From idea to factory in China: A step-by-step guide

By NewTracks AS

Many people believe manufacturing in China is reserved for large companies with their own purchasing departments and established contacts. That is not true. We have helped founders, small businesses and larger companies through the whole process – from idea to finished product. Here is how it actually works.

Step 1: Product documentation – before anything else

No factory can give you a good quote without knowing what they are going to make. As a minimum you need:

- Technical drawings with dimensions and tolerances
- Material specifications – refer to international standards
- Requirements for surface treatment and finish. If you have a product sample, send it.
- Quality requirements and acceptance criteria. Don't assume any quality requirement goes without saying. A separate document for this is recommended, as not everything can be specified on the drawings.

Don't rush this. The time you spend on thorough documentation saves you frustration later in the project.

Step 2: Find the right factory

This is often the hardest step – and the most important. China has thousands of factories, often specialised in different types of products, production sizes and quality levels. If the cooperation feels difficult early in the project, steer clear. It rarely gets better over time.

The good factories have a network of good partners and can take on larger parts of the product than the components they make themselves.

Over 10 years NewTracks has built a network of qualified factories in the Shenzhen region. We audit every factory we work with annually to ensure good working conditions, health and safety, environmental requirements and that they are solid for a long-term partnership.

Step 3: Prototype and approval

Before starting series production, a first-article sample should always be made. This is not just to check that the product is correct and looks right – it is to verify that the factory understands your requirements.

We normally produce three first-article samples – one for the customer, one for the factory and one for our archive. We call these Golden Samples, and they are used as the reference for quality assurance of all future production.

Step 4: Series production and quality control

Once the first-article sample is approved, production starts. Quality assurance is essential, and it should be done at the factory. Don't expect quality to be stable if this is not followed up. Misunderstandings, time pressure or well-meant cost savings are typical reasons why quality can change.

At NewTracks, a member of our team travels to the factory to quality-assure every production run before the goods leave the factory.

Step 5: Payment terms

Normally the factory will require a large part of the payment at the start of production, and the rest before shipping. Make sure you do not make the final payment until you have confirmed that the quality meets the agreed requirements. The factory's motivation to correct any defects is often greatly reduced once they have received full payment.

NewTracks offers normal payment terms based on the customer's credit rating from D&B. Should there be a complaint, NewTracks AS handles it, and we will do our utmost to correct any deviations.

Step 6: Logistics and delivery

Goods can be shipped by sea or air, depending on the need for speed and cost. For goods under 30–40 kg, sea freight normally does not pay off – air cargo is then a good solution.

Check which Incoterms apply. The factory normally helps with export documentation and export customs clearance, but import customs clearance usually has to be handled by the recipient – and this can be costly if you are not prepared.

NewTracks handles transport and customs clearance – all you need to do is receive the goods.

How long does it take?

A rule of thumb:

Prototype: 1–3 weeks. 4–5 weeks if an extrusion tool is needed.

Moulding tool / first-article sample: 4–5 weeks.

Production: 4–5 weeks after an approved first-article sample.

Considering manufacturing in China? Contact us at NewTracks – we will give you an honest assessment.

NewTracks has 10 years of experience manufacturing in China and helps European companies with product development and manufacturing.

Our team in Shenzhen, NewTracks China Co. Ltd., supports project management, engineering, quality assurance and logistics, while commercial responsibility lies with the Norwegian company NewTracks AS.