

8 tips for finding buyers on the European cosmetics market

This document provides key tips on how to increase your chances to find suitable buyers for your natural ingredients on the European cosmetics market. While the aim of this document is to provide tips on finding buyers, success depends on various factors, such as product quality, pricing, level of competition, types of ingredients you supply, etc.

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1. Know which buyers to target

It is important that you carry out some market research before you start approaching buyers. This can save you much time and resources. Make sure you have knowledge about how the industry is structured and what the supply chain looks like. It is also important that you are aware of your strengths and weaknesses as a business. This knowledge will help you find suitable buyers that meet your needs. For example, knowing your production capacity and how much volume you can supply will help you gauge what type of buyers are a good match for you.

Suppliers of natural ingredients from developing countries should look to target distributors or cosmetics companies directly. European buyers of natural ingredients for cosmetics vary in size and in their product range. With a growing trend towards natural products, more conventional cosmetics companies are adding natural ingredients to their formulations. Large European distributors (such as [IMCD](#)) are adjusting their portfolios accordingly.

Some of the most important cosmetics companies in Europe are [L'Oréal](#), [Unilever](#), [Beiersdorf](#), [P&G](#) and [Coty](#). Important natural and ethical cosmetics companies are [Weleda](#), [Neal's Yard Remedies](#), [Léa Nature](#), [Primavera](#), [Lush](#), [L'Occitane](#), [Yves Rocher](#) and [The Body Shop](#).

There are also small and medium-sized distributors of cosmetics ingredients. Some specialise in natural and organic raw materials (such as [SanaBio](#)). Some distributors specialise in specific types of ingredients, such as essential oils or vegetable oils (such as [Henry Lamotte](#)).

Table 1 Types of buyers in the European cosmetics sector

Buyer type	Description	Reasons to target	Example
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Large to medium-sized buyers	These buyers offer a wide range of conventional as well as certified ingredients.	Approach these buyers if you are able to supply in bulk or you potentially have a wider range of ingredients.	IMCD
Small to medium-sized buyers	These companies include smaller traders. These buyers tend to specialise in certain ingredient groups or a specific market.	Approach these buyers if you supply lower quantities, your ingredients are certified or you supply niche ingredients.	SanaBio
Large to medium-sized cosmetics companies	This group includes conventional cosmetics manufacturers that use natural ingredients in their formulations.	Consider approaching these companies if you are able to supply larger quantities of your ingredients.	L'Oréal
Small to medium-sized natural and organic cosmetics companies	Natural and organic personal care manufacturers that almost entirely use natural ingredients.	Approach these companies if you are looking to set up long term projects and/or if you are able to supply certified ingredients.	Weleda

Consider using industry magazines as a source of information when looking for potential buyers. Examples include [Cosmetics Business](#), [Cosmetics Design Europe](#), [Happi](#), and [Cosmetics and Toiletries](#). Use the information from these magazines to judge what companies have the best match with your company.

A growing number of cosmetics companies and distributors are setting up sourcing projects. This is because it gives them more control over the supply chain and provides traceability of ingredients. This trend is likely to continue in the future.

Tips:

Be honest about what volumes you are capable of supplying and select suitable customers accordingly.

Check whether potential buyers have experience with similar ingredients to yours. Look at their product portfolio to see what ingredients they deal with.

If you supply organic ingredients, target traders and distributors that have experience with organic ingredients.

2. Participate in industry trade fairs

Visit trade fairs that focus on the cosmetics industry. You should also target trade fairs that focus on natural and organic cosmetics. This will give you the opportunity to have direct contact with various importers, as well as get an idea about your competition, their portfolio, and prices.

The most important European trade fairs are:

- [In-Cosmetics Global](#) – The largest trade show in the world that focuses on cosmetics ingredients. This is the most important trade show for natural ingredients for the cosmetics industry.
- [Vivaness](#) – This trade fair specialises in organic and natural cosmetics. If you supply certified ingredients, you should consider attending this trade show.
- [Natural & Organic Products Europe \(NOPE\)](#) – A trade show that focuses on natural and organic finished products in Europe. As an ingredient supplier, you will be able to network with some of the leading natural and organic cosmetics companies and buyers.
- [NatExpo](#) – French trade show for the natural and organic sector. You should consider this trade show if you want to target the French market.
- [Eco Life Scandinavia](#) – Scandinavian edition of NOPE. This trade show focuses on the natural and organic products industry in the Scandinavian region. However, there are many exhibitors there from outside the region. The trade fair focuses on finished products.
- [Cosmoprof Bologna](#) – The largest trade show in Europe for cosmetics products. The trade show focuses on conventional cosmetics products, but there is a dedicated pavilion for natural and organic cosmetics. This trade show is worth visiting to network with conventional and natural cosmetics companies.

You can also meet European buyers at trade shows outside Europe. Some of the most important trade shows dedicated to cosmetics and cosmetics ingredients in Asia include:

- [PCHi](#) – Leading personal and home care ingredients trade show in China. You can find buyers looking for new ingredient suppliers.
- [In-Cosmetics Asia](#) – Asian edition of In-Cosmetics. This trade fair focuses on ingredients for the cosmetics industry. Most visitors are from Asia, although exhibitors come from across the world.
- [Cosmoprof Asia](#) – Asian edition of Cosmoprof Bologna. Although this trade show is dedicated to conventional cosmetics, it has a dedicated pavilion for natural cosmetics. This trade show is worth visiting if you are looking at markets other than Europe.
- [Beautyworld Middle East](#) – The largest trade show in the Middle East for cosmetics products, hosted in Dubai.

Important African trade shows are:

- [Beauty Africa Expo](#) – A leading cosmetics trade show for the beauty and wellness industry in Africa, taking place in Tanzania.
- [My Beauty Expo](#) – Cosmetics trade show in South Africa. You should be able to meet distributors, manufacturers and traders in the cosmetics industry.

Trade fairs in Latin America you should consider include:

- [In-Cosmetics Latin America](#) – Latin American edition of In-Cosmetics. This trade fair focuses on ingredients for the cosmetics industry.
- [Biofach Brazil](#) – Leading trade show on organic products in Latin America. This trade show is worth visiting if you supply certified ingredients.

Visiting trade shows in your region may save you costs. It is also a great opportunity to find background information on your new target market and present your company directly to potential customers. However, the concentration of European buyers at trade shows in your region may not be that high. You should try and participate at European trade shows in order to increase your chances.

Tips:

Carry out research before visiting or exhibiting at a trade show. Start by looking through the exhibitor lists.

Budget for attending trade fairs at least one year in advance.

Join networking events at trade shows.

Focus on trade shows that have dedicated sections for cosmetics ingredients, as this will increase your chances of finding buyers.

3. Attend industry events

It is important to expand your network in the cosmetics industry to have a successful presence in the European market. You can do this by attending conferences and events that take place in Europe. You could specifically target events that focus on natural cosmetics and sustainability. By attending such events, you could gain valuable insights into trends and developments in the sector and network with potential customers.

By not attending industry conferences, you could miss out on opportunities to grow your network for your export activities, which could harm your business in the long run. You could also miss out on new and technical developments in the industry.

Examples of events that you should consider are the [UEBT annual conference](#), [SCSS Naturals](#) events, the [Vivanness Congress](#), and the European edition of the [Sustainable Cosmetics Summit](#). These events are good platforms to network with buyers, other exporters and formulators.

Tips:

Request delegate lists beforehand and decide with whom you would like to network at industry events.

Be strategic when choosing industry events. Attend those that take place alongside important trade shows, so that you can save resources.

Take advantage of some of the seminars and workshops that these events offer. It is a great way to gain first-hand knowledge.

4. Connect with sector associations

You should get in contact with sector associations in Europe and in specific European country markets. Sector associations can provide support with necessary regulations that you need to adhere to. They can also provide information about important market players and potential buyers. Sector associations usually disclose member lists, which can serve as a valuable source of information regarding the market players or sector associations of individual countries. The most important sector associations are the following:

- The [European Federation for Cosmetic Ingredients](#) (EFfCI) is an organisation for the ingredients sector. Its members are public authorities, trade groups and private organisations inside and outside the European Union. You can find the list of members on the [EFfCI](#) website.

- [Cosmetics Europe](#) represents the cosmetics industry in Europe. Its members are personal care manufacturers, as well as associations representing the cosmetics sector at the national level. The full [list of members](#) is available on the Cosmetics Europe website.

You should also consider approaching sector associations on a country level. Important cosmetics associations at the country level are:

- La Fédération des Entreprises de la Beauté ([FEBEA](#)) - French association for the beauty industry.
- Industrieverband Körperpflege und Waschmittel ([IKW](#)) - German association for the beauty and home care industry. You can find the full [list of members](#) on the IKW website.
- [Cosmetica Italia](#) - Italian association for the cosmetics industry. You can find the full [list of members](#) on the Cosmetica Italia website.
- La Asociación Nacional de Perfumería y Cosmética ([STANPA](#)) - Spanish association for the perfumery and cosmetics industry. You can find the full [list of members](#) on the STANPA website.
- Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association ([CTPA](#)) (UK) - You can find the full [list of members](#) on the CTPA website.

You should also visit websites of natural & organic cosmetics certification standards in Europe. The most important ones include:

- [NaTrue](#) - Brussels-based international non-profit association and certification agency for natural and organic personal care products and ingredients. You can find the full [list of members](#) on the NaTrue website.
- [COSMOS](#) - Non-profit association based in Brussels that provides certification for natural and organic personal care products and raw materials. You can find the full [list of members](#) on the COSMOS website.

On these sites, you can find information on certification schemes, products and ingredients that are already certified, as well as details of important natural and organic personal care companies.

Tips:

Focus on associations in the countries that could offer the best opportunities for your natural ingredients.

Regularly check association websites for updates on sector trends, regulations and innovations in the cosmetics industry.

5. Make sure you can be found online

The promotion of business services on the internet is an important part of exporting. Investing your time and resources in building up your online presence can create opportunities in the long term. By accessing your website or social media content, buyers can get a sense of trust. Neglecting your company's presence on the internet can reduce visibility and therefore reduce opportunities to connect with potential buyers.

Having a presentable website is an important part of your online presence. Make sure that your content is concise, orderly and grammatically correct. Always provide the list of ingredients that you supply and related certifications. Professional photographs of your products, team and production facilities can add a sense of credibility. You can also create a video about your company and products that you supply and post it on your website. [Candela Peru](#) is one example of a good company website.

Candela Peru clearly explains how their raw material is harvested. The company provides detailed information about the growers and indicates which regions specific ingredients come from. There is also a section on the sustainable production and traceability projects that Candela Peru is involved in. The information provided is

accompanied by videos and photographs from the project. This is a great way to make your sustainability claims more credible and believable.

The company also makes available its [sustainability report](#) on its website. Sustainability reporting shows how companies are addressing their impacts; it also shows a high degree of transparency. The report gives information on Candela Peru's business model, processing plants, certification schemes and traceability of its value chain. Candela Peru also provides UEBT assessments of its value chain in a qualified way.

Figure 1. Candela Peru audit by UEBT, 2014

BioTrade external audit / Auditoría externa Biocomercio	
P1. Conservation of biodiversity	8.19
P2. Sustainable use of biodiversity	8.86
P3. Fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from the use of biodiversity	7.93
P4. Socio-economic sustainability (productive, financial and market management)	9.72
P5. Compliance with national and international regulations	10
P6. Respect for the rights of actors involved in BioTrade activities	9.86
P7. Clarity about land tenure, use and access to natural resources and knowledge	9.17

Source: Candela Peru

There are several ways to promote your company online at relatively low costs. For example, use social media to gain exposure. As a small to medium-sized business, you can easily reach potential customers on social media platforms designed for networking, such as [LinkedIn](#). You can promote your content through LinkedIn groups. You can also contact members of LinkedIn groups without being connected to them. Make sure you share updates in sector groups in order to increase visibility.

Create blogs to generate more traffic on your website. You can post links to your blogs on other social media platforms or forums, such as [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Quora](#).

It is important that you make your ingredients available on online platforms, such as [Alibaba](#) or [Europages](#). European buyers can use these search engines to identify suppliers. Make sure you use keywords referring to your certifications, such as organic and fair trade.

Having a strong online presence is becoming more important for international businesses. The internet is becoming an important tool for business services promotion. More and more companies are using it as a major tool to connect with customers and suppliers.

Tips:

Learn about search engine optimisation (SEO) to generate more traffic to your website. You can find useful information on various [blogs](#) and websites. You can also find online courses on platforms such as [Udemy](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

Create accounts on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Dedicate some time to updating your social media accounts on a regular basis. The same applies to

your blog. Make sure that you share your updates on all your social media platforms.

6. Contact trade promotion agencies, embassies and chambers of commerce

It is important to take advantage of the resources that the various chambers of commerce provide. They are a valuable source of information on regulations, intellectual property, solvency, and advice on import-export issues. You should use this information when approaching European buyers.

By not using chambers of commerce and the information they provide, you may miss out on valuable information provided by these institutions. By using chambers of commerce, you could create a list of potential buyers to target. You can also find financial information on chambers of commerce websites, which you could use to gauge the reliability and solvency of buyers.

Examples of valuable chambers of commerce include [Eurochambres](#), as well as [KVK](#) (the Netherlands), [British Chamber of Commerce](#), the [Association of Italian Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Craft and Agriculture](#) and the [Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce](#). For the full list of chambers of commerce in Europe, visit the [Eurochambres](#) website.

The chambers of commerce operate various matchmaking programmes that help in raising awareness, matchmaking and trainings. These programmes provide guidance to enterprises to help them create profitable partnerships.

- Research potential buyers thoroughly. You have to be careful about who you choose to do business with. Check whether companies are reliable and financially sound before entering business deals.
- Subscribe to chambers of commerce newsletter services, especially for the countries you are interested in exporting to.
- Source information about buyers, markets and other companies in the sector.
- Connect with business support organisations and trade promotion associations in your home country or region. Examples include the [Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency](#) (ApexBrazil), [PromPerú](#), the [Ghana Export Promotion Authority](#) (GEPA) and the [Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation](#) (MATRADE).
- Make sure you study relevant sector information published by business support organisations.

7. Participate in matchmaking programmes and trade missions

As an exporter of natural ingredients to Europe, you should try and connect with various matchmaking programmes and trade missions. These programmes offer a wide range of tools that will help you access the European market. By participating in trade missions, you could save a substantial amount of time and resources.

These programmes offer coaching schemes and market intelligence on specific European sectors. You can acquire insights on what regulations you need to comply with and what trends are taking place in the European cosmetics market.

By not working with the tools that various matchmaking programmes provide, you could miss out on vital information on the European market. Your export activities could also be hampered by a lack of knowledge on regulations and requirements that European buyers have.

Consider participating in programmes such as those run by the [Centre for the Promotion of Imports](#) from developing countries (CBI), the [Swiss Import Promotion Programme](#) (SIPPO), the [Import Promotion Desk](#) (IPD)

and [Open Trade Gate Sweden](#) (OTGS). Organisations such as the [Food and Agricultural Organization](#) (FAO) and the [International Trade Centre](#) (ITC) also provide market access services.

Tip:

Apply to participate in matchmaking and trade mission programmes.

8. Make sure your documentation and technical dossiers are of a high standard

You need to ensure that your dossier is complete before approaching European buyers. There is high competition to supply natural ingredients to the cosmetics sector in Europe. Rising quality standards and stricter EU regulations put a lot of pressure on buyers to meet their customers' needs. It is therefore very important that you invest a substantial amount of time and resources into preparing your documentation.

A comprehensive dossier of data and information about your cosmetics ingredient includes Technical Data Sheets (TDS), Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and Certificates of Analysis. Safety Data Sheets contain information on handling, storage, hazards and emergency measures in case of an accident. Based on the information in SDSs, European buyers will be able to make an assessment of potential hazards with regard to sourcing your ingredients. Technical data sheets contain information on common applications of your ingredients, industry standard specifications, operating requirements, information on composition and warnings.

Certificates of analysis refer to analytical data that support product specification. According to the EN ISO/IEC 17025:2005 standard, the most important requirements for a certificate of analysis include:

- a title;
- the name and address of the laboratory and the location where the tests were carried out, if different from the address of the laboratory;
- the name and address of the customer;
- identification of the method used;
- a description of, the condition of, and unambiguous identification of the item(s) tested;
- the date of receipt of the test item(s) where this is critical to the validity and application of the results, and the date(s) on which the test was carried out;
- reference to the sampling plan and procedures used by the laboratory or other bodies where these are relevant to the validity or application of the results;
- the test results with, where appropriate, the units of measurement;
- where applicable, a statement on the estimated uncertainty of measurement;
- where relevant, a statement of compliance/non-compliance with requirements and/or specifications;
- where appropriate and needed, opinions and interpretations;
- the name(s), function(s) and signature(s) or equivalent identification of person(s) who authorised the test report certificate.

Information in the technical dossier can be also used for marketing purposes. It can contain pictures and illustrations and information on the benefits of natural ingredients and what effect they will have on the customer. You could potentially lose credibility and customers by not following through on this tip. This could harm your reputation in the long run and hamper your export activities on the European market.

Tips:

See the [CBI study 'Tips for doing business with European buyers'](#). It contains valuable information on

how to create and maintain relationships with European buyers.


See the [CBI study on tips for organising your exports to Europe](#). It contains practical advice on topics, such as export insurance, packaging and logistics.


See the [CBI study on how to prepare a technical dossier](#) for cosmetics ingredients.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [Ecovia Intelligence](#).

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