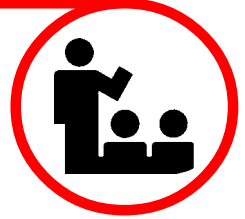


# Export-Import Specialists



## Occupational Brief Title Codes:

- D.O.T.: 184.117-022
- G.O.E.: 11.05.02
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- O\*NET™: 11-3071.02
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## Occupational Subtitles:

- Customs Brokers
- Export-Import Managers
- Freight Forwarding Professionals
- Import-Export Agents
- Wholesalers

## Work Classification Based Related

### D.O.T. Occupations:

- Airport Managers
- Operations Managers
- Traffic Managers
- Warehouse Managers

## Interests Based Related

### G.O.E. Occupations:

- Contracts Managers
- Department Managers
- Tariff Publishing Agents
- World Trade and Maritime Division Managers

## Skills Based Related

### O\*NET Occupations:

- Purchasing Managers
- Sales Managers
- Storage and Distribution Managers
- Wholesale and Retail Buyers

## Noteworthy Quote:

*“As an Importer-Exporter, I have the opportunity to travel all over the world. I get to meet many interesting people while experiencing new and exciting cultures. The reward comes from knowing that you are providing people with a quality product at an affordable price.”*

– **Monty Kim, Importer/Exporter, Sportage For Men, Queens, New York**

**Export-import specialists** (‘ex-port-`im-port `spe-cial-ists) arrange, coordinate, and direct the export and import of industrial and consumer goods and services between the United States and other countries.

Today, business and commerce are global. Goods leave the ports or airports of one country, travel great distances, and enter the ports or airports of others. Each year, the United States and other countries export and import thousands of products and services. Products may include raw materials such as coal; tin; copper; rubber; and oil. Agricultural products may include wheat; corn; soybeans; and cotton. Services may include travel expenditures; charges for transporting goods; royalties and licensing fees for intellectual property, such as the use of patents, techniques, processes, formulas, designs, know-how, trademarks, copyrights, franchises, and manufacturing rights; as well as management, scientific, technical, educational, medical, insurance, telecommunications, and financial services.

Trading between countries is complex business. Goods imported or exported are subject to varied and constantly changing taxes, laws, and regulations which apply in the exporting and importing countries. Special packaging and handling are necessary because all goods must go through customs and inspections. Payment may be in the currency of any country doing business. To make sure shipments move smoothly and legally, many companies hire export-import specialists to handle the global buying and selling of raw materials and finished products.

## Work Performed

In general, export-import specialists arrange for the marketing and distribution of goods and services to or from other countries. Exact duties and titles, however, vary with employer and industry.

**Import-export agents** manage the activities of import-export firms that handle either imports or exports for clients in the United States or abroad. Acting on behalf of their clients, they serve as buyers or sellers of goods, manufacturers’ representatives, or licensed overseas distributors. These companies may deal in many different goods from one country, or from one part of the world. Others deal in one product, such as farm machines, lumber, or leather goods.

Import-export agents serve as intermediaries and coordinate settlements between foreign and domestic buyers and sellers. They plan the delivery of goods and supervise workers in shipping and receiving departments. They may negotiate with foreign shippers to arrange reciprocal freight handling agreements. They oversee the assessment of import and export taxes and the granting of entry permits. Import-export agents oversee the preparation of documents such as shipping papers, manifests, invoices, insurance forms, and other papers required for customs clearance. They may examine invoices and shipping manifests to see that they conform to tariff and customs regulations. They may also talk to customs officials about delays in the release of shipments.

**Freight forwarding professionals** advise clients of the best rates, routes, and modes of transporting goods to or from any place in the world. Using the vast

resources at their disposal, forwarders move products by the most timely and cost-effective means. Freight forwarders deal with regulations such as foreign documentation requirements, hazardous materials rules, government regulations, special packaging or handling restrictions, and licensing provisions. Using customized services to fit the clients' operational needs, forwarders coordinate arrangements for storage, pick-and-pack operations, consolidations, or full-container movements to provide clients with true door-to-door service.

**Customs brokers** deal with shipments that come through customs from abroad to American firms or individuals. These brokers (licensed by the United States Customs) serve as the go-between for the importer and the United States Customs Service. Some importers do the brokering in-house. Most use an outside broker. For the most part, brokers deal with the physical movement of goods through the applicable agencies. They advise importers on import guidelines and new customs Modernization Act regulations. They estimate duties (costs charged by the government) and present documentation meeting customs regulations on behalf of these importers.

Customs brokers check shipping papers to see that they are correct and meet tariff quotas and customs laws. They prepare and file the entry papers with the United States Customs Service. Entry papers may include bills of lading, airway bills, or certificates naming the broker as the shipper's agent. Brokers accept and check cargo invoices and packing lists. They arrange payment of duties and taxes. If a shipment fails to meet entry rules, they work with customs specialists to clear up the trouble.

Brokers may also arrange delivery of the goods to the importer. They may arrange storage of goods in a bonded warehouse and pay storage fees. Brokers may bill shippers or foreign carriers. They may pay in advance for American importers or pay through letters of credit from the importers.

**Export-import managers** direct foreign sales activities for a single employer. They negotiate sales and distribution contracts and arrange payment for exported and imported goods. These managers handle details involved in the transport of goods such as licensing agreements, customs declarations, and packing and shipping.

Managers deal with foreign buyers, federal agents, freight forwarding companies, and warehouses to arrange shipping, air, freight, and other forms of transport. They direct staff who prepare and mail foreign language correspondence, sales literature, bid requests, and other papers. In tracking the movement of goods, they deal with their employer's customs brokers, shipping agents, the United States Customs Service, and others engaged in transporting goods for the company.

**Wholesalers** work in two ways. Some buy or sell large amounts of goods on the orders of firms in the United States or of firms abroad. Others buy goods and store them in a

warehouse. Later, they sell them to whoever meets the price.

Some wholesalers handle both imports and exports. Others concentrate on only one. They may be experts in the goods of one or of many countries. Wholesalers may buy consumer goods such as clothing or jewelry. Others may deal in grain, oil, lumber, or farm machines. They keep buyers informed of the goods they have on hand.

When they sell American goods, wholesalers get the prices and other facts from the American manufacturers and pass them on to the foreign buyers. They may handle all or part of this business through an agent, a freight forwarder, or a customs broker. They work with truck, rail, air, and shipping firms to get the goods to their customers. They work with the United States Customs Service and with foreign customs to arrange delivery of the goods they sell.

### **Working Conditions**

Import-export agents usually work in comfortable offices or customs buildings. Customs brokers usually work in offices near customs offices at airports or near docks. Export managers have an office in or near their company plant. Wholesalers have an office in their warehouse as a rule, and may spend much time in the warehouse itself. Some export-import specialists travel a great deal.

Export-import specialists direct staff and deal with other people in person or by telex, computer, FAX machine, or other communications equipment. At times, when emergencies and misunderstandings arise between buyers and sellers or with other agencies, these workers may be under heavy pressure.

### **Hours and Earnings**

Most export-import specialists work regular business hours, Monday through Friday. Their hours may vary, however, to meet scheduled shipments of goods, or to handle a mix-up or other emergency. Travel may also take place at any time as needed.

Earnings for export-import specialists vary substantially, depending upon the level of managerial responsibility, length of service, education, firm size, location, and industry. Import-export agents, customs brokers, and freight forwarding professionals, for instance, may work on commission, which is generally about 10 percent of the total value of each transaction. The income of wholesalers often also depends on how much business they do. Export-import managers and other salaried export-import specialists generally earn wages similar to other managing positions, which often fall around \$50,000 or more a year.

Exact figures for export-import specialists are not readily available. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2002, earnings for transportation, storage, and distribution

managers (including export-import specialists) range anywhere from \$34,000 a year to well over \$100,000 a year. Half earned between \$45,000 and \$79,000 a year. The overall average was just under \$60,000 a year.

Benefits vary with employer, but generally include health and life insurance, pension plan, and paid holiday, sick, and vacation time. Some export-import specialists who buy and sell products and services may also earn a bonus in addition to their pay.

### **Education and Training**

Foreign trade, whether imports or exports, demands people with a knowledge of foreign countries, business and commerce, and the customs laws. College is the best way to prepare for most export-import specialty work. A degree in transportation management, business administration, logistics, or economics will be useful. A degree in accounting or international business is also suitable. A multidisciplinary program combining business and international studies is another good choice. Many management positions in this field, for instance, are held by people with a master's in business administration with an emphasis in international trade.

Basic courses include accounting, marketing, finance, logistics, international economics, business law, political science, world history, and world geography. Many of these programs offer a semester abroad. Fluency in important trade languages, such as Spanish, French, German, Russian, Chinese (Mandarin), or Arabic, is a definite advantage.

In addition to a college education, special courses, workshops, seminars, and certification programs that deal with the requirements for doing business abroad are frequently offered by large firms, colleges and universities, and professional societies. Course subjects often include export operations; export documentation; export marketing and promotion; import operation/customs brokerage; import regulations and documentation; customs duties; customs law issues; export/import letter of credit; fundamentals of international business; traffic management; insurance; international air cargo transportation; and maritime law.

One of the well-known educational institutes in this field is the World Trade Institute (WTI) of Pace University, the educational arm of the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey. The institute conducts seminars, courses, and conferences on international business and finance for business and professional people throughout the United States. It offers a certificate program in international trade. Students may receive a general certificate or specialize in import operations, export operations, or international transportation. WTI also offers a customs broker license preparation program. Five of the institute's international trade courses may even be applied toward a

Bachelor of Arts degree in Language, Culture, and World Trade awarded by Pace University.

### **Licensing, Certification, and Professional Societies**

The United States Customs Service grants the required licenses to those who pass an extensive written examination for customs brokers. In addition, firms that export military equipment, nuclear fissionable materials, and some other items must have an export license, which they get from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The export-import business is promoted by several organizations. Examples include the American Association of Exporters and Importers; the National Foreign Trade Council; the United States Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel; the Association of Ship Brokers and Agents (U.S.A.); and the American Import Shippers Association. These groups offer their members government advocacy, latest news and developments, and networking and educational opportunities. In addition to these other services, the National Customs Brokers and Forwarders Association of America also offers the Certified Ocean Forwarder Program for supervisory and management level ocean freight forwarders.

### **Personal Qualifications**

Export-import specialists should be mature, highly motivated, intelligent, and decisive. The ability to communicate persuasively, both orally and in writing is vital. They need tact, good judgment, and exceptional ability to establish and maintain effective personal and professional relationships. Strong foreign language skills are important, as well as the ability to adapt to various cultural differences. They should also be able to handle many details at once, and deal with long hours and the pressure of emergencies and misunderstandings.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

### **Where Employed**

Export-import specialists work in seaports, airports, and other places where freight enters and leaves the country. Some major trade cities are New York, Miami, Boston, New Orleans, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, Seattle, Tacoma, San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles. They also work in the cities and towns where manufacturers make the goods or where manufacturers have headquarters.

Export-import specialists may work for shipping and trading firms, transport companies that export by air, land, or water; freight forwarders; and import-export management companies that arrange the shipping and storage of

goods for other companies. Other employers include oil companies, manufacturers, airlines, warehouse firms, trucking firms, banks, producers of agricultural products, and department store chains. One of the oldest and largest American export houses is W.R. Grace and Company.

### **Employment Outlook**

The outlook for export-import specialists is excellent. For almost all countries, international business accounts for an ever-increasing percentage of their economy. The United States is the largest trading nation in the world. The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has gradually abolished nearly all trade barriers between the United States, Mexico, and Canada, has encouraged increased trade among these countries. Trade with Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East is also growing as these nations open up export channels as a result of political shifts.

To some extent, however, the availability of jobs depends on the industry. Employment in the wholesale textile industry, for instance, may be difficult to find, whereas work with a computer or telecommunications consulting firm may be plentiful. Overall, college graduates with related experience, strong communication skills, and computer skills to conduct business on the Internet should have the best job opportunities.

### **Entry Methods**

College graduates may find help obtaining a job through their school's placement office. Those who complete a certificate program may find employment leads through the program's sponsor. Organizations that promote international trade often maintain job posting services. Job seekers should have a resume of their college background and work experience to present to potential employers.

Newly hired workers may start as clerks, aides, or supportive personnel. They may work in the warehouse of a firm in foreign trade, or in the office of a shipping firm or customs broker. They often deal with routine export-import documentation, shipping forms, and letters for foreign clients. They may also process papers to keep track of shipments.

### **Advancement**

In a large firm, export-import managers may advance to higher management jobs. They may become international sales managers, or vice presidents of overseas sales, for instance. Some export-import specialists advance to careers in international logistics (the science of moving goods), business, finance, or marketing. After years of experience and obtaining any necessary certification, export-import specialists may start their own business, or work as independent agents or customs brokers.

### **For Further Research**

**American Association of Exporters & Importers**, 1200 G Street, N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005. Web site: [www.aaei.org](http://www.aaei.org)

**National Customs Brokers & Forwarders Association of America, Inc.**, 1200 Eighteenth Street, N.W., #901, Washington, DC 20036. Web site: [www.ncbfaa.org](http://www.ncbfaa.org)

**World Trade Institute of Pace University**, 163 William Street, 21st Floor, New York, NY 10038. Web site: [www.wti.pace.edu](http://www.wti.pace.edu)

### **Acknowledgments**

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