

## **A World of Opportunity**

### ***How Exporting Can Help You Prosper in a Tough Economy***

by Tom Dzialo

In our current state of recession it's a good time to start exploring the opportunities that exporting can bring to your company. Right now, the federal government is making grant money available to help companies test foreign markets, as well as to invest in educating themselves about the business of exporting and in training their U.S. representatives.

Exporting your company's goods provides many advantages, from increasing sales to creating jobs. Exporting can help your business to become a competitive force in all of your markets. During times of a long economic recession, you can reduce your dependency on the domestic market. If your business is one of a seasonal nature, you might be

able to sell to countries with an opposite season, allowing you to increase stability.

The U.S. Department of Commerce provides some intriguing information about exporting:

- Ninety five percent of the world's consumers live outside of the United States.
- Small and medium sized companies make up the vast majority of growth in new exporters.
- About twenty percent of manufacturing jobs depend on exports.
- Free trade agreements have opened up markets in Australia, Chile, Singapore, Jordan, Israel, Canada, Mexico and Central America.

On the local level, some manufacturers might actually benefit from a devalued American dollar. In a column for Ohio's Columbus Dispatch /Cox News Service (4/13), Gerry Shih reported, "If the dollar were to remain devalued, as some think, it could bring sweeping changes to the U.S. economic landscape and its manufacturing heartland." Also, further interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve "also are forcing the dollar down for

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## **Keep Them Coming Back — with Excellent Service**

by Jill Kennedy

Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again — and bring their friends.

*Walt Disney*

With the proliferation of the Internet, customers have more suppliers to choose from than ever before. For this reason, it is important to find ways to keep your current customers and add new ones to your business.

Providing excellent customer service is one way to do this. The goal is to satisfy your customers so they will continue to be repeat customers and pass the word on to others. Studies show that satisfied customers will tell 2-3 people about their experience, while unsatisfied customers will share their story with 8-10 people.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you strive to provide excellent customer service:

1. Treat your customer service reps as well as you want them to treat your customers. When an employee feels that what he or she does is important and vital to the company, that employee will feel pride in his or her job — and that feeling will be forwarded on to their customers.
2. Keep employees up-to-date on company policies and changes so they will be able to answer questions quickly and honestly.

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the near future, because U.S. securities are appearing unattractive and investors are looking elsewhere for better returns." According to Shih, "This means that not only are American buyers finding domestic goods a cheaper option, but U.S. exporters are enjoying price advantages they haven't seen in decades."

Chuck Biehn Jr., the owner of several West Carrollton [Ohio]-based industrial manufacturing shops, said, "Our prices are essentially at a 50 percent discount" in Europe. Shih noted that the "unprecedented plummet of the dollar finally has presented a window of opportunity that manufacturers haven't had for years." He added, however, "Many Ohio manufacturers insist that the biggest risk for a resurgence not happening is actually a labor shortage, a paradox for a distressed state that has shed jobs for decades."

You can realize growth in the international market. The U.S. Department of Commerce has many programs that can help your company on the road to exporting. They have export counseling assistance to help you get started and to guide you through every step of the export process.

They feature a web promotional magazine where your business and products can be seen by 400,000 people worldwide in 176 countries. They even have webinars to bring you the latest information about new export markets and how to increase your international sales. Trade events are held to promote your products and meet with international buyers. Go to [www.export.gov/exportbasics](http://www.export.gov/exportbasics).

When a tough economy provides lemons, make lemondade! ■



**"The manners that we were all taught as children, such as saying 'please' and 'thank you,' still go a long way in showing respect to the customer."**

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3. Give the customer service reps authority to make decisions.
4. There is no technology that can take the place of a *live* voice. Make sure that a person answers the phone. We all know how frustrating it is to listen to an automated voice giving us a menu with a list of options to choose from, which usually takes you to another menu with more options. Sometimes, but not always, one of those options is to speak with a customer service representative. When you choose to speak with a representative, there is quite often a long wait period. New customers may find this frustrating enough to hang up and call a competitor.
5. The manners that we were all taught as children, such as saying "please" and "thank you," still go a long way in showing respect to the customer.
6. Don't make promises unless you are certain they can be kept. If a shipping date is promised and cannot be met, place a call to the customer and set up another date. Customers will usually be agreeable as long as they are made aware of the change in a timely manner.
7. Listen to the customer. If the rep cannot answer a question, he or she should find the person who can and explain the issue first. That way, the customer does not have to repeat the problem.
8. Customer complaints are bound to happen. If a mistake has been made, apologize for the problem and explain how it will be corrected. Follow up with the customer to ensure the problem has been fixed, and then ask if there is anything else that you can do for them.

Follow these simple steps with every customer, and your customers will remain loyal — and spread the word. ■

**"I do not believe you can do today's job with yesterday's methods, and be in business tomorrow."**

- Nelson Jackson





# Get SMART!

## How to Set Goals and SMART Objectives for Success

by Tom Dzialo

Nothing happens until we have a plan, and good plans have goals and objectives. Understanding the difference between a goal and an objective can be confusing, and too frequently it can lead to frustration and unexpected or incomplete results. Setting goals and objectives correctly goes a long way in helping in the achievement of them.

So what are goals? Goals relate to our aspirations and are broad, brief statements of intent that provide a vision or focal point for planning. They establish an easy-to-understand, general target with few if any details. Think of it as the destination.

Setting goals involves more than just deciding what you want to do. It also involves knowing how the goal is going to be achieved and how long it will take. This is where objectives come into play.

*Objectives* are the battle plan. They provide the detailed steps toward the achievement of the goal. Objectives

are written in an active tense and use strong action verbs like plan, write, conduct, produce, etc. Think of it as the itinerary to reach the destination with specific steps and timings.

When you set SMART objectives, you have a greater chance of successfully meeting your goals. "SMART objectives" refers to an acronym built around the five leading components or measures of a strong plan or program. Those components are:

### **S = Specific**

Objectives must be clear and well defined. When objectives are specific, everyone involved will know exactly what is expected of them and when it needs to be completed. Delivering world-class customer service scores is a goal, while increasing on-time customer shipments scores by 10% within six months is a very detailed and specific objective towards the goal.

### **M = Measurable**

When something is measurable, it is manageable. Establish a measuring stick to track the progress, and

change the approach if you need to.

Measurements allow you to know when the objective has been achieved.

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it!

### **A = Achievable**

Is the objective within your (or your team's) reach? Objectives, unlike your aspirations and visions, need to be achievable to keep you motivated. This does not mean easy. When they are a stretch, innovation and experimentation are encouraged.

### **R = Realistic**

Objectives should be realistic but challenging. Most objectives are achievable but they might require a change in your priorities to make them happen. They must be properly resourced with people, skills, budget, equipment, etc.

### **T = Timely**

Objectives must be set within a time frame, with set start and end dates and milestones. Timeframes create the necessary urgency and prompt action. Without a set timeframe, the motivation and urgency required to complete the tasks might be lost.

SMART objectives will always answer the following questions: Who is going to do what? By when? Why? To what level or standard? When you use the SMART objectives framework, the work you need to do to reach your goals becomes clearer, and pretty soon you'll start to see those goals transitioning from dreams to reality. ■



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“The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don’t define them, or even seriously consider them as believable or achievable. Winners can tell you where they are going, what they plan to do along the way, and who will be sharing the adventure with them”

- Denis Watley



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