

Importing from Asia **end-to-end** reference

Five-stage operational reference covering the full path from specification through landed-in-market — supplier verification, samples, contracts, payment, QC, shipping, customs.

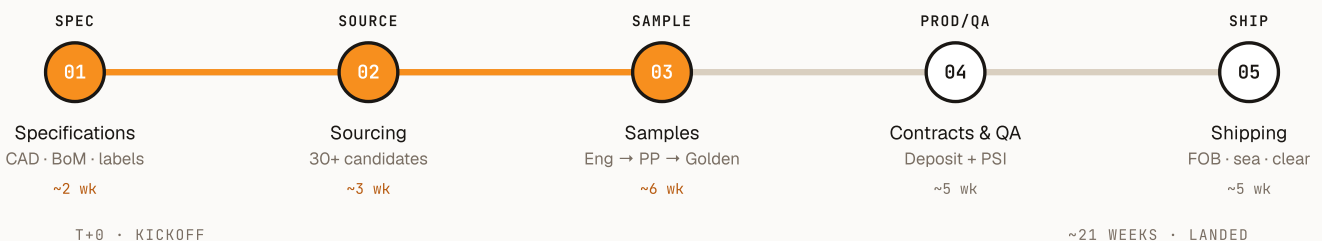
REVISION	ISSUED	OWNER	COMPANION
2.0	May 2026	Ideambox engineering	PDF reference

ABSTRACT

Importing a hardware product from Asia requires brief but real expertise in several adjacent disciplines: regulations, supplier qualification, quality control, contracts, Incoterms, HS codes, VAT. Most can be outsourced to forwarders, brokers, and inspection agents — but only by an importer who understands each well enough to evaluate the work.

This document covers the five operational stages: product specifications, supplier sourcing, product samples, agreement & QA, shipping & customs. Each section is the working reference an engineering team uses to run the round.

FIVE-PART IMPORT WORKFLOW — SPEC TO LANDED-IN-MARKET



FIVE-STAGE WORKFLOW FROM KICKOFF TO LANDED-IN-MARKET. TYPICAL TOTAL TIME: 18-24 WEEKS FOR A FIRST IMPORT.

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| 2. Supplier sourcing | 5. Shipping, taxes & customs |
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1. Product specifications

Before talking to a single supplier, the product must be written down precisely enough that two different factories quoting it would build the same thing.

1.1 Specification package (mandatory attachments)

FILE	PURPOSE	FORMAT
3D CAD (STEP)	Geometry	.step (preferred), .iges (fallback), native .sldprt
2D drawings	Tolerances, finishes, notes	PDF, multi-sheet
BoM	Every line item with sourcing	.xlsx with revision row
Label files	Print-ready artwork	.ai or .pdf with bleed
Firmware (if applicable)	Manufacturing test build	.hex/.bin with MD5
Test plan	What we'll verify on samples	.pdf with AQL + standards
Golden sample photos	Reference (when available)	.jpg high-res, calibrated

1.2 Product regulations checklist

MARKET	KEY REQUIREMENTS	WHEN TO VERIFY
US	FCC, CPSIA, UL listing (if needed), Prop 65, country of origin label	Before RFQ
EU	CE (LVD, EMC, RED), RoHS, REACH SVHC, Battery Reg, WEEE	Before RFQ
UK	UKCA, equivalent to CE	Same as EU
Japan	PSE (T or D mark), Telec for radio, JIS-Z	Before tooling
Australia	RCM, AS/NZS standards, EESS	Before tooling
Canada	IC ID (radio), CSA (electrical), CRO	Before tooling

1.3 RFQ document structure

- **Single RFQ document**
Spec + order quantity + lead time + certifications. Same document to every supplier.
- **Locked revision**
Track which version each supplier received (column in the supplier comparison sheet).
- **Quote template**
Forces apples-to-apples comparison. Pre-filled with line items the supplier must fill in.

2. Supplier sourcing

Finding suppliers is easy; verifying them is the work. Budget more time for verification than for shortlisting.

30-70

CANDIDATES

initial pool per category

8-15

SHORTLIST

survives company-data filter

1-2

FINAL

after capability + sample check

2.1 Discovery channels by region

CHANNEL	BEST FOR	COST / NOTES
Alibaba.com	Mainland China, mass exporters	Free + paid memberships; gold/diamond tier signals investment
Global Sources	China + HK + Taiwan electronics	Free + paid; better-curated than Alibaba
Made-in-China.com	Mainland China industrials	Free + paid
HKTDC	Hong Kong + China + Taiwan	Free directory + paid fairs
Canton Fair (3 phases)	All categories	\$50-100 entry per phase
Hong Kong Electronics Fair	Electronics	\$30-50 entry
Bauma (Munich)	Construction / industrial	EU brand directory
IndiaMart, TradeIndia	India suppliers	Free directory
VietnamExport.com	Vietnam suppliers	Free directory
Local sourcing agents	All regions	5-10 % commission OR fixed monthly retainer

2.2 Initial filter (5-minute scan per supplier)

- Years in business (>3 years preferred for first-time importer; <3 = higher risk).
- Registered capital (>\$500k = stable enterprise; <\$100k = small workshop).
- Employee count (50+ = real factory; <20 = trading company or small workshop).
- Audited annual revenue + main markets (US, EU, JP exposure).
- ISO 9001, ISO 14001, BSCI, similar product certifications.
- Photos: factory, line, QC area, R&D (not just showroom).

2.3 Verifying a candidate

CHECK	COST	TIME
Business license (online registry)	Free	5 min
Customs export rights	Free	10 min
Product certificates with issuing lab	Free	1–3 days response
TÜV/SGS/Intertek on-site audit	\$2 000–8 000	2–4 weeks
Asia Inspection initial assessment	\$300–1 500	1–2 weeks
Video walkthrough of production line	Free–\$200	1–2 days
In-person factory visit	\$2 000–8 000 (travel)	1–3 days

TIP – MATCH CAPACITY, NOT JUST CLAIM

A factory's claimed capacity often exceeds its actual capacity for your product type. Tour the line that would build your product, not the sample showroom.

Ask for: production schedule for next 3 months; OEM customer list (high-level, not contact details); current orders in similar volume range; loaded vs. spare capacity for your timeline.

A factory with all lines fully booked is also a factory that will deprioritise your small first order.

3. Product samples

Samples turn a quote into a known quantity. Treat the sample round as part of the design process, not a formality.

3.1 Sample stages

STAGE	PURPOSE	LEAD TIME	COST
Engineering Sample (ES)	Process feasibility, basic fit	2–3 wk	\$500–3 000
Pre-Production Sample (PPS)	Real materials, full process	4–6 wk	\$1 500–8 000
Off-Tool Sample (OTS / T1)	First parts from production tooling	1–2 wk after tooling	included in tooling
T2 / T3 sample iterations	Tooling refinement	1–2 wk per iteration	\$500–2 000 per iter
Golden Sample (GS)	Signed reference for production	1–2 wk	included
Pre-Production Run (PPR)	Pilot 100–500 units	1–2 wk	unit cost + setup

3.2 Managing the round

- **Inspect against the spec, not the previous sample**
Drift from spec is easy to miss when each sample is judged against the last.
- **Report defects in writing**
Photos + measurements + description per defect. Numbered defect log.
- **Provide suggestions, not commands**
Suppliers know their process; let them propose fixes unless you have specific technical reasons.
- **Do not approve under pressure**
Approval triggers production. If the sample is not right, say so and re-iterate.

3.3 Defect reporting template

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`` Sample ID: PPS-003 (Pre-Production Sample, unit 3 of 5) Date: 2026-04-15 Inspector: [name] Defect ID: PPS003-D01 Location: Top shell, gate area (left side, 12 mm from edge) Description: Surface flash, ~0.3 mm wide x 2 mm long Class: Major (cosmetic, visible at arm's length) Photo: PPS003-D01.jpg (with ruler, 1:1 scale, 5500K lighting) Action req: Trim parting line in tooling; verify on PPS-004 ``
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3.4 The golden sample

- **Sign and date a physical sample**
The version production must match.
- **Both parties keep an identical copy**
Yours in the office, theirs on the production floor.
- **Photograph and document**
High-res images (≥4 MP), dimensional report, tag with revision + date.
- **Use the golden sample to resolve disputes**
Not by argument; by inspection.

4. Agreement, payment & QA

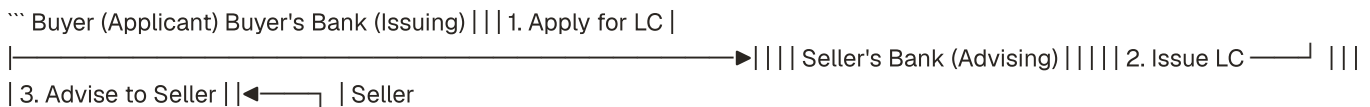
Most disputes come from things that were obvious to one side and unspoken to the other. Get them on paper.

4.1 Sales agreement essentials

CLAUSE	WHAT IT COVERS
Product spec	Attached as appendix; revision-locked
IP ownership	Tooling, drawings, firmware, brand assets stay with buyer
Payment terms	30 % deposit / 70 % balance on PSI pass
Shipping (Incoterm)	FOB or EXW typical for new importers
Late delivery	Per-day or per-week penalty (0.3 %/day cap 10 %)
Defect rate	≤1 % major on PSI; remediation if exceeded
Tooling location	Buyer-owned; supplier safeguards
Termination	Notice + survival clauses (IP, NDA, payment)
Governing law	Choose neutral (HK, Singapore) for cross-border
Dispute resolution	Arbitration (HKIAC, SIAC) over litigation in supplier country

4.2 Letter of Credit (LC) structure

For larger orders or new supplier relationships, LC adds bank-side verification.



4. Seller ships goods (per LC terms) 5. Seller presents docs to advising bank 6. Bank-to-bank verification 7. Buyer's bank releases payment to Seller's bank

LC cost: 0.5–2 % of order value, split buyer/seller. Worth it for first orders >\$50k from new suppliers; less useful for established relationships.

4.3 Deposit + production

– Check the bank account first

Account name must match the factory's legal name. **Highest-leverage anti-fraud check.** Many "scam factories" route to a personal account or sister company.

– Pay 30 % to trigger production

More removes leverage during quality issues.

– Photos at start of production + halfway

Document the line is running and your product is being built.

– Inform the supplier of upcoming QC

Knowing inspection is coming changes how the factory handles the production line.

4.4 Pre-shipment inspection (PSI)

– Third-party inspector

SGS, Intertek, Bureau Veritas, AsiaInspection. Cost: \$200–500 per man-day; typical inspection 1–2 man-days.

– AQL per agreed QC plan

Sample size from ISO 2859 Level II Normal.

– **Inspection report**

Defect rate, photographs, measurements, pass / hold / fail recommendation. 24–48 h turnaround typical.

– **Balance payment after PSI pass**

Ties 70 % to inspection.

CRITICAL – 100% DEPOSIT = WALK AWAY

Suppliers who insist on full pre-payment are either: 1. Undercapitalised (cannot fund their own raw materials) 2. Running a scam (will disappear with the funds) 3. Inexperienced with international trade (don't understand the standard 30/70)

None of these are good news. Established Chinese factories work on 30/70. If a supplier insists on different terms, ask why in writing. If they can't answer, walk away.

5. Shipping, taxes & customs

Once goods leave the factory, the cost of mistakes goes up sharply. Plan the import flow before the deposit is paid.

5.1 Shipping setup

Sea (LCL / FCL)

- <15 m³ → LCL
- >15 m³ → FCL (40' container)
- 14–35 days transit (China origin)
- \$50–120/CBM (LCL)
- \$2 000–5 500 per 40'GP (FCL)

Air

- <250 kg or <2 m³
- 7–10 days standard cargo
- 3–5 days courier (DHL/FedEx)
- \$4–8 per kg
- Cost-effective for samples + emergencies

5.2 Customs procedure summary

STEP	DOCUMENT	WHEN
Confirm HS code	Per product, target market	Before quote
Calculate customs value	FOB (US) / CIF (EU)	At commercial invoice
Issue commercial invoice	Matches declared value	Before shipment
Packing list	Cartons, weights, dimensions	Before shipment
B/L or AWB	From carrier	At loading
Certificate of origin	For FTA preferences	Before shipment
Send docs to broker	All of above	5–7 days before arrival

5.3 Common HS codes for electronics

HS	PRODUCT	US DUTY	EU DUTY
8517.62	Networking equipment	0 %	0 %
8543.70	Other electrical machines	0 %	2.7 %
8504.40	Power supplies, chargers	0 %	3.3 %
8507.60	Lithium-ion batteries	3.4 %	2.7 %
9102.11	Mechanical watches	3.1 %	4.5 %
9006.59	Other cameras	0 %	4.2 %

5.4 Last-mile

- **Send documents to broker 5–7 days before arrival**
Avoids demurrage. Demurrage starts after 5–7 day free port period.
- **Confirm clearance window**
Documents in broker's hands before goods arrive.
- **Plan delivery**
Warehouse, 3PL, or direct delivery.

— **Track inbound shipment**

Use the B/L or AWB number with the carrier's tracking site.

WATCH OUT. the first batch is a learning batch. Plan for at least one mistake — wrong label, wrong duty rate, wrong packaging, wrong document. Build cash and time buffer; document what went wrong so the second batch goes faster.