

# GLOBAL EXPANSION SIMPLIFIED: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR SMES



A DHL EXPRESS WHITEPAPER  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY



In association with



Maastricht University

# SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SME) IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

SMEs play a crucial role in international trade, contributing significantly to economic growth, innovation, and job creation. While often overshadowed by larger enterprises in terms of trade value, SMEs' participation in global markets is vital for maintaining resilient and diversified supply chains.

SMEs are a substantial part of the European Union's economy. According to Eurostat, in 2021, SMEs constituted the majority of enterprises engaged in international trade. Specifically, SMEs made up over 99% of importing enterprises in countries like Austria, the Netherlands, and Slovenia. Despite SMEs numerical dominance, the trade value handled by SMEs was relatively smaller compared to large enterprises. For instance, micro-enterprises, while constituting 78.4% of importers, accounted for only 11.8% of the import value within the EU.

The overall contribution of SMEs to trade value varies significantly across different EU Member States. For example, in countries like Cyprus and Estonia, SMEs accounted for over 80% of the trade value in intra-EU exports. Conversely, in major economies such as France and Germany, the share was significantly lower, with SMEs contributing around 33-35% of the trade value. This disparity highlights the diverse economic structures and the varying impact of SMEs on trade in different regions.

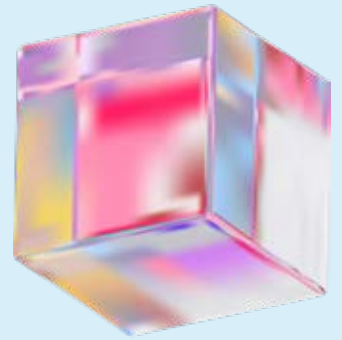
Despite their importance, SMEs face numerous challenges in international trade. These include limited access to finance, regulatory barriers, and the complexity of navigating foreign markets. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies that enhance SMEs' capabilities and competitiveness. The OECD data points out that supporting SMEs through improved access to finance, technological adoption, and favorable trade policies can significantly boost SME's participation in global markets.

The DHL Global Connectedness Report 2024 underscores the resilience of SMEs in the face of global economic disruptions. The report indicates that global trade flows have remained robust, with SMEs playing a key role in maintaining this resilience. The ongoing global interconnectedness, despite geopolitical tensions, reflects the importance of integrating SMEs into the global trade ecosystem.

Contrary to some predictions, globalization has not given way to regionalization. The report notes that most international flows are taking place over stable or longer distances, with a declining share happening inside major geographic regions. For SMEs, this means that opportunities for global expansion are still plentiful and not confined to regional markets alone.

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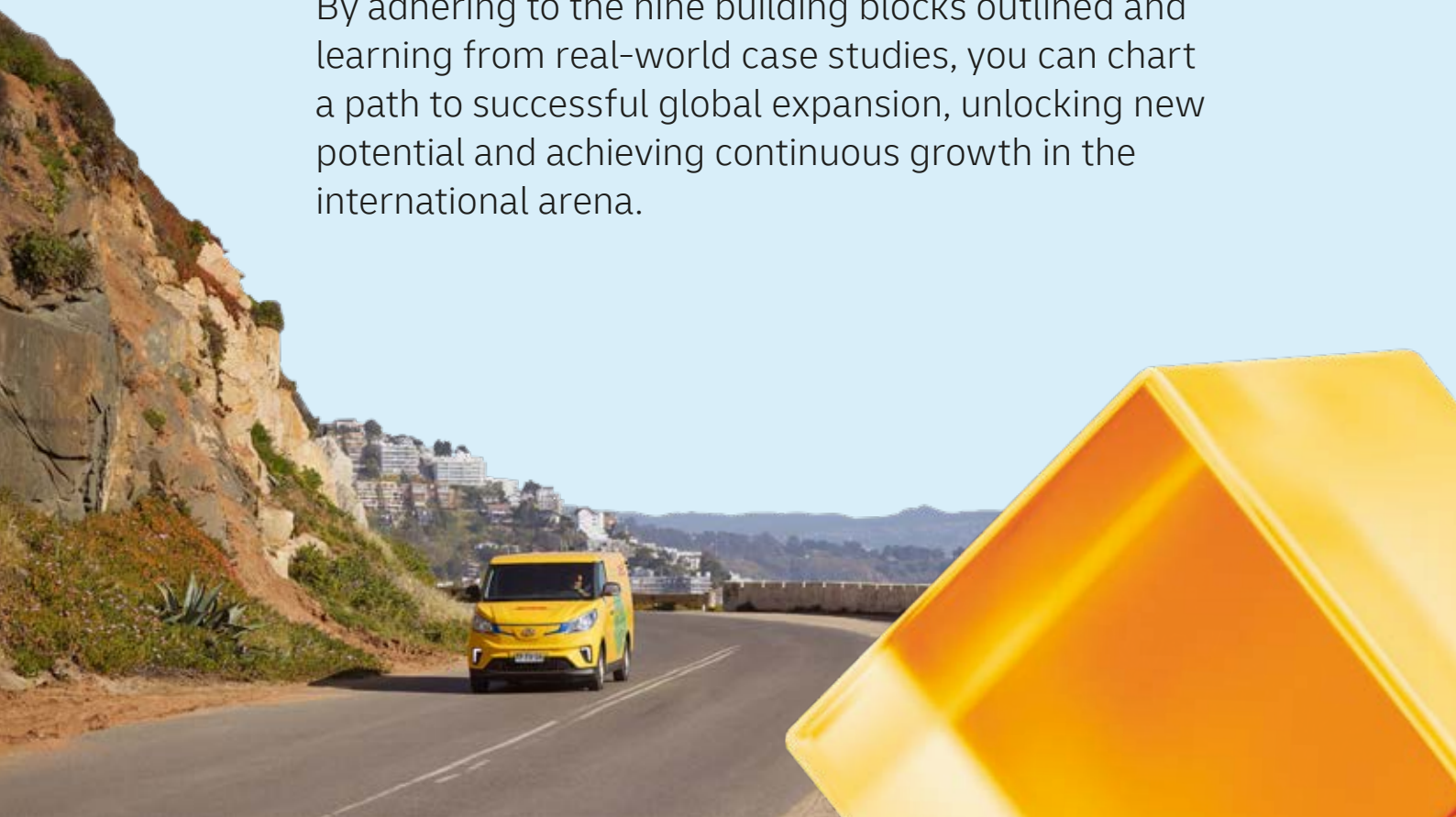
# **IN AN INCREASINGLY INTERCONNECTED WORLD, THE ALLURE OF GLOBAL MARKETS PRESENTS BOTH OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMES)**



For business-owners of these enterprises, the decision to expand internationally is not taken lightly; it requires a comprehensive understanding of various facets, from market entry strategies to cultural nuances, and from regulatory compliance to logistical intricacies. This whitepaper, titled *Global Expansion Simplified: A Guide for SMEs*, aims to demystify the complexities of international expansion, providing a structured pathway for you, as a small business owner, to navigate this ambitious journey.

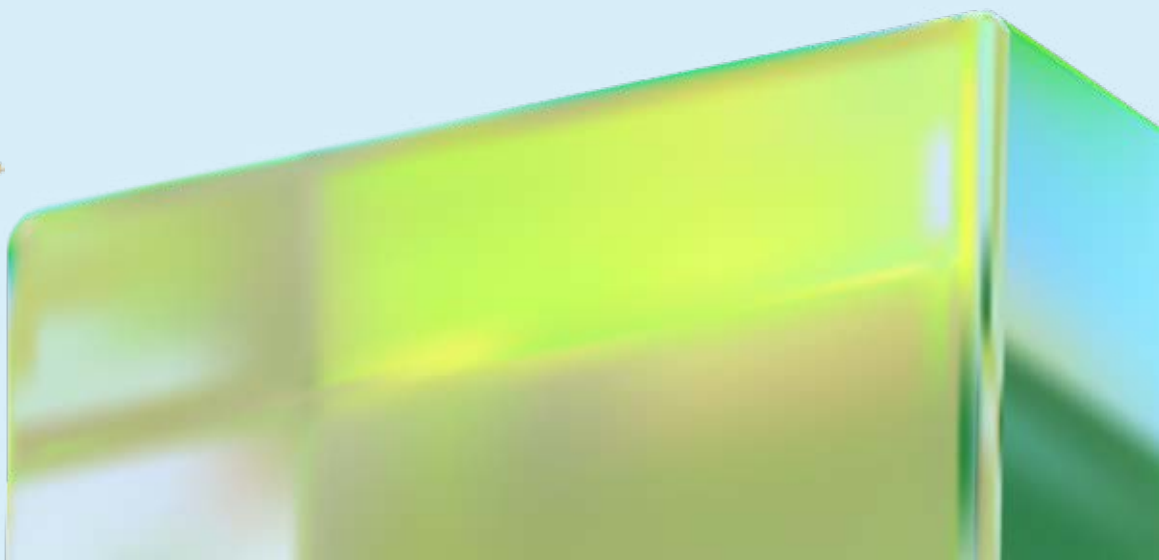
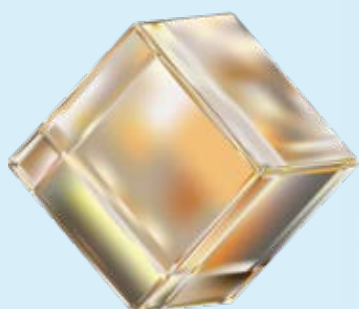
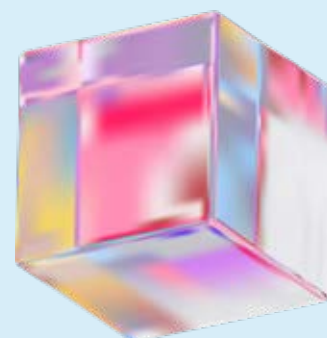
*Global Expansion Simplified: A Guide for SMEs* serves as a comprehensive resource designed to equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to embark on this exciting journey.

By adhering to the nine building blocks outlined and learning from real-world case studies, you can chart a path to successful global expansion, unlocking new potential and achieving continuous growth in the international arena.



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## **Internationalization is not just a strategy for large corporations; for SMEs, it's a vital pathway to accelerated growth and continuity in the global economy**



One of the primary benefits of internationalization for SMEs is the access it provides to new markets. By expanding beyond domestic borders, you can tap into larger customer bases and diversify your revenue streams.

This geographic diversification not only helps in mitigating risks associated with domestic market saturation but also provides a buffer against local economic downturns. For instance, SMEs in high-technology and manufacturing sectors can significantly benefit from the opportunities presented by foreign and global competition. An example of this is Hamamt, a brand that started in a small village in Ghana, and, after launching its e-commerce website, it sold out in three days. Today they ship to customers all over the world.

Moreover, international markets often present unique growth opportunities that are not available domestically. Emerging markets, in particular, offer vast potential due to growing consumer bases and increasing demand for diverse products and services. Engaging in international trade allows you to exploit these opportunities, fostering business expansion and revenue growth. This expansion is supported by advancements in communication and information technology, which have significantly reduced the barriers to entering and operating in foreign markets.

Internationalization also contributes to enhancing your competitive advantage. Competing in international markets requires you to improve your operational efficiencies, product quality, and customer service standards. This competitive pressure drives you to innovate continuously

and adopt best practices, which can lead to overall business improvement. Furthermore, exposure to international competition helps you to better understand global market trends and consumer preferences, enabling you to stay ahead of the competition.

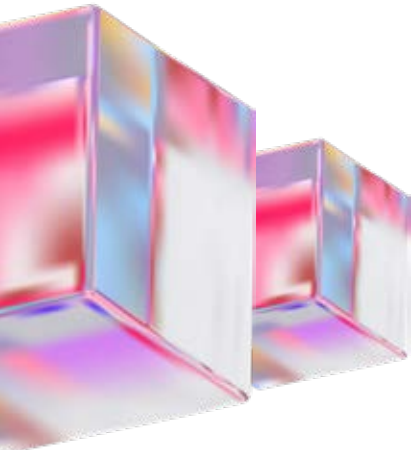
The process of internationalization itself can be seen as a growth strategy intertwined with the development of the business. This continuous evolution helps to build resilience and adaptability, which are essential for long-term sustainability in a dynamic global environment.

Internationalization is more than a strategic option; it is a vital pathway to achieving accelerated growth and continuity in the global economy.

By accessing new markets, leveraging international networks, and enhancing your competitive advantage, you can overcome domestic limitations and thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. As globalization continues to shape the business landscape, business owners who embrace internationalization will be better positioned to capitalize on global opportunities and secure their future success.

In conclusion, SMEs benefit from considering internationalization as an essential component of their business strategy, not only to sustain their operations but also to drive growth and innovation in the global marketplace.

## **Before embarking on international expansion, SMEs must conduct thorough market research to identify potential markets and understand local consumer behavior**



To effectively implement your international strategy, you need awareness and foresight regarding upcoming challenges and opportunities. To get this type of insight, your market research is essential as it provides you with a better idea of consumer behavior, market trends, economic conditions, and cultural nuances.

It is crucial for you and your SME to gain a deep understanding of your potential market and tailor your products and services accordingly. It's not just about identifying the right market, but understanding its dynamics in detail, which is key in developing marketing strategies, product adaptations, and pricing models that resonate with the target audience.

Additionally, market research plays a significant role in competitive analysis and risk mitigation in the global arena. It helps you understand the strategies, strengths, and weaknesses of both local and international competitors, enabling you to position yourself effectively and identify unique selling propositions.

In the global market, there are over 500,000 companies operating in the e-commerce sector alone, highlighting the need for thorough competitive analysis. Furthermore, market research helps anticipate and prepare for risks related to international expansion, such as financial uncertainty, compliance issues, and political instability, ensuring a more secure and sustainable market entry.

As market conditions change, market research becomes an ongoing process that supports continuous improvement and

adaptation, allowing your company to stay agile, responsive, and able to seize emerging opportunities and adjust your strategies accordingly.

All this is easier said than done and requires specific competencies. Analytical skills are fundamental for your business engaging in international market research. These are essential for processing and making sense of large volumes of data. You and your company need to be able to identify patterns, grasp market trends, and extract actionable insights from complex and diverse data sets, especially in markets with significant regional variations.

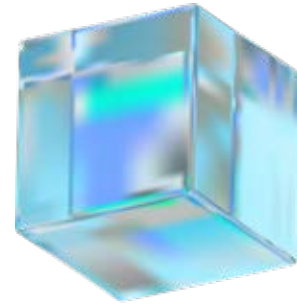
Additional skills are critical for effective market research. In-depth knowledge of the local market, including its competitive landscape, regulatory environment, and consumer preferences, often requires collaboration with local experts. Within that collaboration, language proficiency enhances clear communication and understanding of market nuances.

Utilizing advanced technological tools like data analytics software and social media analytics is key in modern market research. According to IBM (2018), 2.5 quintillion bytes of data are created every day, and effective analysis of this data can provide significant competitive advantages<sup>1</sup>. Companies using big data analytics report an 8% increase in revenue and a 10% reduction in costs on average<sup>2</sup>. Adequate financial resources ensure comprehensive research coverage, and knowledge of legal and compliance aspects are vital for adherence to international standards.



1. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2018/05/21/how-much-data-do-we-create-every-day-the-mind-blowing-stats-everyone-should-read/?sh=1c619d2a60ba>  
2. <https://bi-survey.com/big-data-benefits>

## Human Resources are crucial in SME internationalization by providing the skilled, culturally competent talent needed to succeed in global markets



As a manager or owner of an SME, you need to ask yourself two questions: Are you the right person to lead the company to go global? And are your employees the right people to do the job?

In other words, are the people in your company and the competencies they possess sufficient to execute your international ambitions?

If you have the ambition to go global, research suggests taking a closer look at the roles you – as a manager – need to fulfill. Especially in the early stages of internationalization, managerial characteristics are particularly important. Managers who have prior international experience, are proficient in an additional language next to the home market language, and/or have a higher level of education, are better equipped to support international expansion. If you do not fulfill these yourself, hiring an additional manager or employee to support you, or finding an employee in the company who already has these skills is advised.

An example in this context is companies that employ managers with a migration background. These managers are comfortable communicating in multiple languages, have knowledge of at least one additional market, and offer cultural insights into their country of origin.

Research confirms that immigrant-owned SMEs are more likely to expand. However, when they do, they tend to be more selective about which countries to enter. When faced with language barriers in certain regions, they may choose to go global rather than limiting themselves to a single potential market.

As an SME owner considering international expansion, leveraging your human resources effectively can significantly influence your success. Your employees' collective knowledge, skills, and abilities – known as human capital – must align with your internationalization strategy, whether you choose to expand gradually or adopt an accelerated approach like the born-global model.

For gradual internationalization, the focus should be on accumulating experiential knowledge and learning incrementally from each market entry. For accelerated internationalization, the emphasis should be on hiring employees with specific international experience and skills to compensate for those your organization lacks. For example, the Australian tech SME Canva expanded its international presence by hiring a diverse team with international marketing experience, which enabled it to adapt its platform to different cultural contexts and achieve rapid growth in Asia and Europe<sup>3</sup>.

Providing training programs that enhance language skills, cultural competence, and understanding of international regulations and market conditions is also essential. This investment not only prepares your workforce for the challenges of international markets but also increases your company's absorptive capacity – its ability to recognize and assimilate valuable external information.

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**A study by Aston University\* (2019) found that SMEs that invested in language training reported 30% higher business performance in international markets as compared to those who did not.**  
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3. <https://www.canva.com/newsroom/news/The-importance-of-diversity-at-Canva/>  
<https://www.nimdzi.com/localization-canva/>

4. <https://www.aston.ac.uk/latest-news/new-research-links-languages-exporting-success-uk-smes>



A flexible and responsive HR system is essential for managing the complexities of international operations. Similarly, it's important to design HR practices that can adapt to different market conditions and regulatory environments.

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Encouraging a culture where continuous learning and adaptation are valued is also important. International markets are dynamic, and the ability to learn and adapt quickly is a significant competitive advantage.”

This includes flexible compensation systems, performance evaluation methods, and career development plans that motivate and retain talented employees. Effective HR practices ensure that your human capital is deployed efficiently, enhancing productivity and supporting your international growth objectives.

For instance, the South African SME Yoco<sup>5</sup>, which specializes in payment solutions, has implemented flexible HR policies that accommodate the different labor laws and cultural practices of the various African markets it operates in, contributing to its success across the continent.

While investing in human capital is beneficial, there is a threshold beyond which additional investments may not yield proportional benefits. Over-investing in human capital can lead to increased overhead costs and administrative burdens. It is important to find the optimal level of investment in human capital that maximizes your export intensity without causing inefficiencies.

Encouraging a culture where continuous learning and adaptation are valued is also important. International markets are dynamic, and the ability to learn and adapt quickly is a significant competitive advantage. So it's good to create opportunities for employees to gain international exposure, such as through international assignments, cross-cultural teams, and partnerships with foreign companies.

For example, the Brazilian SME Natura<sup>6</sup>, a cosmetics company, offers international assignments and cross-cultural training programs that have been crucial in developing a workforce capable of managing operations in diverse markets such as Latin America and Europe. This learning culture not only prepares Natura's workforce for international challenges but also fosters innovation and agility within the organization.

In conclusion, human resources play a pivotal role in the internationalization of SMEs. By strategically aligning your human capital with your internationalization strategy, investing in relevant training, recruiting the right talent, developing flexible HR practices, managing the limits of human capital, and fostering a culture of continuous learning, you can significantly enhance your SME's chances of success in global markets.

5. <https://techcentral.co.za/fintech-yoco-looks-to-double-merchant-base-expand-abroad/180114/>  
<https://e27.co/yoco-head-of-international-expansion-on-building-trust-in-a-new-market-20220407/>  
 6. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/4717/471747060009.pdf>





## Cultural intelligence is not optional but essential for SMEs aiming to succeed in foreign markets



Cultural intelligence (CQ) involves an in-depth understanding and appreciation of local customs, values, consumer behavior, and business etiquette, which is crucial for interpreting market data accurately and developing culturally sensitive strategies.

A McKinsey survey<sup>7</sup> (2021) found that 71% of consumers expect companies to deliver personalized interactions, emphasizing the need for cultural adaptation in marketing strategies. This helps in avoiding misunderstandings and ensuring that your business strategies align with local norms and expectations.

Building cultural intelligence is essential for those aiming to thrive in international markets. You can enhance your CQ through social cognitive processes, which involve learning from the behaviors and outcomes observed in other companies and cultural contexts.

This method is particularly beneficial for resource-constrained SMEs, as it allows you to acquire cultural knowledge without the significant investment required for direct experiential learning. By observing successful behaviors in similar companies, you can adopt these practices, reducing uncertainties and improving your strategic decision-making capabilities in diverse cultural settings.

This can be achieved by participating in international trade associations, attending industry conferences,

and leveraging online platforms where cross-cultural business practices are discussed. By doing so, you can gather insights on effective strategies for navigating cultural differences and apply these learnings to your own business operations.

Building cultural intelligence is essential for those aiming to thrive in international markets. Fostering a mindset of continuous learning and adaptation is also important; encouraging your employees to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity through training programs and workshops that focus on cultural norms, values, and business practices of target markets.

This educational approach helps in building cognitive CQ, which is the knowledge of different cultures, and behavioral CQ, which is the ability to act appropriately in cross-cultural interactions. Experience in combination with training are vital in minimizing cultural “mistakes”.

Lastly, you should implement feedback mechanisms to assess and refine your cross-cultural interactions continuously. By collecting feedback from international customers and partners, you can identify areas for

improvement and adjust your strategies accordingly. This iterative process not only enhances CQ but also strengthens the company’s adaptive capabilities, allowing it to respond effectively to the dynamic demands of international markets.

One real-world example of an SME that leveraged learning to gain higher cultural understanding is Joe & The Juice<sup>8</sup>, a Danish juice and coffee bar chain.

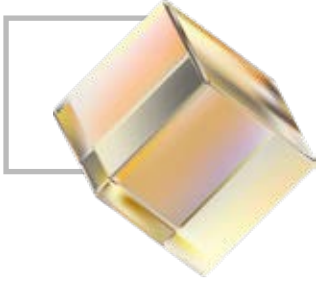
As Joe & The Juice expanded internationally, it placed a significant emphasis on understanding and adapting to the cultures of its new markets. Before entering the U.S. market, the company invested time in understanding American consumer behavior and cultural expectations. This involved immersing employees in the U.S. environment to gather firsthand insights, which helped tailor their service style and product offerings to better meet local tastes and preferences.

This approach proved successful, as demonstrated by their ability to rapidly scale, and adapt their brand to different regions. By fostering an inclusive and adaptive culture, Joe & The Juice was able to create a unique ambiance and service experience that resonated with diverse international audiences. This cultural adaptability was a key factor in their successful expansion into 16 countries, including significant growth in the U.S. and planned expansions into the Middle East.

7. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/the-value-of-getting-personalization-right-or-wrong-is-multiplying>

8. <https://www.joejuice.com/culture>

## For SMEs, forming strategic partnerships and networks in the target market can provide a much-needed competitive edge



The first step in internationalizing your business is to extend your network by initiating relationships with key stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, and distributors in foreign markets.

Actively participate in international trade fairs and industry-specific networking events to gain essential market insights and connections. A proactive approach will help you understand market conditions and customer preferences, crucial for entering new markets. When you create the new, please do not neglect the old. When entering new markets, leverage your existing networks and customer bases. This approach can reduce risks and provide a smoother transition.

Once you have initiated key relationships, focus on deepening them to ensure long-term collaboration. Regular communication, joint problem-solving, and resource sharing are vital. By integrating your network, you can leverage the unique capabilities and market knowledge of your partners, leading to more efficient international operations. In that respect, personal relationships and trust are critical.

Form strategic alliances with local companies, research institutions, and government agencies to access essential resources like financing, technological expertise, and regulatory support. By leveraging such partnerships, you can build a solid foundation for your international operations.

Adopt proactive strategies and leverage available support systems. For instance, you can build robust networks by joining industry associations and trade organizations such as the International Chamber of Commerce or regional export councils. These platforms provide access to valuable resources, including market research reports, trade missions, and networking events that connect you with experienced international business players.

In conclusion, by strategically extending and integrating your networks and forming alliances with local and international partners, you can significantly enhance your internationalization capabilities. This approach not only provides the necessary market insights and resources but also builds a robust support system that mitigates the risks and challenges associated with entering foreign markets. The case studies featured later in this whitepaper can offer valuable lessons as you expand your operations internationally.



## Selecting the appropriate entry mode is a critical decision that can determine the long-term success of an SME's international venture



Entry modes refer to the various strategies and methods that a company uses to enter foreign markets and conduct business internationally.

These modes can range from low-resource commitment options such as exporting, where goods are produced in one country and sold in another, to higher resource commitment strategies like foreign direct investment (FDI), where a company establishes or acquires operations in a foreign country.

Other entry modes include licensing and franchising, which allow foreign businesses to use the company's trademarks, products, or business models in exchange for fees or royalties, and joint ventures or strategic alliances, where a company partners with local businesses to share resources, risks, and profits.

The choice of entry mode depends on factors such as the level of control desired, resource availability, market potential, and the degree of risk the company is willing to assume.

Resource availability is, as always, a primary consideration. SMEs often face resource constraints, which influence the choice of entry mode. Exporting may be more feasible for resource-limited companies, whereas FDI might be suitable for those with substantial resources or access to external financing.

Additionally, market conditions in both home and host markets significantly impact entry mode decisions. For instance, developing countries might face higher risks and costs due to adverse market conditions, making less resource-intensive modes like exporting more attractive.

Effective financial planning is crucial for sustaining international operations and mitigating market uncertainties. Despite your smaller size, you will encounter similar international challenges as larger companies, requiring strong strategies to manage them successfully.

Develop detailed budgets and financial forecasts to plan for future cash flow requirements. This involves projecting income, expenses, and cash requirements under various scenarios, helping you anticipate financial needs and manage liquidity effectively. Accurate budgeting and forecasting enable you to prepare for contingencies and allocate resources where they are most needed. Given the dynamic nature of global markets, proactive financial planning is essential to stay ahead of potential challenges.

The entrepreneurial orientation and capabilities of the SME also play a crucial role. The characteristics of the entrepreneur, such as risk tolerance, proactiveness, and international experience, significantly influence the entry mode. Companies led by entrepreneurs with high risk tolerance and international vision are more likely to pursue higher commitment modes like FDI. This highlights the importance of aligning entry mode choices with the entrepreneurial characteristics and strategic goals of the company.

The choice of entry mode has long-term implications for performance. While exporting provides initial market access with lower risk, it might limit the company's ability to fully exploit market potential compared to FDI, which offers deeper market integration but at higher risk and cost.

You must be willing to adapt your strategies post-internationalization to respond to evolving market conditions and performance outcomes. Continuous evaluation and strategic adjustments are necessary to maintain competitiveness and growth.

To optimize your internationalization efforts, consider starting with low-risk modes like exporting to gain international experience and understand market dynamics before committing significant resources to modes like FDI.

Leveraging alliances or joint ventures with local companies can help mitigate resource constraints and provide valuable market insights, reducing the risks associated with international expansion. Moreover, remain flexible and ready to adapt your entry modes based on performance feedback and changing market conditions. Regular reassessment of international strategies is crucial for long-term success.

In conclusion, by carefully selecting and managing your entry modes, you can enhance your chances of successful international expansion, leveraging your strengths and mitigating risks effectively. This strategic approach enables you to navigate the complexities of international markets, ensuring sustainable growth and long-term success.



## Navigating the complex web of international laws and regulations can be the most daunting aspect of SME internationalization



As global markets open up and competition intensifies, you are increasingly venturing beyond your domestic borders. However, the myriad of legal and regulatory hurdles you face can significantly impede your internationalization efforts.

One of the primary challenges you encounter is the diversity and complexity of regulations across different countries. Each country has its own set of laws governing trade, taxation, labor, and environmental standards, which are not only varied but also subject to frequent changes.

To stay compliant, you need to navigate these differences, which can be especially challenging for SMEs, given their limited resources compared to larger multinational corporations (MNCs). Engaging external consultants is one way to do this. With expertise in areas such as tax compliance, transfer pricing, and international tax structuring they can help you navigate complex tax environments.

Regulatory barriers can pose significant challenges too. Regulations in both host and home countries, along with underdeveloped institutions, can make it difficult to fully capitalize on international market opportunities – an issue compounded by differences in rules and regulations between countries.

Then there are customs-related challenges, such as high duties, complex documentation, and lengthy clearance processes which can impede your entry into foreign markets. Thankfully, there are many ways to address these, all of which will enhance your competitiveness:

- Keep up to speed on target market regulations and leverage trade agreements that offer preferential tariffs.
- Implement robust systems for accurate documentation and consider using customs brokers or freight forwarders.
- Build relationships with customs authorities and participate in training programs to facilitate smoother processing.

- Embrace digital tools for compliance and shipment tracking to reduce errors and streamline your path through customs.
- Prepare for currency fluctuations and economic barriers with financial instruments like forward contracts that hedge against risks.
- Invest in capacity building and training for your team to boost their knowledge of international trade regulations and customs procedures.

Collaborating with clusters of internationalized businesses, such as technology parks or export processing zones, can offer a wealth of shared services and collective expertise for you to tap into. These hubs offer valuable insights and resources from more established companies. Government support is available too. You can benefit from export incentives such as tax rebates and grants, which offer financial assistance as well as crucial market information. These can also help when it comes to securing the necessary business licenses and certifications for international trade.

You can also participate in government-sponsored trade missions and international trade fairs, which provide a platform to establish relationships and explore market opportunities firsthand. But remember, creating a win/win situation here is crucial, so it's important to demonstrate how attending these events is a win not only for you but for those inviting you too.

Logistic partners are also essential in the process of clearance and navigating customs barriers. They can help streamline your international shipping processes and ensure your goods move smoothly across borders, with services that include customs brokerage, freight forwarding, and trade consulting. We will share how to effectively utilize these partners in the next section.



## Efficient supply chain management is key to maintaining competitiveness for SMEs in international markets



As globalization intensifies and barriers to trade diminish, adapting to the dynamic demands of global markets is of vital importance.

Effective supply chain management ensures that you can respond rapidly to market changes, manage costs, and maintain high service levels, which are essential for competing with larger, resource-rich multinational corporations.

One of the main advantages of efficient supply chain management is reducing costs and improving operational efficiency. By optimizing logistics, inventory management, and production processes, you can lower your operational costs, which translates into competitive pricing in international markets. Cost savings also enable you to invest in other critical areas such as research and development, marketing, and expanding your international presence.

Managing supply chains can be challenging due to limited resources and expertise. Logistics providers can be crucial in this context, offering access to advanced infrastructure, technology, and expertise.

They play key roles in supply chain management by providing a variety of services: Combining these various partners helps businesses address their diverse logistics needs.

**Transportation-based providers** manage the movement of goods and include freight forwarders, trucking companies, shipping lines, airlines, and rail operators.

**Parcel carriers** specialize in small package deliveries.

**Warehouse and distribution providers** offer storage solutions (public warehouses), dedicated services (contract warehouses), and order fulfillment (fulfillment centers).

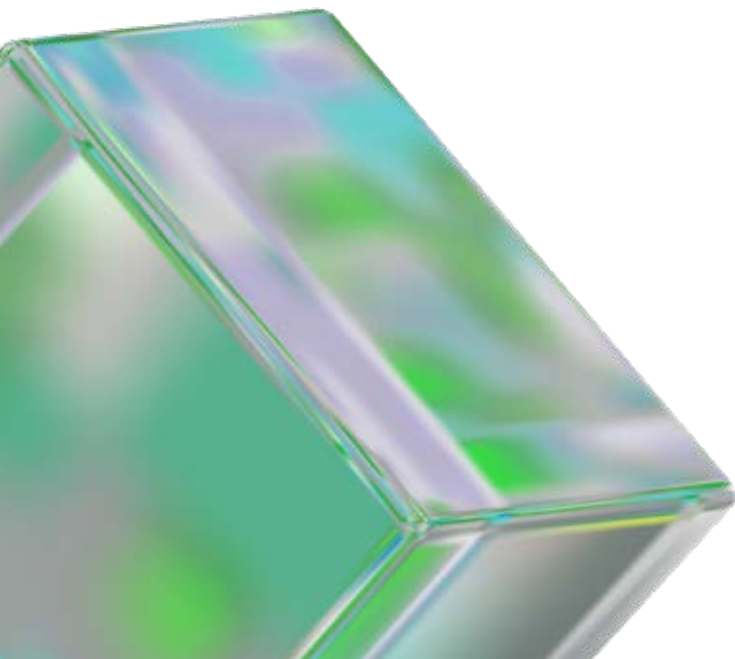
**Financial and information-based providers** handle verification, processing, and compliance, such as freight audit services and customs brokers.

**Integrated solutions providers** offer comprehensive supply chain solutions, including Fourth Party Logistics (4PL) and Lead Logistics Providers (LLPs).

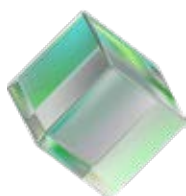
**Specialty logistics providers** address specific needs, such as cold chain logistics for temperature-sensitive goods, reverse logistics for returns and recycling, and event logistics.

**Technology-based providers** use digital platforms and supply chain software to optimize logistics.

**Consulting and advisory services** offer strategic advice and network design.

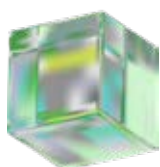


Third-party logistics (3PL) providers play a pivotal role in the supply chain process by offering specialized services that can significantly enhance your operations. Using 3PL providers offers several benefits:



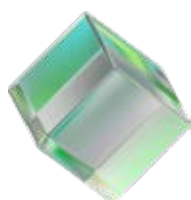
### **1. Flexibility and Scalability**

You can adjust your logistics needs based on market demand without major capital investment, which is especially useful in unpredictable international markets.



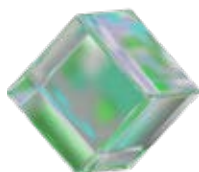
### **2. Specialized Expertise**

3PL providers have the knowledge to navigate complex international logistics, helping you overcome regulatory, cultural, and logistical challenges for smoother operations.



### **3. Improved Service Quality**

With professional logistics support, you can ensure timely and accurate deliveries, boosting customer satisfaction and loyalty in competitive markets.



### **4. Access to New Markets**

3PL providers often have established global networks, giving you access to new markets and distribution channels.

Efficient supply chain management is imperative to maintain competitiveness in international markets. By partnering with third-party logistics providers, you can overcome resource limitations, enhance operational efficiency, and improve your market responsiveness.

This strategic approach not only helps you to manage the complexities of global supply chains but also positions your business to capitalize on international growth opportunities.



## Monitoring and experimentation before committing all your resources is crucial in avoiding failure in your internationalization strategy



When considering international expansion, it's crucial to understand that a strategic approach leveraging experimentation and careful monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs) can significantly enhance your chances of success.

Embracing a lean startup methodology is crucial for international expansion. This approach focuses on launching minimal viable products (MVPs) and iterating based on customer feedback. It allows you to test your hypotheses about international markets with minimal risk and investment.

Experimenting with different aspects of your market entry strategy – such as marketing messages, sales approaches, or product features – enables you to identify the most effective tactics without committing substantial resources upfront.

Rapid prototyping helps you develop and test versions of your product or service in the target market, ensuring that you can stay responsive to market needs and pivot quickly based on real-world feedback.

Regularly gathering and analyzing customer feedback is crucial. This can be done through direct conversations, surveys, and monitoring customer interactions with your product. Understanding customer needs and pain points helps refine your strategy to better suit the target market.

Additionally, tracking sales metrics such as conversion rates, customer acquisition costs, and sales cycle length provides insights into how well your product is being received and whether your market entry strategy needs adjustment. Monitoring the rate at which you gain market share in a new region is also crucial. Slow growth may signal the need to refine your strategy, whereas rapid growth indicates that your approach is likely effective.

Successful internationalization often hinges on the ability to adapt and evolve based on what you learn. So make learning an ongoing process. Use both direct feedback from your experiments and secondary data, such as market reports and competitor analysis, to continuously refine your strategy. Employing a systematic approach to validate your hypotheses about the market is also essential.

**Transportation-based providers** manage the movement of goods and include freight forwarders, trucking companies, shipping lines, airlines, and rail operators.

**Parcel carriers** specialize in small package deliveries.

**Warehouse and distribution providers** offer storage solutions (public warehouses), dedicated services (contract warehouses), and order fulfillment (fulfillment centers).

**Financial and information-based providers** handle verification, processing, and compliance, such as freight audit services and customs brokers.

**Integrated solutions providers** offer comprehensive supply chain solutions, including Fourth Party Logistics (4PL) and Lead Logistics Providers (LLPs).

**Specialty logistics providers** address specific needs, such as cold chain logistics for temperature-sensitive goods, reverse logistics for returns and recycling, and event logistics.

**Technology-based providers** use digital platforms and supply chain software to optimize logistics.

**Consulting and advisory services** offer strategic advice and network design.

By integrating a lean startup methodology with diligent monitoring of KPIs, you can create a robust framework for entering and succeeding in international markets. This approach minimizes risks and ensures that your strategies are backed by data and real-world insights, ultimately leading to more sustainable and successful international expansion.

## Your Ultimate Checklist

In an increasingly interconnected world, global markets offer both opportunities and challenges for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Expanding internationally requires a comprehensive understanding of various aspects, including market entry strategies, cultural nuances, regulatory compliance, and logistical complexities. Over the following pages, you'll find a structured checklist for SMEs aiming to navigate the ambitious journey of internationalization.

### BUILDING BLOCKS

**BLOCK 1. Understanding the Importance of Internationalization**

**BLOCK 2. Conducting Thorough Market Research**

**BLOCK 3. Leveraging Human Resources**

**BLOCK 4. Developing Cultural Intelligence**

**BLOCK 5. Forming Strategic Partnerships and Networks**

**BLOCK 6. Choosing the Right Entry Mode**

**BLOCK 7. Navigating International Laws and Regulations**

**BLOCK 8. Optimizing Supply Chain Management**

**BLOCK 9. Monitoring and Experimenting**





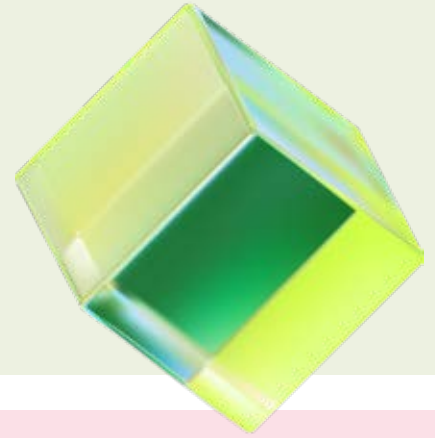
## BUILDING BLOCK 1

**Understanding the Importance of Internationalization**

Internationalization is essential for SMEs aiming to access new markets, diversify revenue streams, and mitigate risks associated with domestic market saturation. It allows businesses to tap into larger customer bases and provides a buffer against local economic downturns.

**Identify Growth Opportunities**

- Assess potential new markets for growth opportunities and diversification of revenue streams.
- Evaluate how diversifying into international markets can help mitigate risks.



## BUILDING BLOCK 2

**Conducting Thorough Market Research**

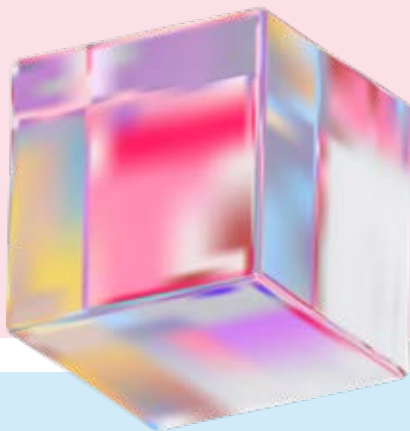
Before expanding internationally, conduct comprehensive market research.

**Understand Market Dynamics**

- Conduct comprehensive market research to understand local consumer behavior, market trends, and economic conditions.
- Analyze cultural nuances to tailor products and marketing strategies effectively.

**Competitor Analysis**

- Study both local and international competitors to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.
- Develop unique selling propositions based on competitor analysis.



## BUILDING BLOCK 3

**Leveraging Human Resources**

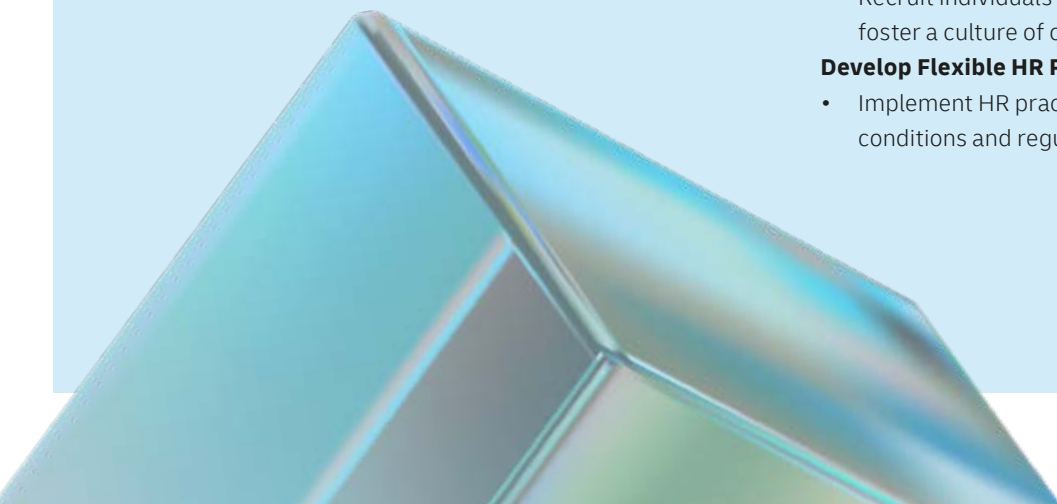
Human resources are crucial in SME internationalization.

**Enhance Skills and Competencies**

- Provide training programs to improve language skills, cultural competence, and understanding of international regulations.
- Recruit individuals with international expertise and foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.

**Develop Flexible HR Practices**

- Implement HR practices that adapt to different market conditions and regulatory environments.



## BUILDING BLOCK 4

**Developing Cultural Intelligence**

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is crucial for SMEs aiming to succeed in foreign markets. It involves an in-depth understanding of local customs, values, consumer behavior, and business etiquette. Building CQ helps in avoiding misunderstandings and ensuring that business strategies align with local norms.

**Enhance Cultural Awareness**

- Invest in training programs to build cultural intelligence within your team.
- Engage in social cognitive learning by observing successful behaviors in similar companies.

**Adapt Strategies**

- Ensure business strategies align with local customs and values to avoid cultural misunderstandings.



## BUILDING BLOCK 5

**Forming Strategic Partnerships and Networks**

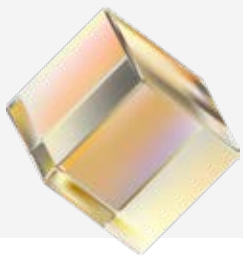
Forming strategic partnerships and networks in the target market can provide a competitive edge.

**Build Key Relationships**

- Initiate relationships with key stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, and distributors.
- Participate in international trade fairs and industry-specific networking events.

**Leverage Existing Networks**

- Utilize existing networks to gain market insights and resources for smoother market entry.



## BUILDING BLOCK 6

**Choosing the Right Entry Mode**

Selecting the appropriate entry mode is critical for managing risks and leveraging local advantages.

**Evaluate Entry Options**

- Assess various entry modes (exporting, FDI, joint ventures) based on resource availability and market conditions.
- Consider starting with low-risk entry modes to gain initial international experience.

**Adapt and Scale**

- Be prepared to adjust entry modes based on performance feedback and changing market conditions.



## BUILDING BLOCK 7

**Navigating International Laws and Regulations**

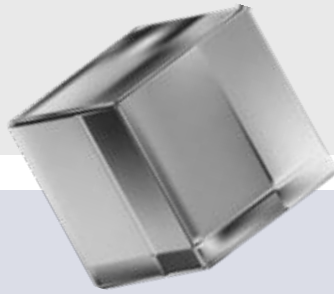
Navigating the complex web of international laws and regulations can be daunting for SMEs. Each country has its own set of laws governing trade, taxation, labor, and environmental standards.

**Stay Compliant**

- Research and understand the legal and regulatory requirements of target markets.
- Leverage government support and industry associations for regulatory guidance.

**Overcome Customs Barriers**

- Implement robust systems for accurate documentation and compliance.
- Consider using customs brokers or freight forwarders to streamline the process.



## BUILDING BLOCK 8

**Optimizing Supply Chain Management**

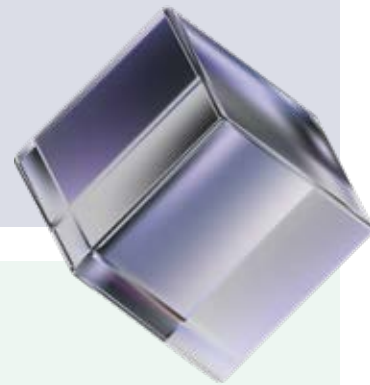
Efficient supply chain management is crucial for maintaining competitiveness in international markets.

**Enhance Operational Efficiency**

- Partner with third-party logistics providers to improve flexibility and scalability.
- Focus on reducing costs and ensuring timely delivery of products.

**Build a Reliable Network**

- Ensure personal interactions and trust with logistics partners to maintain smooth operations.



## BUILDING BLOCK 9

**Monitoring and Experimenting**

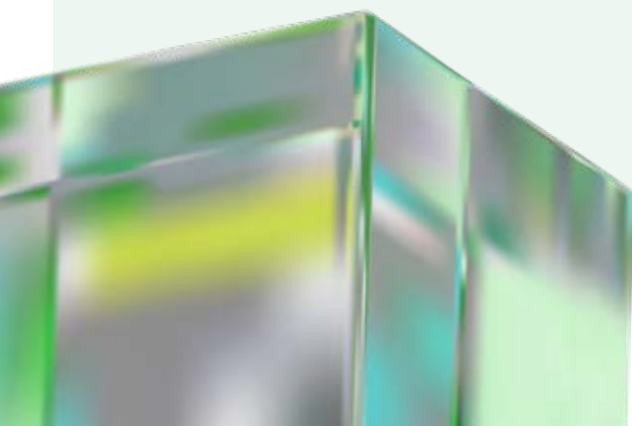
For successful international expansion, use experimentation and KPI monitoring.

**Adopt a Lean Startup Approach**

- Start with minimal viable products (MVPs) and iterate based on customer feedback.
- Experiment with different marketing messages and sales approaches to identify the most effective strategies.

**Track Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

- Regularly gather and analyze customer feedback, sales metrics, and market share growth.
- Continuously refine strategies based on real-world insights and data-driven decisions.



**In our comprehensive exploration of internationalization strategies, we have discussed the critical building blocks essential for successful global expansion. To illustrate the practical application of these concepts, we turn to two real-world case studies that exemplify how these strategies are implemented in diverse environments.**



Our selected case studies focus on businesses in the Netherlands and Singapore, two countries that consistently rank at the top of the Global Connectedness Index for their global connectedness based on the Globalization Report (2024). The Report uses nearly 9 million data points to assess globalization trends including trade flows and information on capital or people flows.

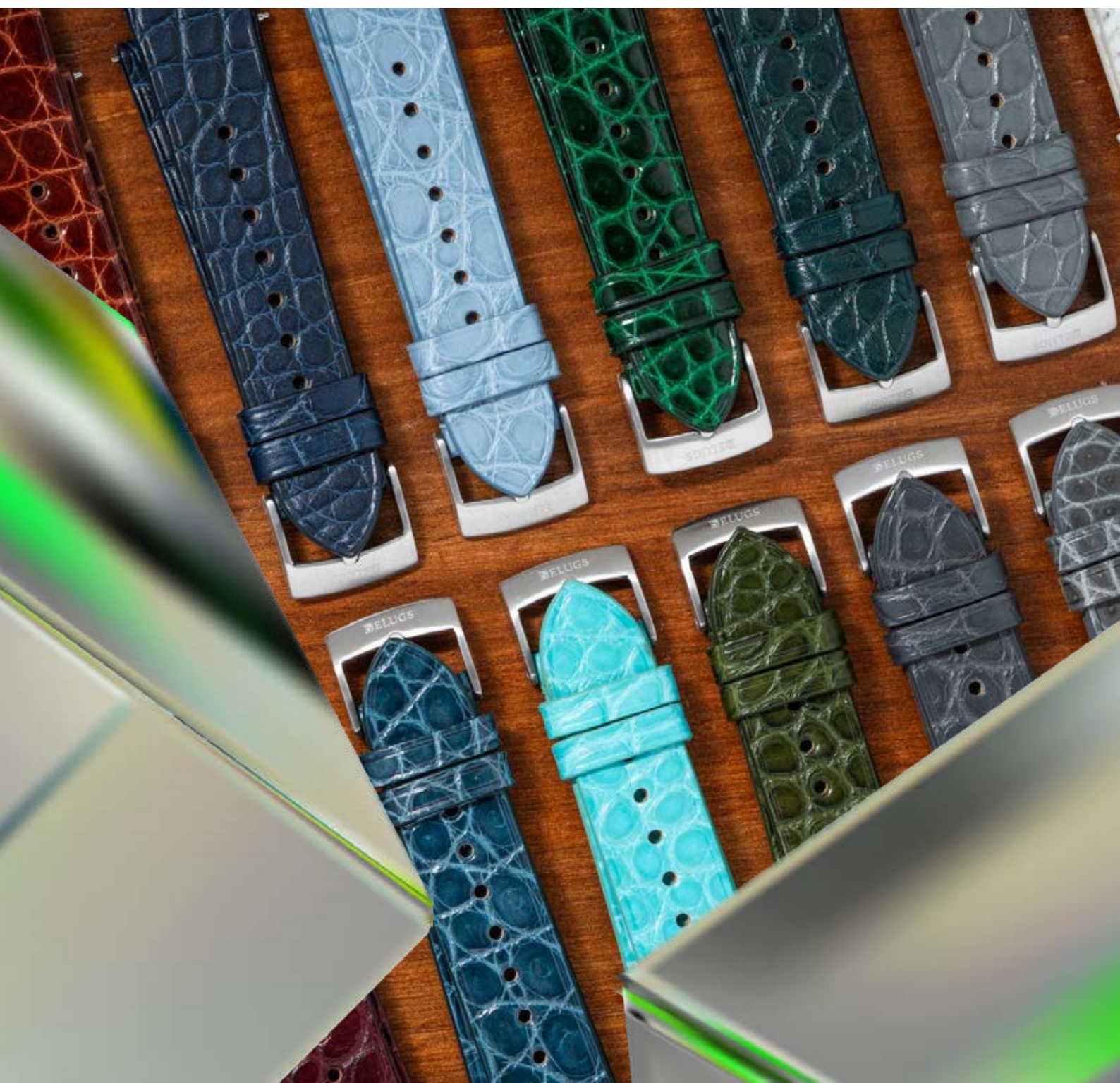
In Singapore, we interviewed the founders of Delugs, a watch strap producer that wants to make watch strap changing a lifestyle. Through our discussions with the company's founders, we delve into the challenges and opportunities of operating in a highly competitive and diverse market, emphasizing the advantages and disadvantages of a global approach.

In the Netherlands, we conducted an in-depth interview with the founder of CODE-ZERO, a leading supplier and sponsor of international yacht races and sailing events. In this interview, we learn about the impact of strategic networking for global success.

These case studies are not merely theoretical examinations but are grounded in real-life experiences and insights gleaned from our interviews with the founders. They provide a vivid illustration of how the building blocks of internationalization can be effectively used to achieve global success. By studying these examples, we gain valuable lessons on the practical implementation of international strategies and the dynamic nature of global business operations.



## CASE STUDY 1



## About the Company

Founded in 2018, Delugs was born from a passion for leathercraft and watch collecting. Based in Singapore, the brand quickly identified a market gap for high-quality, reasonably priced watch straps that cater to both enthusiasts and collectors. The brand offers a diverse range of watch straps, including leather, rubber, and custom-made options tailored to fit specific watch models perfectly. Their signature Cut-to-Size (CTS) rubber straps, featuring a proprietary leaf spring deploying clasp, set new standards for comfort and functionality in the industry. Additionally, they provide essential accessories such as watch storage solutions and maintenance tools.

The journey of Delugs is one of blending traditional craftsmanship with modern innovation. Their dedication to quality and fair pricing has not only filled a niche in the market but has also established them as a trusted name among watch enthusiasts.

## About the Founders

Kenneth Kuan is one of the founders of Delugs. His journey into the world of watch collecting and leather crafting began, about five years before founding Delugs in 2018. Kenneth's keen eye for detail and passion for quality have driven the brand's commitment to offering top-notch watch straps that appeal to both casual wearers and serious collectors.

Chia Pei Qi, co-founder, and Head of Business Development at Delugs, complements Kenneth's technical expertise with her strong business acumen and creative insights. Pei Qi's drive for learning and growth has been instrumental in Delugs' expansion and success. Her unique perspective has helped Delugs tap into the female watch enthusiast market, a sector often overlooked by other brands.

Together, Kenneth and Pei Qi have grown Delugs from a home-based business into a globally recognized brand. Their partnership is marked by complementary strengths – Kenneth's product innovation and Pei Qi's strategic vision – which have driven the brand's continuous improvement and market expansion. Delugs is now synonymous with quality and innovation in the watch strap industry, serving a dedicated community of watch enthusiasts worldwide.



## BUILDING BLOCK 1

**Making Watchstrap –  
changing a Lifestyle**

Delugs had their first sale in Singapore and then gradually pursued an international customer base as their website targeted an international audience. They decided on a generic approach to marketing by focusing on social media platforms, with Instagram being their main focus. In practice, Delugs started with an Instagram account to build a community of watch enthusiasts and to understand their target audience.

This way they were able to reach watch enthusiasts and noticed that local differences within this target group were limited. The common denominator of being a watch lover was more unifying than geographical location. This means that they posted the same type of content and ads for everyone, regardless of their location.

Today, their primary channel for reaching new customers within their target group is still social media.

## BUILDING BLOCK 2

**Knowing your  
Target Audience**

Having insights of their own community and social media analytics allows Delugs to draw conclusions on where most of their customer base is located. Currently, the main markets for Delugs are the US and Singapore, with more customers scattered across the world. However, social media is not the only source of information they rely on.

Actively monitoring the activities of other companies within their industry to pinpoint consumer expectations and habits, is crucial for Delugs. For watch enthusiasts in the luxury brand price category, customers expect superior customer service and first-class quality.

Additionally, market research allows Delugs to identify trends and capitalize on them. For example, the introduction of smart watches with interchangeable straps was a significant step in the watch industry and an even bigger one for Delugs' vision of making interchangeable straps a lifestyle.

While this example supports their view, other producers limit their straps to their own models, making it harder for individuals to match all their straps to different brands or models. Delugs understands the influence these industry developments have on their business and uses their analytical skills to be prepared when trend-setting events occur.

## BUILDING BLOCK 3

**Teamwork Makes the Dream Work**

For Delugs, their journey is like a bus ride with a destination that can change along the way. They believe that everyone in their team should be passionate about what they do and feel good at work, never having to experience the so-called Monday blues. How do you build a team like that?

For Ken, passion is one of the most important factors; it is something you cannot teach and must be brought to the table from the start. Other, more practical skills can be learned. The founders look for the ability and willingness to learn in new team members. They appreciate openness and honesty and are happy to part ways if, after a change of direction, an employee wants to step off the bus to pursue different goals. They want their team to challenge each other, think differently, and bring initiative for new ideas or improvements.

## BUILDING BLOCK 4

**Speaking the Customers' Language**

Recently, Delugs has been experiencing the natural limit of their strategy to rely on an English-only website and business. As they have only been sharing content in English, their biggest market has been the US, supported by collaborations with influencers located in the United States of America. This highlights the importance of languages for internationalization.

However, with the continuous learning and adaptability approach that Delugs is applying, the founders are currently working on new strategic moves to cover non-English-speaking areas. This adaptability is evident in their curiosity about other (offline) channels in markets where customers are not as inclined to shop online.

Their continuous adaptation has led to such significant changes in the business that Ken sees it as a completely new venture approximately every six months. This is reflected in the different tasks that he and his co-founder Pei are executing daily. One of the aspects they value a lot is feedback from their customers and the community they have grown on social media. With every batch of watch straps they produce,

they implement new improvements, even if they are marginal enough to be overlooked by most customers.

“  
With the continuous learning and adaptability approach that Delugs is applying, the founders are currently working on new strategic moves to cover non-English-speaking areas.”



## BUILDING BLOCK 5

**No Network, No Chance**

When starting Delugs, the founders had no prior experience or contacts with the watch industry. They were new, which Ken saw as an opportunity to do things differently, using social media to build their own network. Their community with brand ambassadors was only one example of the 'out of the box' thinking the founders constantly apply.

The ambassadors are unpaid and advocate for Delugs out of loyalty to the brand. This community even enabled them to get their watch straps to a famous singer without having had ties to celebrities or the music industry. Over time, Delugs has established a larger network of producers, crafters, suppliers, and retailers with whom they maintain strong relationships.

These existing partners now function as connections to new leads in more countries and markets. For example, they were able to enter the Middle East and North African (MENA) region through a partner in Qatar who wanted to become a watch strap

retailer for Delugs, enabling the company to reach a bigger audience in Qatar. The same partner then introduced Delugs to contacts in surrounding countries like Kuwait and Bahrain.

The growth of the company was organically supported by the exposure to a larger audience through the retailers. This word of mouth among customers, combined with the online word of mouth was more effective for Delugs than an advertising strategy. This approach allows them to create a genuine and authentic brand that is in constant touch and exchange with their customer base.

The founders highlight the importance of relationships not only with their customers but also with their partners and suppliers, which enables their organic growth, especially in a luxury industry. For Delugs, it is important to have proactive partners who like to challenge assumptions and be challenged to foster quicker improvements and innovation.

## BUILDING BLOCK 6

**Choosing the Right Path to Global Markets**

As Delugs started as a passion project from home, Pei and Ken made use of the resources they had, tapping into the possibilities social media offered. This choice exposed them to a worldwide audience making the first sale outside of Singapore only a matter of time. With this sale, the decision to export their products was made naturally. It was the logical and minimal-risk option for Delugs. They started with local postal delivery but quickly recognized the limitations of this approach when packages got lost or arrived late. This highlights the importance of choosing the right exporting partner.

With the growth of the company and the choice of DHL Express as their professional delivery service, Delugs was able to provide excellent service to their customers while keeping the exporting approach feasible on a larger scale. Recognizing the limitations of a general approach, they realized that different markets required different entry modes. In the MENA region, leveraging relationships and strategic partnerships was the right move to reach customers.

These strategic choices show that Delugs does not use a one-size-fits-all approach; they are prepared to change their entry mode and remain open and adaptable to new opportunities.



## BUILDING BLOCK 7

## Tackling International Regulations and Sustainability Demands

“  
When we craft our product,  
we make sure that they last  
a long time. We are not  
aiming for fast fashion;  
we want products that  
truly last.”

Chia Pei Qi, co-founder, and Head  
of Business Development

A struggle for most SMEs and for Delugs is to reach new geographical markets. Some countries have higher thresholds in terms of additional taxes and import tariffs, which limit Delugs' options for shipping to specific areas while maintaining an affordable price for their products.

Sometimes, governments adapt their regulations to address trends or larger issues such as sustainability. In Delugs' case, some countries are moving away from certain types of leather, leading customers to ask for sustainable solutions. To meet these expectations, Founder Pei states: “When we craft our products, we make sure that they last a long time. We are not aiming for fast fashion; we want products that truly last.”

Additionally, Delugs is exploring options to adapt to new regulations and to be at the forefront of more sustainable solutions. They are exploring different raw materials, textile options and even plant-based straps. In doing so, they are not only complying with laws and regulations but are also anticipating the future buying behavior of their core audience.

As part of their Sustainability measures, Delugs also utilizes Express GoGreen Plus – a dedicated solution that helps their business reduce the carbon emissions associated with their air shipments, through the use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel.

## BUILDING BLOCK 8

## Creating a Reliable and Scalable Supply Chain

Delugs first decided to deliver their products with a local postal service, resulting in lost packages, and creating more work for the Delugs team to track the packages properly and ensure they arrived in good condition with the customer.

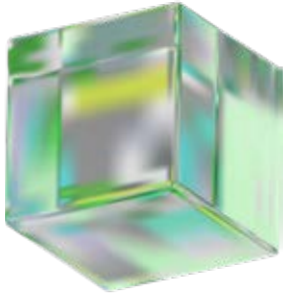
Delugs founder Ken stated: “Actually, pre-Covid we shipped out international orders using postal service but that was very slow. During Covid it became totally unreliable, so we had to switch to using a courier service and I think that is where I stumbled upon DHL, they really helped us to reach an international community.”

When selecting their current delivery partner, Delugs prioritized meeting their key criteria, with speed being the most critical. As a result, they chose DHL Express. With that, Delugs was able to satisfy their customers overseas by delivering at the same speed as local companies.

Additionally, the service's reliability allowed the founding team to focus on the strategic development of the brand and products.

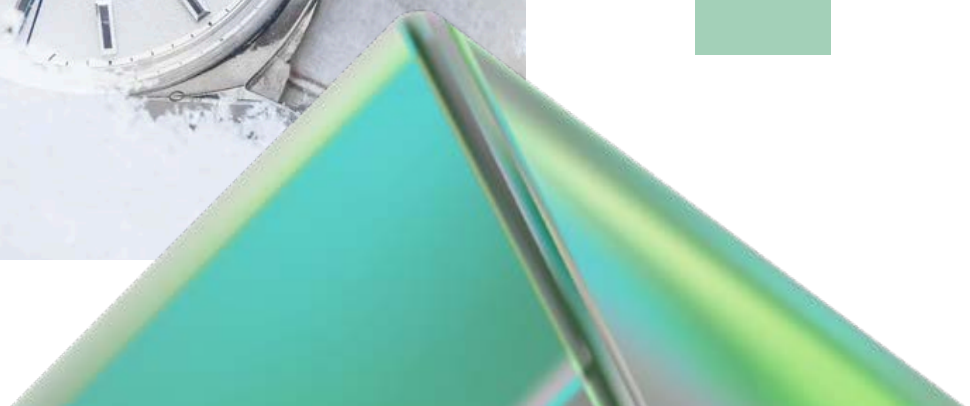
Partnering with DHL Express enabled Delugs to improve their flexibility and scalability while ensuring timely delivery. This allowed them to maintain the service level as they grew. Just as they do with their customers, Delugs maintains personal connections and interactions with partners, resulting in trusted partnerships both sides can rely on.

## BUILDING BLOCK 9

**If You Never Try,  
You'll Never Know!**

The founders emphasize that it is important to know when to take risks and where to place a safe bet. For example, if operations are going smoothly, there is no need to experiment. However, with social media changing every other month and new trends approaching, there is no steady formula for a good post or a viral reach. That is why Delugs stays open to playing with new trends in marketing, doing things differently, and allowing for experiments.

During this journey, the founders also learned that prioritizing is an important skill. As a small business, you cannot do everything at the same time, you need to know what to say yes to and what to say no to. Their advice to other founders is to experiment and think outside the box! Ken and Pei emphasize that you need to tell yourself that it is possible to expand, to be bold and go for internationalization because if you never try, you'll never know.





## CASE STUDY 2



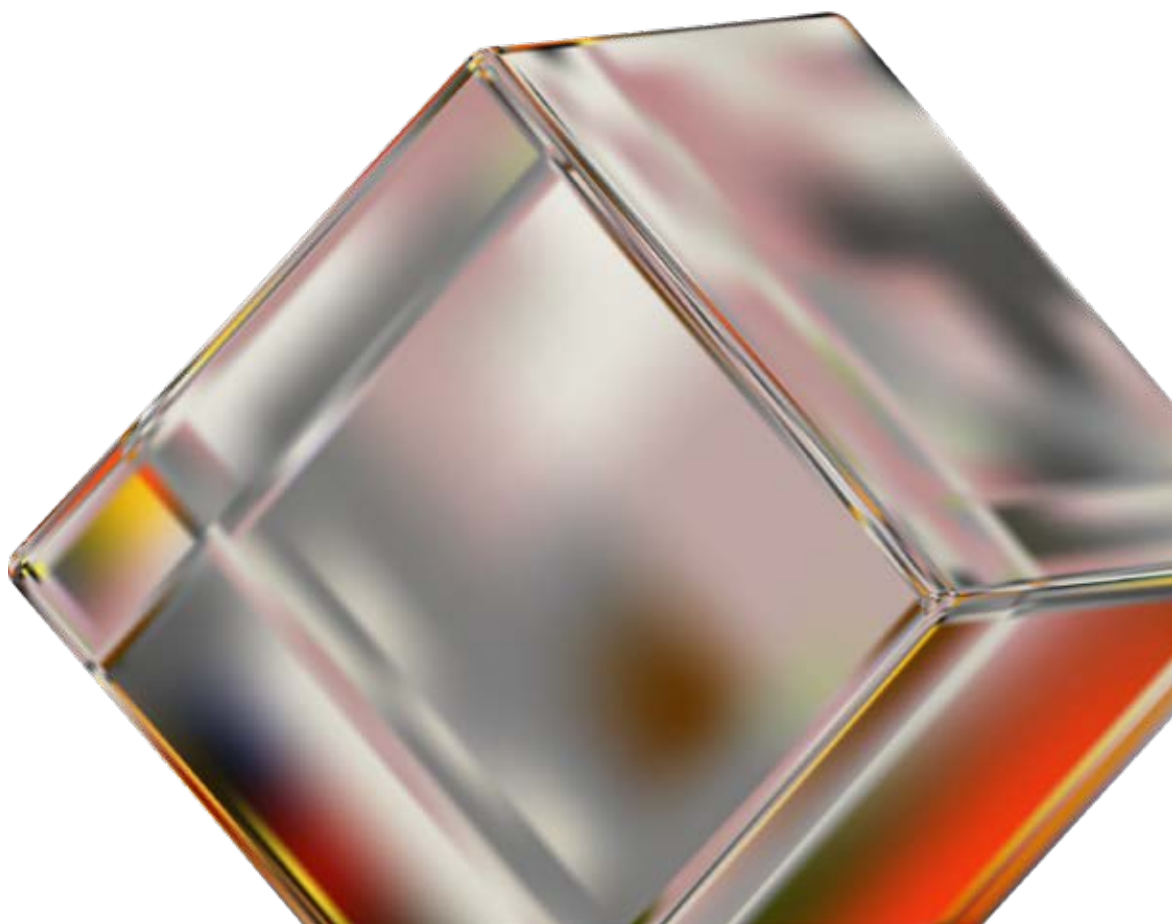
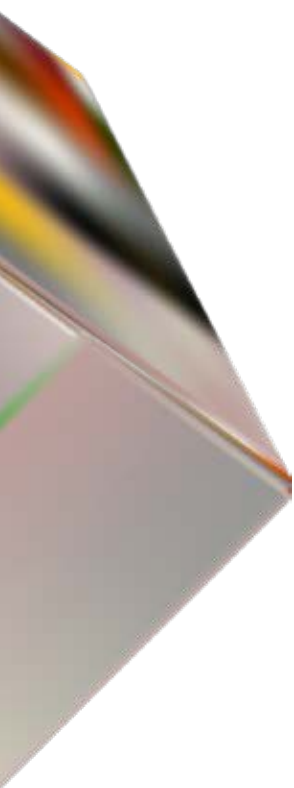


## About the Company

Founded in 2017 in Aalsmeer, NL, CODE-ZERO is a leading supplier and sponsor of international yacht races and sailing events. Under Marc Blees's leadership, the company has become the official clothing provider and sponsor for a competing team in the highest class of international racing. The brand focuses on creating high-performance nautical apparel that blends durability and style, catering to both competitive sailors and casual wearers.

## About the Founder

Marc Blees, a distinguished sailor from the Netherlands, transitioned from an accomplished sailing career to founding the nautical fashion brand CODE-ZERO. His extensive experience in high-profile sailing events informs his vision to create clothing that withstands competitive sailing's rigors while offering casual wear comfort and style. His dedication to this sport and his innovative approach to fashion make him a significant contributor to both industries.



## BUILDING BLOCK 1

**Setting Sail for Global Success**

Marc's journey with CODE-ZERO highlights the significance of internationalization for accessing new markets. Starting in 2017, CODE-ZERO has expanded rapidly, establishing offices and operations in multiple countries, including Germany, France, Spain, the United States, and Hong Kong. This broad geographic presence has enabled the company to participate in global events in high-end sports, thus accessing a wider customer base and increasing brand visibility. By penetrating diverse markets, CODE-ZERO not only broadens its consumer reach but also positions itself as a recognizable global brand, which is crucial for long-term growth and stability.

Diversifying revenue streams is another critical advantage of internationalization demonstrated by CODE-ZERO's experience. By selling in various markets, the company mitigates the risks associated with relying solely on a single

domestic market. For instance, Marc mentioned in the interview the company's significant online growth during the COVID-19 pandemic, which offset the impact of physical store closures. This diversification helps ensure a steady revenue flow even when one market faces economic downturns or other disruptions.

However, internationalization is not without its challenges. CODE-ZERO faced numerous logistical and regulatory hurdles along the journey. These challenges require a well-thought-out strategy and reliable partnerships, like CODE-ZERO's collaboration with DHL for logistics. This partnership ensures efficient and reliable delivery services, which are vital for maintaining customer satisfaction across different regions.

## BUILDING BLOCKS 2 AND 4

**Differences in Markets and Preferences**

The owner's experiences with CODE-ZERO underscore the critical importance of thorough market research before venturing into international markets. His emphasis on understanding and adapting to local consumer behaviors and market trends highlights the role of detailed research in ensuring successful international expansion. For example, CODE-ZERO encountered unforeseen challenges with customs regulations and consumer expectations during their expansion into the United States. Comprehensive market research could have anticipated and mitigated these issues more effectively.

Understanding local consumer behavior is essential. Marc observed that American and European consumers have different body size definitions, which required adjustments to their product offerings. Insights into such preferences and behaviors can only be obtained through a deep understanding of the target market. By tailoring products to meet local needs, SMEs can significantly boost customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Market trends also play a crucial role in successful internationalization. CODE-ZERO's strategic move to create a WeChat store to cater to Chinese customers exemplifies how entering new markets can open up substantial business opportunities that might not exist domestically. This decision was informed by the understanding that WeChat is a dominant platform in China. This strategic move allowed CODE-ZERO to

tap into a vast and engaged user base, leveraging a platform familiar and trusted by local consumers. This example illustrates how understanding and aligning with market trends can provide a competitive edge in foreign markets.

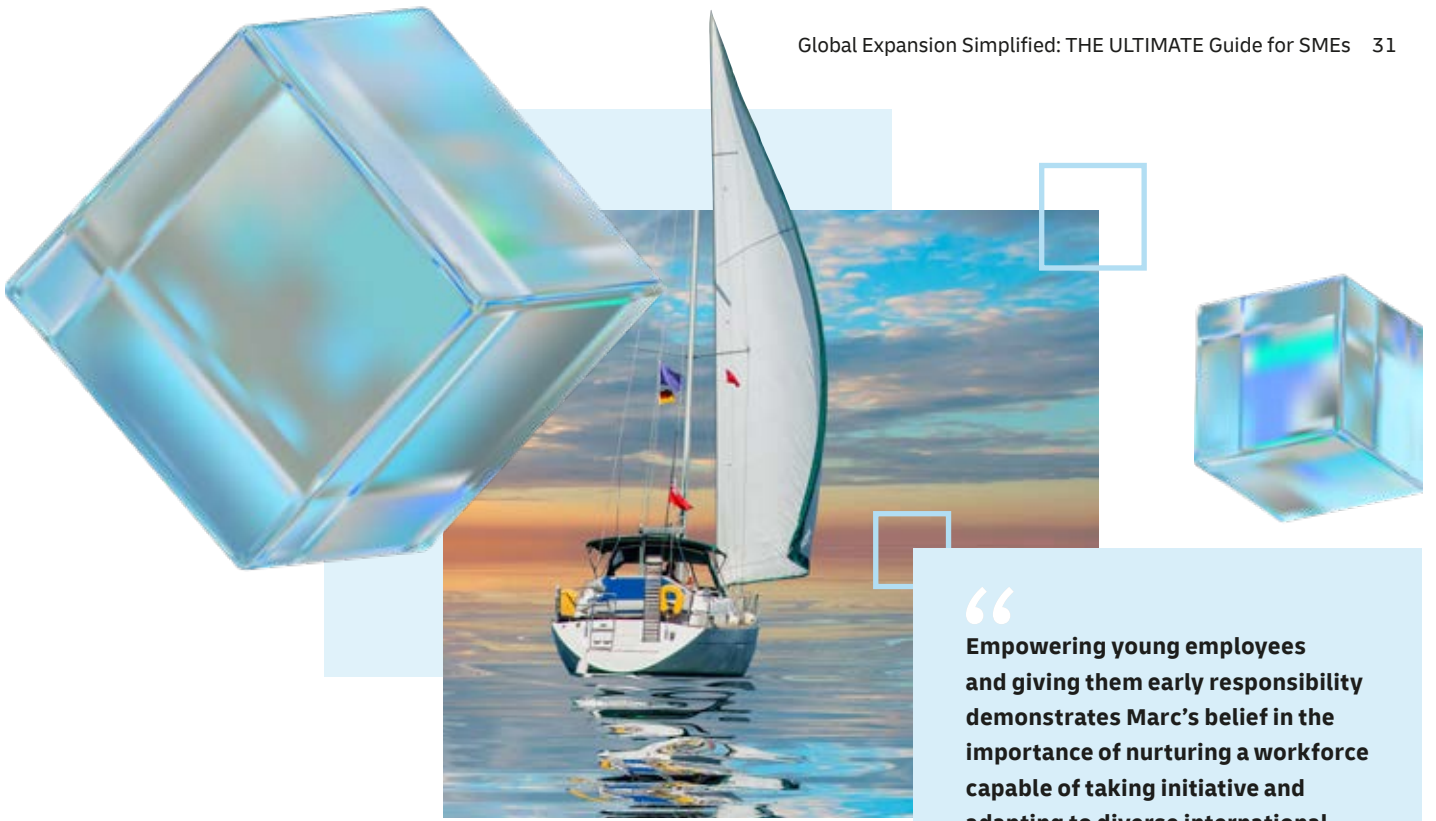
Economic conditions are another vital aspect of market research. CODE-ZERO faced numerous logistical and regulatory hurdles, such as dealing with high import duties in Australia. These challenges highlight the need to assess economic factors thoroughly. Understanding the economic landscape helps in making informed decisions about pricing, supply chain logistics, and overall market entry strategies. It ensures that the business model is viable and sustainable in the long term.

Cultural nuances cannot be overlooked. Marc's extensive network in the sailing and sports communities facilitated CODE-ZERO's entry into various international markets. This network provided valuable cultural insights and helped establish trust and credibility. Understanding cultural nuances helps in crafting marketing messages that resonate with local audiences, ensuring that the brand is perceived positively and authentically. Additionally, Marc's emphasis on understanding and adapting to local

market nuances, such as varying consumer preferences in different regions, underscores the importance of thorough market research and customization in international business operations. These adaptations are necessary to meet local demands effectively and maintain competitiveness.



“  
**CODE-ZERO's strategic move to create a WeChat store to cater to Chinese customers exemplifies how entering new markets can open up substantial business opportunities that might not exist domestically.**”



“  
**Empowering young employees and giving them early responsibility demonstrates Marc’s belief in the importance of nurturing a workforce capable of taking initiative and adapting to diverse international environments.**”

### BUILDING BLOCK 3

## Human Resources as a Strength

One of the key points Marc emphasizes is the need for entrepreneurial and problem-solving mindsets within his team. He values employees who are proactive and capable of finding solutions independently. This attitude is essential for international operations, where unexpected challenges and opportunities frequently arise. For instance, Marc’s approach of empowering young employees and giving them responsibility early on demonstrates his belief in the importance of nurturing a workforce capable of taking initiative and adapting to diverse international environments. This is crucial in international markets where the ability to respond swiftly and effectively to local conditions can make a significant difference.

Moreover, Marc’s reflection on the logistics and supply chain management of CODE-ZERO underscores the importance of having specialized employees dedicated to these critical aspects. He mentioned having two dedicated individuals in Germany focused on logistics partnerships with their service providers. This specialization ensures that the company can effectively manage the complexities of international shipping, customs regulations, and delivery timelines. The presence of such dedicated roles highlights how crucial human resources are in maintaining operational efficiency and customer satisfaction in international markets.

Marc’s interactions with his team also reveal the importance of a supportive and accountability-driven

company culture. He emphasizes the importance of allowing employees to learn from their errors while maintaining accountability. For Marc, making a mistake is acceptable as long as it leads to a learning opportunity.

This balance between support and accountability fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By creating an environment where employees are encouraged to take responsibility and learn from their experiences, CODE-ZERO ensures that its workforce remains agile and capable of meeting the challenges of internationalization.

Additionally, the strategic international hires and the establishment of offices in key locations such as Hamburg, Newport, and Hong Kong reflect the importance of having a geographically diverse team that can provide local insights and expertise. This approach to human resources helps CODE-ZERO navigate the nuances of different markets and build strong relationships with local partners and customers.

Marc’s emphasis on the personal relationships within the logistics framework with their service provider, where personal rapport with drivers and account managers significantly contributes to operational success, demonstrates how human resources extend beyond internal team management. Building and maintaining strong external relationships is equally critical, and having the right people who can foster these relationships is invaluable.

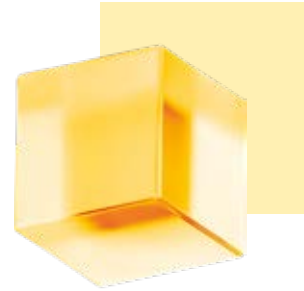
## BUILDING BLOCK 5

### Networking and Partnerships

CODE-ZERO's extensive network within the sailing and sports communities played a pivotal role in their growth. By leveraging these connections, they were able to secure influential partnerships and sponsorships, such as with international yacht races and high-end motorsports. These relationships not only enhanced CODE-ZERO's brand visibility but also provided valuable market insights and business opportunities that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise.

By participating in international events like sailing competitions, CODE-ZERO has been able to showcase its products to a targeted audience of enthusiasts and professionals, thereby increasing brand recognition and sales. These events also facilitate face-to-face interactions with potential customers and partners, which are invaluable for building trust and understanding market needs. Marc's strategic presence in these events helped establish CODE-ZERO as a credible and prominent brand in the international sailing community.

Furthermore, leveraging existing networks has allowed CODE-ZERO to expand organically into new markets. Marc's connections with influential figures in the sports and business world provided entry points into markets that might have otherwise been challenging to penetrate, like for example their entry into high-end motorsports.



## BUILDING BLOCK 6

### Finding the Right Path to Internationalization



Marc's approach with CODE-ZERO demonstrates the significance of choosing the right entry mode to manage risks and capitalize on local advantages. Initially, CODE-ZERO leveraged exporting as a primary entry mode, particularly focusing on online sales. This strategy allowed the company to reach a global audience without substantial investment in physical infrastructure abroad.

By starting with an online presence, CODE-ZERO mitigated the risks associated with high upfront costs and complex regulatory environments in foreign markets. The online model proved especially beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it facilitated continued sales despite the closure of physical stores.

As the company grew, Marc recognized the need for more direct involvement in key markets. This led to the establishment of foreign offices in strategic locations like Hamburg, Newport, and Hong Kong. Setting up these offices is a form of foreign direct investment (FDI), which allowed CODE-ZERO to have greater control over operations and better serve local markets.

FDI enabled the company to build stronger relationships with local stakeholders, understand market nuances more deeply, and ensure faster and more reliable delivery of products. Marc's decision to invest in these foreign offices was driven by the need to be closer to the customers and provide a seamless brand experience.





## BUILDING BLOCK 7

# International Law and Regulations

Marc's experiences highlight the significant challenges and risks of navigating the regulatory landscapes in different countries. He emphasizes the complexity and variability of customs regulations across markets. For example, when CODE-ZERO ships to the United States, the company must carefully follow specific customs procedures and requirements. By adapting its processes to these regulations, CODE-ZERO reduces the risk of delays and additional scrutiny. This approach underscores the importance of understanding and adhering to specific regulatory requirements to ensure smooth operations and maintain customer satisfaction.

In the European Union, Marc highlighted the challenges posed by changing VAT regulations. CODE-ZERO had to hire additional employees to manage these regulatory changes and ensure compliance. This example illustrates how regulatory changes can impact business operations and the need for SMEs to be agile and responsive.

Furthermore, Marc's insights into the high import duties and complex customs procedures in countries like Australia and Brazil highlight the significant financial and operational impact of regulatory compliance. High import duties can substantially

increase business costs, making it crucial for companies to factor these expenses into their pricing and logistics strategies. By understanding these regulations in advance, CODE-ZERO can make informed decisions about market entry and pricing strategies, ensuring they remain competitive while complying with local laws.



## BUILDING BLOCK 8

# Supply Chain Management

Marc's experience with CODE-ZERO highlights the critical role of efficient supply chain management in maintaining competitiveness. One of the strategic decisions he made was to partner with DHL. This partnership has been pivotal in ensuring reliable and efficient delivery services worldwide. By leveraging DHL's established infrastructure and expertise, CODE-ZERO could offer timely delivery and high service levels to its international customers. This collaboration underscores the value of partnering to enhance operational efficiency and flexibility, allowing SMEs to focus on core business activities while ensuring logistical challenges are expertly managed.

Additionally, Marc's reflections on the importance of logistics partnerships reveal how these relationships contribute to scalability. As CODE-ZERO expanded its market presence, having a robust logistics partner enabled the company to scale its operations efficiently. DHL's global network facilitates smooth and timely deliveries, which is essential for maintaining customer satisfaction and brand reputation in international markets. This scalability is crucial for SMEs looking to grow their international footprint

without the need to invest heavily in building their own logistics infrastructure.

Marc also shared the challenges of dealing with diverse and complex logistical environments. For instance, shipping to markets with high import duties, such as Australia, requires meticulous planning and management to avoid excessive costs and delays. By working with a reliable partner like DHL, CODE-ZERO can navigate these complexities more effectively. The partnership allows the company to benefit from DHL's local knowledge and expertise, ensuring compliance with local regulations and optimizing the supply chain for cost efficiency.

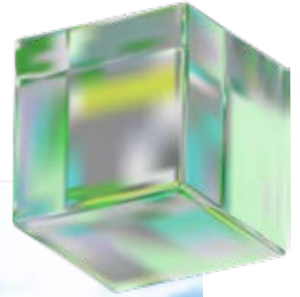
While Marc acknowledges the benefits of partnering with 3PLs, he also recognizes the value of maintaining some control over the supply chain. For example, CODE-ZERO opted to manage certain logistical operations in-house, such as using their own trucks for deliveries in specific countries. This hybrid approach allows CODE-ZERO to retain flexibility and control over critical aspects of its supply chain while leveraging the strengths of 3PL partnerships.



## BUILDING BLOCK 9

## Learning from Mistakes

Marc's approach to building CODE-ZERO emphasizes the importance of experimentation and adaptability. From the beginning, he demonstrated a willingness to try different market entry and growth strategies, highlighting the need for continuous learning and adjustment. Marc's experience shows the value of balancing strategic planning with operational flexibility. His investment in foreign offices and localized operations in different markets underscores his commitment to international growth, while his ongoing adjustments reflect the necessary flexibility to stay on course.



# GLOBAL EXPANSION SIMPLIFIED: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR SMES

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# Appendix D: Reference List

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