

# 10 tips for finding European coffee buyers

Europe is the largest coffee market in the world, where each buyer has their own approach to business, their own expectations and specific demands. As a result, finding the right buyer can take time and effort. It will require you to define your product offer, preferred target market and strategy. Keep in mind that your company and product profiles will first and foremost influence your success on the market. Work through the following tips to help you find European buyers for your coffee.

## Contents of this page

1. [Define your offer and know its potential](#)
2. [Explore your target market and identify your ideal buyer profile](#)
3. [Visit and participate in trade fairs or events](#)
4. [Use international and national sector and trade associations](#)
5. [Build and expand your business network](#)
6. [Invest \(time\) in online marketing](#)
7. [Use online trading platforms](#)
8. [Get to know your buyers](#)
9. [Use the trade press for market information](#)
10. [Be confident and persistent](#)

## 1. Define your offer and know its potential

European buyers, notably those focusing on the specialty segment, are always looking for unique coffees with specific flavour notes from unique origins. As such, it is important for you to know the specific characteristics of your product and its potential. To go one step further, it is crucial to understand how your offer differs from that of your competition. Knowing this is the best way to attract a buyer's attention.

To do so, you need to define your differentiating factor, your Unique Selling Point (USP). Think about what your story is. What sets you apart from the competition? What makes your coffee stand out? Where do your products come from? How are they grown and processed, and by whom? You should think about the following aspects:

- Your coffee beans' genetic profile and variety, and potential supply volumes
- Their agro-climatic context, such as micro-climates, surrounding forests and other natural factors
- Characteristics of the post-harvest practices, such as fermentation and washing processes
- The quality of your coffee, assessed by a consistent method and ideally verified by external experts
- Existing awards won, such as the [Cup of Excellence](#), or feedback from current buyers

Note that on the specialty market, the origin of coffee is especially important, and should be supported with storytelling and traceability. Coffee traders and importers will use your stories in their own communication with roasters. Roasters will, in turn, use your story to help market their products to consumers. By telling the right story, they are able to connect consumers to the coffee's origin, making coffee consumption a more complete experience.

### Tips:

Always have up-to-date and reliable data about your cooperative or company, and about your green coffee offer.

Define your unique selling point (USP) and what you can offer to European buyers. When you have found that, you should create your marketing story around these factors and promote it actively. Storytelling is very important, as both buyers and consumers love to see the story behind a product. Refer to tip 6 in this document to read more about investing in online marketing.

Never make claims that you cannot support, for instance on the quality or production volumes of your coffees.

Certification schemes may be a useful tool to support your story and emphasise the social and environmental responsibility of your coffee growing practices. Read our study on [buyers' requirements](#) for more information about different certification standards.

Investigate whether you qualify for industry awards such as the [Cup of Excellence](#). This can be an interesting way to profile yourself on the European market for specialty coffee.

## 2. Explore your target market and identify your ideal buyer profile

Before starting your search for European buyers, it is important to understand your target market. Each European country differs from the others in terms of consumption patterns, levels of trading, preferences for specific coffee varieties, the number of roasters, as well as their scale and sourcing practices.

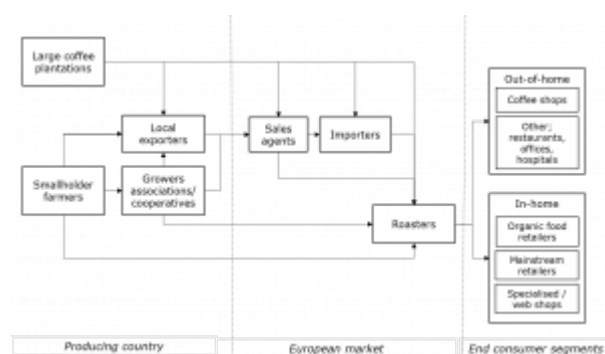
You can start profiling your target market and its structure by asking questions such as: Which markets and channels offer most opportunities for my product? What is the demand for my type of coffee in the target country? Who else supplies my variety of coffee to the market? Where and how do they have access to the buyers?

The figure below shows you the most important entry channels for green coffee beans in Europe. Note that the European market is moving towards shortened supply chains. This means that roasters increasingly source their green coffee directly from origin. Importers, however, do still play a major role in the coffee market and may act as a facilitator in direct trade.

In general, you should aim to look for buyers that are willing to develop long-term business relationships, either directly or through an importer. In fact, one of the most important initial questions is whether your potential client imports directly from origin or via an intermediary.

By analysing market information and identifying the main coffee buyers and their requirements, you will increase your chances to access the European market substantially. Without this market knowledge, you will limit your possibilities, and this could have an effect on your success.

Figure 1: The main channels for export of coffee to Europe



### Tips:

Consider which entry channel is most suitable for your company: directly to coffee roasters, through an importer or trader, or through an agent or broker. Or maybe you are too small and need to export

through an exporter in your own country for the time being.

Check out the websites of big and small roasters and importers in your target market. These websites will provide some initial information on from where and what kind of coffee they source. For instance, study the websites of the Dutch importer [This Side Up](#) and French importer [Belco](#) to read more about their coffee suppliers' profiles.

Have a look at [this list](#) of green coffee importers worldwide, as provided by Boot Coffee Campus.

Compile your own trade statistics on the [International Trade Centre Trade Map](#) and the [EU Trade Helpdesk](#). Find trade statistics for coffee under chapter 9 of the Harmonised System (HS). Read the annual [European Coffee Report](#), which is also a valuable source for more quantitative and qualitative information on the European coffee market.

Read our study on [demand for coffee in Europe](#) and the [information on specific countries](#) to read more about channels and segments in respective markets.

### 3. Visit and participate in trade fairs or events

Trade fairs and coffee events provide an excellent opportunity to actively promote your products and meet potential customers. Exhibiting at a trade fair will increase exposure for your company and products and gives you the opportunity to assess your competition. However, exhibiting can be costly, and you should always carefully assess whether a trade fair will pay off in terms of returns.

If you do not have the means to exhibit as a participant, you can also consider attending these events as a visitor. Being present, and meeting potential buyers face to face, is much more effective than email or telephone communication, especially when it comes to first impressions.

As exhibitor or visitor, it is always important to prepare your trade fair visit thoroughly. This implies you should:

- Choose the right event to attend. Research the events, their main focus and exhibitor/visitor profile. Try to find out if the fair is mainly directed at consumers (such as coffee festivals) or roasters and importers. Check if the focus of the event is on green or roasted coffee.
- Review the exhibitor list at the trade fair's website and select companies from that list that are relevant to your buyer profile. This will help you focus, allow you to make appointments in advance, and to navigate through the exhibition grounds strategically.
- Bring promotional materials but remember to keep them simple and short. A flyer or a business card are best, as long as they display contact details and other relevant information. Potential buyers will most probably not bring long brochures home.
- Prepare and bring samples of each type of coffee you can offer. It is recommended to bring 20-30 samples of each type. Samples usually consist of 300 grams of green coffee beans. These are ideally vacuum-packed, but you can also pack them in zipped plastic bags. Use an attractive sticker with an accurate and adequate description of the coffee, including: Company name, Region, Country, Altitude (meters above sea level), Variety, Process, Screen size, Certification (if any), Contact details, and optional: Availability.
- Practice your "elevator pitch" – a half a minute introduction to your company and product that impacts a potential buyer, using some of your USPs – in English.
- Besides making appointments with potential buyers, make sure to contact sector associations and trade promotion organisations. It is always good to have a good relationship with these organisations for possible future activities.
- Fairs also include workshops, lectures, and cuppings and tastings sessions. Check the agenda of each fair and make a planning of the events you want to join.

The most important trade fairs in the coffee sector in Europe are:

- [World of Coffee](#) — European trade fair with a focus on specialty coffee (organised by [Specialty Coffee Association](#)), held every year in a different European city.
- [Triestespresso Expo](#) — Trade fair specialised in espresso coffee, held every two years in Trieste, Italy.
- [COTECA](#) — International trade fair for coffee, tea and cocoa in Hamburg, Germany, held every two years.
- [BioFach](#) — The most important international exhibition for organic food and fair-trade products, held every year in Nuremberg, Germany. It is a key trade fair for companies that sell organic certified coffee.
- The [Private Label Manufacturers Association](#) (PLMA) is a trade show which takes place annually in Amsterdam, and focuses on private label manufacturing. The event brings together several roasters that source directly from producing countries.

Other interesting events include:

- [Producer & Roaster Forum](#) – this event is held every year in a different coffee producing origin and offers an opportunity for producers and roasters to exchange knowledge, forge relationships and explore new opportunities.
- The [AFCA Specialty Coffee Expo](#) – this event is held yearly in a different African coffee producing country, with the aim to drive domestic coffee consumption in Africa.
- [Specialty Coffee Expo](#) – this event is held yearly in the United States of America, and gathers a wide range of specialty coffee professionals.
- [Tea & Coffee World Conference](#) — international coffee trade fair, held annually in a different city.
- Coffee festivals, where mostly roasted coffee is promoted to retail and consumers. Examples of events in Europe include the Coffee Festivals in [Amsterdam](#) (the Netherlands), [Athens](#) (Greece), [Barcelona](#) (Spain), [Berlin](#) (Germany), [Bucharest](#) (Romania), [London](#) (United Kingdom), [Milan](#) (Italy), [Moscow](#) (Russia), [Paris](#) (France), [Stockholm](#) (Sweden), [Trondheim](#) (Norway) and [Warsaw](#) (Poland). Attending such events can provide you with additional insight into the preferences of European buyers and consumers, regarding origin, flavour and sustainability certification.

Exhibiting at, or visiting a trade fair can be combined with visits to roasteries and/or potential partners in Europe. Note that appointments should be made months in advance and should have a clear purpose.

If you are not able to exhibit at, or visit these events, you can still use their websites to compile a database of potential buyers.

Due to the recent developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, trade fairs and events have been cancelled. For this reason, the virtual tools and means of communication with (potential) buyers have become most relevant. Review the list of coffee trade fairs and events above, and look at the individual virtual alternatives they provide.

## Tips:

Check out the exhibitors' lists of the events above to find out whether they are interesting for you. It is recommended to make appointments with exhibitors in advance. You can find their contact information on the website of the specific event.

Contact local export promoting agencies to help you participate in trade fairs; their support can be financial and/or technical. Examples of export promoting agencies include the [Ugandan Export Promotion Board](#) and [PROMPERÚ](#).

Sign up for a "Trade Fair Participation" workshop by a local or international export promotion agency, to learn how to get most out of going to a trade fair.

At the trade fair, write down questions that you cannot answer directly. After the event, follow up on specific requests such as quotations, further information on your company, product and certificates.

Always have your technical and promotional material as well as samples prepared when you go to a trade fair or event.

Refer to the [Trade show exhibition guide](#) to find more details and planning tools for coffee exporters on how to benefit most from trade events.

Use the [trade fair benefit check](#) after your exhibition. This software, free of charge, is a tool to calculate the cost and benefits for exhibitors and is available in different languages.

## 4. Use international and national sector and trade associations

As a coffee exporter, it is important to join your national or regional coffee association. They often offer interesting services, such as up-to-date market and price information, trade fair participation and marketing support. Examples of coffee farmers/exporters associations include:

- [African Fine Coffees Association](#) (AFCA)
- [Colombian Coffee Growers' Federation](#) or [ASOEXPORT](#) (Colombia)
- [Anacafé](#) (Guatemala)
- [Indonesia Coffee Exporters Association](#) or the [Specialty Coffee Association of Indonesia](#) (SCAI)
- [Uganda Coffee Federation](#)

It may also be interesting for you to become a member of one of the women's [organisations](#) forming part of the [International Women's Coffee Alliance](#) (IWCA). This alliance aims to empower women in the international coffee community by connecting them in a network.

Consuming countries also have sector and trade associations. In Europe, the [European Coffee Federation](#) (ECF) plays a prominent role in representing the interests of traders, roasters, manufacturers and other companies involved in the European coffee sector. Their website includes a valuable [lists of member companies](#), which is a good source to find potential buyers in different European countries.

Also check the websites of the [national associations](#) listed on the website of the [International Coffee Organisation](#). Focus on associations and their members in countries which have a high demand for your product. For specialty coffee, you can refer to the links of the [national chapters](#) of the [Specialty Coffee Association](#) and the website of the [Coffee Roasters Guild](#).

### Tip:

Consider becoming part of a trade association in your country or region. This enhances your credibility and helps you build up your network.

## 5. Build and expand your business network

Apart from sector associations, there are other ways to search for potential buyers. For instance, you can search for potential buyers in the databases of certification bodies and sustainability platforms. Also, think of contacting trade promotion agencies, embassies, and chambers of commerce to find buyers. Do not forget about your existing business network: this may be the best place to start. In general, personal recommendations and connections are a good way to expand your network.

### Check databases of certification bodies and sustainability platforms

Another way to find potential buyers is through the customer databases of certification bodies. For example, by accessing the [database of FLOCERT](#) you can find a list of Fairtrade certified organisations active in the coffee

sector. Furthermore, the [list of UTZ-certified coffee supply chain actors](#) is a rich source of information, and [Organic-Bio](#) provides a list of organic-certified coffee supply chain actors.

You can also check which traders and/or roasters participate in specific sustainability platforms. For instance, have a look at the wide range of actors taking part in the [Sustainable Coffee Challenge](#).

## Get in touch with support organisations and agencies

Embassies, trade promotion agencies and chambers of commerce often have export programmes, which offer matchmaking services and support for exhibiting at trade fairs. The organisers of these programmes have strong relationships with businesses in your target market. As such, they can help you identify, screen and meet potential buyers.

To find a matchmaking programme and/or trade mission in your sector, have a look at the pages of international and European trade promotion organisations. They target mostly small and medium-sized enterprises in selected partner countries that aim to export their products. Examples of such agencies include:

- The Dutch [Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries](#) (CBI)
- The Belgian [Trade for Development Centre](#) (TDC)
- The German [Import Promotion Desk](#) (IPD)
- The Finnish [Finnpartnership](#)
- [International Trade Centre](#) (ITC)

There are also several organisations that support coffee farmers and exporters worldwide, such as [Progreso](#) (the Netherlands), [Agriterro](#) (the Netherlands, specific for farmer organisations and cooperatives) and [Rikolto](#) (Belgium).

In addition to these agencies, you can contact your country's embassies in Europe. Your country's embassies in your target markets could also help you find potential buyers and/or identify the competition. They usually have a commercial attaché to help you with your enquiries. You also have European chambers of commerce with offices in your country or region. Examples include:

- [Ethiopian-Netherlands Business Association](#)
- [German-Colombian Chamber of Industry and Commerce](#)
- [Holland House Colombia](#)
- [British Chamber of Commerce Indonesia](#)

### Tips:

Contact the embassy or trade promotion organisation in your country to see what kind of matchmaking facilities they can offer you.

To find out if your country has an embassy in your target market, go to the [Embassy Worldwide](#) website.

Check the websites of embassies, import promotion agencies and chambers of commerce to see what kind of export programmes they currently execute.

## 6. Invest (time) in online marketing

Online marketing is the best way to attract the attention of potential buyers. You can invest in your own social media account or set up a website. When you opt for a website, make sure that it is accurate and up-to-date. Your website must be clear and should provide relevant information regarding:

- information on your coffee offer, including quality and availability
- the origins of your product
- the mission and history of your farm/cooperative/company
- certifications

The website should convey a reliable and unique image. As such, give your story a face, by providing good-quality photos of the plantations, the farmers and their families (ask for their permission). The website should be inspiring. See, for instance, how [Cedro Alto](#) (Colombia), [O'Coffee](#), [Café Campos Altos](#), [SMC Specialty Coffees](#) (Brazil), [UniTrade Coffee](#) (Guatemala), [Caravela Coffee](#) (Latin America), [Don Pepe Estate Coffee](#) (Panama) and [Rwashoscco](#) (Rwanda) present their stories in clear and appealing ways.

Publish regular updates about your company, your products, your travels to trade fairs and other relevant news on social media, for example on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#). Share your story and inform your audience about your activities. Always pick the right platform and make sure to have attractive up-to-date profiles. Hence, do not start a YouTube channel if you do not have attractive videos. Buyers use these social media online platforms regularly.

### Tips:

Research options for generating visitors to your website. One way of doing this is through Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). SEO is a strategy that helps you to be found using online search engines. Minor changes to your website can positively impact your position on search result lists. For instance, see these tips [to create a Google-friendly website](#) or access the European Commission website for [information about optimising your website for search listings](#).

Link your Facebook, Twitter and Instagram sites so your posts will appear on the three platforms at the same time.

Websites are ideally written in good English.

Provide your client with anything they need for their social media pages and/or websites, in order for your coffee (under their brand) to become more popular.

Read these two Forbes articles with tips on how to improve your social media accounts (tips about [Facebook](#), [Twitter and Instagram](#) and tips about [YouTube and LinkedIn](#)) to promote your business.

## 7. Use online trading platforms

Online green coffee sourcing sites are gaining popularity. These sites often serve as a platform to connect roasters with producers of green coffee. This is mainly directed at buyers and sellers in niche markets with higher-quality coffees. Participating in the communities on these websites provide you with great opportunities to create long-term relationships with buyers.

Examples of online trading websites include [Algrano](#), [Cropster](#) (and [Shipsbeans](#), launched during the COVID-19 pandemic), [Almacena Platform](#), [Beyco](#), [ifinca](#) and [GrainChain](#). The latter three platforms are based on blockchain technology, which could over time [improve accuracy, traceability and efficiency in the entire supply-chain](#).

In addition, it is increasingly common to sell your coffee through online auctions. Auctions provide coffee producers with the possibility to promote their product. Auctions often yield relatively high prices for producers. Note that most of the highest-quality specialty coffees are sold at online actions, which implies that you can often only enter these auctions if you comply with strict production and quality requirements. Examples of online auctions include [Yave](#), [Best of Panama](#) and [Alliance for Coffee Excellence](#). In some countries,



auctions are the common way of mainstream green coffee sales, as is the case in [Kenya](#).

### Tips:

Use online trading sites to help you assess who your competitors are.

Read this [guide to green coffee auctions](#) on Perfect Daily Grind to be better informed about the advantages and disadvantages of coffee auctions, and whether they can provide you with interesting sales opportunities.

Learn [how online auctions can enable direct trade relations](#) in this article on Perfect Daily Grind.

## 8. Get to know your buyers

Once you have found a potential buyer, it is important to understand their business, their culture and their individual requirements and demands. Coffee buyers differ significantly from country to country, and that can be quite challenging in terms of doing business.

Visit your potential buyer's website. Gather as much information as you can about their business, their philosophy and business practices. Find out which segment(s) they operate in, for example, and where their products are sold. Do they buy mainstream products or niche products such as speciality, organic or fair trade coffee? Do they expect certification or do they have specific requirements on bean quality, packaging or transportation?

### Tips:

Once you are convinced your coffee is suitable for a specific buyer, send an email with a complete specification or factsheet of your coffee, such as [this example](#).

Take your time to find the right buyer; research your possibilities and engage with business partners that match your company's philosophy and that you feel comfortable doing business with.

Study our [tips for doing business with European coffee buyers](#).

## 9. Use the trade press for market information

What are the trends in the coffee sector? What influences business in Europe? And what affects your buyer's decision-making? The only way to find out is by keeping yourself up-to-date on market news.

Find out what is going on in the coffee sector. You can follow market developments that are published in trade magazines and websites. Not only do these publications bring up-to-date information on the coffee sector, they also provide a database of potential buyers, such as traders and roasters.

The following magazines or news portals focus on coffee:

- [Perfect Daily Grind](#) – news and educational resources on every aspect of specialty coffee, also publish in Spanish.
- [Daily Coffee News](#) — a free source of information on the specialty coffee market, with an emphasis on the



North American market.

- [Bar Talks](#) – reports about developments and up-to-date news in the coffee and cocoa industries, from production to consumption.
- [Roast Magazine](#) – a bi-monthly trade magazine dedicated to the specialty coffee industry
- [CRS Coffeelands Blog](#) – articles about the development of specialty coffee chains, with a focus on the complex realities of life.
- [Comunicaffé](#) — coffee news.
- [Global Coffee Report](#) — global coffee industry news.
- [Tea and Coffee Trade Journal](#) – reports on developments in the global tea and coffee industries.

### Tips:

Make sure you stay up-to-date on market news by exploring the websites mentioned above.

Consider using such trade websites as a way of advertising your product or company.

Find potential buyers in the company directories of the magazines given above, such as the [directory of Bar Talks](#).

Learn about your competition by browsing through the ads of other producers / exporters in your own country and elsewhere.

## 10. Be confident and persistent

Proper communication and confidence in your product are important elements to doing business. Being well-prepared will give you the confidence you need, and it will give your potential buyers trust in what you do.

It is always good to contact potential buyers by email or phone in the run-up to trade fairs, usually a couple of weeks before the event. The trade fair is a good reason for contacting them; you could, for instance, propose a meeting at the event to discuss business possibilities together.

Remember that it takes time for a buyer to decide to commit to a new coffee supplier. Usually, the buyer has a number of good suppliers with longstanding relations. Do not expect to have a deal after you submit a first coffee sample. Sometimes, it takes one or two years of exchanging information and samples before you get an order.

### Tips:

Plan your export marketing activities: schedule calls with prospective buyers, schedule updating the 'News' tab on your website and inform all prospective buyers when you visit Europe for example.

Make sure you have someone who speaks English available at your cooperative or company, and who checks and answers emails every day.

When contacting a buyer, keep your email short, relevant and concise, while giving complete and accurate information.


If a buyer does not answer, do not hesitate to send reminders. If you sent samples, ask for feedback on the cupping of your coffee sample.

Read our [Tips for organising your exports to Europe](#), to help prepare for organising your first shipment or first coffee transaction. If you already successfully export green coffee to Europe, this study can increase your efficiency and can help you gain a competitive edge.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [ProFound – Advisers In Development](#).

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).

Follow us for the latest updates

(opens in a new tab)  Twitter

(opens in a new tab)  Facebook

(opens in a new tab)  LinkedIn



[RSS](#)