

JAN BUIS

# GLOBAL EXPANSION GO-TO-MARKET STRATEGIES



FOR  
SCALE-UPS

A proven construct of steps to succeed  
when going abroad

# Colophon

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**Author:** Jan Buis

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For inquiries, please contact JB Telecom & Data at:

[postmaster@jbttd.nl](mailto:postmaster@jbttd.nl)

# Preface

**B**y reading this book, you are likely considering a Global Expansion or evaluating your current strategy. Whether you are part of the management team of a Scale-Up or represent a private equity organization aiming to enhance the growth of a client within your portfolio, this book offers valuable insights to guide your expansion efforts.

You will be guided through the process of developing an optimal global expansion Go-to-Market strategy tailored to your portfolio. This book aims to help you avoid costly errors, such as pursuing markets that may not provide the initial success you need when expanding abroad. Believe me—these mistakes are common!

*A well-defined Global Expansion Strategy ensures that opportunities are clearly identified while also highlighting potential pitfalls.*

I specifically wrote this guide for Scale-Ups—businesses that are entering the phase of revenue growth and expansion beyond their initial customer base. Typically, these businesses have demonstrated product viability, with early customers adopting their offerings. Even though the products may still be under development, expansion into new markets, guided by a clear roadmap, can begin.

Additionally, more mature companies that have faced challenges with their global expansion efforts may benefit from the insights presented here. Throughout this book, readers will find twelve case studies that illustrate the achievements possible with the information obtained.

It is highly recommended that you follow all the steps, even though it may initially seem overwhelming. Gaining an understanding of the core concepts alone will significantly enhance your strategic direction, rather than relying solely on the more obvious or traditional approaches.

I would like to thank everyone who has been part of my journey. This includes not only former colleagues and business partners but also the education I received and the friends and family who continuously reflect on my capabilities. Working alongside all of you has provided invaluable insights into the ways expansion strategies can succeed—and sometimes fail.

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# Introduction

**E**xpanding a business internationally can be challenging, particularly if it's the first attempt or if previous efforts fell short. However, it's no more challenging than launching a new business or introducing a new product line into the market. Like those ventures, global expansion requires a series of strategic considerations, all summarized in a Go-to-Market plan.

This book guides through four distinct steps, with each stage concluding with a critical decision on how to proceed. That decision will then carry over into the next step. By the end of the fourth step, a comprehensive Go-to-Market strategy has been developed, with clearly defined activities for each phase.

*The most well-thought-out Go-to-Market Strategy will naturally emerge by progressing through each of the outlined steps.*

The following steps will be required\*:

- **Step 1:** Feasibility Study
- **Step 2:** Route-to-Market Options
- **Step 3:** Remote Presence
- **Step 4:** Remote Visibility

Each step is equally weighted in terms of size and importance and, as mentioned, should be followed in the order presented in this book. At the beginning of each step, there is an initial consideration of the 'why' and the 'how.' If the reason for undertaking an activity isn't clear, developing the 'how' becomes challenging. The 'how' then leads to the main content that follows. Each step concludes with a key takeaway and next step. After completing all the steps, an overall reflection is offered in the form of a 'Final Word.'

Given that each business is unique, it would be impractical—and unwise—to provide a one-size-fits-all solution. However, this structured journey through each step will foster awareness and provide a well-substantiated basis for explaining the decisions made. This foundation will also be valuable when seeking investment approval.

At the end of the book, there will be a list of resources that have informed the content, blending real-world experience with academic insights. Where academia offers theories and frameworks, the real-life experience allow to tailor these to specific circumstances. This synergy is demonstrated throughout the book.

Note: There are also four eBooks made available in this series, and each of the four steps listed above\* is covered in one of the independent corresponding eBook.



# Global Expansion: Why?

**G**rowing companies, particularly Scale-Ups, often contemplate how they can expand their business to sustain their growth momentum. Before addressing the question of “how,” it is essential to first understand the “why.”

Many people underestimate the challenging task of establishing a presence in any market. Success in the home market does not guarantee the same results in international markets. Therefore, a well-defined expansion Go-to-Market strategy is critical to identifying opportunities while also mitigating potential risks.

*Establishing a presence in any market poses one of the most challenging tasks, which is often underestimated.*

There are several compelling reasons for developing a global expansion strategy:

1. **Belief in Portfolio Potential:** A strong conviction that the existing product portfolio can meet demand in new markets.
2. **Leveraging Technology Momentum:** The technology is gaining global attention, prompting strategic discussions.
3. **Stagnation in the Current Market:** Growth has plateaued in the current market, causing the exploration of new opportunities.

4. **New Investment:** Recent capital has been secured to expand market presence and capitalize on growth potential.
5. **Avoiding Decline:** Maintaining the status quo will lead to decline, making the pursuit of new markets critical for sustaining growth.

In essence, there is rarely a wrong reason to expand internationally. However, understanding the “why” behind the expansion is crucial, as it directly influences the “how.”

## **The Obvious will become a Pitfall**

It is relatively easy for companies to select what they perceive as the “obvious” markets for expansion. This decision is often driven by factors such as a shared language or the sheer size of the market. While these factors are undoubtedly important, they are far from the only considerations. By focusing solely on these elements, companies risk overlooking numerous challenges that are likely to emerge once they enter the market. While companies may achieve initial success, they often encounter barriers to long-term, sustainable growth, which can result in frustration and, in some cases, a decision to withdraw from the market.

Another common pitfall is simply replicating the sales strategy used in the home market. While this existing strategy may serve as a sound foundation for expansion, requiring only minor adjustments, it’s important to remember that each market comes with its own unique challenges. What worked domestically may not directly apply abroad, as entering new markets often involves limited resources and a lack of local customer examples. Each market entry requires its own process of adaptation and refinement to ensure success.

There are many cases where companies enthusiastically entered a new market, only to conclude after a year or two that withdrawing was their only viable option. Such experiences can leave lasting scars, often leading to reluctance and hesitation when considering future global expansion.

*A painful market withdrawal can be avoided by taking the extra time to adopt a unique approach to assessing market potential.*

## **Is there a way to avoid the obvious?**

Taking a few extra weeks to gain a broader perspective on the potential of each market can yield valuable insights and fresh perspectives. Rather than rushing into the obvious choices and confronting challenges head-on, consider exploring smaller or less apparent opportunities where it may be easier to establish foundational knowledge about conducting business in a new market, country, or territory.

In the next steps, several constructs will be introduced, designed to help in drafting a strategic roadmap for globalization expansion. This concept will also highlight areas where it may not make sense to focus the initial efforts.

By applying this approach, there will be a strong indication of short-term success. However, it's important to note that this is not the final Global Expansion strategy—it's a starting point that will be refined by gathering more market-specific insights.

# Global Expansion: How?

The “how” of entering new markets comes with its own set of complexities, and there is no universal approach. This underscores the importance of conducting a thorough analysis of the current sales strategy and the rationale behind it when developing a global expansion plan. Recognizing and adapting to these key factors is critical for the success of any market entry initiative.

*Successful selling in the home market does not guarantee the same results in other markets.*

By keeping these factors in mind, the creation of a robust and adaptable Go-to-Market strategy that effectively addresses the complexities and opportunities of expanding into new markets will not be difficult. The key questions remain:

- In which country should the presence be established first, and which countries to be avoided?
- What makes sense in the short term, and what to be addressed later?

To answer these questions, it is essential to evaluate the feasibility of each country in relation to the home market, the business plan and the available product portfolio.

Within the realm of Go-to-Market strategies, there are several frameworks for assessing potential markets and determining the best approach. Over time, researchers and experts have developed and tested many models. This book introduces one such framework, which is grounded in significant real-life experience and has proven to be closely aligned with market realities. Not that other models are flawed, but to highlight that the approach presented here has yielded practical and reliable results according to the experience of the author of this book.

## **Global Expansion = Global Marketing**

Before delving into the framework, it's important to recognize that it falls within the academic field of **Global Marketing**. Global Marketing involves the planning, production, positioning, and promotion of products or services across multiple countries and regions.

This discipline requires the development of Go-to-Market strategies that account for the cultural, economic, and regulatory differences between international markets, all while striving to maintain a consistent brand identity worldwide.

The outcome of effective Global Go-to-Market strategy often necessitates adapting products, messaging, and marketing campaigns to suit local tastes, cultural nuances, and legal requirements—a process commonly referred to as localization. Hence, localization involves much more than simple translation; it encompasses the full customization of offerings to align with the unique characteristics of each market.

# Are you a Scale-Up?

**A**s this book focuses on Scale-Ups a valid question arises: what exactly is a Scale-Up? Before diving into the definition and establishing a working understanding, it's helpful to first consider other high-level types of businesses that are frequently mentioned.

Without a doubt, there is a significant gap between the extremes of a Start-Up and an Enterprise. Generally speaking, every Enterprise was once a Start-Up-or at least one of its predecessors was. This leads to the simple conclusion that every business organization, particularly those that are technology-driven, begins its journey as a Start-Up.

Could it then be concluded that a Scale-Up is a company positioned between a Start-Up and an Enterprise? Perhaps. A Scale-Up has certainly moved beyond the Start-Up phase, but sometimes the company may have been in this phase for decades. It's important to note that not every Scale-Up has the ambition or the capacity to become an Enterprise.

*A Scale-Up either recently transitioned from the Start-Up phase or has remained stagnant for multiple decades, poised for growth.*

## **The Definition of a Scale-Up**

To identify a Scale-Up, it's useful to highlight its characteristics:

- Growth is central to most Scale-Ups. It is not a modest Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of a few percentage points. Scale-Ups often target sustainable double-digit growth.
- Expansion of market presence is a key driver for creating growth.
- Process improvement and operational optimization are powerful indicators that a company is scaling.
- The product portfolio has proven itself in certain markets and is ready for expansion into new ones.
- Often, Scale-Ups are funding growth through new investment or transitioning to another investment partner.

The OECD defines a Scale-Up as a small enterprise with at least 10 employees and a 20% CAGR over three years. However, this definition overlooks organizations that may have existed for years but are stagnating in terms of revenue, customers, and employees. These companies - sometimes 100+ employees strong and generating more than \$100 million in revenue - can trigger a Scale-Up phase because of a change in leadership or a new investor, as the Harvard Business Review describes.

## **So What is a Scale-Through?**

A less common term, Scale-Through, also deserves exploration. What kind of companies fall into this category, and how do they compare to a Scale-Up?

In general, a Scale-Through shares many characteristics with a Scale-Up, such as growth and expansion as core drivers. However, the primary distinction is found in the methods used by these businesses to grow and expand:

- Partnerships and alliances play a central role, with OEM
- relationships often being part of the strategy.
  - Leveraging existing sales channels, where current channels are reevaluated and new channel strategies are implemented.
  - The focus of market penetration is on markets where there is already some presence but that require a renewed effort to stimulate growth.

Although it may appear that a Scale-Through is simply building on past success, it can face challenges similar to those encountered by Scale-Ups. In the end, a well-thought-out strategy is crucial for long-term sustainability. Global Expansion beyond familiar markets is one such strategy, and for Scale-Through companies, the framework introduced in this book will be highly relevant.



# References and Further Reading

In this section, references organized by key subject areas are presented for further reading. These sources have been instrumental in creating this book, whether through direct implementation or as foundational material, to help build a well-rounded mindset.

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