

KAWINI INTERNATIONAL

A FREE GUIDE FOR FOUNDERS & IMPORTERS

# The 7 China Sourcing Mistakes

And exactly how to avoid them — from a team standing inside the factories in Guangzhou.

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From **Kawini International** — built on 20+ years of direct factory relationships in Guangzhou, China.

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## **Most sourcing problems aren't bad luck. They're the same seven mistakes, made over and over.**

Kawini International has been manufacturing and trading out of Guangzhou for more than twenty years. Canton Fair, the factory floors, the freight forwarders, the buyers across Africa, the Middle East, and beyond — we source for founders and importers for a living, and we do it from the ground here, not from a screen on the other side of the world.

That means we see the same expensive errors land on importers' desks every single week. A wrong Incoterm that quietly adds 15% to a landed cost. A "supplier" who was never a factory. A bulk order paid in full to someone who vanished. None of it is exotic. All of it is avoidable.

This short guide walks through the seven that cost importers the most money — and the simple move that prevents each one. Read it in ten minutes. Use it before you wire a single dollar.

1

## Treating Alibaba as your main sourcing channel

Alibaba is a directory, not a factory floor. Many top listings are trading companies reselling other people's production with a markup, and the photos rarely match what actually ships. You're optimizing for who ranks well on a platform, not who makes the best product at the best price.

### THE FIX

Treat Alibaba as a starting list, then verify on the ground. Confirm whether you're talking to a real manufacturer or a middleman, see the actual production line, and compare against factories that never advertise online — which is where the better margins usually live.

2

## Shipping with no local quality control

The most common way importers lose money: the first sample is perfect, the bulk run isn't, and nobody checks before it's loaded into a container. By the time the defects arrive in your country, the supplier has your money and you have a problem you can't fix.

### THE FIX

Inspect before shipment, not after. A physical QC check on the actual production batch — not the golden sample — is the single highest-return thing you can do. Catching a defect in Guangzhou costs a re-run; catching it in Kinshasa or Dubai costs the whole order.

3

## Misreading Incoterms (FOB vs CIF vs EXW)

A price means nothing until you know what it includes. EXW means you pay to get it out of the factory door. FOB stops at the port of origin. CIF covers freight and insurance to your port. Founders compare two quotes, pick the lower one, and discover later it didn't include the costs the other one did.

### THE FIX

Always compare quotes on the same Incoterm, and always work out your true landed cost — product + freight + duties + last-mile — before you decide. The cheapest factory price is regularly the most expensive total.

**4**

## Ordering in bulk before approving a real sample

Skipping samples to "save time" is how you buy 5,000 units of something slightly wrong — wrong shade, wrong weight, wrong stitching, wrong smell. A specification on paper and a product in your hand are two different things, and the gap is always discovered too late.

### THE FIX

Never place a production order without holding and approving a physical pre-production sample from the factory that will actually run your order. Photograph it, sign off on it, and make it the reference the bulk run is checked against.

**5**

## Paying 100% upfront to an unvetted supplier

Once the full amount is paid, all your leverage is gone. If quality slips or the timeline slides, you have no remaining payment to hold against it. With a supplier you haven't properly verified, full prepayment is how importers get burned outright.

### THE FIX

Structure payment in stages — a deposit to start, the balance against inspection or shipping documents. Keep meaningful money on the table until the goods are confirmed correct. And vet the factory's history before the first transfer, not after.

**6**

## Ignoring freight lead times until it's too late

Production is only half the clock. Sea freight, port congestion, customs clearance, and last-mile delivery can add weeks — and importers who plan only around the factory's timeline routinely miss their season, their launch, or their own customers' deadlines.

### THE FIX

Build your timeline backwards from when you need the goods in hand, including realistic freight and customs windows for your specific route. Lock the shipping method early; air vs sea is a cost-versus-speed decision best made before, not during, a panic.

## 7

### Using an agent with no real factory relationships

Plenty of "sourcing agents" are just forwarding your message to the same Alibaba suppliers you could find yourself, then adding a fee. With no genuine relationships, they can't get you priority, honest pricing, or leverage when something goes wrong — which is exactly when you need it.

#### THE FIX

Work with someone who has real, long-standing relationships and a physical presence where your product is made. The difference shows up when a batch is off and a phone call from a trusted face fixes in a day what an email chain can't fix in a month.

WHAT WE FIX FOR CLIENTS EVERY WEEK

# Want us to look at your product?

These seven mistakes are the ones Kawini catches for founders and importers from the ground in Guangzhou — before they cost anyone money. If you've got a product in mind, the simplest way to start is small and fast.

## The Sourcing Sprint

- 3 vetted factory options for your product
- Real quotes — compared on the same terms
- Sample photos & video from the ground in Guangzhou
- A freight estimate to your country
- Delivered in 7 days — Standard & Pro tiers depending on your product

Tell us about your product — DM **SOURCE** on Instagram [@sourcingwithkain](#) and we'll walk you through which tier fits and what it costs.

— The Kawini International team · Guangzhou, China