





Strategies for Keeping Buyers

Once you've found an overseas customer, representative or distributor buyer, do your best to keep the relationship strong. Here are tips on how to build and maintain your international sales contacts. It's important to keep promises, communicate, and be flexible during currency fluctuations.

- Treat all buyers as if they mean the world to you. Picture the best customer service experience you ever had and deliver something similar—or better.
- Maintain relationships for the long term. A complaint of buyers is that U.S. suppliers drop international customers when domestic business improves.
- Keep your promises. The biggest complaint foreign importers voice about U.S. suppliers is failure to ship as promised. A first order is particularly important because it shapes the customer's image of a company as a dependable or an undependable supplier.
- Be mindful of exchange rate fluctuations. Regardless of changes in currency, it probably costs you about the same amount to sell a unit of your product. Show your international buyers you value them as customers—maybe you can trim from your margin or offer longer payment terms so they can afford your product. Or maybe you can pass on savings from imported components or decreased shipping costs that result from a stronger dollar. In return, they'll reward your flexibility with their loyalty.
- Be Friendly and Polite, and consider cultural differences in communication. It is important to avoid undue familiarity or slang, which may be misinterpreted. Your product may be the best and the cheapest—but if international customers don't like talking to you, you'll lose business.
- Send letters that are personally signed. Managers and employees of some overseas companies feel that the usual brief U.S. business letter lacks courtesy.
- Maintain communication. If your company cannot afford frequent travel, consider using e-mail, videoconferencing, faxes, and phone calls to keep the working relationship active and up to date.
- Keep your foreign contacts updated on changes to your business. Let them know about changes in price, personnel, address, and phone numbers.