



Backing your business to grow: How to sell overseas

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Introduction

Why export?

Exports are vital to delivering economic growth and increased productivity and prosperity, and creating good jobs right across the UK. Around a fifth of the UK's jobs are linked to exports, and businesses that sell internationally tend to be more productive and pay higher wages.

Exporting can help small businesses grow revenue, build resilience by diversifying their customer base and become less dependent on any single market.

Through its [Trade Strategy](#), [Industrial Strategy](#) and [Small Business Plan](#), the UK Government is putting in place the policies, support and services needed to drive export-led business growth, particularly in sectors where the potential for growth is high.

Through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), businesses can benefit from lower tariffs, better access to markets and greater

protections in investment and digital trade. For small businesses, this can make it easier to sell into new countries, provided they understand how the agreements apply to their products or services.

Alongside policy and trade agreements, the Government provides direct support to help businesses export in practice. For the first time, the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) has integrated its support for SMEs in a single, accessible place – the [Business Growth Service](#) – designed to help businesses across the UK start, scale and succeed globally.

From tailored market advice and free Business Academy training to UK Export Finance and the on-the-ground network around the world, DBT is making it easier for businesses to navigate international markets, seize opportunities and build resilience.

This guide explains how that support works and how small businesses can use it. It focuses on practical help, and on the services currently available to UK businesses that want to export goods or services overseas.

The aim is to make it easier to understand what support exists, where to find it, when it may be useful and how it fits into the day-to-day realities of running a small business.

This guide explains how government support works and how small businesses can use it.

Who this guide is for

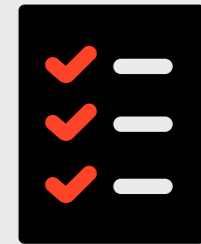
This guide is for UK-based small businesses, including sole traders, partnerships and limited companies. You don't need specialist trade knowledge to use it. It's relevant if you are:

- considering exporting for the first time
- responding to interest from overseas customers
- already exporting and looking to enter new markets
- unsure if any government support is available to you

What you'll find in the guide

The guide covers:

- how to start exporting
- the main types of government export support available for small businesses
- how and when you can use different services
- how one UK-based small business approached exporting in practice



You can read the guide from start to finish or dip in to specific sections. It doesn't replace professional or legal advice – instead, it helps you understand where trusted government support is available and how it can support your export plans.



How to start exporting

For many small businesses, exporting begins in a practical rather than strategic way.

An overseas customer makes contact, a distributor asks about supply, or a business meets a potential buyer at an event. Other businesses take a more deliberate approach, deciding to explore overseas markets once they have a stable product or service in the UK.

However, there is no single starting point. What matters is recognising when exporting could be a realistic option and taking time to understand what it involves before committing resources.



Early decisions to think through

Understanding demand

Exporting usually makes sense when there is a clear pull from outside the UK. That might be overseas customers getting in touch, interest picked up through conversations or events or signs that similar products or services are selling well elsewhere.

Looking closely at where demand exists, and how consistent it is, can help your business decide whether exporting is worth the effort and which opportunities are most realistic.

Choosing markets

Businesses often start with one or two markets rather than many. Factors such as language, regulation, shipping distance, cost, business culture and customers' expectations can influence where to begin.

Understanding customers and pricing

Overseas buyers may expect different specifications, quantities or payment terms. Pricing needs to account for additional costs such as transport, insurance and duties where relevant.

Regulations and standards

Each market may have its own rules for how products and services are sold. This can include safety standards, labelling requirements or professional regulations.

Logistics and delivery

You need to consider how you'll deliver goods or services, who's responsible for them at each stage and how long delivery is likely to take.

Payment and risk

New trading relationships carry risk. Decisions around payment terms, credit checks and insurance can affect cash flow and exposure if problems arise.

Exporting is rarely a single decision you make once. It's a series of steps you take over time, often with adjustments along the way. The next sections of this guide set out what support the government has made available to help you plan those steps and provide certainty as you enter new markets.

Government support for exporting



The UK Government offers a range of services to help small businesses export.

These sit as part of the wider Business Growth Service at business.gov.uk. These services support different stages of the exporting process, from early planning through to finding buyers and operating in overseas markets.

This section explains what support is available to you and how to access it.



Department for Business and Trade (DBT) support

DBT provides a set of services that your business can access as it moves from early interest in exporting through to selling overseas regularly. Some services are designed to answer your questions, others help you test demand, solve problems or expand into new markets.

You don't need to use all of these services. Like many businesses, you might start with one or two and return to others later, should you need them as your plans develop.

1. Where to start

Create an account on business.gov.uk

By setting up an account, you can access personalised government services as you explore exporting and other areas of business support.

Compare international markets, create an export action plan and join the Business Academy (see point 5) for free training. You can also browse a range of support topics to find answers to your questions.

[Create an account now](#)

2. Understand how exporting works

How to export goods from the UK

This guidance explains the practical steps involved in exporting goods, including documentation, customs processes and responsibilities.

It's particularly useful if you haven't exported before or want to check you understand the basics before proceeding.

[Read the guide](#)

3. Explore where to export to

Where to Export service

This service helps you identify overseas markets with demand for your products or services. It uses trade data and sector-specific insights to highlight potential opportunities.

It's useful when deciding which markets to prioritise and where further research may be worthwhile.

[Use the Where to Export service](#)

4. Market guides

Market guides provide detailed information on individual countries, including market conditions, regulations, cultural considerations and practical advice for doing business.

You can filter by sector to see which markets are best suited to your products or services, as well as by region or trading bloc if you already know where you want to focus. With more than 100 market guides available, you can find out what selling into a specific country involves, before you begin committing time or money.

[Read the market guides](#)

5. Learn and build capability

Business Academy

The Business Academy offers free, expert-led training to help UK businesses start, grow and export successfully. Its mission is to give businesses the knowledge and skills to thrive, at home or overseas. Its enhanced training offer is designed to help UK businesses grow with confidence. This free resource is now a core part of the support available on business.gov.uk, providing practical guidance for businesses at any stage.

The Business Academy series currently includes: Explore AI, Digital Edge, Export Accelerator, Unlock Europe, Gateway USA, Funding and Financial Management and Starting Your Business Growth among many more.

[Find out more, view the full calendar of events and sign up to attend sessions](#)



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6. Plan routes to customers

Routes to market

This guide helps businesses understand different ways of selling overseas, such as working with distributors, agents, partners or selling directly.

Use it to choose an approach that fits your product, resources and appetite for risk.

[Learn about routes to market](#)

7. Get practical support and answers

Export Support Team

The Export Support Team provides direct help for businesses with specific export-related questions. Contact the service to get tailored support on topics such as customs, regulation or market access. Useful when you encounter an issue you can't resolve through guidance alone.

[Contact the Export Support Team](#)

Export Support Directory (ESD)

The ESD is a free digital platform that connects UK businesses with a global network of vetted private-sector experts. With over 450 providers covering 190 countries, you can find relevant advice and specialist help in one place.

[Use the directory to explore support options](#)

8. Promote products and meet buyers

Events and trade missions

DBT supports businesses with attending international trade fairs, exhibitions and trade missions. These events help businesses meet buyers, test interest and build relationships in overseas markets.

[View upcoming events and missions](#)

9. Sell online internationally

Digital Exporting Programme

The Digital Exporting Programme helps businesses explore selling products or services online to overseas customers, including through international marketplaces and digital channels.

A free service offering impartial expert advice, it's particularly relevant if you want to reach customers without establishing a physical presence overseas.

[Learn more about digital exporting](#)

10. Trade rules and market access

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

FTAs set out the terms under which UK businesses can trade with partner countries. They can reduce tariffs and strengthen rules in areas such as investment and digital trade.

Understanding which agreements apply can help businesses price products correctly and identify competitive advantages.

[Find information on UK trade agreements](#)

11. Report a trade barrier

If you encounter an overseas rule or practice that makes exporting difficult or unfair, you can report it as a trade barrier. Reports help the government raise issues with overseas authorities.

This service is relevant when problems can't be resolved through normal commercial routes.

[Report a trade barrier](#)

UK Export Finance (UKEF)

UKEF helps businesses manage the financial risks associated with exporting. Its export finance managers can help you:

- find export insurance that protects you if customers can't pay
- win export contracts by guaranteeing finance to buyers so they can source from the UK
- fulfil more orders by unlocking working capital to take on new or higher-value contracts

UKEF's support can be relevant if you're a first-time exporter or expanding into new markets.

[Learn more about UK Export Finance](#)

Other support from the Government

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)

HMRC provides guidance on customs procedures, duties and tariffs, and VAT on exports.

[Find customs and VAT guidance](#)

Intellectual Property Office (IPO)

The IPO can support you with protecting your trademarks, designs and intellectual property (IP) overseas.

[Learn how to protect your IP abroad](#)

Accessing export support in practice

Government export services are designed to be used at different points, depending on where on its export journey a business is and where it wants to go.

Choosing the right support

Which support you find most useful will depend on your level of experience rather than the size of your business.

- **New to exporting?** You'll benefit from advice and training that explains the basics and helps you plan.
- **Some export experience?** You may focus on market research, trade events or buyer introductions.
- **Already trading internationally?** You might need in-market support or help managing risk as you expand.

It's common to use more than one service over time, especially when entering new markets.

Preparing before you engage

Before engaging with any of the support on offer, it helps to have some basic information ready. This makes interacting with the service more productive and speeds up the process.

Useful information:

- If you're already exporting and to where
- Which markets you're interested in exploring
- Any concerns around regulation, delivery or payment

You don't need a finished export plan – government services are designed to support you through this process.

Case study

How Divya Rajan built Treeco Commodities into a global exporter – with government support

When Divya Rajan talks about [Treeco Commodities](#), she describes a business shaped by 30 years of family knowledge in cashew processing and a steady move toward wider markets.

Treeco is based in Lincolnshire and now exports to more than 15 countries, but the shift from a UK-focused operation to a global supplier began with a single trade fair in 2017.

“We exhibited under the UK pavilion with DBT support,” Divya says. “They arranged buyer meetings, supermarket visits and other networking sessions. That support helped us reach the global market.”

The event brought in enquiries from across Europe and the Middle East. It also gave Divya the confidence to treat exporting as a serious path towards growth.



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The first leap abroad

Treeco's first major export relationship came from Spain. After meeting Spanish buyers at the fair, Divya travelled to Valencia.

"We visited their factory, built a relationship and carried out our due diligence," she says. "We checked their creditworthiness and looked at how the factory was run. That helped us see they were trustworthy."

That visit marked the start of Treeco's exporting journey. It also set a pattern Divya still follows – meet buyers in person, test assumptions and make sure the fundamentals are sound before shipping any product.

Protecting the brand as the business expands

Treeco's brand abroad relies on qualities the family has prioritised for decades – consistency and reliability.

"Our brand image in global markets comes from consistent quality, consistent supply and fair pricing," Divya explains. "Each country is different and each one has its own demand. We match what they need."

For example, premium white cashews are popular in Gulf markets, while UK buyers tend to be more price-sensitive and often use cashews in cooking. Treeco adapts to these differences without compromising its standards.

"It's not about selling whatever we have. We understand what the customer wants and supply that, while keeping our quality the same."

A challenge in Algeria

Treeco's early experience in Algeria shows how unpredictable exporting can feel.

After meeting a buyer at a major food fair in Dubai, the company shipped a 20ft container under agreed payment terms. The buyer sent proof of payment, yet the funds didn't reach Treeco's account.

"We were worried," Divya says. "We checked with DBT in Algeria and with the bank." Eventually the cause emerged: "The customer had paid their local branch, but the central bank held the money because of exchange rate changes. They released it when the rate was favourable."

It took almost two months to resolve, but Treeco kept working with the customer and later grew its presence in the region.

"Every country has a different banking system and different challenges. You learn to manage them."

The role of government support

Throughout Treeco's journey, DBT has played a practical role – support with the exhibition space, access to buyers, in-market teams who can help when problems arise and ongoing tools for export planning.

These all now sit within the Government's Business Growth Service, which brings together export advice, capability building, market research tools and signposting to support such as the Business Academy and UK Export Finance. For founders like Divya, that joined-up support helps reduce the uncertainty that comes with entering new markets.

Divya's advice to first-time exporters

Her recommendations are shaped by real-world experience.

"Do your due diligence. Check creditworthiness," she says. "If you can, visit the country and the factory. Build a relationship."

She also stresses financial safeguards. "Try to get some payment in advance, at least 20% with a new buyer. And if possible, take insurance."

And for founders trying to understand demand, Divya's message is simple: "Do market research. Trade fairs help because you can show your product and learn how buyers react."

What Treeco's story shows

Treeco's growth wasn't sudden. It came from careful steps, steady learning and well-timed support.

Divya already knew there was global demand for cashews. What she gained from DBT was easier access to markets, trusted introductions and help navigating unfamiliar regulations and systems.

And Treeco has turned demand into long-term relationships by combining preparation, patience and a clear understanding of what buyers in each market need.



It's not about selling whatever we have. We understand what the customer wants and supply that, while keeping our quality the same."

Export readiness checklist and next steps

We've designed this checklist to help you take stock before you commit time or money to exporting. Not every point will apply to every business, but working through them can help you identify gaps and decide what to do next.

Export readiness checklist

Your product or service

- You understand how your product or service meets demand in the markets you're considering.
- You're clear on how you may need to change your offer for different customers or countries.

Markets and customers

- You've identified one or two priority markets to focus on.
- You've researched basic market conditions, pricing and competition.
- You understand who your buyers are likely to be and how they purchase.

Regulation and compliance

- You know whether your product or service will need to meet specific regulations overseas.
- You've checked labelling, standards or professional requirements where relevant.

Logistics and delivery

- You understand how you'll deliver your goods or services.
- You've considered transport costs, timescales and responsibilities.

Payment and risk

- You've thought about payment terms and how they affect cash flow.
- You understand the risks of a customer not paying you.
- You've considered whether you need to arrange export insurance or guarantees.

Support and advice

- You know where to find government advice, training and market insight.
- You're ready to speak to an adviser about your plans.

Next steps

Many businesses start by gathering information, speaking to advisers and testing interest before they commit fully to selling overseas.

Using government support can help you:

- avoid common mistakes
- understand unfamiliar markets
- reduce financial and operational risk

Finding and accessing services

You can access most of the Government's export support through business.gov.uk. There, you can explore your options, find contact points and move between different services as your needs change.

Start with an [overview of exporting support](#). From there, you can:

- set up an account on business.gov.uk
- access personalised government services as you explore exporting
- compare international markets, create an export action plan and join the Business Academy for free training
- browse the support topics to find answers to your questions

Using government support can help you avoid common mistakes, understand unfamiliar markets and reduce financial and operational risk.





UK Government

Backing your business

Discover the guidance and funding your business needs.

Backing your business is a national campaign delivered by Enterprise Nation in partnership with the Department for Business and Trade (DBT). It's designed to help small businesses understand what government support is available and how to use it in practice.

The campaign focuses on four areas that are central to many businesses: exporting, access to finance, digital tools and high street resilience.

Through practical guides, webinars, newsletters and real business stories, **Backing your business** brings together support from across government, including DBT and other departments and agencies.

The aim is to make it easier for small businesses to find relevant help and apply it to real decisions they face as they start, grow or adapt.

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