

## **HOW TO** Avoid Killing Your Sale to a US Company

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I've spoken to a lot of Israeli companies that would like to see their products in the United States. Many of the products I have seen were (at least in my opinion) great, and could have done well in the United States. But some of them just don't make it. Here are some of things that you should remember when trying to make that sale so you don't end up killing your chances:

- **Don't overpromise.** Don't fall into the trap of thinking that your product has to be able to do everything. It becomes obvious fairly quickly to a knowledgeable buyer when someone is exaggerating a product's capabilities. Talk about what the product is, or what it does well. Don't be afraid to honestly admit to things that it does not do. It is better to lose a sale because you don't match the buyer's needs than to falsely promise something and face a lawsuit later.
- **Get help from native English-speakers.** Most Israelis who are doing business in the United States (or other English-speaking countries) do much better with their English than I do with my Hebrew. But when they try to put together written materials about their product, the language gap becomes apparent, particularly when they do a literal translation of an idiomatic expression. Use local help to "localize" your materials, even going so far to review materials locally for each English speaking country you may visit. The goal is to make sure your audience is comfortable and confident. Of course it is true that a misspelled word in a non-native language has nothing to do with the quality of the product, but it is hard to ignore. Errors undermine the credibility of the company in an exaggerated fashion.
- **Think about the value proposition.** Why will an American audience want your product? The reasons may be different than those used in Israel. In Israel, for example, a food product may have appeal because it is less expensive than the alternative. That same product in the United States may have nutrition or convenience as its main selling point. Get an American with marketing expertise to make sure that your value proposition will resonate with Americans.
- **Do you have a PowerPoint presentation?** Same comments as above, but keep them short. Get help in making it an effective presentation. Not too many words on a page. Use of relevant images. Not too long. Clearly understandable. And make sure it answers the question "Why should I do business with you?"
- **Is there a website?** Potential American customers want to do some due diligence. Make sure you have a website with English pages that have been proofread by a native English speaker. Also be prepared to provide references to other customers.
- **What does your local office or plant look like?** Are you prepared to receive visitors from abroad? If you have a manufacturing facility, will it impress the visitors as state-of-the-art, or will it scare them away by appearing dirty? Ideally your local facility will complement your

international sales effort, and welcome visitors from abroad who will want to buy your product when they get home.

- **What about US regulatory approval?** If your product meets all regulatory requirements, say so. If you are not sure, get competent legal or technical help to find out. But do not say that you meet regulatory requirements when you aren't certain. For example, you may think that your food product is perfectly safe, and it may be, but you may run afoul of labeling laws, or local prohibitions on the use of certain ingredients.

The US is a big market and there are still plenty of opportunities for Israeli companies of all kinds. You need to keep trying, even if it means a few revisions along the way.

Ted Banks is a partner in the law firm of Scharf Banks Marmor LLC in Chicago, IL. He is a board member of the America-Israel Chamber of Commerce (Chicago), and is Treasurer of the Jewish National Fund. He travels to Israel frequently where he visits with great Israeli businesses -- and sometimes the not so great.