

Friday, September 17, 2010

When it comes to exporting goods, there's gold in the BRICs

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Portland Business Journal - by [Alexander Aginsky](#)

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While the U.S. can't compete on the price of labor, it can offer unmatched quality to foreign markets that can finally afford it.

Too many companies sell themselves short. They assume that the challenges of foreign competition could only be worse outside of the country and that their products don't stand a chance.

What these companies don't realize is that the BRIC economies — Brazil, Russia, India and China — are sprouting new billion dollar companies and millionaires everyday who want the products and services that American companies offer.

The days of "America buys and BRIC sells" are soon to be replaced by "everyone buys and everyone sells."

Products made here can command a significant premium because of America's reputation for high-quality products.

Most local companies tend to overlook the export potential of everything from beer to clothes. Such products can command premium prices as luxury products in BRIC economies.

Entering foreign markets is exactly what companies should do to keep profit margins high. The American economy may have slowed, but the BRIC economies are growing at double-digit rates. Establishing a brand and claiming a share of the market could lead to great returns.

That being said, export opportunities don't land in someone's lap and successful market entries don't happen overnight. The hurdles of international business take a great deal of research, planning, and commitment to overcome.

International trade is tough and at times, scary, but it's not a zero-sum game. When the BRIC economies get rich, the American economy doesn't have to shrink. Companies trying to do business the same old way will have to roll over and take the beating of international trade. Flexible companies that can adjust to a changing business landscape will find a wealth of opportunities in the BRIC economies.

If you are considering entering into a BRIC market, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Be prepared for a serious commitment. International trading holds small rewards for one-time transactions. The economies of scale of marketing and shipping make high-volume shipments over a long period of time more profitable. Make sure your company has the capacity for exporting and the finances to get everything off the ground.
 - Research your target market. While mass culture and the Internet are bringing distant cultures closer together, tastes and preferences still vary incredibly from country to country. Products that might be a hit in one country could be too strange to succeed in another. Some cultures are open to new products and some prefer to stick with what they know. Be sure to conduct thorough market research to insure there is adequate demand in your target market.
 - Adjust your marketing for your target market. Beyond simply changing the language on your packaging, try to adapt your entire marketing and branding to fit with the culture of your target
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market. Sometimes even something as trivial as a logo change can have a profound impact on the success of the product in a certain market.

- Research the potential barriers to entry. The BRICs are not known for easy access. A maze of permits, approvals, quotas, and tariffs may be the first things to welcome your products when they reach these new markets. Try to have an understanding of these challenges before you commit to an export strategy. These barriers may be troublesome, but once you overcome them they can act as a deterrent to future competition.
- Determine your competitors. Besides getting to know your local and foreign competition, analyzing a competitor can provide you with a case study to determine what works and what doesn't.
- Consider logistics. The cost of shipping is a serious consideration for exporting and must be factored into your financial projections. Also, you must consider how well your products will fare in a shipping container going across the sea for weeks.
- Have a local presence. Whether it's a complete office staff or a single part-time employee, it helps to have someone on the ground to represent your products and to keep you updated on your performance. Moreover, having a permanent physical presence in your target market can simply add credibility to your company and demonstrate commitment to potential clients.
- Look out for assistance programs. The federal and state governments have a wide array of programs to encourage American companies to export. From grants to develop a business plan, to export credit and insurance, a company should not pass up the opportunity to receive assistance.
- Have the right partners. Whether it's a lawyer, a consultant, or a distributor you can trust in your target market, it helps to have the knowledge and experience of an expert on your side.

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