Import/Export Business
Ask SCORE

Taking Your Business Abroad

In the past few months, the South East Chapter of SCORE has gotten several questions from area entrepreneurs about doing business abroad. This is a very specialized, and sometimes complicated endeavor but in recent conversations I have encountered various questions about the topic, so I will address some of these and try to give some answers and point to resources that are of general interest and help.

First, one must recognize that conducting business abroad may entail frequent international travel to visit prospective business partners. Likewise, business partners may come to the U.S. to work with you. There are several resources that will help you find and authenticate paperwork you and your overseas business partners may need for traveling.

One of the first resources is the U.S. Department of State. It has a website address of [http://travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) which is a service of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. Look for the section on “International Travel”. This is a must-read resource if you are planning to go overseas to conduct business. Country-specific resources include current travel advisories, tips for international travel and document requirements.

As long as you are on the U.S. Department of State website, also check out the “Business” section off the home page. It includes lists of answers to frequently asked questions about doing business abroad, facilitating overseas investment, trade restrictions and assisting foreign companies.

You also need to be aware of the Department of State Office of Authentications, which is responsible for signing and issuing certificates under the Seal of the U.S. Department of State. The Authentications Office also verifies business documents that will be used overseas, including company bylaws, powers of attorney, trademarks, diplomas, transcripts, distributorship agreements, articles of incorporation, good standing certificates, home studies and letters of reference. The Office also ensures that the requested information will serve in the interest of justice and is not contrary to U.S. policy.

Another very valuable resource is “A Basic Guide to Exporting” available from this website: [http://unzco.com](http://unzco.com). But, make sure that you get the most current edition which reflects the most recent changes in the export industry.

It is highly recommended that company officials visit the countries to examine the markets where they are considering selling their products before any transaction occurs. Many foreign markets can differ greatly from the United States and by visiting a targeted country, a company can familiarize itself with cultural nuances which may impact the design, packaging or advertising of the product. Moreover, traveling abroad allows one to locate and cultivate new customers, as well as improve relationships and
communication with current foreign representatives and associates. As in the United States, clients and customers prefer to conduct business in person before concluding a transaction.

The Office of Commercial and Business Affairs (CBA) is the primary point of contact for business concerns within the State Department. Companies that plan to do business abroad should be familiar with this office. CBA services include: problem-solving assistance to U.S. companies, dialogue with the U.S. private sector to ensure that business concerns are factored into foreign policy, and programs and practices to improve the Department's support for business.

You may also keep in mind that certain countries have sanctions placed on them by the U.S. Government. The Office of Foreign Asset Controls of the Department of Treasury provides information about sanctions regulations and maintains a list of individual entities with which U.S. parties cannot do business. In addition, the Bureau of Export Administration (BXA) of the Department of Commerce provides links to federal agencies with export control responsibilities. This agency’s website has general information if help on which Federal agency has export controls/licensing authority over my product?

Taking your business abroad can be tricky, so keep in mind the unique considerations. To learn more about importing/exporting for your business, contact America’s free and confidential source of small business mentoring and coaching, SCORE, on our website: www.score-SEMinnesota.org.

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