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Title	The selection of an agent and the relationship development Finnish SMEs on the Swedish market		
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Abstract

The process of finding an agent is an interesting area for research, when the company in question is a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) with scarce resources. The SMEs do not have as much resources available, as large companies, and the knowledge within the company is often rather limited. Whether the finding of an agent succeeds or fails, can be very crucial for a SME. The research question of the study is "How does SMEs find an agent and what are the ways of developing the relationship". The sub-problems of the research are the following:

1. What are the measures that can be used when choosing an agent?
2. What are the ways of committing the agent?
3. How does the relationship between the manufacturer and the agent evolve?

The main findings of the research were that it is also possible to find an agent through old acquaintances and so that the agent contacts the manufacturer and not the other way around. It is, however, important that the companies have some criteria that they are looking for when searching for an agent. The criteria of the case companies were: vast nets of contacts, activeness, complementary products, being financially sound, and being trustworthy.

Committing the agent to the relationship is given a lot of attention in literature but the interviewed case companies had not used many ways of committing their agents. The ways that the companies had used were: giving product training, giving exclusive dealing rights, keeping in touch daily concerning market changes and everyday business, having sales targets for each year, and trusting the counterparty. The relationships between the case companies and their agents had developed differently, for reasons that can be: the companies had found their agents in dissimilar ways, they used different ways of committing the agent, and the companies emphasised diverse things in the relationship.

Companies that are planning to internationalise through an agent, should reserve time for finding the best possible one. The company should choose the criteria it would like the agent to possess and compare those to the agents on the market. The process takes less time than before the internet era, but it still is resource consuming. Time should also be reserved to go and meet the agent personally, so that the facilities of the agent can be checked and to find out if the manufacturer can personally get along with the agent. The backgrounds of the agent should be carefully checked to verify that the agent is what s/he says to be. The importance of committing the agent should not be understated in the companies: by committing the agent the relationship lasts longer and disagreements can be solved in a constructive way.

Key words	agent, distributor, SME, commitment, agent-manufacturer relationship
Further information	