

Working in International Business

International business, in broadest terms, is any business activity that occurs between people or organizations from different countries. In actual practice, there are many different kinds of international business carried on between different kinds of people and companies.

Before deciding whether a career in international business is right for you, you must first decide whether a career in business is right for you. There are literally hundreds of different jobs in business, each involving different activities, skills, and aptitudes. But in essence, all businesses have a common goal: to provide a product or service to a customer. And in most cases, businesses seek to do so at a profit, an exception being for nonprofit businesses such as public hospitals or other nonprofit organizations.

The specific activities businesses perform can be grouped broadly into eight categories: **accounting, finance, purchasing, logistics, production, marketing, personnel, and management.** In addition to these basic activities common to all businesses, most firms also conduct research and service activities. In most large businesses a person tends to specialize and work in one of these areas. In smaller firms, a person may often be involved in more than one of these areas.

International business can be an exciting and rewarding career. Students may work in international or domestic positions with private companies, governments or other organizations. Though most international careers require extensive travel, some are home-based. As with any professional career, a relevant college degree is necessary, along with business skills, foreign language skills and an ability to adapt to many different cultures.

Since most corporations do not assign managerial employees to internationally oriented projects until employees learn the nature of the employer's business and prove themselves in domestic assignments, it is wise for students to take advanced coursework in a career-oriented functional area such as finance or marketing. Some recent graduates work as international documentation specialists for freight

forwarders or customs house brokers. Others gain practical overseas experience through short-term teaching assignments in emerging countries or Peace Corps volunteer work. Once this practical experience has been obtained, exciting international assignments may await.

Examples of Entry-Level Positions

International Trade Documentation Specialist

This person expedites import or export documents for transportation intermediary companies such as freight forwarders or customs house brokers or for commercial banks. This individual is aided by a knowledge of specialized legal regulations, foreign languages, international trade credit practices and business customs in other countries. Normally, the regulatory specifics related to international transportation are learned on the job.

Staff Consultant or Research Analyst

This position requires the ability to interact with decision-makers by providing advice on the implementation of new managerial support systems as well as background data on new business opportunities. Although these positions start out with solely domestically related projects, they evolve to require ability in assessing data for internationally oriented business opportunities. Thus, familiarity with language, area studies and international business practices will be an asset. A functional concentration in business computer systems, finance, or marketing would improve an individual's chances of obtaining this type of position.

Marketing Representative

This position is typically oriented to the development of sales for manufacturers or service companies. If the representative works for a company that has international marketing activities, the representative may request international marketing responsibilities such as the development of relationships with agents, dealers, distributors, licensees and/or strategic alliance partner firms in other countries. Typically, such opportunities develop after a proven period of success in developing one or more segments of the domestic market. A concentration in marketing is a helpful complement to an international business major for this type of position.