

Measure Market *Share* NOT Markets *Sold*

Many international managers wear their export coverage map as a badge of honor. At major trade shows, polished exhibitors open their pitch with “we are the leading xyz brand in Spain, exporting to 30 countries.” This may impress some distributors, as it reflects that the company has experience with processing cross-border orders. However, the influential data point is the producer’s track record of creating meaningful market share in new countries.

I remember a famous Italian brand approached me regarding a massive distributor search project. Their global director reported that the company sold their brand to 70 countries and confirmed that Export Solutions was active in 96 countries. The project scope was to identify distributors in the 26 “white space” countries which were mostly tough-to-access nations in Latin America and Asia. My response was that although the company claimed sales to 70 countries, they actually maintained a significant business in only 20 countries. My advice was to target 10 of their current countries and upgrade their route to market partner. This option promised a larger size of the prize and reward. The manager did not agree with my concept, as he was more concerned with growing his country count. So, no consulting contract for me, but I still love their brand.

Another time, I met the MD of a high-growth UK snack food manufacturer at Gulfood. I shared that I appreciated his innovative brand and believed it offered potential for incremental export development. His memorable response: “We export to 30 countries and have it covered!” This response was from a company with total turnover of about \$30 million, including no more than \$5 million outside the UK. He was smarter than me, as they sold the company a few years later for \$100 million. However, I wonder with a stronger international footprint, if the purchase price could have reached \$150 or \$200 million?

Stop counting countries as a primary measure of success! Instead focus on creating sustainable brand equity in strategic countries.

1. What are your global market share aspirations?

Many companies set a target such as achieve 10% of the premium segment within three years. Market share objectives will vary by country and should parallel marketing and team investment.

2. What is your market share in your top countries?

Is your brand a leader, player, or niche participant? Distributors may estimate market share, capturing share of category assortment, or percentage of shelf space.



3. What are reasonable expectations for a country?

Factors include population, purchasing power, category size, price competitiveness, and available marketing investment.

4. Distributors are different than traders!

Best in class distributors are local brand builders who maintain pride in their local marketing capabilities. Traders represent customers who buy from you at a price and then resell the brand to anyone in their country. An enormous distinction exists comparing the service offering of these two models. How many of your distributors are brand builders versus traders?

5. From Zero to Hero

Consider alignment with a power distributor in under-represented countries. Small shipments to distributors in large countries contribute to your shipment budget. However, the upside is significant through a more strategic approach.

Ultimately, export managers control their own destiny. Company leadership demands results and will applaud extraordinary shipment performance, whether the new business is sourced from Belgium or Brasil. A fresh and independent analysis of your customer list and coverage map could reveal hidden growth opportunities. Do you really have your top countries covered?

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