

International Growth: A Guide for Startups

International growth does not have to begin with a large team, a new office, or a six-month paid campaign. For startups, the smarter route is narrower: choose one promising market, test real demand, and build local trust.

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GUIDE

Building an International Growth Strategy

For founders in the Netherlands, cross-border growth matters even more in a crowded business landscape. Visibility, focus, and trust are no longer optional growth advantages; they are survival tools.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

"The Dutch Chamber of Commerce registered 2,581,399 business establishments as of January 2025."

Smart international growth starts with choosing fewer markets.

- **Avoid Spreading Thin:**
For early-stage startups, the biggest budget risk is spending limited attention across too many markets at once.
- **Start with Subtraction:**
Instead of asking 'Where could this product work?', ask 'Where can this product win first with the least waste?'
- **Measurable Moves:**
One market with a clear customer profile and a defined problem is stronger than five markets supported only by assumptions.

Source: [SearchLab](#)

A small first market is not a small ambition

Many startups confuse focus with lack of ambition. In practice, focus creates better evidence. A founder who spends 30 days learning from one market can understand objections, pricing sensitivity, sales cycles, and local language much faster than a team trying to post the same message everywhere.

The first market should be treated as a learning environment. The goal is not immediate domination, but discovering whether people outside the home market understand the problem and trust the solution.

TIP: FOLLOW EXISTING SIGNALS

Start where customer pain is visible. A useful first-market decision balances demand, access, and operational simplicity. Look for inbound website traffic, LinkedIn conversations with similar buyer profiles, or referrals from international customers.

Use local trust before spending heavily

Paid acquisition can help, but it is rarely the cheapest way to learn a new market from scratch. Early international growth often depends more on trust than reach. A founder needs introductions, context, credibility, and feedback from people who understand how business is actually done in that market.

For a startup with a limited budget, this makes community a strategic asset. Founder breakfasts, sector meetups, co-working communities, and local business events can dramatically reduce the cost of learning.

TIP: NARROW YOUR OFFER

A product may be international, but the first international offer should still feel specific. Don't localise everything at once. Make one offer travel well—a focused landing page or limited pilot package that answers who it's for, what it solves, and why it's relevant.

How to test one foreign market before committing budget

A lean international growth strategy should build evidence before incurring fixed costs. Before hiring locally, opening an office, or investing in a large campaign, founders can run a focused market test that shows whether the opportunity is real.

TIP: DEFINE TRIGGERS

Start with one country, one customer segment, and one core problem. Define a clear trigger for the next investment—like qualified calls booked or pilot requests. If the feedback shows weak urgency or expensive operational friction, adjust the test before increasing spend.

Use the Netherlands as a network base

For international founders already living or building in the Netherlands, the country can offer more than a business registration location. The real value is often in access to people, programs, events, mentors, and cross-border networks.

TIP: FIND YOUR HUB

The Unusual Space connects workspace, community, startup knowledge, and partner services in one practical environment for international founders who want to grow carefully, not expensively.

International growth becomes more realistic when it is built around evidence rather than excitement. Focused growth is easier to fund, explain, and repeat.

The Focused Growth Advantage

How a targeted strategy accelerates your cross-border expansion.



Test Real Demand

Use digital tools and targeted outreach to learn faster and discover whether people outside your home market truly understand the problem.



Reduce Fixed Costs

Build evidence before hiring locally or opening an office. Run focused market tests to ensure the opportunity is real before spending.



Leverage Networks

Access people, programs, and cross-border networks. A single introduction from a strong community can replace weeks of cold outreach.



Important: Focused growth is easier to explain and repeat

Startups do not need to look global from day one. They need to understand where demand is strongest, who they can reach, what trust signals matter, and which market deserves the next euro of attention. Build around evidence, not excitement.

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THE UNUSUAL SPACE

Navigate International Expansion with Confidence

International growth doesn't have to be a blind risk. The right approach gives you access to real market data, strategic focus, and a stronger foundation.

- Focus on one promising market and test real demand
- Leverage local networks and trust over paid acquisition
- Build a flexible base for cross-border expansion

Ready to Build Your International Strategy?

At The Unusual Space, international founders are part of a wider entrepreneurial environment. Join us to build your cross-border presence with clarity and structure.

Start your expansion: [Join US](#) →