

# 10 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, who you should offer it to, a good online presence and personal contact. Combined with the competitiveness of your service and the number of suppliers that are already on the market, this will influence your chance of success. Not to forget the existing and expected economic situation and your answer to that, as became very clear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though all tips are compiled with utmost care, they are tips and we cannot guarantee you will find buyers.

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## 1. Anticipate and prepare

In a recent CBI webinar on [how to respond to COVID-19 in the IT and Business Process Outsourcing sector](#) (ITO/BPO), 60% of participants (from developing countries) indicated their business was negatively affected by the pandemic. However, a promising 10% reported a positive effect.

In a survey among British companies not currently using ITO, [37% indicated they would consider outsourcing IT and development as a result of COVID-19](#). As remote working is blurring the distinction between in-house, nearshore and offshore teams, this could open doors for software developers from developing countries.

In general, COVID-19 has shown that the chances of finding new buyers significantly drop during a worldwide pandemic. However, in the long run, the IT and IT-enabled services outsourcing market is a growing one. And the pandemic has also created opportunities. Because the IT industry is supposed to be one of the least affected, it might even see a positive growth. Just think about the boost in e-commerce and working from home. Perhaps you are in a position where your company is still operational, but there is no business. Or maybe there is business to be had, but you are unable to run your company at the moment. Either way, you can start finding buyers, but not yet actively. Start with the preparations, read the tips in this document and make sure you are all set to actively approach new buyers later, when the biggest storm has blown over. The lesser companies probably have fallen, there will be less competition and a new market of European companies that are in need of outsourcing service providers will be there for you with plenty of opportunities to offer.

### Tips:

When choosing a sector to focus on, think about this sector in light of the pandemic and the forecasted economic situation in that sector.

If you decide to start looking for new buyers but are faced with a pandemic, start with the preparations. Prepare your whole company and have a strategy ready. Please read the other tips in

this document, they will guide you through the process.

Keep in mind that some marketing channels (for example trade events, B2B meetings and seminars), cannot be used during a worldwide pandemic.

For more information about guiding your company through crisis situations, see our study on [how to respond to COVID-19 in the IT and Business Process Outsourcing sector](#) (ITO/ BPO).

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

Before you can reach out to find new buyers, you need to do some serious homework. Clearly define what you offer and formulate the most important market research questions. The better your research is, 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](#), this 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 specific. 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, the 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, for example, use [Evernote](#) to save interesting information for later reading. Also write down a summary of your research findings so you can refer to it later or refine your research for better results.

## 3. 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic left many European companies looking for solutions or alternatives, especially in the

field of remote working and automation. If your company can offer such solutions, now might be the right time to step up. Identify how your offer can help companies that are struggling right now. Search on social media or LinkedIn for such cases.

### **Tips:**

Create your ideal client profile. Write down things you know about the buyers you currently have. 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 use their example 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.

## **4. 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 most 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 it is 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. Working with intermediaries has become more important in the COVID-19 crisis, as meeting potential partners is very difficult during a pandemic, due to travel restrictions.

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

Most IT and IT-related services companies find their sales agent or intermediary through their network, or by expanding their network using various channels both online and offline. Making use of diaspora has also proven to be a successful route for many IT or IT-enabled services providers from emerging countries.

### **Tips:**

Check the size and value (quality) of your potential intermediary's existing network. A good sales

representative or matchmaker is not someone who just makes cold calls in order to provide services for you. A good sales agent or intermediary has a large, existing contact base. Your expenses will rise by having to pay this person, 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 agents and other intermediaries often work based on a retainer (a sum you have to pay regardless of the work they do). This is 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.

## 5. Look for buyers through sector associations

There are several organisations in Europe that focus on the IT or IT-enabled 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):** strives to be an effective resource of industry knowledge, an effective promotional tool and an effective communication channel for service providers. The CEEEOA website also has 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 IT Outsourcing and Business Process Outsourcing (ITO and BPO) sector. It is a registered association that acts as a platform for professionals and organisations involved in, or interested in sourcing of 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: is an ITO, BPO and RPA (Robotic Process Automation) industry and events directory.

**Global Sourcing Association (GSA):** claims to be the home and the ambassador of the global sourcing standard. They are working on contributing to the positive reputation of the strategic sourcing industry.

### **Tips:**

Follow the leading sector associations that are listed above. Keep track of relevant events they promote, check their newest releases or research findings. Most associations are currently actively posting interviews, webinars and/or articles on how to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.

Look at the members lists of each association. It can provide you with potential prospects for your marketing campaign. The list also informs you about 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.

## **6. Work on a professional online presence**

The buyer's journey of IT or IT-enabled services outsourcing changed in recent years. Buyers no longer wait for companies to introduce themselves. They are looking for you and like to do their own research. This has become even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because there are hardly any chances to meet potential buyers in person, the best way to find new buyers is online.

Your website is the first place where prospects will look for more information about your company and your offer. Therefore, you must treat your website as your most important and most valuable marketing asset. Provide enough high-quality information and make it easy for your prospects to find. The first impression of your website is very important. As such, you need a professional, properly maintained website which supports your promotion and which is ready for marketing.

Make sure your website is not so much about you, but rather for your clients. Try to understand how your potential clients think. What are their wishes and challenges, what information do they need? Also add references from current or previous clients, references are a tool to build trust. 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.

After you have finished your website, make sure potential buyers can easily find you on the internet. Many people use search engines like Google, Bing or Yahoo to find information online. Buyers will most likely do the same. Hence, your site should be visible when someone is looking for your specific service. You can achieve this by [using Search Engine Optimisation \(SEO\)](#). SEO ensures that your site appears on the first page of the search engine results and this way potential buyers are able to find you.

In addition to your website, social networks are a good tool to successfully promote your company. They enable persons or companies to create and share content and to connect with one another (thereby increasing your social network). The most common social platforms in Europe include [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#). In comparison to the other social platforms, LinkedIn is somewhat different in that it is only intended for professional networking.

Meeting new buyers online is hard, but it is possible for small projects. Contracts for medium to large-scale projects are not usually signed online, but the COVID-19 crisis might change that, as there are hardly any possibilities for companies to meet face-to-face.

### **Tips:**

When a potential client is browsing through your website, they need to find a call to action. This is an opportunity to take your visitors a step forward to become a client. 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 [Growyse article](#) show some examples to you.

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.

Search for buyers on social media and LinkedIn. Conduct web search, to see if they do not have outsourcing partners yet.

Share content and news on social media platforms like [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to increase your visibility.

## 7. 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 and social selling has become very important. It is a trust business. During a pandemic there are very few options for companies to meet face-to-face. As such, the best chance for finding new buyers can be found online. Luckily there are many options to meet people online and your network is a great place to start.

[LinkedIn](#) is the most 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 regular visitors to connect.

Invest carefully in [Google Ads](#) or [Facebook Ads](#). Test the results of your advertisements 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.

Have a strategy and clear objectives to boost the size and quality of your professional network and have a system in your company where you register all your contacts. 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 of making 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 record in your 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 (online) events you attend, socialise with them when possible and

appropriate. Your next sales will most likely come from your contacts.

## 8. 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 organising 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. They offer market information for various products and services, they offer export coaching programmes and technical support, they inform and influence policy makers, and they involve importers in the development and implementation of their programmes.

The Swiss Import Promotion Programme ([SIPPO](#)). A government funded organisation that supports BSOs to improve its services for exporting companies, and to strengthen its own institutional set-up, as well as 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. It brings together the interests of German importers with those of exporters in emerging growth markets.

It has partnered up with [Leverist.de](#). Leverist.de connects companies with concrete business opportunities in developing and emerging countries. It launched a COVID-19 topic page, where companies and development cooperations can publish their concrete needs and solutions during the pandemic. Companies from all over the world can find these needs and get in touch directly with the respective contact persons.

[Enterprise Europe Network](#) (EEN), founded by a commission of the European Commission, the Enterprise Europe Network aims to help companies of 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 Ghanaian companies that sell or want to sell products or services on the global market. It organises, for example, export promotion tours, and it participates in trade fairs and trade fair support. The GEPA website also offers market information on various products and services, as well as export guides, market analyses 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 programs of embassies of your European target countries. They also may prove to be a starting point to find buyers.

## 9. Attend trade events, fairs and conferences

Today, large general IT trade fairs, like CEBIT, are less relevant (many of them do not exist anymore either). The scope is too wide, the overlap too small. 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 many opportunities for networking and expanding your professional network.

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

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, trade events, fairs and conferences will most likely not take place for a while. Pretty much all of them are cancelled for 2020, and while many of them have announced another date for their live event, most dates are planned after spring 2021. Some events are looking for online alternatives, and while these might be a good place to share and gather information, socialising and mingling is hard in an online environment.

### Tips:

Do your homework and select events carefully. Only attend events that fit your profile well. There are many trade events directories 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 a speaker spot (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 organisations who can support you in participating in these events. Contact Business Support Organisations in your country. Sometimes organisations in development cooperation provide event participation support. Examples of organisations and programmes are [SIPPO](#), [CBI](#) and the [Enterprise Europe Network](#).



## 10. Use 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.

Industry experts indicate that cold calling has always been very difficult in the IT and IT-enabled services outsourcing sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased these difficulties even more. It is more difficult to reach companies by phone, as most people in Europe are still advised to work from home.

### Tips:

Most commercial (paid) databases offer a free trial period. Make the most of this free trial by thoroughly preparing yourself (see the first tips in this document).

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

If you are planning to start calling companies in Europe, first check the website of the ministry of health in that country, to see if work from home norms apply.

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 that they are the rights ones for your cold calls or emails.


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This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [Globally Cool B.V.](#) in collaboration with Laszlo Klucs.

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