

How to find buyers on the European motion drives, control and automation market

The European market for the motion control sector has an estimated value of around €55 billion (including fluid power products, pneumatics and hydraulics). This document provides a list of tips and advice for finding buyers in Europe. On its own the advice cannot guarantee success, as much depends upon your own pro-active approach.

Most importantly, the manner in which you are able to communicate with your prospects will determine your future success in exporting. Communication skills are undoubtedly the most important factor in any business relationship.

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1. Find buyers by doing your own market research

You can use the internet to research companies and contacts you should target in order to introduce your company. This can be done from your own office.

In order to find the right buyers, your market research should be based on your selected product/market combination. To start, you should review the available market intelligence for the metal parts and components sector on the [CBI website](#), as CBI may have already conducted research on your product and the available market opportunities.

Your internet research should allow you to compile a list of EU-based companies that relate to the development, manufacturing, importing or trading of the product you are seeking to export, as well as the target market and target countries. Use the lists of exhibitors at relevant trade fairs to identify opportunities, and use search engines to find manufacturers or distributors who need your products.

2. Visit trade fairs in the EU

In addition to conducting desk research, you should take any opportunity to meet with other companies in your sector. This key factor could improve your own market intelligence.

A visit to a trade fair in Europe provides the opportunity to meet with people from the sector. Before your visit, you should review the participating exhibitors who relate to your business and select the companies you would like to meet. In most cases, you will be meeting sales representatives from the various companies, and they will not necessarily have any influence on buying decisions. Nevertheless, these representatives can provide you with useful information about their current supply chain, along with contact information for people who do influence buying decisions within the company. Do not be afraid to ask questions: 'if you don't ask, you don't

get’.

A visit to any trade fair may also be a useful way of investigating whether it might be worthwhile for your company to exhibit at specific fairs in the future.

Both the largest and the most interesting trade fair for manufacturers of motion control products are held in Germany: the Hannover Messe and [SPS](#). The Hannover Messe is an international technology event that includes trends and developments within European industrial markets, featuring every product related to engineering solutions. SPS focuses more specifically on automation products and solutions. If your company specifically targets the automotive, agricultural or construction industries, there are other vertical trade shows in Europe focusing on these industries.

3. Participate at trade fairs in the EU

If you have decided to exhibit at a trade fair, advance preparation is essential to your success. First impressions count, and the buyers you will meet at the exhibition are eager to know what you can offer to them and which advantages your company can provide over their current suppliers.

Face-to-face meetings also allow potential buyers to assess your social skills. Given that people tend to buy only from people they like, it is important to have a friendly, smiling and positive persona when working at your booth. Be enthusiastic: *‘nothing great is achieved without enthusiasm’*.

It is important to attempt to contact several target companies (as identified through market research) before the exhibition and invite them personally to visit your stand.

Design interesting posters to be used on the stand, along with samples, which must be of *excellent* quality (nothing less).

Dress in appropriate business attire.

4. Contact European companies based in your country

One very good option for acquiring customers in the EU involves contacting multi-national companies with production sites in your own country. By acquiring business locally and providing excellent service within your own country, you can significantly improve your chances of becoming a supplier to that company in Europe.

Any audits by prospective customers are likely to be conducted initially by local personnel from the company’s facilities in your own country.

5. Find distributors in Europe

Three types of distributors operate in the EU: agents, wholesalers and distributors. Given that it is not always easy to distinguish these types from each other at first glance, it is always preferable to visit your prospective partner’s premises in order to determine exactly what they could do for your company.

The distinction can be classified as follows:

- *Agent* – a company that finds customers and obtains orders to be shipped directly from your factory to the client. For this service, the agent receives a commission (which may vary, and which should be agreed upon in writing upon establishing the partnership).
- *Wholesaler* – a company that usually buys in bulk (containers) and maintains stock for immediate dispatch to end users, OEMs or distributors.
- *Distributor* – a company that promotes brands and products to the end-user or OEM markets. Distributors

may carry stock, but usually not as much as wholesalers.

6. Use the Member Lists of Sector Associations

Buyers can also be found through the websites of sector associations. Many associations list their members on their websites.

Sector associations provide benefits to their members in terms of business development, organisational matters, export promotions, improve earnings, technology, innovations, training, HRM and environmental issues, along with other services.

The following are several examples of associations:

- [EPTDA](#) - the European Power Transmission Distributors Association displays their [member list](#).
- [AEMT](#) - the Association of Electrical and Mechanical Trades. The member list can be searched on the home page.
- [EASA](#) - the Electrical Apparatus Service Association has a [members list](#).
- [CETOP](#) - the Comité Européen des Transmissions Oléohydrauliques et Pneumatiques has member lists for [hydraulics](#) and [pneumatics](#).
- [BFPA](#) - the British Fluid Power Association. The member list can be searched on the home page.
- [VDMA](#) - the Verband Deutscher Maschinen- und Anlagenbau, German Engineering Federation has a [member list](#).
- [BGA](#) - the British Gear Association has a [member list](#).

7. Use LinkedIn in order to connect with European buyers

[LinkedIn](#) is an excellent tool for establishing contact with people who have influence within their companies. LinkedIn is a social media platform for business professionals. If you do not have a LinkedIn account, you should go on-line and join immediately. You can search the LinkedIn site for companies, people and job titles and connect with other members. Be sure that the profile you create provides a good impression of both you and your company.

8. Professionalise your website in order to attract buyers

When contacting prospects, expect that they will search for information about your company from your website in order to determine whether it is consistent with what you may have told them about your company.

It is therefore imperative for your website to look professional and to contain up-to-date information about the company and the products you offer.

Your website should contain the following information, which buyers are likely to seek:

- Company information (about us)
- Product information (professional product pictures, technical capabilities, accuracy, materials)
- Certificates or information about accreditations
- Production capacity
- Production process
- Contact details (including the name of the direct contact person)
- References from existing customers/success stories with customers

Ensure that your website is properly managed and reviewed on a weekly basis. If you include a news page on the site, be sure that the news is updated on a very regular basis.

9. Participate in trade missions

Join incoming or outgoing trade missions from or to Europe. Contact business support organisations or national trade promotion organisations in your country about upcoming trade missions, which could provide opportunities to establish direct contact with companies based in the EU.

10. Prepare in advance before contacting any European buyer

Understand as much as possible about buyers and their companies before contacting them.

- Consult the company's website in order to obtain all essential information about the company.
- Search the company and its employees on LinkedIn.
- Prepare for the conversation by writing down what you would like to discuss, noting all relevant points about your products and the service you can offer to the prospect.
- Read and understand the content of CBI's [Top 10 Tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

'Making initial contact with prospects can be daunting. Regardless of whether it is face to face, on the phone or by email, however, it is important to be confident, positive and friendly. If you make any promises, be sure to keep them. The contacts you meet must be able to trust you, and broken promises automatically cast doubt on your ability to foster a reliable partnership. Not all of the work can be undertaken from the comfort of your own office. You must be prepared to travel and to be pleasantly persistent in your quest to meet prospective clients,'
Malcolm Sheryn - CBI expert on Motion Control.

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