



Product marketing for fresh pineapples

Although the pineapple is well known in the most EU countries, little is known about the existence of 100 different varieties. As the former most popular smooth Cayenne is now completely being replaced by the MD-2 on the supermarket market shelf, there is still much to do on marketing and promotion of the other varieties now being preferred by a few connoisseurs. In this respect your product marketing efforts should not only be based on seasonal requirements (2nd supplies), but also on a well thought-over presentation of your fruits, your company and an effective promotion to increase the awareness on your varieties.



Pineapples at the fruit corner
(Carrefour, France)

This module gives an insight in your:

1. Marketing efforts
2. Communication to buyers
3. Events to meet buyers and participation
4. Product presentation and promotion

5. Brands and brand positioning
6. Webpage development

1. Marketing efforts

In many cases, an importer takes care of the product marketing. This is also the case if you supply to a wholesaler, supermarket, although at a lesser extent if you supply direct to small grocery retailers.

In your discussion with buyers, it still would be useful to think about what kind of consumers would be most interested in your fruits:

- Consumers who are not aware of the varieties from Ghana or Benin, especially of sugarloaf.
- Consumer who want to try something different from the usual, i.e. pineapples with a more pronounced acid/sugar taste.
- Consumers who are concerned about sustainability in the supplying country.
- Consumers in those countries you can reach – as your direct air connections with EU countries are limited.

Your product marketing should cover all the tactics and actions needed to reach these consumers. It is important to show your pro-active approach to the market. Even if the buyer has his own approach, it will be a basis for collaboration; he will recognise that you seriously want to enter into a long-term relationship instead of doing a one-shot business.

2. Communication to buyers

Good communication skills are extremely important for you as an exporter. Speaking the same language as the buyer is best; otherwise English is the most common language in the EU countries. French is spoken in France and in the central/southern part of Belgium.

Speaking the right language. Most sales promotion to consumers is in the local language and packaging can be in English or French, although in Germany the German language is preferred.

The professional nature of your printed material and your website are valued highly in EU countries. A formal approach should be adopted in sending emails and using the telephone.

Efficiency and accountability are key words in doing business in this part of the EU. People in most EU countries are very results orientated. You can show emotion but be measured in how you do so.

Transparency, assertiveness and equality are important values. Say what you think. There is no issue with disagreeing with someone in Europe if you can clearly argue your reasons.

Fact-based conversations. "Small talk" with strangers does not have a significant social function in EU culture in comparison to cultures where personal relationships are more important. Conversation tends to be very fact-based. The concept of "mingling" with strangers is not widely acknowledged.

Giving compliments can often cause embarrassment and awkwardness. Some topics of conversation are welcome, such as sport, travel and holidays, current affairs, work or previous experiences.

Information to prepare when talking with buyers

In addition to your business card with your name, telephone (landline and mobile), email address, a buyer will request other detailed information before entering a possible business relationship. Considering that these questions are generally the same, an exporter interested in air freight should prepare answers to almost unavoidable questions such as:

- What pineapple variety is grown?
- Are you GLOBALGAP certified (minimum requirement in Germany, Netherlands and North EU countries)?
- Do you have any other certification such as MRLs (Food safety) or environmental protocols or social certifications?
- What is your production period (seasonality)? What are the peak production periods?
- What are the effective volumes produced and what is the production's forecast growth for the coming year?
- What percentage of the production is destined for exports and what percentages are left on the local market? In other words, do you have regular outlet options on your local or regional market?
- How much volume can you send on a weekly basis?
- Do you work with or without growers (farming contracts)? How many?
- What are the airline companies flying out of your country? What are the flight frequencies and what is the cost of freight per airline?
- What are the sea freight companies from your country? What are the shipping schedules and what is the cost of freight per vessel?
- What are the main production costs?
- At what price does you expect to sell your pineapples in the export market? What is the minimum price under where you consider losing money?

In general, many EU importers of fresh produce seek a long-term relationship with their suppliers. They have high demands on the quality of the produce and the reliability of the supply. Trust, quality focus and reliability are therefore important ingredients for a sustainable business relation.

3. Events to meet buyers and participation

Trade fairs are good opportunities for you to meet potential buyers. When participating, think about:

- *The design of your stand*, ensuring that it is visitor friendly and presents your pineapples in the best possible light. Always have somebody in the stand!
- *The communication, advertising, advertorials and invitations* at least one month before the show starts in order to ensure that your key target customers will visit your stand.
- *That you have the proper materials in English (or French)* to hand out and enough information at the stand to answer all potential questions.
- *That you are organised to follow-up all questions* and possible interest by having the business cards of all people who visited your stand.

If you cannot afford/justify having a stand at a trade fair, you may find that it is a valuable experience just to *attend a trade fair as a visitor*. Although you will not have an opportunity to sell anything, you will meet other trade personnel in the fresh fruit industry. You will often find that representatives from the leading food trade press are exhibitors at trade fairs, and they can be a very useful source of information.

The best fairs and events for fresh pineapple exporters are those specially dedicated to the retail of fruit and vegetables. Among these the most important are:

- **Fruit Logistica** and Freshconex held in Berlin, Germany, 4–6 February 2015, <http://www.fruitlogistica.com>
- **Fruit Attraction** held in Madrid becoming increasingly important, 15 – 17 October 2014, <http://www.fruitattraction.ifema.es>
- **SIAL Fair** held in Paris, 19–23 October 2014, <http://www.sialparis.com/>
- **Biofach** (organic) held in Nürnberg, Germany, 11–14 February 2015, <http://www.biofach.de>
- **World Food Fair** held in Moscow, Russia, 15– 18 September 2014, <http://www.world-food.ru/en-GB>

If you only can allow attending one fair, the best choice for you as a pineapple producer is the Fruit Logistica held in Berlin at the beginning of the year, as it has become *the* place to be when you are in the fruit and vegetable business.

It is all a question of your target – there is no real need to attend several fairs if you are unable to satisfy the buyer's requirements when it comes to quality.

Trade press and useful sites

Trade journals, professional websites and newsletters are important sources of up-to-date information on developments in the fresh produce sector. The most relevant sources of information on the market for pineapples in the EU and in selected markets are:

- **Fruittrop**, International magazine for tropical fruits and vegetables for all tropical fruits available online in French and English – <http://www.fruittrop.com>
- **Freshplaza** is a major global portal for fruit – <http://www.freshplaza.com>
- **FreshFel Europe**, forum for the Fresh Produce Industry – <http://www.freshfel.org>
- **Eurofruit Magazine** – <http://www.eurofruitmagazine.com>
- **International Tropical Fruit Network** – <http://www.itfnet.org>, contains product specific information on post-harvest handling and packaging and export market requirements (Under 'Market and International Trade') for various tropical fruits, including pineapple.



Display with tropical fruit incl. pineapples (fruit logistica)

B-to-B market places

You can find trade partners and main players in the fresh produce sectors on:

- [Foods for Trade](#) - leading B2B marketplace for the food industry. You can create your own company profile and search for trade partners and promote your company via customized ad packages.
- [The Food World](#) - is a database of companies categorized by specific food sectors. Select 'pineapples' which gives you a list of companies in this sector.
- [Organic-Bio](#) - this is also an online database with organic and Fair-trade companies (producers, exporters, importers, wholesalers) worldwide.

4. Product presentation and promotion

The pineapple varieties are presented as any other fruit to buyers or to consumer in the supermarket. Most consumers look at the size, shape and colour and generally have a preference for the colour yellow/orange as this is associated with ripeness.

The MD-2 is cylindrical in shape. In fact, it is a hybrid developed from other pineapple varieties, combining firmness of the skin, which permits lengthy transport; good colour, to attract the eye of the consumers; as well as a sweet taste. Compared to other varieties currently on the EU market, MD-2 has a longer postharvest shelf life, which is an important factor to consider when promoting them. Although the complete fruit is generally sold, some supermarket chains sell the fruit without its crown.

Heavy promotion by Del Monte. So far as the fresh pineapple trade is concerned, the MD-2 variety has won the marketing battle, taking the lead from Smooth Cayenne. When introducing MD-2, Del Monte heavily invested in a large scale introduction campaign directly attacking Smooth Cayenne by saying that MD-2 was much better. The trade was being persuaded by arguments from Del Monte such as:
the MD-2 was less sensitive to bruising and thus more suited to sea transport; its quality was very regular compared to that of Smooth Cayenne; and, last but not least, the fruit's very sweet taste attracted more and more consumers to buying MD-2 pineapples.

In terms of marketing, African producing countries did not have much to do thanks to the already well-established reputation of the MD-2 pineapples. However, it was not as easy to switch from an all Smooth Cayenne production to an all MD-2 production. It was in this variety change process that Côte d'Ivoire lost its race to other pineapple producing countries, also being hindered by political issues in 2010/2011.

Smooth Cayenne, before the arrival of MD-2, used to be the leading variety of fresh pineapple sold on the European markets, dominating the EU market by 90% to 10% with the former Costa Rican variety, Champaka.

Smooth Cayenne is also cylindrical in shape; however, the fruit is vulnerable to various shocks incurred during transport. It is bruising easier because the skin is thinner than the MD-2. Therefore, Smooth Cayenne is mainly transported by air and represents around 70% of all air freighted pineapples to the EU market.

Unlike MD-2, Smooth Cayenne has a sweet/acid taste that is very characteristic of the variety. Still the connoisseurs can recognise them and who prefer its specific bitter bite.

Programmed sales and promotional operations

The best-case scenario for the importer is when he knows what volumes he can expect from his producers on a weekly basis. Accordingly, he can organise "programmed sales" together with promotional operations with these big agro-



MD-2 having an attractive yellow colour



Smooth Cayenne with a thinner skin and a large crown

multinationals. This comes in handy with the larger volumes that are expected during Christmas or Easter.

Promotional packaging

In supermarkets, different situations may occur: either the supermarket will show the original box in which the fruit was exported, which mainly happens when fruits are from one of the leading brands; otherwise, the supermarket chain will use their own crates or baskets, or re-label the fruit to its own generic brand.

Sometimes special promotional packaging is used, for example, based on country of origin or on target groups e.g. children (see photos).



Victoria (Queen Victoria) is a small trapezoidal-shaped pineapple. The fruit generally falls under a specific 'small exotics' category which is small by size and also small by the volumes handled. This 'baby-pineapple' has a sweet taste and stimulates digestion. The skin can be used as a 'shell' for fruit salads or shrimp cocktails.

The fruit is very fragile and mostly sold through the small grocery retailers (greengrocers, delicatessen, exotic fruit) and increasingly through supermarkets, especially at Christmas. Because of the limited volumes and high air freight cost, Victoria is well presented and targeted at the higher-income groups.

Sugarloaf, a bottle-shaped pineapple, which can be considered a newcomer to the air freight trade as it has been exported for less than 5 years. Consumers were slow to become used to its shape, and to its white-coloured flesh. However, this variety has found its niche with a steadily/slowly growing market. In the air freight market, a good understanding of your potential export markets and volume requirements, timing and promotion are essential to be successful.

The number of potential air freight markets is narrowed by the difficulties relating to the limited direct flights from your country to various EU destinations. The main destinations for the air freighted pineapples are France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Lower volumes go to the UK, Germany and Switzerland.

The high costs generated to reach certain destinations is another difficulty.

A good example of new possibilities on the air freight markets is the development of Sugarloaf exports. Previously unknown on the EU markets, sugarloaf pineapples have begun to develop in France in the past 5 years, as a 'new' variety'. It took some time to introduce the fruit but it now seems



Sugar loaf with its white coloured flesh

that this niche market is slowly growing. Similar work could be done in other importing countries to introduce the Sugarloaf variety.

This growth was thanks to a combination of delivering the right product in terms of ripeness and taste on to the market; selling it at the right price; and using the best promotional tools in the supermarket (original box, mentioning 'picked ripe' or 'high nutritional value' or 'ready to eat') to advertise the sugarloaf. Although Sugarloaf pineapples are generally sold on the same price basis as Smooth Cayenne, there are several operators who sell them at slightly higher prices because of the reduced volumes available and because of the consumers' good response to the taste of the fruit.

Your role in promotion and product presentation.

Promoting a product or developing advertising material usually costs money, and producers in developing countries are generally limited in terms of financial resources. In fact, most of the promotion is dealt with by the supermarket through in store promotion (money-off actions), or by the importer.

It is very important to work in collaboration with your trade partner (supermarket, importer..) where you as an exporter can bring in idea's, visions, photo's, newsletters or stories from your country. For example, Waitrose (UK) advertised organic processed pineapple chunks being 'airlifted' from the African hilltops to the UK stores within hours of being picked by Fanti tribesmen in Ghana. The Fanti tribesmen are around 80 farmers from four settlements in the Central region organised into a Produce Marketing organisation (the Blue Skies Organic Collective). This is an interesting story to include in your promotion. Story telling is an important trend in retailing to create sympathy, involvement and transparency. See also at:

http://www.waitrose.com/home/inspiration/about_waitrose/the_waitrose_way/foundation/foundation_ghana.html#.U3oy-9J_v8k



Story telling to create sympathy and transparency

Photo's/pictures

For leaflets, brochures high resolution photo's or illustration are used with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi (dots per inch). However, this highly depends on the format of the photo. In principle, higher resolutions will give the best result.

For newsletters or reports being sent by e-mail, the resolution of the photo can equal or between 72 and 300 dpi.

In web development you can use an extreme low resolution photo's in order to maintain the speed of a webpage when loading.

Note that dpi does not correlate with the memory (Kb or Mb) of the photo, if you are in doubt, you can verify the DPI in Photoshop, or ask a graphic designer.

Product tastings and give away

In case of larger volumes, the importer or the person supplying the supermarket will often pay for product tasting in order to boost sales. A special area is set in the supermarket with a person (sales person) to be assigned handing out small chunks of pineapple, or showing consumers how to prepare the fruit, using a *special preparation aid* e.g. as a give-away item from your country when buying larger volumes. This person also assists in organising the tasting and the related (in store) promotion, questionnaires etc..

With pineapples becoming more and more common fruits, these tasting events have been considerably reduced over the years. Supermarkets consider that pineapples are no longer "unknown fruits". In addition, importers or people supplying supermarkets are more and more reluctant to paying for 'the sales person' in charge to keep their margins.



Product tasting

6. Brands and brand positioning

Brands in fruits are certainly adding value to the fruit and important to distinguish one pineapple from another. Particularly if you focus on the higher-income consumers who are more sensitive to a proof of quality, taste or health benefits all of which can be expressed by branding.

When MD-2 was first imported on to the European markets, it was under the Del Monte brand. At first people would simply mention Del Monte's pineapple if they think about an MD-2. So, the Del Monte brand has set the standard for quality.

Positioning is important, but can you make it?

Developing or positioning a brand is certainly important in a competitive market such as MD-2 or in the sea freight market to be distinctive. However, this requires several elements that not all producers can supply, and - most of all - the (promotion and marketing) costs are high in this ongoing process.

For you as an African pineapple producer (air freighted fruits), developing a brand means greater emphasis on good/constant quality, on the presentation of the pineapples and on a good packaging. Very few producers manage to reach the required level to achieve the right qualifications to start up a 'branding' strategy and process. Moreover, once you have developed a brand image, marketing must follow, i.e. the marketing must allow for the payment of a premium price for the branded fruits. You must be able to supply just one or two importers per market, in order to avoid any battle in the pricing of your product.

West African brands

On the air freight market, there are currently two brands that stand out for their quality, presentation and marketing process. One brand sells fruits from Ghana only (*Delighana*) while the other brand sells fruits from Guinea and Cameroon (*Burquiah*).

Be distinctive by developing an 'origin' brand

Because of the costs involved in the branding process, producers from developing countries will tend to develop '*an origin*' rather than a specific company brand. 'Fruits from Benin' or 'fruits from Ghana' for instance. The process that leads to the designation of an origin is also very difficult to set up. It means that the fruits shipped in a generic box represent the entire trade. It also means that quality controls done at departure are the same for all the exporters using the same type of 'origin brand'.

7. Webpage development

Exporters who sell under their brand generally turn towards the internet for more coverage and advertising. Web pages give you an opportunity to show potential buyers what your company does and where it is done.

Going online is fundamental in business nowadays. Especially when taking into account that trust and credibility are major challenges for DC exporters, your website could conquer these already to some extent. A website showing a well-presented pineapple range, production process, cooling chain, competitive advantages (quality, delivery reliability) and a list of other customers, helps create a trustworthy environment. You have the following options here:

- **Create a simple 'shop window' to present your company online.** There are several special sites with tutorials to create your own site free or at very low costs. For example, www.joomla.org which have 'templates' with a structure of a standardised website. However, to make it more professional looking and user friendly, it takes time. It will take even more time if you want to sell online.



The Del Monte label setting the MD-2 quality standard

- You probably could ask a free-lance web developer in your country or in your export market. Some trade magazines offer standardised 'shop windows'. They also offer expensive hosting packages. You also can present your company via online trading platforms.
- **The use of pictures.** In both cases, it is very important to use good pictures showing the pineapples, their use/applications and your aimed consumer group enjoying them. The best would be pictures on a similar background in the same format and the same size. With an online photo-editing programme, e.g. <https://pixlr.com/editor/> you can reduce the file size for fast viewing by the visitor of your site.
- **Before making your site, try to check examples of other fruit exporters or importers.** It is crucial to present yourself in a consumer focussed as well as in a modest, original and professional way without making too many promises. Do not forget that your site is accessible worldwide and might be interpreted differently in other cultures. Some good examples are:
 - <http://www.milani-fairtrade.ch/>
 - <http://www.burquiah.com/index.html>
 - <http://www.compagniefruitiere.fr/>

Your own website and other online benefits

Having a website is associated with being a modern, professional organisation. Additionally, your printed material such as company profile, brochures, presentations and product catalogues can be digitalised and put on your website.

The Internet also enables you to spread your marketing communication. Social media websites such as [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) can help you gain familiarity with EU buyers. *Video sharing* databases like YouTube give you the opportunity to refer potential buyers to a video about your company or pineapple range. Some main brands make video's of each product.

This survey was compiled for CBI by **Searce**
in collaboration with Thierry Paqui

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