific skills. If you want to take this approach, hire specialists to help you, unless you have the right people in house. The expertise of the intermediary should be in line with your solutions or vertical market. If you offer search engine optimisation services for the tourism industry, you should look for a person who has worked in a tourism agency in your target market. Such a person probably knows many companies in the tourism industry of your target market and might be able to introduce you to them.

You can pay a sales representative or matchmaker to find individuals and firms for your products or services. The main difference between a matchmaker and a sales representative is that a matchmaker only provides contacts and organises meetings for you with potential clients (so you do the selling). A sales representative also does the selling for you and can eventually also get involved in the projects.

Tips:

Most IT and IT-related services companies find their intermediaries or sales representatives through their network, or by expanding their network at trade fairs. Making use of diaspora has also proven to be a successful route for many IT or IT enabled services providers from developing countries.

Check the size and value (quality) of your potential intermediary's existing network. A good sales representative or matchmaker does not want to make cold calls in order to provide services for you. A good matchmaker or sales representative has a large existing contact base. Your expenses will rise by having to pay a sales representative, but you will be free to concentrate on your service or product and search for other markets yourself.

Make sure you properly inform them about your company. Consultants, for example, speak with many potential customers and are often involved in creating long lists of potential outsourcing providers. The more information they have on your company and the better they understand your capabilities, the more they can spread the word about you.

Limit your risk by defining a trial period of a few months with concrete goals and deliverables. The intermediary should for instance come up with a certain number of leads within the trial period. If this objective is not met, the contract can be ended. Be especially cautious if an intermediary works only based on retainer or success fee, if an intermediary wants to work for you part time beside his/her regular job or if he/she does not have an existing network of professional contacts.

Sales representatives often work based on a retainer (a sum you have to pay regardless of the work of the intermediary, usually a fixed monthly payment) plus a certain percentage of the total project value they deliver. When working with intermediaries, aim for a retainer plus success fee type of payment scheme. This combination should provide motivation for the intermediary to deliver.

When contracting an intermediary, involve a good lawyer who knows the applicable law of the country where the intermediary resides and has previous experience with this type of contracting. Pay special attention to exit clauses (how and when the contract can be ended), success criteria, deliverables and payments.

4. Look for buyers through sector associations

There are several organisations in Europe that focus on the IT or IT enables services outsourcing market and its developments. Connecting with these organisations and their events will provide you with valuable information and contacts. In some cases, it will also make it easier for European buyers to find you. Follow their websites, sign up for newsfeeds and other publications and/or register as a member.

The leading trade organisations for IT and IT-related services outsourcing in Europe are:

Central and Eastern European Outsourcing Association (CEEEOA): CEEEOA strives to be an effective resource of industry knowledge, an effective promotional tool and an effective communication channel for service providers. On its website, you can also find best practices from the sector, expert information, research findings and innovative solutions from CEE countries.

Deutscher Outsourcing Verband: this is an independent member organisation for the ITO and BPO sector. It is a registered association that acts as a platform for professionals and organisations involved in, or interested in, sourcing or providing IT or business process services in and/or for the DACH markets (DACH: Germany, Austria and Switzerland, hence: German-Speaking Europe).

EUBIS, the [European Business and IT Services](#): this is an ITO, BPO and RPA (Robotic Process Automation) industry and events directory.

[Global Sourcing Association \(GSA\)](#): this claims to be the home and the ambassador of the global sourcing standard. The GSA is working on contributing to the positive reputation of the strategic sourcing industry.

Tips:

Follow the leading IT trade organisations that are listed above. Keep track of relevant events they promote and check their newest releases or research findings.

Look at the member's lists of each association, which can provide you with potential prospects for your marketing campaign. The lists also inform you of the kind of members an association has. This is important if you are considering becoming a member yourself and/or if you are thinking about participating in an event.

Marketing and sales from a distance is very difficult. Online advertising for IT outsourcing services is less relevant. Also read our study on [tips for doing business with European buyers](#) - to find tips for doing business with European buyers in the outsourcing services sector.

5. Treat your website as your promotional tool

The buyer's journey of IT or IT enabled services outsourcing has changed over recent years. Buyers no longer wait for companies to introduce themselves. They will be looking for you themselves and like to do their own research.

Your website is the first place where prospects will look for more information about your company and your offer. Their first impression of your website is of great importance. This means that you need a professional, properly maintained website which supports you in your promotion and is ready for marketing.

Try to understand how your clients think. What are their wishes and challenges? What information do they need? Make sure your website is not so much about you, but rather for your customers. A good professional web presence is important, but when it comes to initiating partnerships, live meetings are much more essential.

Tips:

Treat your website as your most important and most valuable marketing asset. Provide enough high-quality information that your prospects can easily find. Make sure the information is accurate, to the point and up to date. Your website is your extended brochure where potential buyers can find most of the information they are looking for.

When a potential customer is browsing through your website, they need to find a call to action. This is an opportunity to take your visitors a step closer to becoming a customer. It is the most important part of making a sale. There are many examples of practical, innovative and/or funny calls to action. This [WordStream blog](#) and this [GroWyse article](#) give some examples.

Take note that, unless you are a professional web developer, developing a website is not a do-it-yourself job. Hire professionals and brief them properly.

If you provide services or products to local clients, separate your IT outsourcing offer from these functions. Buy a separate domain or use a subdomain.

Your website must be usable on PCs, laptops, tablets and mobile phones.

Help buyers to find you by using Search Engine Optimisation. You can use [Google AdWords' Keyword Planner](#), for example.

6. Use your network & make contacts

Your network is potentially one of the most valued assets for generating new business. The European market for IT and IT enabled services can be best approached through personal contact. One-on-one selling and social selling have become very important.

[LinkedIn](#) is the most widely used international networking source. The website has groups and discussion pages for all types of industries. Engage in several of them. Be present, participate in discussions and invite other "regulars" to connect.

Be careful when investing in Google Ads or Facebook Ads. Test the results before you commit considerable resources, time and money. Previous experience shows that using these tools to make contacts can be highly disappointing.

Tips:

Build your network and make contacts in your target market. The larger your professional network, the bigger the chance you will successfully develop business. Larger is better: while the quality of contacts is important, the size and growth of your professional network is equally important.

Prepare a strategy and clear objectives to boost the size and quality of your professional network, and organise a system in your company where you register all your contacts. When you are in Europe, you can use your contact database to organise meetings.

[Optimise](#) your LinkedIn profile for sales. Consider upgrading your LinkedIn and use [Sales Navigator](#). Look at blogs to find [tips and tricks](#) to make the most out of your Sales Navigator membership. Look at the tips LinkedIn is offering for [using your network to find buyers](#).

One of the best ways to make relevant, high-quality contacts in Europe is to attend various, specialised trade events such as trade fairs and conferences. See the tip: [Attending trade events, fairs and conferences](#) for more information about this.

Work with your contacts. They are not just a single record in a database. Inform them about the latest news about your company, connect with them on LinkedIn, get them involved in your market research, invite them to trade events you attend in Europe and socialise with them when possible and appropriate. Your next sales will most likely come from your contacts.

7. Participate in the programmes offered by Business Support Organisations in your country

Business support organisations (BSOs) exist to support your business. They can provide you with knowledge, contacts, connections and insights that you might never have acquired yourself, or at least not as quickly. Many BSOs invest in export promotion or organise events and event participation abroad, such as B2B matchmaking, roadshows or participation in conferences and trade fairs.

Furthermore, BSOs often organise trade missions. Organisers of these missions have strong relationships with businesses in your target markets. They can help you identify, screen and meet prospective buyers.

Examples of BSOs that might be relevant for your IT or IT enabled services outsourcing are:

Centre for Promotion of Imports from developing countries ([CBI](#)). A government-funded organisation that supports more than 800 entrepreneurs to become successful exporters on the European market. CBI offers market information for various products and services, export coaching programmes and technical support, informs and influences policy makers and involves importers in the development and implementation of its programmes.

The Swiss Import Promotion Programme ([SIPPO](#)). A government-funded organisation that supports BSOs to improve their services for exporting companies, and to strengthen their own institutional set-up, as well as to connect them to an extensive network.

The Import Promotion Desk ([IPD](#)). A government-funded organisation from Germany that aims to offer sustained and structured promotion of the import of certain products and services from selected partner countries. The IPD brings together the interests of German importers with those of exporters in emerging growth markets.

[Enterprise Europe Network](#) (EUN). Founded by a commission of the European Commission, the Enterprise Europe Network aims to help companies offering all kinds of products and services to innovate and grow internationally.

The Ghana Export Promotion Authority ([GEPA](#)) is an example of a local BSO. It offers business support to Ghanaese companies that sell or want to sell products or services on the global market. For example, it organises an export promotion tour, participates in trade fairs and provides trade fair support. On its website, you can also find market information on various products and services, export guides, market analysis tools and much more.

Tips:

Make sure you know the relevant BSOs in your country, region and market, and connect with them. Look at the different kinds of support they can offer you.

Actively seek out contact with these organisations on a regular basis, so that they know about your company. Get your business on their mailing lists, sign up for their newsletters and attend their events.

Avoid the pitfall of wasting time on fruitless networking. Participate in programmes which really fit your profile and objectives and which offer services that you can benefit from in the short and long term.

Share your knowledge and challenges with BSOs, so that they can improve their services.

Also look at the programmes of embassies of your European target country. They may prove to be a starting point for doing business.

8. Attending trade events, fairs and conferences

General IT events like CEBIT are not relevant anymore (many of them do not exist anymore either). However, smaller, specialised trade events have become very important. Bear in mind that specialised events are only interesting for companies that fall into that specialism. Be realistic: attending an event (as a visitor, speaker or exhibitor) most probably will not result in direct sales, even though sometimes it does happen. Attending a

trade event will provide you with many opportunities for networking and expanding your professional network.

Attending well-selected trade fairs, B2B events and conferences offers excellent opportunities to expand your professional network in Europe. It might also be interesting to visit sector-relevant trade fairs on other continents. Beside making contacts in these events, you can also do market research, develop new business ideas and follow up on the latest trends and developments in your specific market segment or technology.

Tips:

Do your homework and select the events very carefully. Only attend events that fit your profile well. Many trade events directories are available online, such as [10Times](#), [Expo Database](#) and [UK Exhibitions](#). Create a list of relevant events and update this list regularly.

When attending a conference, try to apply for one of the speaker spots (if you are an expert or innovator in your field). Also invite some of your existing contacts to meet at the event. You can also combine your event participation and organise meetings with selected contacts at their office.

Use the trade fair's exhibitor directory to organise meetings with exhibitors before the fair. Participate at B2B activities at events (if available).

At European events, do not aggressively try to sell your services or products. Use a soft approach and focus on making a larger number of high-quality contacts you can follow up on.

Look for support for your event participation. Contact Business Support Organisations in your country. Sometimes, organisations in development cooperation also provide event participation support. Look for these opportunities. Examples of organisations and programmes are [SIPPO](#), [CBI](#) and the [Enterprise Europe Network](#).

Company databases

Company databases are resources where you can find potential buyers. They can be free, like [company.info](#), or paid, via chambers of commerce (for example, the [Kamer van Koophandel](#) in the Netherlands) or commercial databases like [Bold Data](#). Identify which databases will benefit your search for new buyers and use them to create a list of potential customers to target.

Tips:

Most commercial (paid) databases offer a free trial period. Make the most of this free trial by thoroughly preparing yourself (see tip number one).

Focus on Small to Medium Enterprises, as they are the easiest to get access to, according to industry professionals

Never spam! Do not send out large numbers of unwanted emails. Make sure that the telephone numbers and email addresses that you use are legitimate and will receive your cold calls or emails

Read our additional studies regarding exporting your outsourcing services

to Europe

- [Tips for organising your exports](#) to Europe – to find tips for organising export of outsourcing services to Europe;
- [Tips for doing business](#) with European Buyers – to find tips for doing business with European buyers in the outsourcing services sector.

This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by Globally Cool.

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