



## Is being a woman a barrier to international business?

One company director's experience of cultural differences, making contacts and building a business on the global stage

[International](#) trading is a big part of the enterprise that my business partner and I run.

The universal relevance of our product range, which appeals to audiences across sectors including medical and eco-friendly, meant that from the beginning we saw every reason to give our company an international reach. Our cartons carry five different languages, and we currently ship to 62 countries, working with distributors in 25 different territories.

We have made strong partnerships with distributors all over the world and with our global customer base, both of whom have been instrumental in building the business that Yes Yes Yes has become. [UKTI](#) also helped by offering us brilliant coaching in international trade, and organising visits for us to meet distributors in various territories under their [Passport to Export](#) scheme.

We then undertook a hugely constructive New York trade mission arranged by Santander's [Breakthrough programme](#), which introduced us to key trade representatives in the US market. Today, I am pleased to say the company has blossomed worldwide.

But did being female affect our chances of success? Such a question seems ridiculous in the 21st century, but when the current social landscape is considered it appears less so. [Female board members are still heavily outnumbered by men](#) and in many countries across the world women are encouraged to conform to outdated stereotypes and roles. So with this in mind, did we find establishing a presence globally a tall order?

The short answer, reassuringly, is no.

As professional women growing a business our challenges have not been any different from those that men would encounter. In my experience, in order to succeed in the commercial world you need to have a shared set of values with whoever you are working with. The issue is not one of gender, but of professional integrity, proven competence, sector expertise and depth of experience.

After all, business is driven by money, so a good businessman (or woman) will always appreciate sound investments and enriching partnerships, irrespective of gender. It simply should not be an issue.

My business partner I have been the founders and creators of all aspects of our products and business from day one. We both have a background in pharmaceuticals, and through using this expertise to create a range of innovative products with international patents, gaining visibility through exhibiting at influential trade shows and our drive to be a global business, we have established ourselves on the international stage.

The strategy for growing The Yes Yes Company in international markets was to develop and nurture robust business relationships. To this end, we used no delegates or third parties when meeting potential partners. Everything possible was done face-to-face by us, building associations of trust and mutual advantage.

We think that not only should the business aims of our partners match ours, but our ethical goals should also be aligned. With this in mind, another essential element of successful exporting is researching the cultural, commercial and regulatory environments of a different region.

Our visit to New York was integral in helping us establish contacts we would have otherwise been unable to meet, not only growing our network but our knowledge of the industry. We endeavour to grow contacts in this way across every market we operate in as it not only expands understanding of the region but provides you with friends in the sector who can share advice, tactics and resources for mutual gain.

Observing the fundamental principles of good business practice will lay the foundations for not just women but all those involved in business, to establish them successfully without discrimination.

A sound business proposition and a relationship that inspires confidence are the most important things that can be brought to the table when trading internationally. This is what you will be judged on – not your looks, your ideology or your gender, but your ability.

If this is not the case, then it is safe to say the person on the other side of that table is not a business person and not someone who deserves your time and investment.

*Susi Lennox is alchymical director at [The Yes Yes Company Ltd](#)*