

EXPORT-IMPORT MARKETING: DOES IT NEED MORE ATTENTION?

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Are changing marketing conditions in world competition creating a need for an updated look at Export-Import Marketing? The purpose of this paper is to argue that we need a fresh look at some traditional old knowledge in order to strengthen the dynamism of our current international marketing skills, and the way we teach them.

In our fascination with the rise of the multinational corporation we let our interest in teaching the subject of exporting and importing fade into the background. Coming as it did out of the curriculum of the old "business college" that preceded the modern school of business administration in the teaching of many business subject, it is even questioned by some as not sufficiently "academic" to justify treatment at the university level. However, the waning dominance of the MNC in world economic growth emphasizes the rising dependence of our international economic health on our ability to increase the nation's declining share of world exports.

A survey of major international marketing texts used today shows no pattern for dealing with the subject. One will give it a separate section, another almost no mention at all. The tendency is to break it apart among topics and to treat it descriptively as a set of givens about which one cannot do much. Here and there the authors reveal a sharp insight but then back off. Nowhere is a picture of a complete transaction laid out for the reader.

The essential point to be made is that when one has a clear understanding of all the pieces to the transaction and how they fit together this knowledge has a synergistic effect giving a dynamic strength and flexibility to the marketer who possesses it. The export-import transaction is the base on which all international trade in physical goods rests. Yet there are often unbelievable tales of naiveté among otherwise sharp American business people. The author's experience and research in international trade promotion reinforce this point. A decision to enter the world marketplace frequently dies out or is delayed by the questions, "What do I actually do? What do I really need to know?"

A lot of titillating seminars and "how to do it" literature are available. They are almost invariably the product of someone who is a specialist in one or another of the export-import service areas. A person is not carried far enough to reach a threshold of confidence. Much trial and error and many painful experiences result. Here international academia can make a valuable contribution. The academic is above the narrowing focus of the workplace. He (or she) is in a position to generalize, to see the transaction in its entirety and to teach others to see it.

What an overviewer finds is a fascinating arena of marketing opportunities in what is often ignored or brushed aside as the drab details to be left to others. Information is power and this area has many special peculiarities. Even a language of its own. Who does what and why? Where does one turn for

information and service? How does one communicate? Litigate? How can this knowledge be used to affect competitiveness? In price? In delivery? In terms of sale? In security? In financing? In managing channels? In product quality? In customer confidence?

By having a firm grip on the basic details of the transaction one can reduce risks and costs, increase options and flexibility, and manage with less hesitation in the marketplace. One is less intimidated by what "specialists" have to say and more encouraged to explore alternatives. Things like duties, freight rates and insurance premiums are not absolutes. Documentation is not an unsettling mystery but a known quantity to be taken in stride and pitfalls avoided. One becomes sensitized to the marketing value of new technologies and procedures, such as containerization and minilandbridges.

It is disturbing to see the calm with which Americans accept the increasing role of Japanese trading companies in marketing our exports. While respecting the Japanese for what they are doing let's rise to meet foreign competition by a renewed emphasis on our own export-import marketing skills.