

40 Random Tips for Emailing China Suppliers

Since 2001, I've worked with Chinese suppliers in manufacturing and importing for the retail and promotional product industries. Over the years, I learned these effective email tips and still use them on a daily basis.

I want to share these tips with you. Please let me know your feedback on this list, thank you.

Jacob Yount
Tel: 252-515-2195
jacob@JLmade.com

For more helpful information on China importing for the retail and promotional product industries, please visit: www.JacobYount.com

- 1.) Use your supplier's first name. Everyone has a name and likes when you use it. Their first name is not "Hi".
- 2.) "Hi" is usually a sign that you're shopping out your quote. Suppliers know you are shopping out your quote, just don't make it obvious, got it?
- 3.) Don't bcc your supplier and send the email to yourself. Another obvious sign that you did not only email this one supplier, but again, you shopped them out...and didn't care how obvious you were at it!
- 4.) Even worse are those buyers who do not even have the courtesy to bcc the supplier but they cc them along with many other suppliers!

Talk about showing supplier loyalty...sheesh!

5.) Make the email subject line relevant. Most suppliers use their inbox as their to-do list and their inbox becomes their ONLY filing system.

If the subject line is something that's used in-house between you and your buyers, then it has nothing to do with what the supplier is handling.

An email with an irrelevant subject line, risks being overlooked.

6.) Copy in as many people as you want; colleagues, 3rd party providers, whoever, but just don't expect your supplier to understand the reply-all phenomena.

I've worked with China suppliers since 2001 and the reply-all concept is often overlooked. When to reply-all and when not to is not grasped.

Make it your own responsibility to forward the message to the pertinent parties.

Time out*: I've seen it where a buyer was cc'ing in their client on certain aspects of the product development phase; sort of letting the end-user in on the process and also getting their input.

But then the supplier over used the reply-all button and even divulged sensitive price info over to the end-user that should've been between the buyer and the supplier only.

7.) There is a blackhole in front of China that causes a large portion of emails not to arrive to suppliers' inboxes. Perhaps it has something to do with the Great Fire Wall of China. Perhaps it has to

do with your supplier has 6,843 emails in their inbox and doesn't categorize anything (see above point #5).

Either way, follow-up with your supplier via Skype or [QQ](#) and make sure they received the message.

Otherwise, you will wait 3 days to know they have not seen your email.

8.) Be mindful of the fact that most of your email is going to be misunderstood.

Chinese suppliers typically read emails in a flurry of an overview and very few points are digested. If you provide 5 points for the supplier to comment on, it's common they will comment on a few of the points and ignore the others.

9.) If some points can wait, hold them until a follow-up email. Putting too many points in a single email will be fruitless unless your purpose is to just let the points hang for a next email copy-and-paste.

If you have 10 pending points and if time allows, consider dividing that up into 3 emails, spaced out by a day or so.

10.) At the same time, you don't want to send new info on a daily basis to your supplier. This will water down the project and [make your inquiries and your communication pack less of a punch.](#)

The supplier will just think you are a "rambler" and will ignore what you are saying. Suppliers hear a lot of noise on a daily basis from potential clients who do not order. Make yourself stand out.

11.) Having the above point in mind, think about the project before you send an email. You want your emails to not be too long or to be too short. You want to avoid multiple email threads flying around. Before you send the email, think of any questions you have and any loose ends you can tie off.

12.) If you have 10 pending points / questions, see what you can answer yourself. Too often, buyers treat their supplier like they are Google or a customs database. Instead of asking your supplier what testing is required, do the research yourself.

Remember, the supplier is not a virtual assistant who has the job of reminding, updating and organizing all of your information.

13.) Speak in specifics not generalities.

Instead of saying: We must hit the delivery time!!!!

Say: Please confirm we are still on track for the goods to leave the factory on May 15.

Instead of saying: Why was the last price cheaper?

Say: The quoted price from last week was \$2.00 and today's quote is \$2.18 - please explain why the difference.

You do not want your emails to cause the supplier to have to hunt through their messy files.

14.) But more importantly, you want to speak in a "record format" or "start-to-finish" format.

You want to look at your own emails as a **PATH** and a record of fact. Not general questions where both sides can lose the context.

15.) Have “calls to action” in your email. Your supplier should be able to read the email in a reasonable timeframe and know exactly what you are asking them to do.

The supplier should not have to waste time trying to find your **KEY POINTS**.

I’ve seen it many times: buyer thinks they’ve confirmed “x”, supplier is still waiting for buyer to confirm “x”.

In the buyer’s mind and even possibly in their words, they **GAVE** the confirmation, but it was not written in a direct, matter-of-fact format.

16.) Avoid speaking in a passive format using “filler words”.

Instead of saying: Well, we’ve decided that now would be the best time for us to go ahead and to start the samples.”

Say: I give confirmation to **START** the samples. Please email the sample invoice”.

Speak direct, to the point, again, give clear calls to action.

17.) Do not take silence as agreement or confirmation. If the supplier did not acknowledge the point then it’s very likely they did not comprehend the point or entirely missed the point. This point **STILL** needs to be confirmed by your side!

18.) Keep track of what email points were ignored and resend those points in a follow-up email and inform the supplier that these outstanding points need to be commented on.

19.) Avoid abbreviations. I recommend even getting rid of "asap". It kills me when I see a client type EOD to a suppliers in the People's Republic of China.

Do you want your supplier scratching their head and wasting time searching for an abbreviation meaning or do you want them focused on quoting and producing the product?

20.) Spell out your dates. May 18 instead of 5/18 as the Americans write or 18/5 as the Europeans write. The Chinese write their dates like 2015/18/05 (understood as 2015年5月15日) - see where the confusion may fall?

21.) Avoid in-house speak. This may be terminology you use within your own company and use with your buyers.

If you use the in-house speak with your supplier it may mean nothing or even worse be visual and verbal clutter that will detract from the key points you need to get across.

If something is not important or pertinent to your supplier, then do not continue to say it.

Eliminate meaningless clutter from your brief/RFQ/wording.

22.) Avoid slang, jargon and cutesy phrases. Local speak does not translate well and it will add more clutter to the email, potentially causing the important points to be overlooked.

The most common slang phrase you think will be harmless may actually cause further misunderstanding.

Communicating with China vendors is already difficult. Do not add to the difficulty.

23.) Never use sarcasm in an email to your China vendor. It will cause misunderstandings and time loss. Even worse, what may be considered as harmless sarcasm from your side may be unprofessional mocking from their point of view.

Get rid of it, wise guy (or gal)!

24.) Eliminate emotionally-charged language from your emails.

You are emailing a supplier not Dr. Phil.

Get rid of words like "happy, disappointed, awesome, concerned".

Instead of think in terms of "samples are confirmed. we confirm this. we do not confirm that. the quality is rejected".

If you receive samples, do not act like a screaming fan who is meeting the Beatles for the first time and say, "We ABSOLUTELY LOVE the samples".

How about just saying? "We confirm the samples"

Passion is fine but show your passion in your professionalism and your order volume, not in over-the-top, hyperbolic language.

25.) Avoid contractions. Instead of “don’t, can’t and shouldn’t”, use do not, cannot and should not.

26.) Repeat the noun instead of using pronouns or try to limit your pronouns.

You do not want your supplier spending time trying to figure what “it” refers to.

Spend the extra 1 second to retype the word.

27.) Repeat words when necessary. When speaking about color and it could refer to either the material or the logo, do not just keep saying “color”, but clarify, “material color”.

Add qualifiers to words when possible.

28.) Avoid compound sentences or anything that looks like a run-on sentence. Shorten the sentences as much as possible.

Do not think you are being unprofessional in doing this.

Make new bullet points.

29.) Emails to suppliers should not be a stream of consciousness. The supplier is not sitting inside of your mind, understanding all things as you ramble off.

Speak in a start-to-finish format.

Point A, Point B, Conclusion.

30.) The purpose of that start-to-finish format is, is that it will act as a running to-do list between you and the supplier.

“You mean I have to make a to-do list for my supplier?”

No, you don't have to, but leaving it up to them... it won't get done either.

This running to-do list also acts as a checklist to assure that everything you requested was answered/provided/actioned by the vendor.

Because of sloppy emails, buyers frequently forget what they asked or confirmed.

31.) Since, after reading my enlightening tips, you will write points in what I've called a “record format” (or to-do list or start-to-finish format), then use BULLET POINTS.

Get rid of blobby, monstrous paragraphs with run-on sentences.

Think “Dick and Jane” short and to the point sentences...right Spot?

32.) At the same time, avoid “cave man grunt” 1 word or 2 word answers. If the supplier asks you a question and even though it may be a “yes or no” question, do not give them a yes or no answer.

Qualify your yes or or no.

*Time Out: Here is an example of caveman grunt scenario:

Supplier emails client and says: *See attached color, is this correct?*

Client answers in a caveman grunt from iPhone: *No, that's not correct.*

NOW WHAT? Do you want to continue playing a guessing game with the supplier? This kind of 1-word or 1-phrase answer is what causes delays or is what causes the supplier to choose their own route, which will many times be incorrect.

The more effective answer would be to say that color is not correct and then show, demonstrate or re-explain the correct color.

33.) List how many attachments you are putting in the email and have the supplier confirm they received all attachments you are sending.

If there is a critical attachment and it falls into the blackhole, you will never know, until it's too late.

Buyer: Why was that logo not included in the artwork?

Vendor: We never received the file.

34.) Have the supplier CONFIRM they can OPEN the attachment. Let's say you send critical artwork in a certain file and other pieces of the artwork in other files.

The supplier may confirm they received the file but are not able to open it. They may never tell you they could not open it and therefore do not incorporate it into the sample and then you've lost 2 weeks... seen it happen, honest!

35.) Give your attachments proper names. Make sure jpegs you email are not named DSC0114993.

Name the files according to what you are intending to demonstrate.

36.) It's an email, not a chat.

Although it is not always avoidable, try to avoid rapid-firing 1-question or 1-comment emails.

Too much back and forth will muddle the thinking of the key points and main topics of the project. For rapid fire chatting, move it over to QQ or Skype.

37.) In the same vein, avoid sending too lengthy of emails.

Emails should be clear, concise, points of direction, not sending the supplier "War and Peace".

If a lengthy description is required, consider putting it into a Word doc and attaching it in the email.

This way, the supplier will give the Word Doc. a different degree of importance.

38.) Whenever possible, avoid words.

What?!?! How to avoid using words?

By using visuals, images, mockups, PDF files with big red arrows pointing to what you want.

Key point: Avoid trying to DESCRIBE what you are thinking, instead SHOW what you want.

39.) Just like you do not like it when a supplier ignores your questions, do not ignore their questions.

Even if the question is unclear, mundane or you feel you have gone over the answer 100 times already.

Answer again with patience and clarity.

The burden to avoid danger lies on your shoulders.

If you do not assure the supplier is clear, they may proceed on a wrong path and produce incorrect product.

40.) "If any questions, call me".

If your supplier does not normally call you on the phone, then why say this?

How about,

"Confirm if each point is clear. If something is not clear, tell me and I will elaborate".

A BIG THANK YOU for taking time to read this. Let me know if you have any points to add. Contact to me discuss your China projects and let me know if I may be of help.

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