




Selling Shoes to Korea: Lessons + 3 Fast Fixes

APICCAPS Webinar — 15 Minutes to Understanding Korean Buyers

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I decode Korea's B2B hidden O.S. of
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The Challenge

Why do Portuguese brands fail at fairs in Korea?

The Reality

Portuguese brands consistently produce exceptional footwear, world-class craftsmanship, premium materials, and competitive pricing. Yet at Korean trade shows, these same brands often struggle to generate meaningful buyer interest or secure purchase orders.

The disconnect isn't about product quality. It's about market readiness and cultural understanding.

Common Mistakes

- Wrong size runs that don't match Korean foot measurements
- Unclear brand stories that fail to resonate
- Slow follow-up that loses momentum with busy buyers
- Pricing presented in euros instead of Korean won



Korea Market Snapshot

Understanding Korean consumers is the first step to success. Korean shoe buyers are sophisticated, informed, and have specific preferences that drive purchasing decisions.

Style-Savvy Consumers

Korean consumers follow global trends while maintaining distinct aesthetic preferences. They value unique design and craftsmanship over mass-market appeal.

Comfort-Driven Decisions

All-day wearability is crucial. Koreans walk extensively and use public transportation, making comfort a non-negotiable feature.

Discovery Channels

Premium department stores like Lotte and Shinsegae, plus online platforms like Musinsa, drive brand discovery and purchasing.

Korean buyers prioritize **brand identity and reliability** over low prices. They're willing to pay premium prices for products that deliver consistent quality and align with their lifestyle values.

Case Study: Camper

From Quirky in Spain → Premium in Korea

Camper's Korean success story offers valuable insights for Portuguese brands. This Spanish footwear company transformed from a regional quirky brand into a premium lifestyle choice in Korea through strategic positioning and cultural adaptation.

1 — 1999: Market Entry

Camper enters Korea through premium department store partnerships, positioning as European craftsmanship brand.

2 — 2010s: Identity Building

Consistent brand messaging around comfort, creativity, and Mediterranean lifestyle resonates with Korean consumers.

3 — 2018: Cultural Collaboration

Partnership with Korean fashion label ADER ERROR creates local relevance while maintaining brand DNA.





Why Camper Works in Korea



Premium Distribution

Strategic placement in prestige department stores like Lotte and Shinsegae, plus select outlet locations. This distribution strategy reinforces premium positioning while maintaining accessibility.



Consistent Identity

Camper maintains its quirky, creative design philosophy without chasing seasonal trends. This consistency builds trust and recognition among Korean consumers who value authentic brands.



Cultural Relevance

The collaboration with Korean fashion label ADER ERROR demonstrated cultural understanding while staying true to brand DNA. This move resonated with younger Korean consumers.



All-Day Comfort

Camper's focus on ergonomic design and premium materials addresses Korean consumers' practical needs for comfortable footwear in urban environments.

Lesson From Camper

Koreans didn't buy Camper because of price

The key insight from Camper's success is that Korean consumers make purchasing decisions based on value perception, not price competition. They invested in Camper because the brand delivered on three critical factors that matter most to Korean buyers.

Comfort

All-day wearability for active urban lifestyles

Identity

Authentic brand story that resonates culturally

Cultural Bridge

Local collaborations that show market understanding

- ❏ **Key Takeaway:** Korean consumers are willing to pay premium prices for brands that understand their needs and demonstrate cultural respect through thoughtful localization efforts.

3 Fast Fixes for APICCAPS Members

Based on buyer feedback and successful brand case studies, here are three immediate improvements that will dramatically increase your chances of success in the Korean market.

1 Size Readiness

Korean consumers expect half sizes and specific size ranges. Add half sizes across your core models and focus heavily on the 230–250mm women's range, which represents the majority of Korean female consumers. This simple adjustment shows market understanding.

2 KRW Pricing Sheet

Present all wholesale and retail prices in Korean Won, not euros. Include clear documentation of EU-Korea FTA origin proof to demonstrate tariff advantages. This removes friction from buyer decision-making and shows professional market preparation.

3 24-Hour Follow-Up

Korean business moves fast. Always send your line sheet and origin statement via KakaoTalk within 24 hours of meeting. This responsiveness differentiates you from competitors and demonstrates serious commitment to the market.

First Buyer Interaction

Your first meeting with Korean buyers sets the tone for the entire relationship. Korean business culture values respect, preparation, and genuine interest in understanding their market needs.

01

Proper Introduction

Exchange business cards with both hands and a slight bow. This traditional gesture shows cultural respect and sets a positive foundation for the conversation.

03

Resist Immediate Discounting

Don't offer discounts during the first meeting. Korean buyers respect brands that maintain their value proposition and negotiate professionally.

02

Ask the Right Question

"What sells best to your customers?" This question demonstrates genuine interest in their business success rather than just pushing your products.

04

Professional Follow-Up

Send Korean-language line sheets and origin documentation via KakaoTalk within 24 hours. This shows efficiency and market readiness.

Quick Korea Checklist

Before attending your next Korean trade show or buyer meeting, ensure you have these five essentials prepared. This checklist represents the minimum market readiness standard for serious Korean market entry.



KRW Prices

All pricing in Korean Won with clear wholesale/retail breakdown



Korea Sizing

Half sizes available, focus on 230-250mm women's range



Korean Language Sheet Card

Have in 1 pager the information or line sheets in Korean language ready.



2 Hero Models

Focus presentation on your two strongest, most versatile styles



24h Follow-Up

KakaoTalk contact ready, line sheets prepared for immediate sending

Each element on this checklist addresses a specific pain point that Korean buyers have mentioned when working with European footwear brands.

Wrap Up + Next Step

You don't need to be Camper to succeed in Korea

Success in the Korean footwear market isn't about having the largest marketing budget or the most famous brand name. It's about demonstrating market readiness, cultural respect, and professional preparation.

The Reality

By implementing these three basic fixes (proper sizing, KRW pricing, and 24-hour follow-up) you'll immediately differentiate yourself from competitors who haven't done this homework.

Korean buyers are actively seeking new European brands that understand their market needs. **The opportunity is there for brands that show up prepared.**

Take Action

Ready to stress-test your Korea market-fit?

I offer a 10-day Korea Expansion Health Check™ specifically designed for European brands. This assessment identifies your readiness gaps and provides actionable recommendations for market entry success.

Contact APICCAPS for connection details.

Questions & Contact

Ready to Start?

Implement these three fixes before your next Korean buyer meeting. The difference in response will be immediately noticeable.

Need More Help?

Korea Expansion Health Check™: a 10-day readiness test with step-by-step fixes before you invest.

✓ **Fractional CMO/CSO:** hands-on partner to drive sales and market entry without full-time overhead.

Decide fast, act faster because Korea rewards speed and clarity.

Thank you for your time today

Your Portuguese craftsmanship expertise combined with Korean market understanding creates a powerful competitive advantage. The Korean footwear market is ready for brands that show up prepared and culturally aware.

