

How to find an international supplier



“Nearly 408,000 companies traded goods internationally” in 2015. “The majority of these companies were ‘small and medium sized enterprises,’ or SMEs, with fewer than 500 employees.”

– US Department of Commerce

Global markets are more accessible than ever. No matter what some news outlets will say, technology, telecommunications, and more open trade routes have given businesses of all shapes and sizes opportunities to expand into markets abroad.

In fact, small businesses are doing much of the heavy lifting.

According to the US Department of Commerce, “nearly 408,000 companies traded goods internationally” in 2015. “The majority of these companies were ‘small and medium sized enterprises,’ or SMEs, with fewer than 500 employees.”

Depending on where you hope to work globally will determine what resources are available, and where to find them (if they exist at all).

At Veem, we’ve helped create a global small business network packaged in an international payments structure. To help our small business users succeed, we’ve compiled thousands of words in resources to help them work in the country of their choice.

So we took all of our knowledge and hard work and put it in one place to make it convenient for people like you. ***You’re welcome.***

Without further ado, here are our top 5 places to look for an international supplier (small business, or not).





Trade shows



You’ve definitely heard of these, one way or another. Conferences, expos, and conventions could all fall under the umbrella term “trade show.” If you still don’t know what we’re talking about, we’ll fill you in. [A trade show is](#) “a large exhibition to promote awareness and sales of especially new products within an industry.” It’s pretty straightforward.

Trade shows come in all shapes and sizes. For the bigger ones, business owners from around the world register months in advance to get a booth, or just a visitor pass to see what everyone in the industry has to offer. For smaller events, they may have no admission, and offer a more personalized setting to really get to know the presenters and speakers.

Either way, every single industry in the world has some kind of trade show or conference. Whether it’s biannually, annually, or quarterly, everyone from manufacturers to accountants are dying to show off and learn about new trends in the space.

The only real catch of trade shows is that they’re often one of the most expensive ways to find a global business partner or supplier. Travel, room and board, going out for

drinks with your new buddies, and especially setting up a booth (if you choose to) can really start to add up by trip's end.

The benefit is that you kind of get gifts for going. Marketing literature and swag (t-shirts, socks, buttons, even actual products sometimes) are all part of the price of admission to various global trade shows.

Now you ask, how am I supposed to find a supplier or business partner? Clearly the best way is to set up a booth. People come to you, and you can leave the booth as you please. But, a visitor pass is just as good. You can walk around the entire show, meeting as many people as you can, and you're not tethered to your own booth. Whatever your little heart desires, you can do at a trade show.

You can find trade shows in every country by simply Googling "trade show." There are literally

hundreds of websites and databases with up-to-date information on where, when, and how to attend the show of your choice.

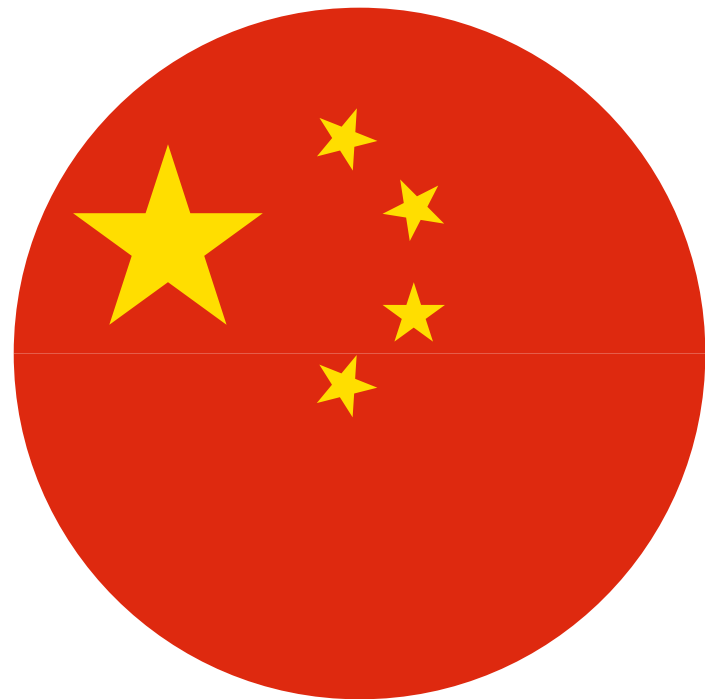
But, as a small business owner, it's reasonable to assume that, at any given conference, big businesses may win-out. Bigger booths, more staff, and potentially sponsoring the conference itself can make it hard to exhibit properly, and even hard for visitors to find smaller operations.

No fear.

[According to multiple sources](#), the share of US SMEs contributing at US trade shows in 2016 was 26%. If that's any indication of the global market, 26% isn't bad at all.

Now that we've established the importance of trade shows in finding global suppliers and business partners, here are a couple of great ones you might want to check out.





THE CANTON FAIR, GUANGZHOU, CHINA

Briefly, Guangzhou's Canton Fair is arguably the largest trade show in the world. It's held biannually, and attracts more than 24,000 of China's most prominent foreign trade companies.

That means a few great things for US small businesses. First, probably every international supplier you'll ever need can be found at the fair. And second, they're all just that: international. No need to sell your new friends on working globally. They've been there, done that, and will probably be happy to meet with you about it.



THE PHILIPPINES

No, that's not a typo. The Philippines is known for amazing trade shows in every industry across the country. While Manila is the island nation's capital, Davao and Quezon City may be even better for finding and attending trade shows. Events as big as [Manufacturing Technology Davao](#), to the fun smaller ones like the [Grimm Car and Motor Show](#).

Everything at these events from the sheer size to the amount of fun you'll have is amazing, and the Philippines, and the Philippines, while not always on the radar for international suppliers, is rife with opportunity for small businesses. Check out why in [our business country guide here](#).

The background is a solid blue color with a pattern of small, white plus signs (+) scattered across it. The plus signs are more densely packed in the top-left and bottom-right corners, creating a sense of depth and texture.

Government agencies



Small business owners don't have to do it all themselves. International business can be a trying and daunting task, and it's definitely better to look for resources to help you out.

The US government has historically aided small business access to global markets, and created resources and initiatives to help them do so. [Export.gov](https://www.export.gov) contains a series of web pages and content with information on every country the US trades with. It tells you how to do business in the given country (in terms of culture and most popular markets), travel information, modes of transport, and almost everything you might need to do business.

Except, of course, for a handy list of suppliers in that country.

Departments of trade, commerce, and foreign affairs around the world provide these lists as a resource for their own businesses and as incentive for global entrepreneurs to work with them.

That's right: while the US enjoys the luxury of being a highly sought-after trade partner, the same can't be said for other smaller, out-of-the-way nations. They do their best to get you to come to them. It works to their benefit, but also makes it easier for you to find the best country to work with instead of the most popular one.

Maybe Portugal has a great deal with the US for tariffs, but Vietnam has great prices on leather. Canada makes a lot of car parts, but so do Japan and South Korea (and probably at a better rate). With the constant shifting of political standings, US small businesses are being forced to look elsewhere for international goods they once took for granted coming in from Canada and Mexico.

These lists are crucial to the future of small business trade globally, and are the perfect resource for the entrepreneur looking to spread their wings.

Here's a great example.



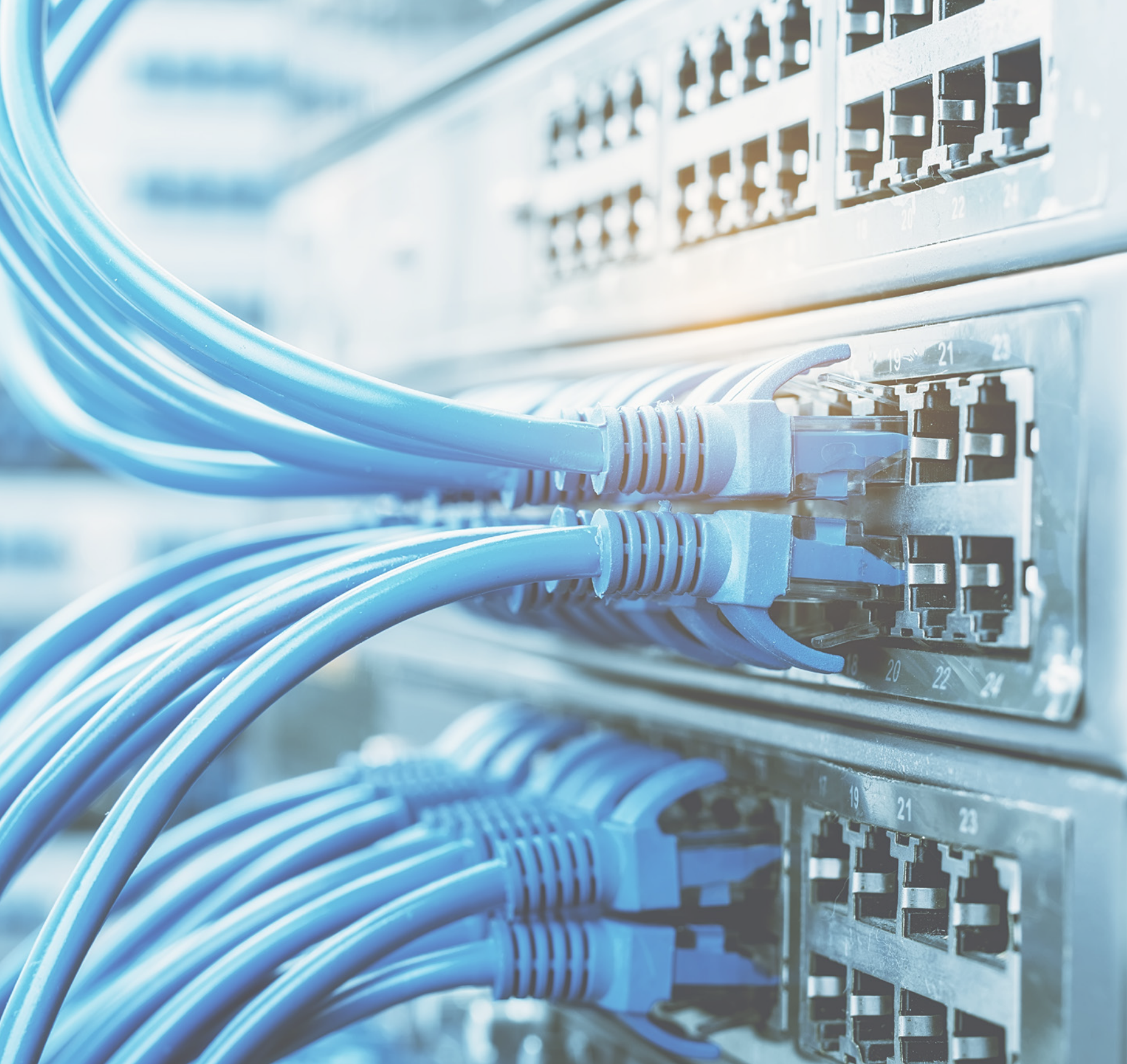
CANADA

I know we just talked about Canada being harder to trade with because of unstable politics. However, for those with strong trade ties to our Northern neighbors, there can be awful growing pains if you decide to move on. Costs of transport might go up, and partners you've worked with for years may suddenly fall off the map.

That's why Canada.gov's supplier list is just what you need. The "Find a Canadian Supplier" tool allows you to not only scroll through a literal list of them, but also offers financing options, and organizes each supplier list by industry. [Check it out here.](#)

Governments around the world offer this as a free service. Make sure you're taking advantage of everything you might, and definitely need.

Databases



“But,” I hear you say, “isn’t what you just said before also a list and database?” Yes it is thank you for pointing that out I really appreciate it (I don’t).

While you’re great at identifying synonyms, where these databases and lists come from are much different, and therefore require their own section in this extremely helpful list.

The internet is a fast and mysterious beast. There’s probably too much information on it, and definitely too many videos of cats nothing. Honestly it’s overwhelming. And when you don’t know where to start your search for that very specific thing, your phone or laptop seems utterly useless.

Thankfully, finding global suppliers isn’t that hard if you know where to look. Typing “international supplier” into Google might be a little broad (you could try it though). To start, figure out what industry you’re looking for a supplier in. This should be pretty easy, as you know what you need to keep your business running.

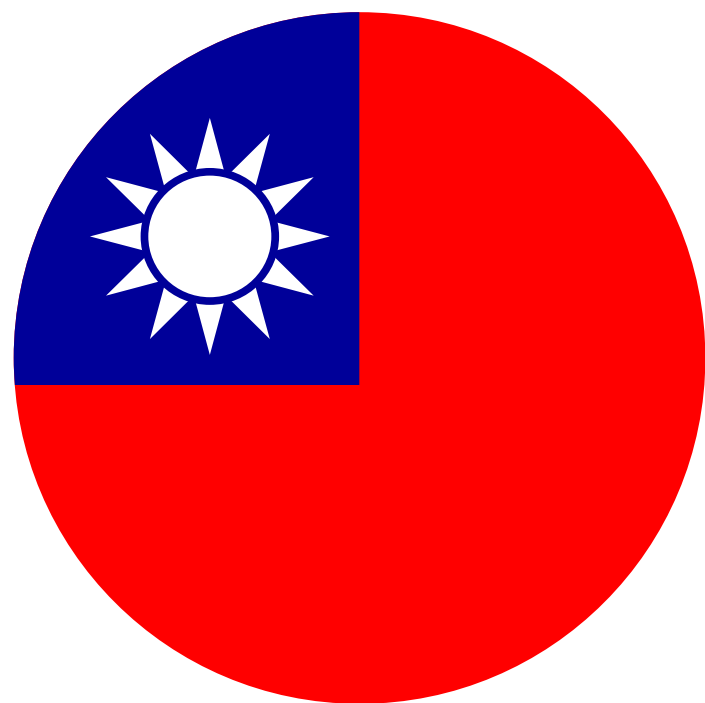
From here, you can actually start looking online. Though, depending on what you're looking for, you might be out of luck. For example, typing "international steel supplier" into Google will bring you to a Wikipedia page of global steel manufacturers. Most of these companies are huge, and based in the US. Not exactly what you're looking for.

The best course of action is to figure out which country you'd prefer to work with. It could be for any reason. Cheap labor, a trade deal that favors US businesses, you have family there, or whatever. Even picking a random country just to give it a shot is fine with us.

For example, if you decided to Google "[Mexico Steel Suppliers](#)," you'd find some great resources like [this one](#), [this one](#), and [this one](#). Check them out.

Now, if you happen to have no idea what you need, or want to work with a certain country regardless of the product you need, you can search for suppliers in that specific area. Some countries have better resources than others. Here's one example.





TAIWAN

Being one of the most popular manufacturing hubs in the world, Taiwan has its fair share of suppliers, and databases to find them. The government has some resources, but the real gems can be found in search engine listings.

Santander has a fantastic “[trade portal](#)” widget on their website for those looking for Taiwanese suppliers. All you have to do is choose your sector, and the widget will list the most trusted suppliers in that area.

Generally the widget will link to entire organizations of suppliers, like the [Taiwan Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association](#).

There are also sometimes less credible-looking websites. But, sorting through the duds will lead you to the gems in this lucrative and highly sought-after supplier market.

The background is a solid blue gradient. Overlaid on this are numerous light blue plus signs (+) arranged in a grid-like pattern. The density of these plus signs is higher on the left side and decreases towards the right, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Supplier Agents



These are probably more familiar. If you've done any research before landing here, you've definitely heard of [supplier agents](#).

For those who haven't, we'll fill you in. A supplier agent (or agency) is either a sole proprietor or corporate entity who is an expert in a certain area of business. Area means geography, industry, sector, market, customer segment, and more.

These agents work in very specific areas depending on a business' very specific needs. If you're looking for a steel manufacturer in Vietnam, your supplier agent will give you a list of companies and businesses for you to work with. If you need spark plugs from France, they have people for that.

Of course, these services don't come free. Whether your potential supplier agent is an individual or corporation, there are fees involved depending on what your needs are, where you're hoping to work, and how long you'll need them. For this information, you'll have to set up a meeting.

An important thing to remember is that a supplier agent is not a distributor. Distributors are like the middlemen between suppliers and businesses: they hold a suppliers' products and goods to sell to businesses. Now, you might be asking yourself, why wouldn't a business buy directly from the supplier? Well, a couple of reasons.

Suppliers in certain countries and industries can be notoriously hard to track down (hence the need for this very article), and businesses may not have the funds to travel or ship directly from overseas and are willing to pay the markup imposed by the distributor. The latter is the more common issue.

Whether you choose a distributor or supplier agent depends on business size, resources, and reach. You can find supplier agents in your own country to work with, but finding a local who knows the industry and business culture intimately will be your best bet.

Here are a couple of examples.





AUSTRALIA

Australia has a notoriously great trading relationship with the United States. Amidst trade wars and tariff hikes, Australia has remained a close and largely unaffected partner thanks to a fairly extensive bilateral trade agreement.

Admittedly, part of the reason trade goes over so well is the lack of a language barrier. It's easier to find suppliers and business partners when you don't have to work with a translator. So, supplier agents aren't in as high of a demand from US small businesses in Australia. However, they are a great example of what to do and look for.

The [Australian Trade and Investment Commission](#) has a great article on not only the difference between distributors and agents, but breaks down the pros and cons of each, and even [offers a tool for finding your specific agent, distributor, or supplier](#) (if you're daring).

I know what you're thinking: this is cheating because it could count as a database and government agency. But, I counter with the fact that this is our article and we can do what we want.



VIETNAM

Vietnam is another major supplier destination for businesses around the world. In fact, they're one of the world's best suppliers. With low labor costs, a perfect locale for trading, and millions of skilled laborers, the world is clamoring for a piece of this suppliers' paradise.

That's why websites like www.growyourbusiness.org exist. This website helps international business owners find suppliers, distributors, and agents from every corner of southeast Asia. No, it's not necessarily specific to Vietnam. But, because the supplier market in the nation is so dense, and the language barrier sometimes difficult to traverse, resources like this are few and far between, and should be used whenever and wherever possible.

Don't look a gift database in the mouth.

The background is a solid blue gradient. Overlaid on this are numerous light blue plus signs (+) arranged in a sparse, irregular pattern. The plus signs are more concentrated on the left side and become sparser towards the right. Some plus signs are aligned in vertical columns, while others are scattered individually.

Networking



Old faithful never falls out of style.

The explosion of telecommunications technologies and the internet have made connecting with a friend in Seoul from Tulsa as fast and easy as a click. It's opened businesses large and small to a brave new world of markets they never could have dreamed of. Even 20 years ago, the opportunities these technologies offer businesses were unimaginable. Now, they're largely taken for granted.

The web hasn't quite lost its untrustworthiness when it comes to business and banking. We're getting there, but some (rightfully) remain skeptical. In which case, talking to someone face to face is the answer.

It may take more time, and it's definitely more expensive. But, traveling to your ideal supplier might be the only way to get what you need done. And it has added benefits.

Though FaceTime and Skype are great, nothing beats an old fashioned face-to-face conversation. You can really get the feel for your supplier's emotions, body language, and learn about where your products are coming from.

People are all about conscious-sourcing nowadays.

If you're traveling to a place where English isn't prominent, you may have to find a translator to help you out. But, the effort on your part to make yourself understood and to understand the needs of your supplier won't go unappreciated.

We won't give any specifics or examples for destinations here. In every country in the world, physical visitation is a welcomed gesture of good faith.

Each country, city, county, and even person has their own quirks and customs that can make meeting them for the first time hard.

Whether you're headed to China or just up to Canada, be sure to do your research going in. You don't want to be caught saying the wrong thing, kicking your feet up when you're not supposed to, or acting too stiff in a relaxed environment.

There are a ton of resources online and off to help business owners prepare themselves for a trip around the world, across the pond, and everywhere in between.

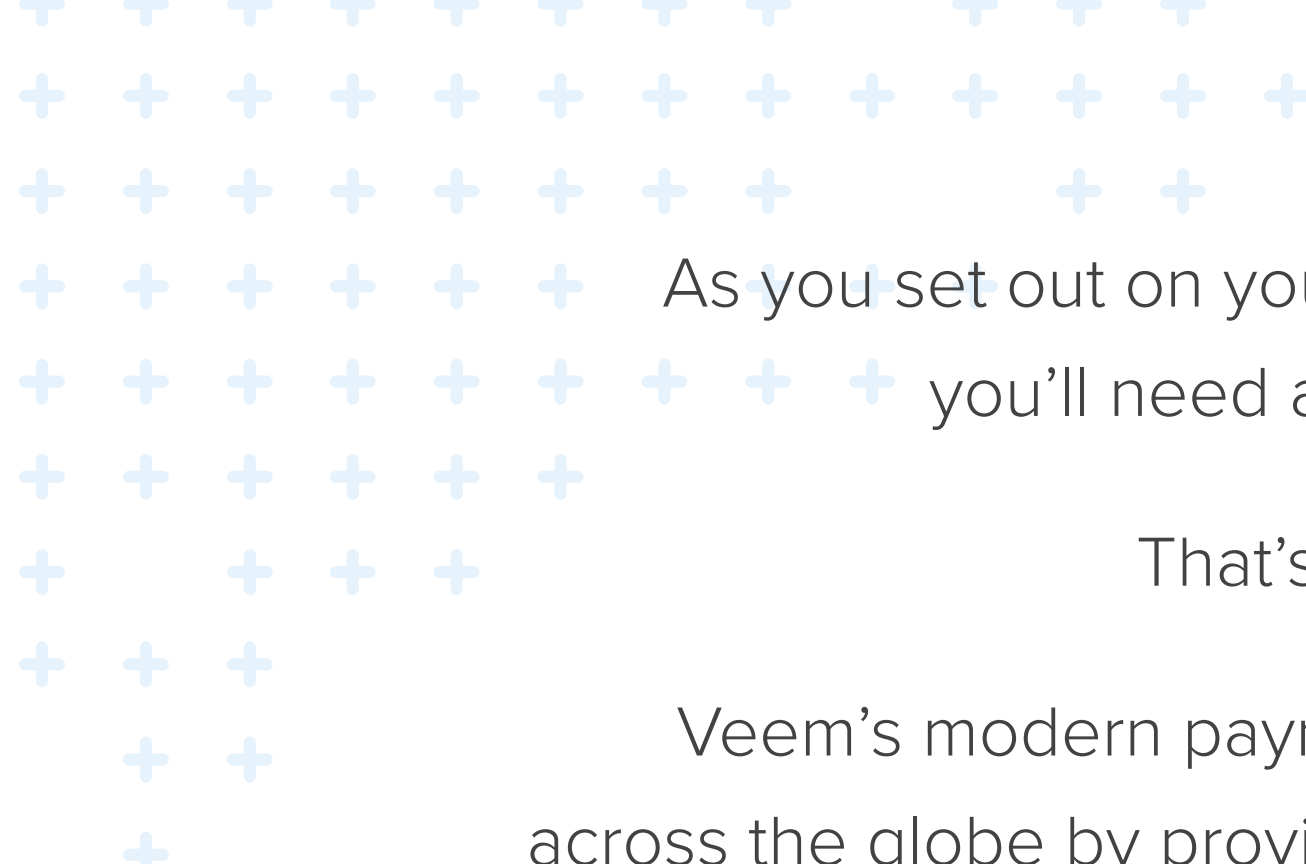
Finding an international supplier isn't easy. The internet has made things easier, but it hasn't removed every hiccup or kink in the supply chain. These resources are here for

a reason. Hopefully, compiling them in this handy article has given you some insight into your options as a business owner.

Large or small, international business is the future. Markets are continually opening, broadening, and expanding. No policies will change that. With a wealth of resources at the ready, businesses have no excuse not to explore their options in international trade. Suppliers, manufacturers, and vendors are everywhere, waiting for the next deal to come their way.

Be that deal. Be that business.





As you set out on your international business endeavors,
you'll need a way to pay your suppliers.

That's where we can help.

Veem's modern payments technology helps businesses
across the globe by providing verified vendors, accurate tracking,
and great rates.

Save on every payment with Veem.

Sign up for free



50 Osgood Place,
Suite 220 San Francisco, CA 94133

business@veem.com
www.veem.com