

2019 New Year, New Business Ideas

It's far from business as usual in the export world. Most companies are managing a decent 2018 finish through a combination of emerging market growth and improved conditions in the home market. 2019 looks tougher, with the China – USA trade war a big concern. Trump, Brexit, currency swings, and the surge in internet shopping create an uncertain outlook for our "old school" export development plans. Listed below are ideas to define your new game plan for achieving your 2019 targets.

1. Focus on Fewer, Bigger Opportunities

All markets are not created equally and many of us spend too much time on small or mature markets. Pick 1-2 high potential markets in your area. Visit frequently and invest at a higher level in local programs. The USA market opportunity is "bigger than BRIC's" for most Europeans.

2. More in the Store

Dedicate 2019 to improved retail conditions for your brand. Publish an in-store presence handbook. Sponsor a sales contest to encourage better shelf positioning. Spend a half day on each trip visiting stores. The supermarket is where inventory is translated to actual sales. How do you measure the difference between a "good store versus a bad store?"

3. Create a Listing Map for Each Country

Each market should maintain a brand availability listing map. This template should track your brands availability by size (variant) and by retailer. Create a methodology to track new or lost distribution.

4. E-Commerce Sales Strategy

Online sales of supermarket items surged by more than 100 percent in some countries. E-commerce sales will surpass brick and mortar sales in India and represent 35% of sales in China for some imported brands. Unfortunately, many distributors have not grasped a sense of urgency to address this high growth channel. Challenge each distributor to create a game plan for their e-commerce channel. Support early efforts with digital marketing dollars. The future is now!

5. January Call or Visit to Each Distributor CEO

Get an early pulse on the market. Make personal calls to leaders regarding 2019 expectations, planned investments, and

insights from large retailers. Reinforce your key priorities and secure commitment for "no surprises."

6. Launch Breakthrough

Think Big! An adjustment in mindset towards "what if?" can deliver game changing results for your business. The consumer goods industry contains many success stories where hungry innovators challenged existing status quo to achieve breakthrough results. Breakthrough is about delivering extraordinary results by employing unique strategies and perseverance. The beauty of breakthrough is that everyone can participate. Each team member needs to analyze his business and identify one sale or achievement that would deliver maximum impact. Breakthrough objectives should focus on "big wins at big accounts" and be aligned with your company's overall growth strategy.

7. Co-Branded Promotional Campaign

Retailers generate excitement through theme events around a group of complimentary items or common cause. Reach out to brand owners of products that sync with your product. For example, a low calorie sweetener manufacturer could do a joint promotion with a coffee manufacturer. What about a barbecue event with barbecue related products: charcoal, meat, snacks, drinks, condiments, etc. Another example is a retailer promotion celebrating their company anniversary or support of their designated charity (breast cancer, diabetes, etc.). In many countries, leading distributors sponsor an annual event for all the brands they represent. Many countries export offices organize annual events at leading supermarkets for all food brands from their country. In each case, manufacturers pay for a portion of the event as costs are spread out among all brand participants.

8. Hot Countries

Business may be tough at home, but certain regions will boom in 2019. GDP growth is positive for most of Asia and Latin America. South Korea and Colombia are mid-sized countries offering good potential with modest investment requirements. Look to our "fab 5" of Canada, Malaysia, Morocco, Peru, and Saudi Arabia for good opportunities to source incremental business. Mexico and Brasil are complex, but worthwhile markets to pursue.



9. Distributor of the Year – Sales Contest

Sales people love to compete. It is incredible the results that can be generated for a modest prize. Consider a "Distributor of the Year" program. Normally, I like contests that are 50% dependent on shipment performance versus quota, 25% on achieving new product launch acceptance (or other major initiatives), and 25% for intangible activities: breakthrough performance, success despite adversity, etc. The key is to strike a balance between shipments (what counts) and other factors as in many cases shipments don't tell the entire story. Publish periodic updates and rankings. This pushes leaders to remain focused and laggards to increase intensity. Everyone loves to be part of a winning team.

10. Underperforming Markets – Distributor Change

All companies have problem markets! The first step is to admit that the market has a problem. It's a natural instinct to rationalize poor results and hope for future improvements. We must remind ourselves that chronic underperformers impact our ability to achieve our personal sales and profit targets. Organization change is a last resort, but sometimes the best avenue to reinvigorate your brand. A new distributor brings energy, focus, and commitment. Make the decision today, in order to have your new distributor make an impact on second half 2019 sales.

The new year represents an excellent opportunity to set aside time to identify industry trends and develop your personal plan for making a difference in 2019. Send a message to senior management that you are focused on the future. Good luck!