

7 tips for finding European fish and seafood buyers

To export your fish and seafood products to Europe, finding a buyer in Europe is one of the most important steps. The following tips will guide you through the process of making sure that buyers can find you (maybe more important than finding them), exploring the different types of buyers that might be interested in your products and narrowing those buyers down to those with the highest potential. By following these tips, while we cannot guarantee that you will find a buyer, you will increase the likelihood that you reach out to companies interested in you.

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1. Make sure that buyers can find you online in multiple ways

In the online arena, having a presence is an absolute must for any company, including yours. Your online presence should be visible in many ways. Have a professional company website and use the free social media channels to your benefit. In general, European buyers will search for new exporters through search engines such as Google. They will use search words such as “exporter + seafood type”, “purchase + seafood type”, “sourcing + seafood type” in combination with a particular country. LinkedIn is also used, especially to connect directly with sales directors.

Have a professional company website.

First of all, it is key to have a professional website for your company so buyers can find you online. When buyers seek more information about your company, it increases trust when they find a professional website for your company. A company website can really support the professional image of your company, when done right; when done wrong and in an unprofessional way, a company website can also really hurt the image of your company.

Dedicate time and invest some money into developing a professionally looking website, which means a good design, high-quality pictures and all the information that a buyer wants to know.

Your website should cover at least the following.

- Information on your company – “about the company”: where you are located, how long you have been in business, how and by whom the company was founded;
- Information on your core team – “team”: director and management team; having pictures of the team is a plus, as it will create a positive image;
- Information about your products – “product range”: what you offer, where you source your products (do you catch/farm them yourself or do you work with partners), the quality and specifications that you can offer, any certifications that you have;
- Contact information of your sales team with an email address and a mobile phone number. Make sure that everyone has a company email address. Using @hotmail, @yahoo or @gmail addresses will transmit an unprofessional image of the company.

For a professional image, not only the design but also the texts of the websites should be written in correct

English, or the language in which business is most often done. It is smart to connect with a native speaker and to have them edit the texts on your website. If the text is written in bad English, the buyer will question the ease with which they can communicate with you.

If you use pictures, which you should definitely do, make sure that they are of high quality and look professional. Try to avoid using pictures that are blurry or of low resolution. If you use pictures of your production area, make sure that the production area is clean, that the product looks clean and that no product is lying on the floor.

Some examples of very well-designed websites are the ones of [Acuamaya](#) and [Granjas Marina](#). Their websites are made with the colour of their logo, they have beautiful pictures of their product range, they mention their values and mission, and the Acuamaya website shares a picture showing their team.

Use free professional social media such as LinkedIn

When you have an online presence through your website, you can expand that presence by making use of the free professional social media networks. It is important to know that Facebook is not used or seen as “professional” by European companies. Buyers will never look for you on Facebook. Most buyers in Europe use LinkedIn as the social media platform that they use to learn more about a company. Apart from having a website, it is also important to have a company profile and personal profiles of the key people in your organisation on LinkedIn.

Through LinkedIn, you can increase the visibility of your company by sharing regular updates. A new catch, the products that you have available in certain sizes, stories about the people who work in your company and even news messages on your product (how the stocks are doing or the general sizes that buyers can expect from you) can all be shared on your company profile. Underline your experience and knowledge about the product.

Furthermore, sharing short videos of your company, the catch/farming grounds and the production is a very nice way to show more about your company, and increase your positive exposure to potential buyers.

Make sure that the images and logo on your social media profile(s) match your company website so you create one unified image that people start to recognise as your company.

Apart from LinkedIn, other social media platforms to consider are Twitter (although Twitter is more widely used in other countries, not so much by European buyers) and Instagram (though this medium is mostly relevant if you are producing retail-ready products).

Online advertising

If you are thinking about starting up your company, it is better first to invest your money in a website, supported by company profiles on free social media channels, than to start immediately with paid online advertising. Many of the free social media channels also offer targeted [paid advertisement options](#), in which you can choose the amount that you spend, allowing you more control over the budget.

Once you decide to take out a paid advertisement, seafood websites such as [Undercurrent](#) or [Intrafish](#), even though they might be expensive, reach a large and global audience.

Tips:

Develop a professional website of your company so buyers can find you online.

Make use of LinkedIn as a free medium to increase the visibility of your company.

2. Research the members of relevant sector associations to start building your lead list

In Europe, most seafood companies are represented by seafood-related sector associations. There are associations on both the European level, such as the Seafood Importers & Processors Alliance (SIPA), and the country level, such as the Visfederatie (VIF) in the Netherlands. The associations represent the companies by addressing problems. They take diplomatic actions in Europe and do joint marketing efforts to promote certain seafood products, among other things. These organisations can help you find buyers (their members) and give you insight into what buyers find important.

Sample associations on the European/international level are the following:

- [Seafood Importers & Processors Alliance \(SIPA\)](#) - SIPA is an international alliance of seafood companies focused on food safety issues and legislation. In [the news section](#) of their website, you can find valuable information on the current food safety and legislation issues on which they are working. This information is important for you to know while doing business in Europe.
- [EU Fish Processors and Traders Association \(AIPCE-CEP\)](#) – a joint organisation consisting of the AIPCE (EU Fish Processors and Traders Association) and CEP (European Federation of National Organisations of Importers and Exporters of Fish). They represent the fish sector in the European Union. On their website, they publish an European Union's [Finfish study](#) each year, which you can download for free.

Most European countries also have national seafood sector associations. If you know which countries and types of buyers give the best opportunity for selling your product (see the next tips), check out the websites and members of the national organisations in the countries of your interest.

North-western European national sector associations:

The Netherlands

- [Visfederatie](#) – this sector association represents Dutch seafood processors, sellers and fishermen, as well as related companies such as transport companies;

Belgium

- [Belgische groepering van de visindustrie - Fédération Belge de l'industrie du poisson \(Belgian Fish Industry Federation\)](#) – this sector associations represents the Belgium seafood catch and processors companies;

Germany

- [Bundesverband der deutschen Fischindustrie und des Fischgrosshandels e.V.](#) (Federal Association of the German Fish Industry and Wholesale Fish Trade);

Denmark

- [Danish Seafood Association](#).

Southern European national sector associations:

Spain

- [Asociación Nacional de Fabricantes de Conservas de Pescados y Mariscos \(ANFACO\)](#) (National Association of Canned Fish and Seafood Manufacturers);
- [Asociación Española de Mayoristas, Importadores, Transformadores y Exportadores de Productos de la Pesca y Acuicultura \(Conxemar\)](#) (Spanish Association of Wholesalers, Importers, Manufacturers and Exporters of Fish Products and Aquaculture) – this sector association not only represents the seafood sector in Spain, but it also organises the international trade fair [Conxemar](#) and publishes a [magazine](#) (in Spanish), which can give you very interesting insights into the industry;
- [Asociación Española de Importadores Mayoristas de Alimentos del Mar \(ALIMAR\)](#) (Spanish Association of Seafood Wholesale Importers).

France

- [Association Des Entreprises de Produits Alimentaires Elaborés \(ADEPALE\)](#) (Association of Processed Food Companies);
- [Syndicat National du Commerce Extérieur des Produits Congelés et Surgelés \(SNCE\)](#) (National Trade Union of Foreign Trade with Frozen Foods);
- [Union du Maréyage Français \(U.M.F.\)](#) (French Fish Trade Union).

Italy

- [Associazione Nazionale Conservieri Ittici e delle Tonnare \(A.N.C.I.T.\)](#) (National Association of Canned Fish and Tuna);
- [Associazione Italiana Industrie Prodotti Alimentari \(A.I.I.P.A.\)](#) (Italian Food Industry Association).

Portugal

- [Associação Nacional dos Industriais de Conservas de Peixe \(ANICP\)](#) (National Association of the Canned Fish Industry);
- [Associação da Indústria Alimentar pelo Frio \(ALIF\)](#) (Association of the Cooled Food Industry).

Tips:

If a website that you are trying to access is in a language which you do not speak, download [Google Chrome](#). This browser offers automatic translations. When translating a document or email, [Google Translate](#) is a very useful tool.

Use the lists of members on the websites of the sector associations in a particular country. They can give you an idea of who your potential customers are in a given country or region and save a lot of time that you may have spent doing desk research online to find the companies.

Check out the news section of the sector association websites. They can give you insight into what is currently happening in the sector in terms of treatment, customs problems and more. If a website is in the local language, use Google Translate to translate the website.

3. Know which European market you are targeting

Selecting the right countries is important to take into account. How well the product that you are offering matches the market that you target will determine whether it will be successful or not. In selecting countries or markets, it is important to understand that while Europe is often talked about as one market, you can actually distinguish different markets within Europe, and all countries have different fish-eating habits and consumption rates.

Being aware of the division of markets within Europe is one thing, but it is also important for you to be able to target specific countries in these 3 parts of Europe. You can find out more details about which markets to target by checking import statistics through sources such as [TradeMap](#) and/or [Eurostat](#).

In general, you can distinguish 3 different regional markets in Europe for seafood: the north-western European, southern European and Eastern European market.

The north-western European market consists of the countries the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, and the Nordic countries such as Denmark Finland and Sweden. While these countries have the highest purchasing power, they have less fish consumption per capita than the European Union average. In general, the north-western European markets have a larger focus on sustainability certification. The types of seafood that are in the highest demand are value-added seafood such as peeled shrimp and filleted fish.

The southern European market consists of the markets Spain, Italy, Portugal, France and Greece. These countries represent the highest seafood consumption in the European Union. The southern European markets are fish lovers, and do not mind consuming whole fish and seafood. The demand for sustainably certified seafood is increasing, but it is not a market requirement yet.

The Eastern European market consists of countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. While these markets are still relatively small, it is a region where the demand for seafood is increasing the most. The purchasing power in the Eastern European countries has also increased over the past years. Demand for certified seafood products is still limited. This market is a good starting point for exporters of seafood from developing countries.

Tips:

Get a better understanding of the differences between these markets in the [CBI market statistics and outlook study](#). It will help you to target the right markets for your products.

Apart from the [European Union fish market report](#), also check out the entire website of [the European Market Observatory for fisheries and aquaculture \(EUMOFA\)](#), as it contains a lot of information about the specific markets and seafood consumption in the European Union.

For specific information on the European Union shrimp markets, read the north-western Europe and southern Europe updates in the [free online magazine ShrimpTails](#)

Read our market analysis for [a more complete breakdown of regional consumption differences](#). It will help you to decide on which market and country will offer you the most opportunities.

4. Know which types of buyers to target

When looking for new buyers in Europe, it is important for you to target buyers which are not only looking for your product but which also fits the supply chain and requirements that your company provides. It may seem common sense, but take time for this step: do research, create a buyer profile and target buyers which match your company. It is important to consider your company's maturity, your products, and your management and marketing capacities. Different buyers will demand different certifications or product specifications, which may require additional investment.

In the European market, you have the following categories of buyers: traders, processors, importers that supply retail/food service and retailers with direct sourcing.

Traders

Traders are individuals or companies which are often looking to buy containers or pallets and which will resell them to importers throughout Europe. As traders are resellers which are used to purchases and sales being made on the spot, they are often looking for new suppliers and it is easy to do business with them. These traders will often buy containers to resell in the European market on a pallet basis. An example of a trader in the European market which works with Latin American companies is [Delfin](#); [Gel-Peche](#) works in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

There are approximately 3,500 traders operating in Europe.

Processors

These importers have production facilities in Europe. They buy seafood products in bulk and reprocess them, in their own production facilities, into retail-packed products for the European market. As the products that these

importers request are bulk-packed, these companies are easy to supply with products. However, it depends on their end-customer what they will request in terms of certification. Examples of processors are [Heiploeg](#), [Mayonna](#) and [Brasmar](#).

There are approximately 250 processors operating in Europe.

Importers that supply retail/foodservice

This type of importer has been contracted by a retailer, often based on a long-term (1-year) contract to supply them. Supplying retail, this type of importer will request products already packed in retail bags and IQF frozen products. They will have specific requests for food safety, sustainability and social certifications as well. Documentation and traceability also need to be fully in place. Examples of importers that supply retail are [Seafood Connection](#) in north-western Europe, and [Delfin](#) and [Compesca](#) in southern Europe.

There are approximately 800 importers that supply retail or the foodservice sector operating in Europe.

Retailers with direct sourcing

It is also an option to sell directly to retailers, without importers or traders in between. The highest margins can be made here and retailers who source directly often want long-term business relationships, but it also tends to be the most difficult option for importers from developing countries. The difficulty is that retailers often conclude annual contracts, which makes it hard to manage price fluctuations. They also have extensive requirements and are intolerant of problems such as delays to shipments. Defaulting on the terms of your contract could lead to high penalties.

There are about 10 retailers that source their fish and seafood directly operating in Europe.

Seafood buyer/supplier databases and directories

The following seafood websites can be of use to find potential buyers of your product, as they offer information and contact directories of suppliers/buyers of seafood:

- [Globefish](#) – information on international fish trade from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);
- [Sea-Ex](#) – Skype Directory for the seafood fishing marina and aquaculture industries;
- [The Fish Site](#) – website for the global aquaculture industry;
- [FIS](#) – fish information and services portal;
- [Europages](#) – multilingual European Union business-to-business (B2B) search engine, which includes a Buy & Sell marketplace;
- [Greentrade](#) – largest marketplace for producers, manufacturers and distribution networks in the organic industry, good for research by country, category, product and buyer;
- [Seafood Source](#) – news website and directory of seafood industry suppliers around the world;
- [Undercurrent](#) – key news website for the global seafood sector;
- [Intrafish](#) – key news website for the global seafood sector.

Tips:

Before starting to connect with buyers, do your research, create a buyer profile and investigate which type or category of buyer fits the product that you can offer right now.

If you currently only produce bulk, your best chance is to connect with traders and importers that do their own processing.

Check our [buyer requirements study](#) to learn more about sustainability requirements in the fish and seafood sector.

Check our trends study to learn about [the trends that will be important to your business with Europe](#),

now and in the future.

Check our [tips for doing business with European fish and seafood buyers](#) for tips on how to approach and do business with European buyers.

5. Go to the trade fairs that your buyers attend

For selecting trade fairs to attend, it is important for you to understand that the selection of trade fairs can be made strategically. For example, if you found out in your research that you have a lot of chances to sell your product in Spain, it might be wise to select a seafood trade fair in Spain such as Conxemar, as you are more likely to be able to connect with the right buyers. The fairs do not always have to be located in the country of your target company and larger fairs such as Seafood Expo Global have a more international audience.

There are several large seafood trade fairs in Europe to which you can go:

- [Seafood Expo Global](#) – the world’s largest seafood trade fair, held in Brussels, Belgium every year in April. From 2021, it will be held in Barcelona, Spain. It is a great place for you to start, as you will be able to target international and European buyers here.
- [Conxemar](#) – an international trade fair for frozen seafood, held in Vigo, Spain every year in October. This fair is international, but it is very much focused on buyers from Spain and Portugal.
- [SIAL Paris](#) – an international trade fair for food which is held in Paris every other year around October. It often takes place around the same time as the Anuga trade fair in Cologne, Germany.
- [Anuga](#) – a leading trade fair for the trade, foodservice and catering market in Cologne, Germany. It is also held every other year.
- [Fish International](#) – the most important German trade fair for the fishery business. It is a good place to make connections with German fish traders and buyers. This fair takes place in Bremen every 2 years.

The aforementioned trade fairs are all organised in Europe, so you are guaranteed to run into European buyers there. There are other international seafood trade fairs and conferences which European buyers also attend:

- [Seafood Expo North America](#) – the largest North American seafood show, held in Boston every year around mid-March,. It is the most important seafood show to get into contact with US buyers, but many European companies also exhibit and many European buyers visit this trade fair.
- [China Fisheries & Seafood Expo](#) – the largest international trade show with an orientation towards China, held in Qingdao, China every year at the end of October/November. It is the most important trade show to get in touch with Chinese buyers, but an increasing number of European companies are exhibiting as well as visiting the seafood show.

A company can attend a trade fair as a visitor or as an exhibitor. As a visitor, you will be free to walk around the fair, while it is open, and you can engage with other visitors and exhibitors. As an exhibitor, you will have a booth at the fair, allowing you to approach companies in which you are interested in, but also allowing companies that are interested in you, your product or your region to find, approach and engage with you. Attending as an exhibitor is far more expensive than a visitor pass but has advantages, if it is planned and executed well.

As a visitor to these trade fairs, you have the potential to go and meet new customers from all over the world. Before going to a seafood show, research the companies with which you want to engage, find their booth number and try to research the name of the purchase manager (Google “purchase manager” + company name). Approaching your target company will make it easier for you to get in contact with the right person. Often, purchase managers are present, but they are very busy and less likely to approach you; you will have to go find them.

If possible, attending these shows as an exhibitor has the extra advantage of attracting new business partners to you, and providing extended access to the fair and other exhibitors. However, it also requires a greater time and financial investment. First, go to a variety of exhibitions and trade fairs to see which your target group attends; these fairs will offer you the best opportunities. Once you have an understanding of who goes to what fair, you can better choose the fairs in which it is best to invest the money and the time which it takes to participate as an exhibitor.

A lot of business is done outside of the fair's opening hours. If you go as an exhibitor, the times when companies are setting up for the day and finishing up are often less busy and good to approach target companies. As a visitor, you will have already left.

Plan fair trips in advance

The websites of trade fairs have an extensive list of all their exhibitors online. Often, you can filter these lists based on the type of company (supplier/buyer/processor), type of product and country, with a general email address of the company connected with it. An example is the [Seafood Expo Global exhibitors list](#) or the one of the [Conxemar trade fair](#).

Tips:

Plan your trip to the seafood trade fairs a few months in advance, and reserve flights and hotel rooms in due time. Doing so could save you a lot of money, as rates go up and hotels are fully booked at an early stage in the year.

When you visit the trade fairs in a particular country, also plan some time to visit a few supermarkets in the city where you are staying. It will give you a good idea of the product demand, price, look and feel. If possible, also visit nearby cities or countries; sometimes, another European country is only a train ride away, giving you a fuller understanding of European consumers' demands.

You can reduce the cost of exhibiting by partnering with other companies and sharing a booth.

If you are planning on attending as an exhibitor, make sure to purchase your booths as early as possible, as there are limited spots and the more affordable spots often go quickly.

Plan some time for the days after the expo. Many companies who make the trip schedule some extra time before heading home. This period may be a good opportunity to meet when there is less time pressure.

6. Take advantage of the organisations there to support you

You have a range of governmental, non-governmental and private organisations, both in Europe and in developing countries, which can support you in finding European buyers. They differ in the ways that they can support you, and all have their strengths and weaknesses.

Governmental and non-governmental organisations

Most European countries have a governmental organisation that supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from developing countries. You can get in contact with these organisations for support in making the connections that you need to start exporting to Europe.

Most developing countries have a chamber of commerce or a commercial delegation at some of their embassies in European countries. If you want to export to a certain European country, check whether your country has an embassy in that particular country and check whether they have programmes to support you.

Some developing countries have a business support organisation (BSO) in their homeland and might also have subsidiaries in a specific country. Some of these BSOs are governmental and some are private or semi-private. [ProEcuador](#), [Vasep Vietnam](#) and [UPAMES](#) in Senegal are examples of BSOs. If your country does not have a BSO, try to convince your government to start one. These organisations are usually focused on a specific sector such as fish and seafood, and often organise national and international business events to promote the country's exports.

While many of the governmental and non-governmental agencies offer support for free, they often have a very specific mission and offering. If you fit the criteria and are interested in the programmes, they can be extremely valuable resources.

Some examples of organisations to which you can go for support are listed below.

- [Centre for the Promotions of Imports from developing countries \(CBI\)](#): Part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this organisation offers [a range of reports available online](#), both general (on exporting products and services to Europe from a developing country), sector-specific (on the fish and seafood sector as a whole) and product-specific (such as Pacific white shrimp, crab or carp). These reports are free to access and can help you to find buyers in Europe. CBI also offers personalised support, but there are criteria with which you are required to comply and programmes in which you are required to participate. Examples of the type of support available through CBI are export coaching programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises, technical support to business support organisations in developing countries, as well as involving policy-makers and importers in the development and implementation of the programmes.
- [The European Trade Helpdesk](#): this organisation and their website will support you with all the need-to-know information on the European market, such as requirements with which imported goods have to comply, including label regulations, import duties, taxes and statistics on imported goods.
- [Make Trade Sweden](#): if you consider Sweden and the other Nordic countries your target market, it is wise to consult Make Trade Sweden. They support both exporters from developing countries with market intelligence reports on Sweden and the Nordic markets.
- [The Swiss Import Promotion Programme \(SIPPO\)](#), [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit \(GIZ\)](#) and [Enabel – the Belgian development agency](#) are examples of other governmental organisations in specific European countries which all have support programs for SME companies from developing countries.

Private companies

There are also a range of private companies that can help you to create your lead list, make first contact with potential buyers and/or manage your relationships with your clients in a certain country or region. These companies can be intermediaries who may take a percentage of each sale, or consultants who charge a time-based rate.

Going through intermediaries or consultants can be useful. There are 2 main advantages. First, it allows the exporter to gain insight into the European market from someone within the industry who speaks the language and who knows the players. They can also provide you with connections into markets that would otherwise be difficult to reach. Second, they can also provide you with updates on the movement of the market and the competition, helping you to focus your lead list.

Consultants and intermediaries, though they can be expensive, offer you completely personalised services. These service providers can talk you through making your lead list criteria, and help you to find and connect with your leads. The advantage that this process may have over governmental and non-governmental organisations is that the support can be completely driven by you, as their client, and your needs.

Some examples of organisations to which you can go for support are the following.

- [Seafood Trade Intelligence Portal](#): this private agency from the Netherlands has lots of data and contacts worldwide. These private consultants work based on an annual membership or an hourly consultancy fee. Due to their detailed knowledge, they can be a good, reliable and personalised source for exporters and

importers.

- [Fresh Studio](#): this company is a consultancy firm, based in Vietnam, which offers support in marketing and contacting buyers.

7. Finalise your lead list

When you have defined which countries/markets and what type of buyers offer the highest opportunities for your product, the next step will be to finalise your lead list and find specific buyers to target. There are various ways to find companies.

As previously mentioned, you can use the member lists of sector associations to get suggestions on which companies would be potential buyers. You can also use the exhibitor lists of trade fairs. A variety of seafood news websites with contact directories are available as well.

Rather than just contacting all the companies on the websites, it is important to look carefully at the companies and select the ones with the highest potential, based on some predetermined criteria such as the country, type of buyer, size of company, product range that they offer or other criteria relevant to you. The creation of a lead list will increase your success rate because you will rule out, and therefore do not waste time on, impossible sales.

Tip:

Before creating a list, determine the search criteria so you will be able to target your search more.

Read the CBI Tips for organising your fish and seafood exports to Europe to get useful advice on how to make exporting your products to Europe as easy as possible. Learn how best to navigate European customs and buyer requirements, as well as how to deal with transport and insurance.

Read the CBI [Tips for doing business with European fish and seafood buyers](#) to learn more about the way that buyers in Europe typically like to operate. The tips will give you practical advice on how to make first contact with European buyers and how to conduct business with them in a way that will impress them, giving you an advantage over your competitors.

The study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [Seafood Trade Intelligence Portal](#).

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