



The voice of the fencing industry

USING THE AFI TRADE PORTAL

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ABOUT

The AFI Trade Portal is a unique online trading and communications platform developed exclusively for AFI members. It includes a sophisticated messaging system that enables members to easily buy, sell, advertise and communicate between each other, ultimately making the association and its membership stronger. It was developed in answer to a number of member companies who, when asked, said they wanted *"more business and cheaper prices"*. The AFI Trade Portal does both.

It works like a combination of EBay, Facebook and an online Employment Agency. Like EBay you can post up notices of things that you want to sell, and send messages to sellers about the things that they sell. Like Facebook you can send status update notices and messages to other members, and you can make up a Buddy list of friends (and even block other members). Like an Employment Agency it matches your own attributes to those that are looking for them, in this case matching buyers of certain fencing products with those that sell them.

Contractor members looking to buy a certain product can raise a single message which will automatically go to all AFI members that sell that product. Supplier members looking to sell a certain product can raise a single message that reaches all AFI members that buy that product.





Nestled within the Member Area of the AFI website – www.afiorg.uk - the Portal also contains your company's public profile, i.e. what external buyers and others see when they search for a fencing supplier on the AFI website.

All information stored on the AFI Trade Portal is confidential, encrypted, and is not used nor distributed externally outside the association.

LOG IN

- In your internet browser, navigate to the AFI Website www.afiorg.uk
- On the top menu bar, click **Member Area** to show the Member Area login page (or navigate directly via <http://www.Afiorg.uk/member-area/>)
- At the bottom of the page, in the yellow input fields, enter first **Your email address**, and then **Your password**.
- Upon joining AFI your password is set by default to your postcode (lower case without any spaces), although you may have changed it since. If you have forgotten your password it can be reset by following the **Forgotten Password?** link at the bottom of the page, or contact AFI – we cannot see your password, but we can reset it.
- If you don't want to enter your password next time you login click the **Remember Me** box (and it will automatically fill in your password next time you log in)
- Once logged in you will see the **Member Area** main menu bar on the left, which gives access to AFI's member-only features as listed
- To access the AFI Trade Portal, click the second menu option **AFI Trade Portal**.
- The opening screen shows your **Messages - Inbox**, indicating (in red) if you have any unread messages
- In addition to the **Messages** menu box (top left) you will also see a **Members** menu box (middle left) and a **Your Account** menu box (bottom left). Further instructions on the contents of each are included below

ENTER-AMEND YOUR BUSINESS DETAILS

Your business details were originally established using the information contained on your AFI Application. In this section you can add further or amend current information about your company and its products and services.

- Click the **Business Details** option within the **Your Account** menu box (bottom left), and check and/or amend the details are accurate and up-to-date
- The yellow fields are mandatory. Everything else is optional
- Click **Update Details** (bottom button) if you have changed anything (NB – any changes to a member profile are sent to AFI for approval prior to going live)

ENTER-AMEND YOUR BUSINESS PROFILE

In addition to your Business Details, your **Business Profile** is what is viewed by external buyers and others who find your company via the AFI website. It is important that your profile is as comprehensive and up to date as possible, containing your company logo, a description of the products and services that you offer, and hyperlinks to your own company webpage (if applicable).

- Click on the **Business Profile** option in the **Your Account** menu box. If your logo is not uploaded and displayed, use the **Browse** button to upload it from your own computer on to the Portal
- Ensure that the contents of the Business Profile text box adequately represent your organisation
- You can even add hypertext links to pages on your own company website from key product or other phrases in your Profile (instructions further below)
- Click **Update Profile** if anything has changed



ENTER-AMEND “WHAT YOU DO”

The **What you do** section records specifically which fencing products you Supply Only (SELL) and/or Supply & Install (BUY), indicated by ticks in the appropriate columns. These choices are used to direct the messages that you will both send and receive from the Portal, e.g. you will only receive Selling Notices for things that you buy, and only receive Buying Notices for things that you sell. In this way the messages that you and other members receive are not Spam, rather they are specifically matched to the things that you buy and sell.

- Against each product-type listed, click in the relevant column select/deselect what you **Supply Only** (SELL) or **Supply & Install** (BUY). These choices will determine which messages (Notices) you receive from the AFI Trade Portal.
- The Supply Only column is principally intended for use by manufacturers, stockists and distributors (not installers), as members with ticks in this column will receive enquiries from contractor buyers wanting to buy those products to install themselves.
- The Supply & Install column is intended for contractors. Members with ticks in this column will receive enquiries from external buyers wanting a member to install a fence around their premises, and from Supply Only members with product offers.
- For example, if you tick Steel Palisade Fencing as a Supply Only choice, you will be able to receive Buying Notices from AFI contractor members wanting to buy Palisade.
- If you tick Timber Fencing as a Supply & Install option you will receive external enquiries from buyers wanting a Timber fence around their premises, along with Selling Notices from other AFI members who sell Timber Fencing.
- There is no advantage to ticking categories which you do not sell or install, as you will simply get unwanted spam messages which are of no interest to you.
- Click **Update Preferences** if you changed anything.

ENTER-AMEND USER DETAILS

The **User Details** on this page are used for login, and to determine who (within your organisation) receives which messages from the Portal.

- The **Main User: Login/General email** is your main login Email address for the Portal, and the one that receives all messages and Notices.
- The **Sales/Estimating email** address receives Buying Notices from the Portal.
- The **Contracts/Purchasing** email address receives Selling Notices.
- If a single person in your organisation fulfils all three of those roles, then put their Email address in all three places (as all three need to be completed). All Email addresses receive Announcements.
- If you want to receive Notices and Announcements in your external Email program, e.g. Outlook, tick the box below the Email addresses (if this box is not ticked you will only be able to read messages that you receive when logged in to the Portal).
- Use the next section to change your password if you need to. For example, when you join AFI your password is initially set to your postcode (in lowercase with no spaces). You are advised to change this to something more confidential.
- NOTE - the AFI team cannot see your password (for confidentiality and security), but they can reset it, following which you can log back in and change it back to something personal and confidential.



VIEW YOUR OWN PROFILE

You can see your company profile 'as seen' by external customer buyers via the green **Find an AFI Member** dialogue box in the middle of the AFI website's **Home page**.

- Leave the **Type of Fence** to **All Fences**, put your company's postcode in the **Job Postcode** field, and click the **Find Member** button below. Your company should be at the top of the list of search results returned – they are listed in order of proximity to the postcode given.
- From the list of members, click **More** to the left of your company's listing to reveal how your profile looks. It shows your company name, postcode and website, your logo (if you have uploaded one as described above), the first few lines of your company profile, plus the tick list showing what you do.
- Click **Read More** to reveal the remainder of your profile as seen by others. You can add links to your own company website within your company profile (see below) which clients can click through. Try clicking on member AlphaFence (NP7 9LA) to see how this works.

CREATE A BUYING NOTICE

If you want material prices whilst preparing a tender or quotation, or prior to placing an order, create a Buying Notice. A Buying Notice is a message whose subject is a fencing product, e.g. "Concrete Fence Posts", and is sent only to other members that SELL that particular product. If they don't sell the product, they don't get the Notice. In this way suppliers get messages from buyers for the things that they sell. Buyers get to access the entire AFI membership of matched suppliers with a single message.

- From the AFI website Home page choose **Member Area** from the top menu, and then click **AFI Trade Portal** which opens up the Messages menu and displays your **Inbox**.
- From the Messages menu box click **Create Message**.
- Select **Buying Notice** from the **Type of message** drop-down list.
- Select the **Product / Subject** of your Notice from the next drop-down list, e.g. "Steel Palisade Fencing"
- Write a short Message indicating the specification, quantity and type product required, e.g. "*Quote request: 200 metres of 2.4 metre high galvanised Palisade Fencing, triple pointed pales, no legs, snap off fixings, delivery Norfolk*". The message box allows 500 characters of 'free text', so the message can be worded however you like, so long as the recipient can understand what you want pricing.
- Click the **Preview** button below the message to check its readability and whether it contains any errors or omissions etc. Click the **Edit** button if it is not yet correct.
- When the message is finished and ready, choose the recipients group from the **Send To** drop-down list. It can go to **All Members**, **Supply Only** members or **Supply & Install** members, or to your **Preferred Members** list (see below).
- Select which group to send the message to, and click the **Send** button to send the finished Notice.
- Within your selected recipient list the Buying Notice is instantly sent to ALL members that sell the product that you have selected - an enquiry taking a moment to compose can reach dozens of supplier members, guaranteeing the best current market price.
- Those that don't sell it don't get the notice, ensuring that you get quality competitive quotes from bone fide sellers, and suppliers get bone fide enquiries from buyers.
- Once sent you will see a message indicating how many matched companies have received the Notice. You will also receive a copy of the Notice in your own external Email, e.g. Outlook, Inbox
- NOTE if you have created an Excluded Member list (blocked members – see below) these will NOT receive any of your notices created within the Portal.



CREATE A SELLING NOTICE

If you have something to sell, e.g. a special offer, seasonal discount or some old surplus stock, create a Selling Notice. As above a Selling Notice is a message whose subject is a fencing product, and it is sent only to other members that BUY that product. If they don't buy the product, they don't get the Notice. A single notice can reach dozens of interested buyers.

- Just as above you create a Selling Notice by choosing the **Create Message** option from the **Messages** menu box in the Portal
- Select **Selling Notice** from the **Type of message** drop-down list.
- Select the **Product / Subject** of your Notice from the next drop-down list, e.g. "Temporary Fencing Systems"
- Write a short Message giving details of your offer, e.g. "100 surplus Heras-type ready fence panels (3.5 x 2.1 metres), rubber feet and couplers. Buyer collects. Hampshire"
- Click the **Preview** button below the message to check its content and readability etc. Click the **Edit** button if it is not yet correct
- When the message is finished and ready, choose the recipients group from the **Send To** drop-down list. It can go to **All Members**, **Supply Only** members or **Supply & Install** members, or to your **Preferred Members** list (see below).
- Select which group to send the message to, and click the **Send** button to send the finished Notice.
- Within your selected recipient list the Selling Notice is instantly sent to ALL members that buy the product that you have selected – the Selling Notice taking a moment to compose can reach dozens of members who may be in the market for that product, particularly if at an offer or bargain rate.
- You should see a message indicating how many matched companies have received the Notice. You will also receive a copy in your own external Email, e.g. Outlook, Inbox.

CREATE AN ANNOUNCEMENT

If you have something to say, create an Announcement - perhaps you have taken on a new staff member, or product range, or agency. An Announcement is another form of Portal message used to inform other members of company news that may be of interest to them – essentially it is free advertising, targeted (by product) to those members who may be interested in its subject matter.

- Announcements are created from the Messages section of the Portal exactly as Buying and Selling notices above.
- From the AFI website Home page choose **Member Area** from the top menu, and then click **AFI Trade Portal** to opens up the Messages menu
- Click **Create Message**, then select **Announcement** from the **Type of message** drop-down list
- Next select the **Product / Subject** of your Announcement from the next drop-down list, e.g. "Swing & Sliding Gates"
- Compose your message text as above described – 500 free text characters – **Preview** it, **Edit** and/or **Send** when ready
- Announcements are also sent to any (non excluded) member that either buys OR sells the product that is the subject of your Announcement - if they don't buy or sell it, they don't get it.
- In this way all messages created in the Portal should only go to members who are interested in the subject matter. Timber suppliers, for example, won't get Palisade announcements. No more Spam – just targeted bone fide messages between members



CREATE A BUDDY LIST

Like Facebook, you can create a Buddy List of Preferred Members – rather than sending messages to the entire AFI community, perhaps you want to restrict them to a dozen or so whose products, quality and service you know well. Once you have a Buddy List you have the choice to send messages just to them, or to all members.

- From the AFI website Home page navigate back to the Portal admin section: choose **Member Area** from the top menu bar, then **AFI Trade Portal** from the left column menu, and then **Member Preferences** from the **Members** box (middle left).
- Under the **Search for member/s** title at the top, either enter the member's name (or part) in the **Name:** box and press the **Search** button to find a specific member, or leave the box blank and click **Search** to list all AFI members.
- Search for your Buddy in the member list, and once found tick the **Select** box to the right of their listing. If the list is lengthy, you can shortcut this method by entering your Buddy's postcode in the top right field (and then click the **Search** button).
- This reveals options under the **Available Actions** (right menu box). Click **Prefer Business** to add them to your Preferred Member List.
- You should get a message at the top of the list indicating that your Business Preferences have been updated.
- Click the Back button in your browser to exit back to the Portal, or click the **[Business preferences click here](#)** link above the list.
- From the member list you can also **Exclude Business** to prevent them from seeing your Notices and Announcements (see below), or **Enquire to Business** to send them a private message.
- You can now send Notices and Announcements either to all members, or just to your Preferred Members Buddy List
- You can remove a member from your Buddy List by ticking against their entry and clicking the **Remove** button below



CREATE AN EXCLUDED MEMBER LIST

Again, like most social networking sites, you can 'block' certain companies from viewing your details or receiving your Notice and Announcement messages by adding them to your Excluded Member list - perhaps you don't want a competitor seeing your messages.

- This is done exactly as above, i.e. first finding the member's listing using the **Search Members** or **Member Preferences** options from the Members menu box
- Once found, **Select** the member by ticking the right hand box on their listing, then click **Exclude Business** in the right hand **Available Actions** menu
- Excluded members will not receive your Notices or Announcements, nor can they see your Profile. Subsequent messages composed and sent to **All Members** do not go to any of your excluded members
- You can remove a member from your Excluded Members list by ticking against their entry and clicking the **Remove** button below

CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE BLOG

The Blog is a forum for online discussion between members concerning any fencing or related issue. It may be an opportunity to ask a technical question, to express an opinion on some hot current issue, or to cheer us all up with a fencing joke.

- From the AFI website Home page top menu bar choose **Fencing Blog** which opens up the Portal's Blog page listing the current Blog subject headings
- To read a Blog click on its subject heading to expand the comment trail below
- To contribute, click on the relevant subject heading and **Add a Comment** within the **Comment** box
- Click **Submit** to post it to the Blog
- NOTE all comments posted to the Blog contain a link to your own website, which Google counts as a valuable inbound link giving your page relevance and improving its result in Google's search pages (see below).

READ NEWS ARTICLES

The Industry News section is regularly updated with articles and information relevant to the fencing and related industries.

- The **Industry News** section is accessed from the top menu bar on the Home page of the AFI website (or alternatively via the Newsfeed at the bottom of most website pages)
- The right-hand menu is useful for filtering the numerous news articles into specific subject areas, e.g. Health & Safety, Training, etc
- Members can contribute News articles by Emailing them (via the Email address at the top right of the website)



ADDING HYPERLINKS FROM YOUR PROFILE TO YOUR OWN WEBSITE

- From the AFI website Home page choose **Member Area** from the top menu, and then click **Your Member Profile** option from the left menu bar
- Click on the **Business Profile** option in the **Your Account** menu box (bottom left).
- In the Business Profile text box, add/edit/amend your business profile text so that it correctly represents the range of products and services that your company provides
- To add a hyperlink to your webpage, first open a new internet browser Tab and navigate to the web page that you want to link to
- In the browser address bar at the top of the web page displayed, select (with the mouse) the web address. It should turn dark blue. Right click the mouse anywhere in the selected area and select Copy (this copies the web address to the clipboard)
- Next return to the Tab with your AFI Business Profile, and within the text box similarly select the word or phrase in your profile text that you wish to act as the link to the website
- The selected text also goes dark blue, and two new icons appear above the text in the formatting bar (the first looks like a figure eight on its side, the second like the first one split)
- Click on the first symbol. It will open a small window titled **Insert/Edit Link**
- In the left hand **General** tab right-click with the mouse in the **Link/URL** field, and select **Paste**. This should paste the address of the webpage to which you are linking
- In the next **Target** field, select "Open in New Window (_blank)" from the drop-down list
- In the next field, **Title**, enter a brief description of the linked page, e.g. "Sports Fencing"
- Ignore the next Class field, and click the **Insert** button (bottom left). The window disappears and the hyperlink is set
- The final step is to click the **Update Profile** button below the text (NB – the new profile is sent to AFI for approval – this prevents members putting false or erroneous or defamatory material on the site). The Updated profile then may not be available immediately
- You can add as many hyperlinks to your profile text as you like

USING THE AFI TRADE PORTAL TO OPTIMISE YOUR SEARCH RANKING

We are informed that Google no longer relies upon Meta Tags and Key Words for ordering search engine results (although some other search engines, e.g. Yahoo & Bing, may still do). Rather, Google ranks websites by their 'relevance' to the search term being used. The higher your relevance, the higher up the result lists your website shows. The most relevant website for any search term is at the top of page one. That is everyone's goal.

- One way Google measures relevance is by the number of inbound links, i.e. links from other websites, to your own website. If lots of other people are linking to your site then Google assumes that your site must be relevant and authoritative.
- So inbound hyperlinks clicked through from your Profile on AFI's website count as inbound link. The more people that click through to your website the higher your relevance, and ranking.
- The much under-used Blog on AFI's website, containing a link to your own website will, if followed, also count as an inbound link and increase your relevance and authority.
- Another key measure affecting ranking is the time people spend on your website. Google measures this and keeps statistics of the 'bounce rate', i.e. how long until a reader bounces off your site and on to another.
- If people reach your site and then bounce off quickly, i.e. they didn't find what they wanted, then that counts as a negative in terms of relevance. By contrast if they spend time reading your page it is deemed to be relevant and authoritative, and this increases your ranking.
- So it is important to make the pages on your own website and AFI's Portal relevant to what you do in terms of text, and interesting enough to keep visitors there reading it. The more you engage with the Portal the better your Google result.