

Title:

Taking Your Business International

Word Count:

822

Summary:

Q: I'm interested in doing business internationally. I have done some reading on the subject, but there is an awful lot to digest. Have you had any experience in this matter and can you suggest the best way to get started?

-- P. Granger.

A: Great question, Mr. Granger, though not one I'm personally qualified to answer since I have not had direct experience with international sales. So like any good columnist without a clue I can either make up something and hope it sounds...

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Article Body:

Q: I'm interested in doing business internationally. I have done some reading on the subject, but there is an awful lot to digest. Have you had any experience in this matter and can you suggest the best way to get started?

-- P. Granger.

A: Great question, Mr. Granger, though not one I'm personally qualified to answer since I have not had direct experience with international sales. So like any good columnist without a clue I can either make up something and hope it sounds semi-intelligent or I can consult someone who really is an expert on international sales and let him answer your question. Since my agreement with The Times prevents me from fabricating anything other than my true age (I'm 29), let's go with the latter.

I called on Jose Rodriguez, President of RISMED Oncology Systems, a Huntsville company that provides high medical technology to radiotherapy professionals around the globe, to get his input on the subject. Jose is an old friend and client and if anyone can give pointers on doing business internationally, Jose is the man.

Jose believes that the decision to do business beyond your own backyard should

be based on your success as a local, domestic business first. "Unless the business is intended to be one that sells to international customers only, one should not jump into international business until they have devoted the time to develop a good local and domestic business first," Jose recommends.

Here are a few other points Jose recommends that you keep in mind when considering an entry into the international business arena.

Instill Confidence In Your Customer

Regardless of the type of product or service you sell internationally, you must be ready to provide your international customer with an even higher level of service that you offer your domestic customers. To instill confidence in your international customers you might have to offer such things as around the clock telephone support, extended warranties, and other services that help the customer have confidence in doing business with you.

Know The Rules

You must understand all of the rules and regulations that govern international business practices in this country as well as those in your customer's country. Understanding the rules will allow you to provide service beyond the expectation of the buyer and operate within the boundaries of the law.

Understand The International Shipping Process

If goods are being shipped internationally you must have a thorough understanding of shipping modes and regulations. Any difficulties with shipping will always be viewed by the buyer as the seller's responsibility, right or wrong. Understanding the entire shipping process and having policies in place will help avoid shipping problems and keep the customer happy.

Work With Experienced Companies

Always look for experienced companies to work with, especially when it comes to shipping, insurance, freight forwarders, etc. Such companies are great allies and will help keep everything in order and will also help in solving problems related to their end of the process.

Signed and Sealed

Never conduct business under verbal orders. Always put everything in writing with the required signatures. Doing international business is different than domestic business. Outside the United States signatures and seals are required to seal the deal. Don't worry about offending your customer as this is just part of doing business internationally.

Include A Packing List

If shipping goods, always do a packing list and always number the packages (if 5 packages are being sent, label them 1/5 [1 of 5], 2/5, etc.). If anything is lost, they will know which package is missing and you will have sent a packing list detailing what was in every package, making it easy for the customer, the shipper and the insurance company to solve the problem. Also, always insure your goods for at least 110% of their value.

Have A Damage Policy

Always have a note in your paperwork requiring damage or losses to be reported within 24 hours. Damage reports should be made to the customer's local delivery company as well as to the shipping company on your end.

Signing Off

If you are selling services abroad, always have the required paperwork so that as the work is finished or as deliveries are made, the customer signs off in agreement with what was delivered.

Ensure Payment

Depending on the amount of the sale, always require payment in advance in U.S. currency or payment through a letter of credit to be paid out in U.S. currency. You might also require that the letter of credit be irrevocable and transferable, that it allow for payments of partial shipments, etc. The more flexible the letter of credit, the better, and usually such clauses are yours just for the asking.

There are many other considerations you should investigate before starting your international business, but that's a great list to get you started.

Thanks for the great advice, Jose. I couldn't have said it better myself.