



[10 tips for finding buyers on the European cocoa market](#)

Europe plays a dominant role in the global cocoa sector. The largest European ports of Antwerp (Belgium) and Rotterdam (the Netherlands) are important, as well as the large European grinding and processing industry. This means plenty of opportunities for finding buyers. Use the following tips to help identify potential buyers for your products.

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1 . Know your product and its potential and then define your ideal buyer profile

Ask yourself what kind of cocoa you produce or want to produce. Be aware of the fact that European buyers are increasingly looking for cocoa that is different, not just for bulk. They are looking for specific flavours, origins and nuances in fragrance and texture.

For example, there is an increasing demand for fine flavour (or specialty) cocoa. This is a niche market in which smaller quantities of more expensive quality cocoa are traded. Investigate this market. Note that the combination of origin and variety with storytelling and traceability is important here.

Identify the European countries which offer the most opportunities for your cocoa, then find out which type of company buys your cocoa. Promising target markets include:

- [Belgium](#)
- [France](#)
- [UK](#)
- [Finland](#)
- [Germany](#)

- [The Netherlands](#)
- [Switzerland](#)
- [Spain](#)
- [Italy](#)
- [Eastern Europe](#)

You will want to look for companies that are willing to develop long-term business relationships. This gives you the best chance of success in Europe.

Tips:

- Always have up-to-date and reliable data available regarding your farm and/or farmers and the production quantity, your cocoa varieties, the way you ferment and dry your beans, your region, climate, soil et cetera.
- Read our study about [fine flavour cocoa](#).
- By identifying the other exporters in your target markets and to whom they are selling, you can get a good idea of who the market players are.
- Take a look at our study about [doing business with European buyers of cocoa](#).
- Visit our website for more [market information from the European cocoa sector](#).

2 . Identify preferred market channels

If you focus on the premium, specialty or [fine flavour](#) market segments, direct trade is the preferred channel. Try to find speciality bean-to-bar makers, chocolate stores, chocolatiers or bakeries in your target markets.

Check out the websites of chocolate makers and cocoa processors in Europe (big and small). This is a good way of finding out where they buy their cocoa and what kind of cocoa they use.

Tip:

- Find out which [market channels there are to choose from](#) when looking for buyers in Europe.

3 . Build and expand your business network

Once you have defined your product, your buyer profile and your preferred market channel, it is time to look for buyers. A good place to start is in your existing business network. If you already process your products locally, for example, ask your processor(s) who they work with. Try and expand your network this way. Personal recommendations work well.

Tips:

- Contact European companies that are based in your country (see point 9).
- Look for certification bodies, product associations and cocoa magazines that list companies in the cocoa sector online, for example the websites of [ICCO](#), [Eurococoa](#) or

[Cocoamerchants](#).

- Incentives work well when working with partners. If a sale goes ahead, you can suggest sharing the extra margin with the local processor who helped you find the buyer.

4 . Visit the websites of sector associations

Visit the websites of international sector associations, such as:

- The [International Cocoa Organisation \(ICCO\)](#)
- The [Federation of Cocoa Commerce \(FCC\)](#)
- The [European Cocoa Association \(ECA\)](#)

Some of these associations provide member lists, which could include potential clients. They also provide a lot of relevant information about the worldwide and European cocoa markets.

Also visit the websites of national associations, such as the [Royal Belgian Association of the Biscuit, Chocolate, Pralines and Confectionary \(ChoPraBisCo\)](#). ChoPraBisCo has published a [list of Belgian praline and chocolate companies](#).

Have a look at the website of the [Vereniging voor de Bakkerij- en Zoetwarenindustrie \(VBZ\)](#). VBZ represents Dutch companies that produce and sell bakery and confectionary products. On their website you can find a [member list](#), which includes many different companies that work with cocoa.

Examples of interesting local associations are the [Indonesian Coffee and Cocoa Research Institute](#) and [Caribbean Agribusiness](#).

Tip:

- Consider becoming part of a trade association. This lends you credibility and helps you build up your network.

5 . Contact your country's embassy or consulate on your target market

Your country's embassy in your target market(s) could help you find potential buyers and/or identify the competition. They usually have a commercial attaché to help you with your enquiries.

Tip:

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

6 . Visit or participate in trade fairs (or their websites)

Trade fairs provide an excellent opportunity to meet potential customers. Visit or exhibit at trade fairs. Interesting trade fairs are:

- [Chocoo](#) (Amsterdam)
- [Salon du Chocolat](#) (Paris)
- [Anuga](#) (Cologne)
- Sial (Paris)
- The Speciality Chocolate Fair and the Chocolate Show (London)

Meeting buyers face to face is essential for building trust and sharing information and experiences. However, make sure you prepare your trade fair visit thoroughly by:

- reviewing the exhibitor list;
- selecting companies that are relevant to your buyer profile;
- asking the sales representative at the booth for their buyer's (purchaser's) contact details;
- convincing them about the advantages your company can offer;
- bringing samples.

Tips:

- Contact local export promoting agencies, such as [ProColombia](#) and [ProEcuador](#), for trade fair support. This support can be both financial and practical in nature.
- Do not limit yourself to only talking to potential buyers. Network with sector associations and trade promotion organisations.
- If you cannot visit trade fairs, at least have a look at the list of participants and exhibitors that they offer. Approach these participants (see point 9).

7 . Use social networks

There are over 100 cocoa groups on [LinkedIn](#), such as the [Cocoa Trading Network](#) and [Cocoa Bean to Bar – Artisan Chocolate](#). Use these groups to find contacts and potential buyers. Being an active member in a group on LinkedIn is a good way to engage in the global cocoa sector.

8 . Team up with buyer missions, matchmaking programmes and trade missions

Embassies, trade promotion agencies and chambers of commerce often organise matchmaking programmes and trade missions. The organisers of these missions have strong relationships with businesses in your target markets. They can help you identify, screen and meet prospective buyers.

Find a matchmaking programme and/or trade mission in your sector. For example, have a look online at the [Matchmaking Facility](#), which aims to stimulate business relationships between entrepreneurs from developing countries and Dutch entrepreneurs.

Tip:

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

9 . Contact your buyers with confidence

Communication and confidence are key to doing business, so you need to be confident about what

you are selling, and the information you send to your potential buyers needs to be clear. Make sure you are well prepared and:

- call or email potential buyers;
- send emails directly to the names of purchasers/buyers you have collected;
- write a good introduction about your company (points to mention can be found in the [doing business with European buyers of cocoa](#) module, under point 1);
- contact buyers in the run-up to trade fairs;
- use the trade fair as a reason for contacting them;
- invite buyers to meet you at a trade fair;
- have samples prepared – interested buyers will ask you to bring samples and data to the fair.

This approach will give you the confidence you need and it will give your potential buyers confidence in what you do.

Tips:

- Take your time to find the right buyer: one you feel comfortable working with.
- When contacting a buyer, keep your email short, relevant and concise.
- Consider hiring a sales representative or agent if that makes you feel more comfortable. Although working with a sales representative or an agent can be very effective, selecting the right one is crucial. If you decide to hire an international sales representative or agent, make sure you select one who has an established network of bean buyers or chocolate makers.
- If you are not confident about communicating in English, do so in your own language and consider using the services of a professional interpreter or translator.
- Offer to send interested buyers a sample of your product. Make sure you keep track of which sample you sent to which company. Send a sample of 1 kilogram, so it is easy for your potential buyer to test it and make sure you keep 1 kilogram of the sample yourself as well.

10 . Invest in online marketing

Investing in online marketing is the best way of helping buyers find you. You can do this with your own account on Instagram or through a website. Use social media to build a unique image.

Building a simple website to promote your product is a great way of creating an online presence for your company. Include:

- information on your cocoa varieties;
- the history of your farm;
- the story behind your products;
- photos of the farmers, the plantations etc.

Give regular updates about your cocoa farm and/or cocoa product on social media, for example on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Tell the world your story and inform people about what you are doing. It is quite likely that consumers will also see your online profiles, as traceability is a strong trend for cocoa products in Europe and an increasing number of chocolate makers mention the source of their cocoa on the product wrapping.

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.

Tip:

- See these [steps to a Google-friendly site](#) and see the European Commission website for [information about optimising your website for search listings](#).

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