

Ask about exporting before you begin

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“Too many people export fresh chili peppers! I plan to cut and dry mine. What can you tell me about the market I should target?” My Uncle Michael had it backwards. When you start a business, you should identify the need you will be filling first. Then determine how you will fill that need. My uncle determined what he wanted to do first. Now, he wanted to find a market that would accept his proposed product. When starting a new business or project, it is to find out as much as one can before one takes the plunge.

The problem is, we do not know what we do not know. My uncle found a logical way to beat the competition – just do something different. He however was unaware of one of the cardinal rules of marketing – see a need, fill a need. Begin with the consumer and work your way backwards to giving them what they want. What if Uncle Michael invests in cutting and drying chili peppers, only to find out that no one is interested? If you are thinking of undertaking an export venture, take advantage of the information sources below before you go too far.

CURRENT AND PAST EXPORTERS

Talk to people who are already exporters. Get as many points of view as possible. Ask them every possible export question you can think of. Find out how they got started. What requirements did they have to meet? In their experience, is exporting profitable? What challenges have they faced and how did they overcome them? What regrets do they have, if any? If they had to begin their export journey all over again, what would they do differently? What are the benefits of being an exporter? In their opinion, should people be encouraged or discouraged from becoming exporters? Conversations with current or past exporters should be one of your first steps as you think about becoming an exporter.

LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCIES AND BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS

If you are seriously considering export, you **must** get in touch with or visit your national export agency. In Uganda, this is the Uganda Export Promotion Board (UEPB) located at UECDL Tower on Nakasero Road, Kampala (<https://ugandaexports.go.ug/>). Get to know the officers. They too are an excellent source of information on exporting. Eventually, you will need to register yourself as an exporter. In Uganda, this is also done at UEPB. Other good sources of export information in Uganda are Uganda National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (<https://www.chamberuganda.com/>) as well as member-based business associations like Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Ltd. (<https://uweal.co.ug/>).

INTERNATIONAL TRADE WEBSITES

The International Trade Centre (ITC) website (www.intracen.org) provides extensive market information including statistics, market requirements and market analysis reports on countries all over the world. The Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI) website (www.cbi.eu) provides market information by sector on the European Union. It will be a little more challenging to obtain meaningful information on regional opportunities. This however is where UEPB comes in.

I encouraged Uncle Michael to do all the above. I hope you will too, before you begin your export journey.