

10 tips to find buyers on the European honey and sweeteners market

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Tips and suggestions for identifying and contacting potential importers

The European honey market is a major importer of honey from all over the world. Still, it is not always easy to identify and get into contact with the right buyer for your product. This document will give you a number of tips and suggestions to help you in this process.

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1. Do your market research

Before you start exploring the European market for honey importers, it is important that you understand the market structure. This means understanding the role of different players in the market, identifying the main importers and analysing their buying requirements. You should also study the retail offering per country and try to understand the honey consumer preferences per country.

In addition, it is very important is to know your competition. You should have a clear picture of the national and international supply market and define your unique selling points. You should also have an idea of average market prices and price developments before you start your commercial development process.

Tip:

For more information on the European honey market, refer to the website of [CBI](#).

2. Know the sector associations

Most of the larger honey importers are united in national honey associations such as Honig-Verband e.V. in Germany and Syndicat Français des Miels in France. Together with importers from countries without national associations, these associations are united in the European Federation of Honey Packers and Distributors.

The European and national associations' websites often provide member lists of honey processors and importers from their countries, with contact details for individual companies. In addition, these sites provide up-to-date news on market developments, legislative news and other relevant information for honey companies.

Tip:

Visit the website of [FEEDM](#) (European Federation of Honey Packers and Distributors) to connect with the national honey associations. For Germany, refer to the website of [Honig-Verband e.V.](#) For France, refer to the website of [Syndicat Français des Miels](#).

3. Participate in trade fairs

Participating as an exhibitor in international trade shows such as Anuga in Germany, SIAL in Paris or similar fairs is an excellent opportunity to meet potential buyers for your honey. Many large importers visit these events, in some cases also as exhibitors. In addition to meeting new customers, it is always a good opportunity to meet with existing contacts and discuss new business.

If you do not have the budget to exhibit at a trade show or if you do not feel prepared yet to participate, you can also opt to just visit an event. Visiting a major trade fair in Europe is a good opportunity to learn more about the market. You can do a lot of market research by walking around at a trade fair, and you can also visit some booths of honey importers to introduce your company.

Tip:

Visit the websites of [Sial](#) and [Anuga](#), the largest European trade fairs for the food industry, and the website of [Biofach](#), the most important trade fair for organic food.

4. Participate in industry conferences and networking activities

Visibility in the sector is extremely important for companies wanting to export their products to the European market. For a buyer, it is a good sign to see that a (potential) supplier contributes to the development of the sector on a regional and international level. Visiting industry conferences and networking events shows that you are interested in developing the sector and your expertise. At the same time, these are excellent platforms to meet potential buyers in a more informal environment.

Just like honey exporters, honey importers need to stay up to date on the latest market developments in the sector. They will visit conferences (such as the bi-annual Apimondia conference and exhibition) and scientific events to learn more about trends and innovation in the area of beekeeping, processing and testing. Visiting these events will not only increase your understanding of the market, but will also bring you into contact with potential buyers of your products.

Tip:

Visit the website of [Apimondia](#).

5. Target customers via direct marketing

Direct marketing can be a tool to get into contact with buyers from honey importing companies, especially if you do not have a large budget to spend on marketing. To be effective it is important to connect with the person responsible for purchasing. For that, it helps to have a good sales pitch and matching documentation ready. Do not send samples to companies unless they specifically ask you for it.

Many buyers already have their regular suppliers and prefer to meet companies at trade shows or during supplier visits. However, a direct mailing could be a first step in the commercial process.

6. Work with brokers and traders

Working with traders or brokers could be particularly interesting if your company has limited marketing and sales resources to effectively target the European market. It could also be relevant if your company only produces quantities of honey which are insufficient for an importer. In that case, a broker or trader could consolidate your product with honey from other producers in your country or region in order to be able to offer sufficient quantities to the importer.

Before choosing to work with a broker or trader, you need to be sure this is the best strategy for your company. Depending on the conditions of the contract, working with traders could prevent you from selling your product directly to the European market. Also, by not being involved in the commercial process you may miss out on essential commercial and market information.

7. Use online directories and trade sites

The importance of online marketplaces is still limited, as European buyers prefer direct contact for detailed assessment of potential suppliers. Online directories such as [Alibaba.com](https://www.alibaba.com), [tradekey.com](https://www.tradekey.com) and others may give you access to some less traditional markets, or allow you to promote specific products (e.g. other hive products such as wax, pollen, propolis and bee venom).

Register your company on online directories and trade sites. Most of the time registering your company and publishing your company's details and products can be done free of charge. The more specific the platform, the better: some examples include platforms for organic products, fair trade platforms, national and regional trade sites and Halal/Kosher platforms. Keep in mind that it is important to critically analyse the response you get from these sites. Some contacts can be valuable to your business, while others may be much less interesting or even unreliable.

Tip:

Visit the websites of [Alibaba.com](https://www.alibaba.com) and [tradekey.com](https://www.tradekey.com) to get an idea of trade sites.

8. Participate in buyer missions, matchmaking programmes and trade missions

Participating in buyer missions, matchmaking programmes and trade missions can be a good instrument to get to know a new market and develop contacts with potential importers. Many countries organise commercial visits to promote their export sector. Joining such visits can be an effective way to expand your network.

When considering participating in a foreign mission or matchmaking event, it is important to check that honey is one of the focus areas of the mission. The honey sector is a well-defined and relatively exclusive sector. If no

honey importers or traders are invited to the event, participating will most likely not be a good investment for your company.

9. Optimise search engine results, digital marketing and advertisement

It is very important for you to identify and find the right customer, but it is also important that importers can find you. You need to make sure that potential customers can easily find you on the Internet. Sometimes they already know your company name, but they will usually be looking for honey exporters from your country via a search engine.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a strategy that helps you to be traced via search engines. With some minor changes on your website, you can positively impact your position on the search result lists. If you want even more exposure you can also think about ad word campaigns, as well as digital and print marketing campaigns. However, since the target group of importers that you want to reach is fairly small and well defined, (online) marketing campaigns in general are not considered a very effective instrument.

10. Understand your customers

Identifying potential customers is an important part of your commercial process, but what is also important is differentiating your commercial approach for each individual buyer. To do this, you will need to spend time to understand the needs of each customer, the volumes and types of honey they buy and the specific market segment they operates in.

Before you contact a potential buyer, you need to be well informed. First visit the website of the company to get as much information as possible. Find out which segment they operate in (import, processing, packing, wholesale) and which types of honeys they work with (table honey, baker's honey, organic, fair trade, monofloral, etc).

Also do a web search on the company and the buyer to see if you can learn more about their commercial strategy and their approach towards suppliers. Once you are done, the time is right to meet your new customer.

This survey was compiled for CBI by ProFound – Advisers In Development in collaboration with CBI sector expert Reindert Dekker.

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