Export Opportunities in Belgium

In 2017, Belgium ranked 12th among U.S. export destinations and 6th among Virginia export destinations. Some of the top opportunities for U.S. exporters in Belgium include:

- Information and Communication Technologies
- Medical Devices
- Power Generation Equipment
- Safety and Security

Top Virginia Exports to Belgium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Export Category</th>
<th>2017 Value</th>
<th>Change 2017/2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Commodity Chapters</td>
<td>$573.3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastics</td>
<td>$127.8</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadding, Felt &amp; Non-wovens</td>
<td>$91.4</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man-made Filaments</td>
<td>$60.4</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man-made Staple Fibers</td>
<td>$55.3</td>
<td>-51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Fuels &amp; Oils</td>
<td>$46.2</td>
<td>171%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco &amp; Manufactured Substitutes</td>
<td>$27.4</td>
<td>170%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanning or Dyeing Extracts</td>
<td>$27.0</td>
<td>-39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Machinery</td>
<td>$22.7</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Pulp</td>
<td>$19.6</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood &amp; Wood Charcoal</td>
<td>$9.8</td>
<td>-38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(U.S. Central Intelligence Agency)

U.S. Exports to Belgium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Value (In US$ Millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$29.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(World Trade Atlas)
Opportunities in Belgium for Exporters

Information and Communication Technologies
Belgium has a vibrant ICT market. According to the Digital Economy & Society Index (DESI) that ranks EU member states on digital performance and competitiveness, in 2016 Belgium ranked 6th overall out of 28 countries in terms of digital economy development. The ranking takes into account digital public services, connectivity, integration of digital technology, use of Internet and human capital. Belgium’s total ICT market size in 2016 was assessed at $13.5 billion, employing some 70,000 people – 45,000 in hardware, services and software; 15,000 in operations and maintenance; and 10,000 with telecom operators.

Best prospects for US exporters include:
- Unified security management and software;
- Consulting services;
- Cloud securing services;
- VPN related products and services; and
- eCommerce enabling turnkey solutions.

Power Generation Equipment
Belgium has no natural energy sources, so it imports all of its natural gas and petroleum requirements for its energy needs. Currently, several shifting factors influence the rapidly changing Belgian energy market, including the continuing EU-wide process of deregulation and liberalization; the incentives to develop renewable energy sources; and the changing structure of the country’s energy distribution. The EU has set up a strategic plan for 2020 to increase the proportion of renewable energy in the final consumption of energy within the EU. Belgium’s proportion of renewable energy is 7.9%; the 2020 objective for Belgium is 13%, and this plan has been renewed for 2030, with EU member states having agreed to reach a minimum of 27% of renewable energy by that time.

Best prospects for US exporters include:
- Generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity;
- Emissions-controlling measures and renewable energies; and
- Maintenance and provision of spare parts.

Medical Devices
Belgium produces less than 10% of medical equipment consumed domestically. The U.S. has a 28% share of total medical equipment imports into Belgium. The Belgian market for medical equipment and supplies is estimated at $2.4 billion in 2017. Over the past 5 years, this sector has seen an annual growth of approximately 4 percent. Belgium is an effective entry point and base for marketing medical equipment to the rest of Europe due to its geographical location, its effective healthcare system, and its relatively open attitude regarding procurement. U.S. suppliers are particular dominant in the sectors of diagnostic imaging apparatus, orthopedic and implantable products, and medical and surgical instruments.

Best prospects for US exporters include:
- Diagnostic products;
- Orthopedic products;
- Home-care products;
- Obesity and diabetes products;
- Medical software;
- Telemedicine; and
- eHealth and mHealth

Safety and Security
Although Belgium ranks 14th for Safety in the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)’s annual Global Peace Index, the presence of several international organizations and embassies has increased the demand for sophisticated security equipment and guard services. A strong emphasis has been placed on counter-terrorism, homeland security, transportation, and critical infrastructure protection.

Best prospects for US exporters include:
- Electronics such as active RFID chips;
- Body and surrounding monitoring sensors in apparel;
- Adapted personal protective gear featuring antibacterial, self-repairing and lighter products;
- Electronic detection systems, such as fire detection, camera monitoring, burglary prevention and access control;
- Robotic equipment, such as drones; and
- Improved communication tools.

This information is adapted from the U.S. Commercial Service. Click here for more export opportunities.
FAST FACTS

Economic Overview

Belgium’s central geographic location and highly developed transport network have helped develop a well-diversified economy, with a broad mix of transport, services, manufacturing, and high tech. Service and high-tech industries are concentrated in the northern Flanders region while the southern region of Wallonia is home to industries like coal and steel manufacturing. Belgium is completely reliant on foreign sources of fossil fuels, and the planned closure of its seven nuclear plants by 2025 should increase its dependence on foreign energy. Its role as a regional logistical hub makes its economy vulnerable to shifts in foreign demand, particularly with EU trading partners. Roughly three-quarters of Belgium’s trade is with other EU countries, and the port of Zeebrugge conducts almost half its trade with the United Kingdom alone, leaving Belgium’s economy vulnerable to the outcome of negotiations on the UK’s exit from the EU.

The government has pledged to pursue a reform program to improve Belgium’s competitiveness, including changes to labor market rules and welfare benefits. These changes have generally made Belgian wages more competitive regionally, but risk worsening tensions with trade unions and triggering extended strikes. In 2017, Belgium approved a tax reform plan to ease corporate rates from 33% to 29% by 2018 and down to 25% by 2020. The tax plan also included benefits for innovation and SMEs, intended to spur competitiveness and private investment.

(CIA World Factbook)

Cultural Guide

- When greeting for the first time, a handshake is appropriate for both men and women. It is usual to address people using title and surnames at first, with the transition to the more familiar use of first names over time.
- Business attire is formal, smart and conservative.
- Business meetings are usually conducted formally, and you are expected to arrive in plenty of time. You can expect the meeting to be structured and efficient and for a preset agenda to be followed.
- It is often best to speak English in Belgium, even if reasonably fluent in French Dutch or German, as this maintains neutrality. In Brussels, English is widely spoken. It is understood by many and is a preferred language of business.

(Kwintessential)

A trait shared by all business cultures in Belgium is an insistence on compromise, even when it doesn’t significantly benefit either party.

- A trait shared by all business cultures in Belgium is an insistence on compromise, even when it doesn’t significantly benefit either party. Belgian businesspeople see meeting halfway as a willingness to work together.
- Food is important, and if conducting business over a meal, it is better not to try to discuss the detail of a business transaction until the eating has ended and coffee is served.
- Hard work and an appreciation for culture are important values to Belgians.
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Virginia Economic Development Partnership - International Trade offers a number of export-related services to Virginia businesses, including trade missions and market research by our Global Network of in-country consultants. These services are available to all Virginia exporters.

For more information, please visit our website: ExportVirginia.org

Online Resources

- Belgium Overview
  Global Edge - Michigan State University
- Belgium Factbook
  CIA World Fact Book
- Kwintessential Guide to Belgium
  Kwintessential
- Belgium Country Profile
  BBC

Additional Resources:

Market Reports

- Belgium Country Commercial Guide
  U.S. Commercial Service
- Ease of Doing Business Report
  World Bank
- Overseas Business Risk - Belgium
  United Kingdom Trade and Investment