

8 tips for finding buyers on the European spices and herbs market

Last updated:

08 December 2017

Finding buyers and contracting sales is a key priority of any company. These aspects provide proof that your intensive preparations and investments are being received well. Below, you will find eight tips to help you find buyers in an organised way.

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1. Start by conducting thorough market research

In B2B trade (Business to Business), the number of buyers is more limited than in B2C trade (Business to Consumers). Still, there are several hundred importers of spices and herbs in Europe who are your potential buyers.

Before you start searching, think about the type of buyer for which you are looking:

- importers of raw materials;
- packers;
- distributors of pre-packed products.

Each of these buyers has different demands in processing, packaging, order size, supply time and service level.

In addition, do you focus on a specific niche such as organic, Fairtrade or sustainable, or do you offer conventional products? Your challenge will be to find a buyer that not only needs your products but also matches your capabilities.

Opportunities on the market for spices and herbs can be found in both the lower end and the higher end of the market.

At the higher end, organic, Fairtrade, sustainable and speciality products are in demand. Food safety requirements are also stricter at the higher end of the market and traceability is required.

At the lower end, spices without such differentiating characteristics can be traded, but this segment tends to

become smaller over time.

In Europe, certain countries serve as trading hubs for herbs and spices; for example, Spain for chillies or the Netherlands and the United Kingdom for pepper. Find out which countries serve as a hub for your product(s). Then, focus your search for buyers on these countries.

Importers often serve multiple European countries and sometimes even the whole of Europe. This fact makes them a good starting point for first-time exporters.

Tips:

- Identify to whom you want to sell: importers, packers or processors, distributors of pre-packed products or directly to the retailers.
- Find out which countries offer opportunities in our study of [Trends for spices and herbs in Europe](#). Read our fact sheets on [pepper](#), [dried ginger](#), [nutmeg](#) and [vanilla](#) for information about the relationships between the products and particular geographical hotspots.
- Find buyers that match your capabilities in terms of size, organisational structure, product (e.g. mainstream or niche), and compliance with food safety and sustainability requirements.

2. Decide on which countries you want to focus

If you are selling spices and herbs in bulk, your potential clients will be importers and packers specialised in this industry. Especially the importers will serve several European countries or even the whole of Europe. In this case, find out which countries serve as trading hubs for your products. This area is where your initial focus should be. Packers may work at the European scale or nationally. In either case, you may select two or three priority countries. Focus your research on these countries.

Tips:

- See our product fact sheets on spices and herbs, which focus on Europe as a whole but highlight the most interesting markets within Europe as well. Have a look, for example, at our fact sheets on the [European market for dried ginger](#), the [European market for sustainable spices and herbs](#) and the [European market for culinary dried herbs](#).
- Have a look at the [studies of Trends and markets for spices and herbs](#), which focus on Europe as a whole but provide some details on the countries as well.

3. Study market requirements and prepare yourself well before starting to sell

B2B trading is a small and close-knit world, and you have only one opportunity to make a first impression. Make sure that you are well prepared before you address the market.

Buyers are receiving dozens of emails with product offers every week and will only seriously consider your offer if it looks professional. Do not try to lure buyers with unrealistic or low prices. They know what good quality should cost, so focus more on quality, food safety guarantees and supply capability in your communication.

Certifications for HACCP and GMP are an important plus or, more often, a must in the eyes of buyers; so try to know in advance what the buyer requires from a first contact.

Tips:

- See our [Tips for doing business on the European market for spices and herbs](#) for more information about how to prepare yourself thoroughly.
- Read our study of buyer requirements for [more information on quality and food safety requirements](#).
- You may have to upgrade your processing facilities and sourcing strategies to meet European requirements.
- If you do not meet the strict quality requirements imposed on northern and western European markets, try to look for buyers in eastern or even some southern European countries. The same legal requirements apply, but they will often accept lower-quality spices and herbs (lower oil percentage, dull colour or slightly damaged) or they may not always ask for additional guarantees such as food safety management systems.

4. Review the websites of European sector associations

Sector associations are a good place to find potential buyers. Some of the associations publish member lists on their website, where you will be able to find contact details for many European companies. Alternatively, it is often possible to request these lists by email.

The most important sector association in Europe is the [European Spice Association](#) (ESA).

Most European countries have their own national associations for the spices and herbs trade as well, such as:

- [Fachverband der Gewürzindustrie e.V.](#) in Germany;
- [Association of Processors and Packers of Spices and Seasonings](#) (AEC) in Spain;
- [Dutch Spice Trade Association](#) in the Netherlands.

Tip:

- Download the [full member list of the European Spice Association](#), which includes contact details of national sector organisations and affiliated companies.

5. Participate in trade fairs and conferences

Trade fairs are a great place to meet potential buyers. You will find that many trade fairs include a section dedicated to spices and herbs. There is no international event solely focused on the spice and herb sector yet.

Many countries exhibit in these trade fairs with a national pavilion. If your country is one of them, you may be able to exhibit in this pavilion at a reduced cost. Alternatively, you can book an individual stand directly with the organisers.

For the first time at an event, it is a good idea to participate as a visitor instead of as an exhibitor. This approach is a good way of getting to know your target market.

The most important international trade fairs are:

- [Anuga](#), the largest trade fair for food and beverages in Europe. It is held every other year in Cologne, Germany and hosts relevant sections for spice exporters: Fine Food, Bread and Bakery, and Organic Food;
- [Salon International de Alimentation \(SIAL\)](#), held every other year in Paris, France. It is a general trade fair for food and beverages, with a strong focus on France. It has more diverse sections including relevant sections for spices and herbs: Pavilions of the World, Infood and Organic Food;
- [Food Ingredients Europe \(FIE\)](#), a smaller trade fair focusing exclusively on ingredients, including raw materials and semi-finished products offered for sale to the food industry. The trade fair is held at different locations in Europe every year.
- [Natural Ingredients Europe \(NIE\)](#) is a trade fair organised by the same organisers as FIE and is held every year, either together with FIE in odd years or with the other trade fair Health Ingredients Europe (HIE) in even years.
- [Biofach](#), a trade fair focused exclusively on certified organic products. It is surprisingly large for such a specific niche and held in Nuremberg, Germany every year in February. Spice exporters can be accommodated in the sections with international pavilions. Biofach also includes an annual conference on developments in the global organic industry.

Tips:

- Trade fairs often publish lists of exhibitors. These lists are a good source of contact details for potential buyers. See, for example, the option to [search for exhibitors](#) on the Anuga website.
- Prepare well before visiting or exhibiting at a trade fair. Make appointments in advance, use email and other media to inform people that you are coming, and prepare samples, brochures, business cards, websites and price lists.
- Some trade fair organisers host local or national events to which international buyers are also invited. In Asia, for example, FIE organised trade fairs in Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand over the past few years, and it will continue to do so in the coming years. See the [Fi Asia](#) website for more information. In Peru, the [Expoalimentaria](#) has become a major commercial event (held in Lima annually in September).

6. Network and meet buyers face-to-face

On top of international trade fairs and conferences, you will find smaller events being organised by sector associations. One example is the annual conference of the [European Spice Association \(ESA\)](#). This event is for members only, but it is a great opportunity to meet buyers.

This conference is not a trade fair, though, and it is probably most suitable for more experienced exporters. The trading community present here may have little time for meeting small start-up companies.

It is also a good opportunity for finding out the latest developments in the industry.

Other examples of this kind of event are the [World Spice Congress](#), the meetings and exhibits organised by the [American Spice Trade Association \(ASTA\)](#), trade missions and smaller B2B meetings. However, the primary purpose of these events is to resolve certain issues in the sector. As a result, trading is not the main purpose of such events.

Tips:

- National governments may organise trade missions or B2B meetings. Contact the trade departments of European embassies in your country or the trade departments of your country's embassies in Europe.

- Contact national and international spice associations such as the [International Pepper Community](#) (IPC), [Vietnam Pepper Association](#) and [Spice Board India](#) to find out whether any events are being planned.

7. Use direct marketing

Think about the best way to communicate with your potential buyers.

One cost-effective way is direct marketing via a promotional email. Email is a powerful tool to come into contact with potential buyers. You could write a short and professional email introducing your company and product offering.

In the email, include a link to your website. The link should be up to date, in English and consistent with your product offering. Even if you do not get a response, follow up the email with a phone or Skype call. This approach will increase the chances of success.

Tips:

- Be honest. Do not try to attract buyers with unrealistic or low prices. They know what good quality costs, so focus more on quality, food safety and your strongest capabilities.
- Send a presentation that introduces your company, your products, and your strengths and skills. This strategy is a good starting point, which can be followed by additional information such as quotations, packaging options or delivery terms.
- Do not send mass mailings. This practice is considered as spam (unsolicited commercial email) in Europe and is an unwelcome form of communication.

8. Make sure that you can be found online

Apart from actively searching for buyers yourself, it is also important that buyers can find you.

You need to have a website that contains basic information about your products, your facilities and relevant documentation, for example.

Make sure that your website is informative, accurate, well written and professional.

On your website, pay attention to the issue of sustainability, since this issue is receiving more and more attention in the spices sector.

Social media such as [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#) are increasingly popular as a way to promote products and ideas. Adapt your style to your audience, but make sure that your message and the information which you distribute is consistent across all your chosen online and offline media.

Tips:

- It is a good idea to ask for or employ assistance from someone who can write well in English and understands your target audience. A professional editor is one choice. They will be able to help you

find the right style, and remove or avoid spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. This aspect adds to your professional image; mistakes do not.

- It is also a good idea to post your product offerings on online trading platforms, yellow pages or databases such as [Alibaba](#). These sources are widely used by buyers and sellers. Often, buyers are not looking for a service but for contact details.
- [Organic Bio](#) is an interesting platform to find buyers if you offer organic edible preparations and spices.

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