

GUIDE TO

# Effective Online Business Communication



**Open Trade  
Gate Sweden**  
National Board of Trade

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## **Chapter I. What is online communication and why does it matter to exporters?**

### **Online communication and International Trade**

Remote communication has always been an essential part of international trade as exporters are based in different countries or continents than their buyers. During the last decades, hundreds of digital platforms emerged that allow all kinds of online communication between exporters and buyers. This means that you can now promote your products and interact with international buyers at a lower cost and on a larger scale than ever before.

The Covid-19 outbreak, and its associated travel restrictions, has further increased the need for online communication and forced thousands of exporters to develop strong digital marketing strategies to continue selling their products abroad. Because of this, digital marketing and online communication have become the new normal for how exporters and buyers interact.

In the highly competitive environment of the European export market, you must build trust with potential buyers through successful online communication. You need to implement effective online communication strategies and tactics with international buyers to be successful in international trade.

### **What is online communication? A working definition for exporters**

All communication that takes place over the Internet is understood as online communication. This includes all ways in which you connect, communicate, and carry out transactions with international buyers through the Internet.

### **Main types of online communication**

The number of digital platforms that can be used to communicate online is almost endless and continues to grow. From your own website and social media profiles (on LinkedIn, Facebook or any other) to your email and more interactive platforms like WhatsApp, Signal or Microsoft Teams, the list of digital platforms for online communication keeps growing every day. However, not all platforms serve the same purpose or are equally effective when it comes to international trading. To build trust between exporters and buyers, you need to understand which platform or channel to use, when, and how. This guide aims to help you, as a potential exporter, answer these questions.

## Chapter II. Who is your audience in international trade?

### The relevance of understanding who you communicate with online

Even though online communication has many benefits for exporters, there are several challenges you need to overcome. One of those challenges is understanding whom you will be talking to. Having a deep understanding of who you are talking to can make a big difference in the success of an interaction with an international buyer. Make sure you answer the following three questions as best as possible.

#### Step 1 – What is the distribution channel?

First, it is crucial to understand what [type of buyer](#) you are communicating to. Take the European Union (EU) for example. The EU functions as a single market. Products enter the EU at entry points such as the Rotterdam port or Frankfurt airport. From these entry points there are a number of players along the distribution channels through which your product will reach an end consumer. Examples include: (EU) importers, agents or distributors, retailers, wholesalers, processors and final product manufacturers.

It is key to identify with whom you will be talking to in order to structure an effective online communication. Buyers in different positions usually have different requirements. If you are talking to an importer, trader or distributor can make a big difference when writing to them. For example, importers of raw materials are interested in aspects such as specifications, food safety and traceability, whereas retailers need final products and need to know how products fit into their product category and which consumer segment is targeted in addition to specifications, food safety and traceability. In general, players down the chain have more requirements. When interacting with a buyer you should always know what their main needs and requirements are in order to convey a relevant message to them.

#### Step 2 – What is your buyer's profile?

Within the [distribution channel](#), not all buyers are the same. If you want to increase your selling chances you need to be able to convey accurate messages to your prospects. By profiling your buyers you gain both a better understanding on whether buyers fit your offer but also on how to communicate with them. This will help you to transmit a more accurate message to them. You can profile prospects following the following six criteria:

1. **Market Segment:** Is the buyer part of the market segment that you are targeting?  
Depending on the characteristics of your product you might want to supply your products only to a specific market segment. Make sure you are communicating with a buyer that fits your market segment. If not, make sure you adapt your message.  
Example: You sell Moringa powder as a natural ingredient. Your target segment is active retired people willing to pay for a high-quality natural ingredient to boost their immune system. Based on this, you should look for buyers of natural ingredients that sell products that use ingredients (like moringa powder) for food supplements for retired people. When reaching out to these potential buyers you should refer to the benefits of your moringa powder for this market segment.

2. **Size:** The bigger the buyer, the better? Not really. When communicating with potential buyers you should interact with companies with volume demands you can meet. It might be easy to think that bigger buyers are better as they're interested in large volumes and have higher budgets. However, supplying to big prospect also means you will need to consistently supply a large volume of your product, at a consistent quality throughout the year. When communicating with buyers you should always keep in mind if you are talking to someone with a demand you can supply. When writing promotional messages or emails to buyers do refer to the quantities you can supply if there is a match between your supply and the buyer's demand.
3. **Mission (e.g. sustainable or ethical)?** You should find out whether a buyer is concerned about sustainable, organic and/or ethical sourcing, especially if you offer such products. If after some research, you know that a buyer is looking for these types of sources and you can supply them, then you need to communicate it. The most common practice to do so is by sharing certification names and the actual certificates, you can also share stories and data about your sustainable mission and activities.
4. **Processing and value addition:** Raw material or final product? Find out whether your prospected buyer is interested in sourcing raw materials or processed products. This will define what aspects of your offer you will share with them in your messages.
5. **Level of use:** Is the buyer already trading or marketing your ingredient? Is the buyer using similar ingredients? If prospects don't have experience trading your product you should always keep in mind not getting "too technical" and being able to explain your actual Unique Selling Point or Unique Buyer Reason (read more in the next chapter).
6. **Competition and comparable offer:** Where does the buyer source from? If a prospect is currently sourcing from a supplier that offers a similar product, you will need to show how your product is a better option or simply whether it fits their current requirements.

### Step 3 – Who is your buyer persona?

Finally, you need to understand your buyer persona. A buyer persona is a description of someone who represents your target audience (your current and prospective buyers). Your buyer persona will guide you on how to communicate online with him or her. Usually a B2B buyer persona contains information that relates to their experience with [the product, the industry as well as personal traits](#). The better defined your buyer persona, the better you will be able to structure your online communication. For example, age, a key component of your buyer persona is key when choosing [a channel to communicate](#) with a potential buyer. Even though you always have to verify that your buyers are comfortable with the channel you suggest, your buyer's persona can help you understand what suits them better. Always doublecheck this on the first email, text or WhatsApp you send. While Generation Z and Millennials might be comfortable with communicating through WhatsApp, Generation X might not. Don't assume, always ask.

By identifying the distribution channel for your product, the profile of a potential buyer and your buyer persona, you can structure messages that are relevant to your buyer, thus increasing the success of your online interaction. If you send an email with the technical information of your certificates to the management assistant of a distributor, you are much less likely to be successful than if you would send an email with a clear passionate pitch to the purchasing manager of an import company.

**While you won't always have all this information, when available, make sure to use it to maximize your chance of success.**

## Chapter III. What is your Unique Selling Point?

### Your Unique Selling point

If you want to be successful in exporting, you need to know how to position yourself in your target market. To position yourself in your target market, you have to be able to share your company's story in a distinctive way. Additionally, these messages have to be consistent across all channels. Remember that international markets are highly competitive and that you will not be the only one promoting your company in the digital space. Therefore, you must find attractive ways to stand out. A great way to stand out is by working on your storytelling and promotional messages. And, the best start to this is identifying your **Unique Selling Point (USP) or Unique Buying Reason (UBR)**.

### Unique Selling Point (USP) or Unique Buying Reason (UBR)

From your [market research](#) you should learn what is in demand in your target market and what your competitors offer. This will help you to determine how you can stand out from your competition. Every time you prepare a written online promotional message, answer the following question: **What makes your product/company more interesting than the competition?**

#### TIPS

Define your Unique Selling Point with the help of following questions:

1. What your company does well?
2. What the customer wants?
3. What your competitor does NOT offer?

Combine the answers and you will get a short and meaningful description.

### Product benefits versus product features

Once you have defined how to position yourself in your target market, you should work on communicating your product benefits instead of features. Product features describe what the product does, ideally distinguishing it from the competition (key to your USP/UBR). However, the benefits of the product highlight how the product can generate value for the end consumer. While communicating both features and benefits is key, for online promotional purposes it is a good strategy to focus on communicating benefits, as they are what make your buyer's customers buy their products. Please note that in a highly saturated market in which benefits of products are clear in your target market, communicating distinctive product features is key to stand out with a buyer.

To communicate a benefit you start from the feature. Clearly define the feature you want to stand out. Let's take for example an exporter of essential oils from indigenous plants for natural cosmetics. The Unique Selling Point of its product is the high concentration of certain substances in the essential oils. The exporter has Certificates of Analysis from reputable laboratories as evidence for the high concentrations of these substances. Now,

when creating its promotional material for online communication, this exporter needs to be able to communicate its essential oils benefits instead of features. Even though the feature is clear (high concentration of certain substances), the benefit (the use that customer gives to a product) is not. The exporter will need to relate the feature to the main use of the essential oils, which is to give fragrance to cosmetics. Thus, the product benefit is that the essential oils give the cosmetics a unique fragrance, which can be described with attractive terms preferably provided by trained perfumers. When communicating its USP this exporter should communicate something like: *Our essential oil will give your cosmetic products the fragrance of flowers and citrus fruits! Due to the high concentrations of substance X, consumers of your cosmetic products will be delighted by the wonderful fragrance.*

Once you have identified your USP/UBR and know how to communicate your products benefits, is time share them through the **seven main types of online tools to market your business.**



## Chapter IV. How to reach and engage with international buyers?

### The seven main types of online tools to market your business

Once you understand who your buyer is, it is time to start reaching out and to engage with them. There are several online tools that you can use to market your export business. Most of these tools can be grouped in any of the following seven groups: Your website, Email marketing, Social Media, Virtual Export Promotion Activities, Online directories and B2B/B2C marketplaces.

#### 1. Your website

Among all the digital assets for matchmaking, your website is probably the most important one. Your website is the digital channel by which you can promote your company and share your company information and story. Once you have decided that you want to engage with international buyers, you should invest in a professional website. Your website is usually the first impression that a buyer will have from your company. Sometimes it is even better to not have a website if it does not meet the minimum standards for export promotion. Technically, a professional site should include: a content management system or CMS, a reliable hosting, an analysis feature, Search Engine Optimization features, and the capacity to integrate it with your social media profiles. In addition to the technical requirements, when designing your website, you should develop a great user experience thinking on who your buyer is. In the promotion of exports being able to share your story through high quality pictures and short descriptive paragraphs is key. When developing your website you should be able to share your **Unique Selling Point** clearly. Only once you have developed a good website to promote your company you should focus on how to gain traffic. There are several digital marketing strategies that you can consider to attract visitors to your website. Among all digital marketing strategies that exist, working on a content marketing strategy and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) stand out.

You should consider developing a content marketing strategy and to implement a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy to organically attract as many buyers to your website as possible. If you use a content marketing strategy, you aim to create value for users and visitors of your website by posting content in different digital formats such as posts, infographics, images, and videos. You can use this content as a starting point to promote your brand and to capture leads. Content marketing usually goes together with SEO. SEO aims to improve the visibility of your website in the organic results of the different search engines. Currently this is one of the most popular digital marketing strategies with a strong focus in one search engine: Google.

#### TIPS

##### **If you are targeting the Swedish market...**

it is a good thing to invest in a professional website in English. Most buyers will first check you online before deciding to take further contacts.



## 2. Social media

Nowadays, your website is not the only relevant channel to present your online promotional messages. The use of social networks has gained extensive territory in international trade promotion in recent years. You can use social media digital marketing strategies to increase your brand awareness and interact with potential customers through social networks. Social media have a high capacity for content to go viral and to interact with current and prospective buyers. If you don't have social media profiles for your company yet, definitively consider creating them and sharing content. Not all social networks are relevant for business though. When it comes to international trade promotion, consider using them to promote your products and even to meet potential buyers. The main social media platforms used for business include Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. You should create content based on an understanding of the [main characteristics of these platforms](#).

### About social media networks in Sweden

LinkedIn is the world's premier business network with 722 million users ([January 2022](#)). Sweden is not different from this and to date, LinkedIn is still regarded as the main business social network in the country. When approaching or interacting with international buyers, distributors or importers, LinkedIn can be certainly a good channel to convey your message. Remember that LinkedIn is a business network, thus, conversations and connections occur in this context and you should follow an online business code.

However, remember that buyers and importers of your product are also people with personal social network profiles. When resources are available it is also a good complementary strategy to work on social media profiles that target end consumers. For that, you should consider Facebook, as it's the largest one and Instagram as it is one of the fastest growing social media networks.

## 3. Email marketing

Another common digital marketing strategy to attract buyers to your website and market your business is Email marketing. Email marketing is the use of email messages to inform, attract, and retain buyers. It is a great online tool to market your business. It is economical, profitable, measurable, adaptable to different segments, and automatable. Currently there are several free of charge tools to develop good looking email campaigns. Great tools to develop email marketing campaigns include [MailChimp](#) and [HubSpot](#) among [many others](#).

When developing your website, make sure you include a subscription to your newsletter option so buyer can follow your updates. Note that the main challenge when setting up an email marketing strategy is to use a database of potential buyers' information and emails that is [compliant with the EU General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#).

## 4. Virtual Export Promotion Activities

### Virtual Trade missions

A Virtual Trade Mission is the virtual version of a trade mission. Trade missions are trips with the purpose of exploring international business opportunities in defined target markets. Usually, these trade missions are arranged by trade promotion agencies, such as: export promotion agencies from developing countries' governments (see [ProChile](#), [Vietrade](#) or [DTI](#)), import promotion agencies based in developed countries' markets (see [CBI](#) or [IPD](#)), multilateral agencies (see [ITC](#)) and NGOs (see [COLEACP](#)).

Due to Covid-19 most of these events have migrated online. Make sure that you are in touch with organizations that facilitate them and stay tuned to their updates to participate in such events as they are great opportunities to promote your business.

If you want to participate in a virtual trade mission you need to be capable of both structuring effective online written messages and following rules for online effective meetings. When participating in these events you should follow our advices on how to profile your prospective buyers, how to communicate effectively with international buyers and on how to structure effective promotional texts.

### **Digital trade fairs and conferences**

This is the virtual version of trade fairs and conferences. As with trade missions, due to COVID-19, most trade fairs are taking place either digitally or in a hybrid form (digital and onsite). Most of the digital trade fairs are privately organized events in which importers and exporters meet at a certain date to establish new business relations.

Another benefit of participating in a digital trade fair is to get updated knowledge on market trends and networking. When visiting digitally you have access to a digital platform in which all visitors and exhibitors are present. You can engage directly with buyers by simply sending them a contact request. Some of the trade promotion agencies mentioned above organize participation of exporters in these fairs as visitors and/or exhibitors. Make sure you are in touch with them and to stay updated on their participation in digital trade fairs.

Examples of European based trade fairs are: [BioFach](#) (largest organic trade fair in Europe), [Anuga](#) (largest food fair in Europe), [Nordic Organic Food Fair](#), [Food Ingredients](#), [Vitafoods](#) (nutraceuticals) and [In-cosmetics](#).

As a part of virtual trade missions and digital trade fairs, online matchmaking and B2B meetings are key. Online Matchmaking is when an organization identifies business opportunities for you after analyzing the match between your product and a certain target market. It is the online process by which you develop all the required preparation and profile your business before getting in touch with a prospective buyer. This has to be done in such a way that it will increase your success chances. Structuring effective written messages is key for this. A successful matchmaking process results in B2B meetings. B2B meetings take place once you have engaged with a prospective buyer. A B2B meeting is usually a 30 mins digital meeting in which both parties are introduced and assess the fit between supply and demand. Currently, there are several matchmaking platforms that can be used to engage with potential buyers, for example: ECRM – Efficient Program Planning Sessions ([marketgate.com](http://marketgate.com)).

## **5. Online directories**

Online directories are digital platforms where producers, traders, importers, exporters and buyers from a certain sector are listed. Online directories are great platforms to give your brand visibility within an established sector such as coffee. For example, the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) manages the SCA Coffee Directory ([directory.sca.coffee](http://directory.sca.coffee)), a new digital platform connecting buyers and sellers in the global coffee industry. Make sure you know whether an existing platform for your product is already online. Although these aren't meant for transactions, online directories are great channels to get to know prospective buyers and to present yourself as a supplier.

## 6. B2B and B2C marketplaces

An online marketplace is an e-commerce website where your product information is promoted by a third party. They are an online based selling channel in which you can conduct transactions with your customers. Depending on your export marketing strategy you might want to sell directly to end consumers (B2C) or to buyers (B2B). Most of these marketplaces charge a fixed fee or variable fee depending on the amount of each transaction.

You can construct your own marketplace with platforms such as [shopify](#) or rely on third party managed platforms such as [1-2-taste](#). Such platforms are a great option to promote your products as they invest in digital marketing and have an existing digital audience of potential buyers for your product. Other examples of marketplaces include: <https://www.exporthub.com/>, <https://www.nutnose.com/>, <https://agro-market24.eu/>, or <https://agrimp.com/>.

### TIPS

#### Keep in mind!

Regardless the tools you decide to use to promote your business digitally, you should always share a consistent story across all channels.

## Chapter V. How to communicate *effectively* with international buyers?

### Interacting online with international buyers

Finding and profiling buyers for your products is only half of the job. To start selling abroad you need to be able to build trust with your current and prospective buyers through remote communications. One way to do so is to keep a professional and effective online written communication with your counterparts. In this chapter we share with you tips to communicate with international buyers, insights on the Swedish business culture and we introduce the netiquette, the internet etiquette to communicate effectively with buyers.

### Communicating with international buyers

In Europe, English is the most widely spoken language for international business. However, English as a native language, is mainly spoken in the United Kingdom and Ireland and English proficiency is very [high in European countries](#). Therefore, for most buyers English is a second language. You will have to be able to transmit a clear written message in English. In addition, you should also respect the netiquette.

### The netiquette — Follow the 12 best practices for effective English online written communications

When you meet a prospective buyer for the very first time in a trade fair, event, or dinner you are expected to follow a certain etiquette. Etiquette is a group of certain unwritten rules and best practices to behave properly in business interactions. Ignoring these rules may sometimes be perceived as rude, which you'll want to avoid when building a relationship with a buyer. The Internet etiquette or 'Netiquette' is a set of rules and accepted behaviors when communicating online. This consists of the following 12 best practices to effectively communicate online with international buyers:

1. **Start in English:** English is the most accepted business language in Europe. If you don't know the local language, always use English. This will help you avoid misunderstandings or to make inappropriate comments. Don't assume your counterpart's preferred language based on their name, but always ask.
2. **Don't assume gendered pronouns:** Don't assume pronouns based on gender-related names. Not because it says John, it means you should refer to him, or because it says Susan you should refer to her. Never assume the gender or preferred pronoun of an email recipient. Nowadays, many European companies are implementing a preferred pronoun statement on their employees' signatures. Try to always write gender neutral messages.
3. **Outline your arguments:** Try to be as concise as possible when talking online. If you're going to highlight several attributes or benefits of your product, start by saying, "This product has 5 key benefits that differentiate it from the rest..." and then proceed to describe each one.
4. **Be descriptive:** Try to strengthen your message by including media files. As they say, "A picture is worth a thousand words". Remember, written messages will be interpreted by your counterpart. Try to include documentation and pictures in high quality but low size when sending a message to a buyer.

5. **Mind the size:** Avoid sending heavy emails or messages. An email becomes heavy after 5 MB. If you want to share documents or pictures via email, try to compress them or share them via a sharing platform such as dropbox or google drive. To compress attachments, you can use online .pdf or .jpeg compressing websites.
6. **Avoid sarcasm, jokes, sayings, slang or clichés:** Avoid translating your sayings or jokes to English as they will probably not make sense in the mind of an international buyer. Although interesting and fun, save these anecdotes for a face to face or online meeting in which you will have time to explain it. Within and between European countries there are significant cultural differences, as between European countries and the rest of the world.
7. **Keep it simple:** Simple terms work the best. If your messages are filled with complex language, tecnicisms and jargon someone may misinterpret your intended message.
8. **Write for a good impression:** Buyers will build an idea of you by reading your messages. Mind your spelling, grammar, sentence building and writing style. Always ask for advice if you think your written English is not good. Switch between a formal and informal tone when appropriate.
9. **Better long and understood than short and misunderstood:** Even though you should avoid sending lengthy emails, aim to always make sure your message is clearly explained and written.
10. **Proofread:** Proofread everything before clicking “send”. Always control for potential grammar and orthography mistakes. You can install software on your laptop or use a cloud-based software like Grammarly to assess the quality of your messages.
11. **Give complete responses within a day:** You should try to answer asynchronous messages such as email within a business or working day. Also, since communication is not happening in real time, you should take the time to write a complete response.
12. **Be nice.** And always remember, there is someone at the other side of the screen. Try to make your counterpart feel like you care about the message and your interaction.

## Read up on the Swedish business culture

For effective communication, it is important to understand the recipient of your message. The more you know about your buyer, the better the message you will be able to send. You could start by getting information about your buyer's culture, business customs and manners. If you want to build a relationship with a Swedish trading partner, learn about Swedish business culture. By understanding the Swedish culture, you can communicate more effectively and hopefully build meaningful relationships. You can read more about the Swedish business culture [here](#).

## Master the main online written communications channel: Email

Once you know who your buyer is (distribution channel, buyer profile and buyer persona) and you have been able to engage with them, you will need to master the main online written communication channels with them.

To date, e-mail is still the main communication channel for international business. European countries have high numbers of [active internet users](#). And, even though chat apps are very relevant ([with 90% of internet users using these types of apps](#)), these are not always the best option for business communications. The [Business Messaging Survey 2021](#) showed that almost half of the respondents prefer receiving business communications via email. SMS and WhatsApp were favored by only 25 percent of the sample study.

### The Dos and Don'ts for effective emails

As email will be the most likely and common channel for your communications with buyers. We suggest to use the following best practices of effective emails.

#### Dos

- ✓ Write good email subjects. A good email subject is short and clear. A best practice email subject contains 9 words and gives a clear impression on the content of the email.
- ✓ Write short sentences.
- ✓ Customize the content depending on the recipient.
- ✓ Incorporate media files when convenient to convey the message.
- ✓ Include a professional signature from you and your company.
- ✓ Use a professional e-mail hosting.
- ✓ Leave an automatic response when needed so buyers know how to reach out to you if you are away, or where to forward their message to. This also lets your buyers know that you may take more time to get back to them.

#### Don'ts

- ✗ Don't use CAPITALS, they are the equivalent of shouting or big exclamations.
- ✗ Don't spam. If you haven't heard a response, be patient and provide a respectful amount of time before following up.
- ✗ Don't mark an email as urgent if it really isn't. Avoid sending urgent emails too often.
- ✗ Don't copy (cc) everyone and try to keep your cc recipients limited. Always explain who is on cc on the email.
- ✗ Don't Overuse the Ellipsis...Ellipsis is the series of periods "...". These leave an unfinished tone and meaning to your message.

### About using abbreviations

Please FW this ASAP. FYI. TBD in next meeting. You might have found yourself already in front of one of these abbreviations. Even though they are widely used in internal communications to coordinate and keep teams informed, avoid using these abbreviations when communicating with an international buyer for the first time. These will be regarded as too informal. Keep in mind that once you get to know your buyer better then you can transition to a more informal communication.

### About using emoticons ;)

:) ? ;) ? Have you ever felt like adding an innocent emoticon to that serious email? It is tempting, that is for sure. Especially since everyone is very used to their use when exchanging messages between relatives and friends. Even though emoticons are not banned from online written communications in the import-export business, you should use them carefully. In principle, as with many of the best practices suggested in this manual you should wait for the buyer to take the first step. Even once your buyer uses an emoticon, be mindful on when to use them. Try to not overuse them, never use more than two per email or written message. In other more informal channels like WhatsApp, messenger or even LinkedIn private messaging, other emoticons such as “thumbs up” are widely used. However, only use them once a more informal communication tone has already been established.

### About your Email account – use an official hosting

As with websites and web hosting, email hosting is a service provided by a hosting or email company to manage custom domain-based email accounts. It is common practice to own and manage an email hosting with your company’s name or brand. This makes your email look more professional when interacting with international buyers. Avoid the use of personal emails with nicknames with funny or less serious words.

## Examples

### Example 1

*Good practice:*

Sending a formal quotation for your products to potential buyer via email detailing all the characteristics of your offer in an attached .pdf file.

*Bad practice:*

Sending relevant messages and files via WhatsApp that will be hard to find afterwards. Sending a quotation via WhatsApp is perceived as highly informal in the European culture.

### Example 2

*Good practice:*

Nicolás Caso works at ProFound – Advisers in Development. His email is [ncaso@thisisprofound.com](mailto:ncaso@thisisprofound.com)

*Bad practice:*

Nicolás email is [nicolasbestconsultant@gmail.com](mailto:nicolasbestconsultant@gmail.com)



## About communicating with other online communication channels

### **Can I use WhatsApp for international trade business?**

In Europe, smartphones are mainly used as personal devices. Therefore, content and interactions via smartphone apps such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram, Signal and others are still regarded as personal and private. This changes if employees or business owners use company smartphones for work. You can identify when a business owner or employee has a working smartphone when the number is shared on their email signatures or when they state that you can contact them through other chat applications. Don't use WhatsApp with a current or potential buyer unless they suggest to do so. In addition, in the import-export business it is best to always use email for formal communications such as introductory emails, quotations, contracts and providing documentation or certificates. You should use email for those interactions because it:

- is safe,
- allows you to copy (cc) different team members from your own and your buyer's company,
- allows documentation sharing per message,
- allows you to keep track on what has been shared in the past, and
- it is stored in both your own and your buyer's servers allowing you to consult it in the future in case you lose your laptop or device.

### **Can I use social media for online communication with Swedish buyers?**

LinkedIn is the world's premier business network with 722 million users (January 2022). Sweden is not different from this and to date, LinkedIn is still regarded as the main business social network in the country. When approaching or interacting international buyers, distributors or importers, LinkedIn can be certainly a good channel to convey your message. Remember that LinkedIn is a business network, thus, conversations and connections occur on this context and you should follow an online business code. We suggest that you follow the following advices when interacting with Swedish buyers on LinkedIn: [6 things to avoid when reaching out to Swedes on LinkedIn](#).

## Chapter VI. How to write effective messages and emails?

Once you know your audience and have correctly identified the channels to communicate with them you should be able to know how to convey your message effectively. In addition to follow the netiquette, in online written communications there are certain rules, tips and tricks that you should follow. Below we share our key advises when writing messages to buyers for your products.

1. Take your time: Don't get caught writing a message to a buyer in a rush on when you are too busy. If you take the appropriate time to write a prospective buyer you are likely to avoid both grammar and content mistakes.
2. Follow a clear structure: written messages and specially emails have a clear structure. Follow it. A clear email has the following structure:
  - a. **Salutation:** The salutation of an email is the first sentence your recipient is going to read. It is key to start with a correct formal salutation in order to give a first good impression. The salutation of a formal email is similar to the salutation of a letter. When communicating with business people in Sweden you should try to always send personalized emails with the name of the contact person. When you cannot identify the right person, you should write "To Whom it May Concern." However, if you do know the recipient's name and preferred pronoun, you should write down "Dear Mr./Ms". If you know the name but not the preferred pronoun then start by writing "Dear NAME + LAST NAME".
  - b. **Introduction:** When communicating with Swedish importers you should try to catch their attention right at the beginning of an e-mail. To do so, try to relate to an identified need that the prospective buyer has and that you could potentially fulfill. This will be appreciated by your prospective buyer. Then introduce yourself shortly. This is name, position and company. However if you already started communications with the recipient of your message it is also a good practice to start by referring to the latest message. This is, answering to a previous question or just following up to a pending topic. This will set the expectation and give clarity to the message that will be read afterwards.
  - c. **Core message:** In an introductory email of your company you should follow our advices on how to structure a written pitch (see the example bellow). However, for other communications the length of the message will depend on what needs to be communicated. Being said that, you should always aim to write short emails of around 150 words.
  - d. **Call to action:** Close your emails with a call to action. You can suggest a prospective buyer to visit a link with more information of your company, to send him/her a sample or to schedule a follow up meeting.
  - e. **Salutation:** when closing and email you should follow the standard practices. To do so we advise you to close your email by adding: "I look forward to hearing from you" + a salutation of your preference such as: "Best regards", "Warm regards" or "Best wishes".

## Example: How to write a pitch for your export business

Buyers tend to receive dozens of emails from potential suppliers every day. To stand out, you need to be convincing and able to highlight your USP or UBR in just a few sentences. Try to build a short pitch following the structure of an elevator pitch.

This is a short introductory conversation of around 30 to 60 seconds in which you introduce yourself, your company, your products, highlight its USP or UBR and finish with a call to action. This pitch should be around 75-90 words and structured in the following manner:

### **Step 1: Introduce yourself (15 - 30 words)**

First things first, when sending an email or pitch message to your buyer you always need to start to introduce yourself. This should be as simple as sharing your name and position at your company, as well as your intention of getting in touch.

*Example* – Introduce yourself: “My name is John Doe and I am Export Manager at Cassava Passion from Ghana. I am writing to you to present our company and products.”

### **Step 2: Introduce your company and product (15 words)**

Next, you should share your company and product(s).

*Example* – Introduce your company and product: “We are a 30-year-old producer and exporter passionate about processed cassava products such as cassava flour.”

### **Step 3: Share your USP/UBR (30 words)**

The most important part of your pitch will be to share what makes your company stand out in the market you’re aiming to supply to.

*Example* – Share your USP/UBR: “Aligned with the latest consumer demands, we offer sustainably produced gluten free flour. Our products have organic (ECO CERT) and sustainable (Fairtrade) certificates. We also have a strong CSR commitment” You can insert a link to your website on the last word of that sentence.

### **Step 4: Finish with a simple call to action (15 words)**

When getting in touch with a prospective buyer share a clear and simple call to action at the end. You can offer an introductory B2B meeting, to share more detailed information, to explore your website or even to send samples.

*Example* – Finishing with a simple call to action: “If you would like to know more about why our cassava is so special click here.” You can insert a link to your website on the last word of that sentence.

Add links for further information

When sharing your online written pitch, also use other complementary resources. It is a good strategy to add one or two links on your message where you can share your website, a certain landing page or an online profile of your company. This way the message you share is short, but the buyer has the possibility to do further (guided) research on your company.

### **Finally**

Remember that the key success factor for a written pitch is knowing the recipient of your message. In other words, before writing a pitch for a certain buyer make sure you understand him/her. You can follow our advice on how to get a better understanding of your target audience.