

EDITORS' PICK | Dec 12, 2016, 09:39pm EST

How To Find Chinese Manufacturers If You Don't Know Anyone In China



Brandon Green Former Contributor 
Asia

 This article is more than 3 years old.

TWEET THIS



I recommend starting out by building a list of 10 suppliers with whom you can communicate directly.



I cannot recommend enough that as part of the selection process, you make a point of flying to China and touring the factories that will be used to manufacture your products.




STR/AFP/Getty Images

A client recently had me source a new Chinese supply chain for injection-molded plastics. In this series I'll explain how we were able to go from having no contacts in China to successfully receiving quotes from several injection-mold manufacturers. There are many steps to building a supply chain for a product, including design, transport & logistics, due diligence and negotiation. Today, we'll focus on finding the manufacturers.

1. Start Early And Build Your First Supplier List

Plan on spending at least a month identifying your best manufacturing partner, and several more months finalizing designs, fabricating molds and beginning the manufacturing process.

It can be daunting to start with nothing when you are trying to establish relationships leading to a successful manufacturing partnership. At first, any manufacturer you find seems like your only hope. That's why I recommend starting out by building a list of 10 suppliers with whom you can communicate directly. 

Building a large list helps to reduce the feeling of scarcity as you develop relationships and negotiate with the most promising manufacturers.

Though you could engage a sourcing agent to connect you with their recommended firms, here are some ways to meet suppliers that are accessible to everyone:

Today In: Asia 

Kemet Gains After China Approves \$1.8 Bln Sale To Taiwan Apple Supplier Yageo

China Gets Third New Billionaire In Two Weeks As Alibaba-Backed Raycloud Lists

Divorcing China: The West's Return To Ideology And Its Impact On Global Business

Alibaba.com

[Alibaba](#) assists buyers and exporters in finding and sourcing manufactured goods produced by Chinese firms. Use Alibaba's search bar to find products like yours. Search strings that include the production method work well. I used "injection-mold plastics" and quickly found many pages of manufacturers for molds, plastic components and assembled products.

Contacting suppliers is simple: just click on the orange "Contact Supplier" button on the product page or directly from the search results and start typing. I recommend creating a canned intro that describes who you are, what your product is and what you are looking for.

Here is approximately what I used:

Hello,

My name is Brandon Green, and my company is looking for plastic injection-molded components.

These components are produced from [polystyrene, polycarbonate, etc.], and are used for _____.

We already own molds / need to have molds created / need help finalizing our designs.

We expect to have a Minimum Order Quantity of _____ units every __ months.

I will be in Shenzhen and Guangzhou from _____ to _____ for Canton Fair, and would like to meet with injection-mold plastics manufacturers at that time.

Thank you,

Brandon

[Company Name]

Allow the suppliers a few days to respond. You can use this time to reach out to other firms, or learn more about the production process and refine your

product's requirements. Don't fixate too much on choosing suppliers with perfect English. It's important to be able to communicate, but as long as you're both able to get your points across with the help of translation software, it's better to prioritize compatibility with your order quantities and ability to meet the production standards you require.

Canton Fair

Commonly known as the Canton Fair, the China Import and Export Fair is a trade expo designed to connect Chinese manufacturers and wholesalers with buyers and exporters. It has been running since 1957 and held its 120th session in October 2016.

Though attending a major trade fair might be intimidating at first, gaining access is easier than one might expect, and allows for meeting a large number of suppliers in person in a short amount of time.

Keep in mind that most suppliers are at Canton Fair to sell their finished goods, not to find clients for bespoke manufacturing. However, I asked many firms there if they perform custom work, and the worst response I received was a polite "no."

You can apply to visit Canton Fair online [here](#). Though the approval process is typically fast, give ample time for your application prior to your trip. Admission is typically free of charge for advance applications, but not same-day tickets.


2. Reach Out To Your Network

Even if you don't know any manufacturers, tell people in your network what you're looking for. Much to my surprise, my (mostly U.S.-based) network was able to connect me with several injection mold manufacturers, both near-shore and overseas.

Being open about your needs and goals can be helpful within China as well. Other business travelers to Shenzhen can be very helpful, given the entrepreneurial nature of the community. I found buyers happy to share their recommended manufacturers. In fact, simply by asking for advice from an expat community in Shenzhen, I received many recommendations of the best suppliers to partner with based on our specific needs.

3. Schedule Time For Factory Visits

A common concern in any new relationship with overseas suppliers is that communicating over such a distance can make it easy for misunderstandings to occur, and meaning can get lost in translation.

I cannot recommend enough that as part of the selection process, you make a point of flying to China and touring the factories that will be used to manufacture your products.  Not only will the visit assist in understanding the process itself, it will give you and the manufacturers common visual vocabulary in dealing with any issues that come up. Moreover, it allows you to review the facilities to make sure the procedures and practices are up to the standards you require.

Though it may seem difficult to move from a sales representative's contact info to a factory visit, I found it as easy as suggesting a day. It's best to have a firm understanding of your product and needs before beginning the visit. While a sample or 3D model can be very helpful in communicating, many companies have engineers who are happy to work with you to understand your needs and find a solution, or even design a product based on your requirements.

4. Recognize The Economics Involved

While injection molding is a very inexpensive way to fabricate large numbers of products, the economies of scale are only in your favor if you can handle Minimum Order Quantities (MOQs) of thousands of units per batch. Using

CNC (Computer Numerical Control) manufacturing to create a product mold can cost from \$12k to \$60k, and altering that mold can be expensive and difficult. If your product requires complex development and iteration, you will want to use rapid prototyping methods like 3D printing to finalize the design before commissioning a finished product.

5. Caveat Emptor

As with any new business relationship, be sure to perform adequate due diligence before entering any agreements or remitting payment.

6. Achieving Results

By employing these strategies, we identified manufacturing partners and received several quotes within a few weeks of initial contact. These quotes reflect a strong understanding of our product and requirements, and a savings of over 35% from our current domestic production costs. As daunting as it may seem to move from a design to a finished product, results can be achieved rapidly and effectively using these methods to find suppliers who will guide you through the process. Just remember, suppliers are looking for you just as hard as you're looking for them.

Follow me on [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).



Brandon Green

Follow

I am a former investment banker who now spends his time exploring startup communities around the world, focusing on local philosophies in innovation, growth, and capital... **Read More**

[Site Feedback](#)

[Tips](#)

[Corrections](#)

[Reprints & Permissions](#)

[Terms](#)

[Privacy](#)

© 2020 Forbes Media LLC. All Rights Reserved.

[AdChoices](#)

ADVERTISEMENT