



Establishing a firm foothold in international markets is tough for many enterprises, but particularly difficult for mainland enterprises that face many uncertainties and lots of competition.

Senta Plastic Products Co Ltd in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, faced the same problem when it was set up 10 years ago. However, starting from 2006, Senta successfully made use of Hong Kong's well established status and mature business environment as an international hub and gained international buyers' attention by using the Hong Kong Trade Development Council's (TDC) 3-in-1 promotional platform consisting of exhibitions, product magazines and online advertising at tdctrade.com.

One-stop promotion

helps enterprise step on International Stage



◀▲ Senta's production line and machinery for manufacturing stationery products in the Quanzhou factory

TDC research shows that 90% of international buyers use at least three channels, including exhibitions, product magazines and online portals, to source suppliers. Thus it is crucial to maintain high visibility in all three channels when promoting a product.

The Senta success story reflects the fact that TDC's 3-in-1 total marketing solution – combining exhibitions, tdctrade.com and print magazines – effectively promotes suppliers and enterprises to international buyers.

Sourcing website is business bridge

The 14-year-old company's core business is the production of all kinds of stationery products, including pencil boxes, sharpeners, writing boards, stationery sets, office stationery, gifts and premiums.

"We previously concentrated mainly on the domestic market, but were dragged into serious debt by several distributors," General Manager Gong Rui Xue recalls. "Three years ago, we decided to go overseas and shift our business focus from domestic sales to exports."

Senta initially adopted the common export strategy used by many small- to medium-sized factories – getting orders through mainland's export trading companies and producing products in its own factory.

However, Ms Gong soon discovered that the trading companies were reluctant to disclose client information and data, which blocked useful communications between the manufacturer and the buyers and convinced Senta to open its own markets overseas.

"We went through a lot of difficulties during the changes from concentrating on the domestic market to working with export trading companies, and finally opening up international markets," she says.

"Our experiences taught us that we have to understand a market in order to gain a share, but we needed a bridge such as a business platform in order to understand the market."

Ms Gong then discovered the TDC trade portal, www.tdctrade.com, which was ideal because it already had more than 660,000 registered buyers, where more than 70% international visits are from Europe and the US.

"This strong and comprehensive user base ensures our products can easily reach far-away international buyers, which immediately shortens the distance between both parties," Ms Gong explains.

"More enquiries from buyers enabled us to know a lot more about their needs and requirements, which helped tremendously in various areas such as research and development, product improvement, company strategy and adjustment."

Senta became a tdctrade.com advertiser in February 2006, and Ms Gong has no hesitation in praising the service. "The search engine is simple and easy-to-use, letting buyers search for their desired products by simply punching in key words, regions, product categories, company names, product brand names, industry categories or export markets," she notes. "Details of targeted suppliers such as company profiles and product information appear on screen almost simultaneously."



Quality is more important than quantity

Besides advertising on tdctrade.com, Senta also participated in TDC's Gifts & Premiums Fair and other exhibitions in order to enjoy face-to-face contact with buyers.

The online sourcing platform established an important and profitable communication link between Senta and overseas buyers, while also allowing the company to prepare itself for exhibitions and trade fairs.

Ms Gong admits the firm did initially hesitate when it came to choosing the right exhibitions. "There are a lot of exhibitions being held on the mainland – the crucial element is choosing the right one," she says. "Participating in a poor-quality exhibition only wastes effort and money."

She points out that the number of visiting buyers is in fact a secondary consideration when it comes to choosing an exhibition. "What we want is quality rather than quantity," she stresses. "We need high-quality buyers, who can maintain long-term business relationships with us, and the TDC exhibitions obviously possess this advantage."

Senta now participates in the Hong Kong Gifts & Premiums Fair organised by TDC each year, having discovered that the innovative "customised on-site tdctrade.com sourcing service" is a 'point-to-point' channel that allows buyers and suppliers to get into contact with each other quickly, easily and efficiently.

"Before and during an exhibition, TDC will collect the sourcing need of registered buyers and their interested products, and give them their customised exhibitor and supplier list."

"A list of enquiring buyers is also sent to exhibitors for follow-up after the show, further enhancing its effectiveness and value from the company viewpoint," Ms Gong avers.

Magazines promote brand names and capabilities

The success of both the tdctrade.com platform and the TDC magazines encouraged Senta to launch its own SENTA and CHIRK brands in order to attract more attention and interest from sizeable customers.

The company also placed full-page and half-page advertisements in TDC's Hong Kong Gifts, Premiums and Stationery magazine earlier this year in 2007 in order to boost awareness of both brands. "TDC has more than 40 offices around the world and participates in important international trade fairs," Ms Gong advises.

TDC's 14 product magazines are distributed through these channels to targeted buyers all over the world. "I believe this is a very strong promotional force for us," she maintains. "The two new brands have received increasing enquiries from big buyers, indicating a promising future."

Senta has thus invaded international markets by taking advantage of the TDC's one-stop promotional platform – advertising on tdctrade.com, participating in the Hong Kong Gifts & Premiums Fair and advertising in Hong Kong Gifts, Premiums and Stationery magazine.

"These three channels provide useful and effective promotional tools for companies like ours," Ms Gong concludes. "They pave the way for us to explore international markets, attracting and gaining buyers from all areas."

◀ Senta's plastic products are available in various colours and styles

Bringing together suppliers and buyers



The customised tdctrade.com sourcing service helps 540,000 international visitors to local TDC trade fairs conduct precise product searches.

It provides buyers with a supplier list that contains such essential information as the booth number, product name and photo, which helps them maximise precious sourcing time at TDC exhibitions.

The innovative service has been enthusiastically received by buyers, who made more than 2,000,000 product enquiries since the customised tdctrade.com sourcing service was in operation in March 2007.

In addition, TDC's online sourcing platform and print advertisers receive a full list of relevant buyers who have enquired about their products.

These carefully-integrated initiatives bring together suppliers and buyers, resulting in mutually-beneficial business.

Further details can be obtained by telephoning (852) 1830668 or emailing sourcing@tdc.org.hk

TDC's online sourcing service: <http://sourcing.tdctrade.com>