

How to Communicate With Indian Factories



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A practical guide to talking with Indian factories from abroad: which office hours overlap with yours, why phone and WhatsApp beat cold email, who you are really talking to, what a "yes" means and how to plan around Diwali and other festival shutdowns.

The Short Version

- India stays on UTC+5:30 all year, so your overlap shifts when your own clocks change.
- Call or WhatsApp first, then send the spec by email so there is a written record.
- Run one WhatsApp group per order and summarise decisions weekly in writing.
- Never accept a change of bank details over WhatsApp or email. Confirm by phone on a number you already had.
- In August, ask each maker in writing for its own festival shutdown dates.

An importer in South-East Asia spent weeks emailing Indian health and personal care makers in 2023 and then posted, a bit desperate, "Literally none of the companies or people I've contacted have responded" ([r/india, 2023](#)). The top answers weren't about the product or the price. They were about the channel. That's how much communication decides in India.



This post is the practical side of talking to Indian factories - which hours actually overlap with yours, why the phone beats email, how to use WhatsApp without regretting it, how to plan around festivals and what a "yes" means. One honest caveat - every factory is different, and a big exporter with a full export team will behave more like a Western supplier than a small workshop does. Adjust for who's on the other end.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

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- 01 Cold email is the weakest way to reach an Indian maker.** Buyers report weeks of silence by email, and an Indian maker in the same thread said he gets "hundreds of such mails a month". Phone and WhatsApp get the replies. (*[r/india, 2023, four voices](#)*)
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02 India never changes its clocks, so your overlap moves twice a year. From Sydney, the shared office window shrinks from about four hours to three when Australia goes onto daylight time in October. From Auckland it's about two hours at best. *(Time zones: India UTC+5:30 all year. Office hours of 9:30 to 18:30 in India are our planning assumption)*

03 Knitwear hubs lose labour for weeks, not days, around the festivals. Migrant workers travel home, and Tiruppur reports shortages every festival season. *(Knitting Views)*

What we don't know yet

- ☐ Working days actually lost around Diwali, cluster by cluster. Nobody measures it, and we plan to in 2027.

1. The Hours That Actually Overlap

India runs on one time zone, UTC+5:30, all year, with no daylight saving. Most of your markets do change their clocks, so the overlap shifts at different times of the year depending on where you sit. This table assumes Indian office hours of about 9:30 to 18:30, which is our planning figure, not a rule.

Your city	Hours ahead of or behind India	Shared office window (your time)
Sydney, Melbourne	4.5 ahead (Apr to Oct), 5.5 ahead (Oct to Apr)	About 14:00 to 18:00, or 15:00 to 18:00
Auckland	6.5 ahead (Apr to Sep), 7.5 ahead (Sep to Apr)	About 16:00 to 18:00, or 17:00 to 18:00
Dubai	1.5 behind	Almost the whole day
London	4.5 behind (late Mar to late Oct), 5.5 behind (rest of year)	About 09:00 to 14:00, or 09:00 to 13:00
Berlin, Paris, Rome	3.5 behind (summer), 4.5 behind (winter)	About 09:00 to 15:00, or 09:00 to 14:00
New York	9.5 behind (Mar to Nov), 10.5 behind (rest of year)	None. Your early morning is India's late afternoon
Los Angeles	12.5 behind (Mar to Nov), 13.5 behind (rest of year)	None. Your evening is India's early morning

What does that mean in practice? If you're in Australia, New Zealand or the UAE, you can talk to India inside a normal working day, and a weekly call at a fixed slot is easy. If you're in Europe or the UK, mornings are your window. If you're in the US, you'll be writing in your afternoon and reading the answers when you wake up, so write everything so it can be answered without a follow-up question. Ask one clear question per message and number your points, and you'll save a day on every round trip.



2. Pick Up the Phone

Back to our South-East Asia importer. The most useful reply in that thread was one line - "Phone/WhatsApp is something everyone checks" ([r/india, 2023](#)). An Indian manufacturer replying to the same post explained the other side. He gets hundreds of enquiry emails a month, and most of them go nowhere, so email gets triaged hard.

So call first. A short call, or a WhatsApp message asking for a good time to call, tells a maker you're a real buyer. Then send the email with the spec, so there's a written record. Cold email to a factory's general inbox is the weakest route in, and a busy owner will usually answer whoever rang.

One thing to watch - posting a requirement on a lead-selling directory, or leaving your number on one, can bring a flood of calls from sellers you never contacted. Treat anyone who reaches you first as unvetted, however polished. More on that in [the technology that helps](#).

3. Know Who You're Talking To

In a mid-size Indian export unit you'll usually meet three people. The owner decides prices and priorities. The export manager or merchandiser runs your order day to day. And the production floor, where your spec actually gets made, often works in Tamil, Hindi, Punjabi or another language, not English.

Why does that matter? Because the person who answers your WhatsApp may be very good at English and still have to explain your order out loud to someone who wasn't on the call. So send specs that survive translation – measurements in a table, critical points marked on a photo, a physical reference where you can. That's covered in depth on [the everyday challenges](#), and I won't repeat it here.

The practical move is to ask, early and politely, who your day-to-day contact is and who signs off. Get both numbers. When something's urgent, the owner's call gets it moving, and when something's routine, the merchandiser is the right person to chase.

4. Use WhatsApp Well

WhatsApp is the working channel of Indian business, and it's genuinely useful. You get photos from the floor the same day, quick voice notes, video calls on demand. Here's how I'd use it.

1. Make one group per order, with your contact, the merchandiser and anyone on your side, so nothing gets lost in a private chat.
2. Ask for photos and short videos at every stage – fabric in, cutting, first pieces off the line, packing.
3. Keep voice notes for quick questions, and put anything that matters in writing.

4. Once a week, have someone summarise the decisions in an email or on the purchase order, because a chat thread is a poor record when there's a dispute.

And never accept a change of bank details over WhatsApp or email. Payment fraud in India often arrives as a friendly "our account has changed" message from an account that's been hijacked. Confirm by phone, on a number you already had. The payment checks are on [how to pay an overseas supplier safely](#).

5. How "Yes" Works

You'll hear "yes" a lot. Buyers who've worked here long enough say it plainly, and so do Indian agents: a direct "no" is rare. Most of the time it isn't dishonesty. It's politeness, optimism and a real fear of losing the order. The cultural side is on [the everyday challenges](#).

What I'd add is how to phrase the question so the answer means something. Don't ask "can you do this?", ask "when can you send me one?" Don't ask "is the fabric ready?", ask "please send a photo of the fabric with today's newspaper next to it". Don't ask "will you ship on the 15th?", ask "what has to happen by the 5th for the 15th to hold?" Questions with a date, a thing and a proof get answers you can plan around.



And treat silence as a message. A maker who goes quiet usually has a problem and hasn't found a way to tell you. A quick, friendly call asking what's blocking them works far better than a stiff email asking why they haven't replied.

6. Festivals and Shutdowns

The festival season is the one calendar fact every buyer needs. Diwali falls on 8 November 2026 and on 29 October 2027, and in the weeks around it most units slow or close and migrant workers go home, often for weeks ([how to source from India](#) has the full 2026–27 calendar with dates and sources). Regional festivals matter too – Pongal in mid-January in Tamil Nadu, for instance, is a big one for Tiruppur and the southern clusters.

The communication job is simple and almost nobody does it. In August, ask each maker in writing for their own shutdown dates and when full staffing is

back. Then plan your production and your shipping around their answer, not a national holiday list. On our reading, Christmas orders from Western markets land on Indian lines in August and September, just before the festivals, so the buyers who confirm early get the line time.

Send a Diwali greeting, too. It costs nothing and it's noticed. A good relationship in India is built in small, human moments as much as in purchase orders.

7. When You Can't Be There

The single strongest message from buyers who've done well in India is that someone kept showing up - on calls, on the floor, at the next order. A factory visit helps, but one visit doesn't carry a relationship for a year. If you're a small team on the other side of the world, that presence is the hardest thing to provide yourself, and it's exactly what [SourcingSync](#) provides - people in India who speak the language on the floor and stay with your order.

Related reading: [Ready next week? Indian supplier delays](#) · [Why Indian lead times are longer](#) · [Sample perfect, bulk not](#)

Our South-East Asia importer's problem wasn't India, and it wasn't his product. It was the inbox. Pick up the phone, pick the right hours, ask questions that come with a date and a proof, and India's makers answer a lot faster than their reputation suggests.