ROMAM VENTURES

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT INTERNATIONAL MARKET

A Practical Market Screening and Selection Guide

MAKE THE MARKET FIT THE BUSINESS.

A disciplined framework for narrowing a broad list of countries into a defensible shortlist—and deciding where to investigate further.

FREE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Prepared by RomAm Ventures

United States ↔ Romania and beyond

About this guide

Choosing an international market is a resource-allocation decision. The objective is not to identify the largest or most fashionable economy. It is to identify markets where your business can find reachable customers, compete credibly, comply with applicable requirements and earn an acceptable return.

This guide is intended for small and medium-sized businesses evaluating exports, services, sourcing, partnerships, public procurement, investment or a local operating presence.

By the end, you should have a documented shortlist, a set of evidence gaps, a preliminary market ranking and a clear next-step research plan.

A practical selection sequence

- Define the business objective and the offer being taken abroad.
- Set non-negotiable requirements and constraints.
- Build a broad list of candidate markets.
- Screen out markets with critical barriers or weak strategic fit.
- Compare the remaining markets using weighted criteria.
- Validate assumptions with customers, partners and qualified local sources.
- Select a priority market—or decide that more evidence is needed before choosing.

Important distinction

A market shortlist is not a launch approval. Selection identifies where to investigate and test. A separate business case should confirm regulatory feasibility, financial viability, delivery capability and risk before material commitments are made.

Contents

1. Define what the business needs from a market
2. Establish your selection criteria
3. Build a candidate-market longlist
4. Conduct a first-stage screen
5. Compare shortlisted markets
6. Research real customer demand
7. Evaluate access, competition and delivery
8. Check regulatory and operating feasibility
9. Score, challenge and validate the results
10. Make a market-selection decision

Appendix A. Weighted market scorecard

Appendix B. Market research evidence log

Appendix C. Market selection decision brief

1. Define what the business needs from a market

Start with the business objective—not a country name. A market that is attractive for exporting may be unsuitable for establishing a subsidiary. A country with low production costs may not be the best location to reach your target customers.

Clarify the type of opportunity

- Sales market: new customers will buy your products or services.
- Sourcing market: suppliers, materials, manufacturing or specialist capacity are the primary objective.
- Operating location: the business needs staff, facilities, a legal presence or local delivery capability.
- Partner market: the priority is finding distributors, agents, teaming partners or joint-venture partners.
- Public-sector market: government or institutional procurement is the principal route to customers.
- Regional base: the country may serve as a gateway to neighboring markets, customers or supply chains.

Write a one-paragraph market objective

Identify the offer, customer, geography, commercial reason for expansion and expected outcome. Include the time horizon and the resources available. This statement becomes the test against which candidate markets are assessed.

Example

“We will identify one or two markets where our industrial maintenance services can reach mid-sized manufacturers through qualified local partners, with a pilot customer secured before establishing a permanent office.”

Set constraints early

- Maximum investment before first revenue or contract award.
- Required gross margin, sales volume or strategic value.
- Time available to reach first customer and recover investment.
- Languages, travel, security or staffing constraints.
- Regulatory, ownership, licensing or technology restrictions.
- Existing customer, supplier or partner relationships that may create an advantage.

2. Establish your selection criteria

Use a consistent set of criteria to compare countries. Criteria should reflect the business model and the specific product or service. Avoid choosing criteria simply because data is easy to find.

Recommended criteria groups

Group	Core questions
Market demand	Are there identifiable customers with a real need and ability to pay? Is demand growing, stable or declining?
Strategic fit	Does the market fit the company's offer, capabilities, experience and objectives?
Competitive position	Can the company differentiate? Are competitors entrenched? Are substitutes strong?
Market access	Can the company legally and practically sell, deliver, import, export or participate in procurement?
Economics	Can the offer be priced profitably after taxes, duties, logistics, commissions and local support?
Operating feasibility	Can the company recruit, deliver, support customers and manage operations effectively?
Partner ecosystem	Are credible distributors, agents, suppliers, subcontractors or advisers available?
Risk and resilience	Are political, legal, financial, security and supply-chain risks manageable?

Separate essential requirements from preferences

Some factors are pass/fail gates rather than scoring preferences. For example, a required license may be unavailable, a product may be prohibited, or a customer may require a certification the company cannot obtain. Identify these early. Do not allow a high score in market demand to conceal a critical legal or delivery barrier.

Avoid false precision

A weighted score is a decision aid, not a scientific prediction. Record the evidence and confidence behind each rating, and use professional judgment when factors cannot be reduced to a number.

3. Build a candidate-market longlist

Generate a broad but relevant set of candidate markets. Use several routes to identify countries rather than relying on a single ranking or report.

Where to look for candidates

- Existing customers: where do current customers operate, expand or source?
- Inbound demand: which countries generate inquiries, website traffic, referrals or requests for quotations?
- Competitor activity: where are comparable providers selling, hiring, investing or bidding?
- Industry clusters: where are relevant buyers, suppliers, technology centers or production hubs concentrated?
- Trade flows: where are imports, exports or supply-chain relationships relevant to your product?
- Procurement activity: where are public buyers publishing tenders or recurring requirements?
- Partner networks: where do chambers, associations, advisers or current partners identify credible opportunities?
- Regional strategy: could one country provide access to customers in neighboring markets?

Create a consistent longlist record

For each candidate, record the reason it is being considered, the intended customer segment, potential route to market, known barriers, initial source and date. Keep assumptions separate from verified facts.

Do not confuse country rankings with company opportunity

General competitiveness, ease-of-doing-business or economic rankings can help identify topics for further investigation. They do not establish that customers need your product, that your company can access them or that the economics will work. Use broad rankings as context—not as the final decision.

Longlist discipline

A manageable longlist might contain several plausible candidates. The right number depends on the sector and research resources. The objective is to narrow the field without prematurely excluding a market that has a strong, evidence-based fit.

4. Conduct a first-stage screen

The first screen should eliminate markets with decisive barriers or a clear lack of fit. Use a small number of high-value questions before spending time on detailed comparison.

First-stage screening questions

- Is the product or service permitted and can the company legally provide it?
- Is there a plausible, identifiable customer segment?
- Can the business reach buyers through a realistic sales or delivery channel?
- Is there a credible reason the company could win against existing alternatives?
- Can the likely price support acceptable margins after market-specific costs?
- Can the business meet required standards, certifications, licenses or local-content rules?
- Can the company manage the market's risk and operational complexity?
- Is the market consistent with the company's budget, capacity and time horizon?

Use three screening outcomes

Outcome	Meaning	Action
Advance	No obvious fatal barrier; credible fit and evidence of opportunity.	Include in detailed comparison.
Hold / investigate	Potentially attractive, but one or more important facts are unknown.	Assign research to close the evidence gap.
Remove	A critical barrier or weak fit makes the market unsuitable under current assumptions.	Record the reason; reconsider only if conditions change.

Document why a market is removed

This creates a defensible decision record and prevents the same unsuitable market from repeatedly returning to the shortlist without new evidence.

5. Compare shortlisted markets

Once the longlist has been screened, compare the remaining candidates in more depth. A weighted scorecard can make assumptions visible and reveal where further research is most valuable.

A practical scoring method

- Choose criteria that matter to the business and define what a high and low score mean.
- Assign weights totaling 100%. Give greater weight to factors that determine success.
- Rate each market on a consistent scale, such as 1 (weak) to 5 (strong).
- Multiply each rating by its weight to calculate a weighted result.
- Record a source, evidence note and confidence level for each important rating.
- Do not award a high score to unknown information. Mark it unknown and investigate.

Illustrative weighting—not a universal formula

Criterion	Illustrative weight
Customer demand and willingness to pay	20%
Market access and regulatory feasibility	15%
Commercial economics and margin potential	15%
Competitive position and differentiation	15%
Strategic fit and company capability	10%
Partner and channel availability	10%
Delivery and operating feasibility	10%
Risk and resilience	5%
Total	100%

Adjust weights to reflect the opportunity. For a regulated product, regulatory feasibility may deserve a much higher weight. For a service business, customer access and local delivery capability may be decisive.

6. Research real customer demand

Customer demand is one of the most important—and most frequently overstated—parts of market selection. Population, GDP and industry size do not tell you whether a specific buyer will purchase your offer.

Test demand at the customer level

- Identify actual organizations or buyer types that could purchase the offer.
- Determine who uses, influences, specifies, approves and pays for the product or service.
- Speak with potential buyers and ask about current solutions, unmet needs and purchasing processes.
- Understand budgets, procurement calendars, qualification requirements and typical sales cycles.
- Test whether the buyer sees a meaningful advantage in your offer.
- Seek concrete next steps: technical review, supplier registration, pilot, quotation request or formal procurement process.

Questions for customer discovery

- What problem are you trying to solve?
- How do you address it today, and what does that solution cost?
- What matters most when choosing a supplier?
- Who is involved in evaluation and approval?
- What certifications, references, local presence or service levels are required?
- How are suppliers identified and qualified?
- What budget, procurement route or timing applies?
- What would prevent you from buying from a new or foreign supplier?

Grade the strength of demand evidence

Evidence	Indicative strength
General market reports or broad sector growth	Context only; not proof of reachable demand.
Customer interviews describing a problem	Useful qualitative evidence; validate willingness and ability to pay.
Buyer request for information, supplier qualification or quotation	Stronger evidence of an active buying process.
Pilot, paid trial, purchase order or signed contract	Direct commercial evidence, subject to terms and execution risk.
Repeat purchases and referenceable customers	Strong evidence of sustained demand and delivery capability.

7. Evaluate access, competition and delivery

A market can have demand but still be difficult to serve. Assess how customers buy, how competitors deliver and what your business must do to reach and support the customer.

Market access and routes to customer

- Direct sales: can the company sell remotely or does it need local representation?
- Distribution: do distributors or resellers control access to customers?
- Agents and intermediaries: what authority, compensation and legal rules apply?
- Public procurement: are registrations, local content, security clearances or local partners required?
- Digital channels: can the service be delivered online and are data or consumer rules relevant?
- Strategic partners: can a partner provide access, technical capability or delivery coverage?

Competitive analysis

Identify direct competitors, indirect competitors and substitute solutions. Compare their target customers, price positioning, service coverage, reputation, certifications, local presence and differentiators. Determine whether your advantage is meaningful to the buyer—not merely distinctive in your own description.

Delivery feasibility

- How will products be transported, stored, installed, maintained or returned?
- What response times and after-sales support do customers expect?
- Can local staff or subcontractors meet quality and safety requirements?
- Are critical inputs available, reliable and compliant?
- What are the payment, credit and working-capital implications?
- What happens if the partner, supplier or transport route fails?

8. Check regulatory and operating feasibility

Regulatory feasibility should be investigated early enough to prevent wasted effort. The applicable requirements depend on the product, service, sector, customer, transaction and legal structure.

Topics to verify

- Foreign ownership, company registration, local representative or establishment requirements.
- Sector licenses, professional permissions and operating permits.
- Product standards, conformity assessment, testing, labeling and certification.
- Import/export rules, customs classification, duties, origin and restricted goods.
- Sanctions, export controls and restricted-party screening.
- Tax, VAT or other indirect taxes, withholding and potential taxable presence.
- Employment, immigration, payroll and workplace obligations.
- Privacy, cybersecurity, data transfers and intellectual property.
- Public procurement eligibility, supplier registration, local-content and security requirements.

Use a verification log

For each issue, record the requirement to investigate, the relevant official authority or source, the date checked, the person responsible, the professional advice received and the status. Distinguish confirmed requirements from questions still awaiting verification.

Do not rely on old summaries

Government rules, fees, forms, thresholds and agency procedures change. Verify current requirements directly with the relevant official authority and qualified professionals before acting.

9. Score, challenge and validate the results

A scorecard can create an appearance of certainty. Challenge the result before accepting the highest-ranked market.

Run a sensitivity check

- Would the ranking change if one important weight increased or decreased?
- Does one weak but critical factor get hidden by several strong minor factors?
- Are two markets being scored using comparable evidence?
- Are some ratings based on opinion while others are based on verified facts?
- Would a different entry strategy change the market ranking?
- What is the cost of being wrong about the most important assumption?

Validate the top candidates

- Conduct additional buyer interviews or meetings.
- Request indicative quotations from logistics, legal, tax or operating providers.
- Speak with potential partners and check their claims independently.
- Review current official rules and procurement or licensing requirements.
- Test pricing and customer response with a pilot or limited commercial activity where lawful.
- Update the scorecard when new evidence changes an assumption.

> **A good decision may be “not yet”**
>
> If key evidence is missing, the most responsible outcome may be to delay selection, run a focused research project or test a different entry route. A decision to wait is better than a costly commitment based on unsupported assumptions.

10. Make a market-selection decision

A market-selection decision should explain not only which market is preferred, but why it is preferred, what evidence supports the choice and what must happen before the business commits resources.

Decision brief structure

- Business objective and offer being evaluated.
- Markets considered and reasons for inclusion or removal.
- Priority customer segments and evidence of demand.
- Weighted comparison results and key assumptions.
- Regulatory, commercial, operational and financial constraints.
- Preferred entry strategy and potential partners or channels.
- Key risks, mitigations and unresolved questions.
- Required budget, resources, owners and milestones.
- Decision requested: proceed to validation, pilot, launch planning, hold or stop.

Suggested decision gates

Gate	Evidence required before proceeding
Market shortlist	Plausible fit, identifiable customers and no obvious disqualifying barrier.
Detailed validation	Buyer evidence, competitor analysis, initial cost model and regulatory questions mapped.
Pilot approval	Defined customer or partner, lawful delivery route, budget, controls and success measures.
Launch approval	Verified compliance requirements, approved financial case, delivery capacity, contracts and accountable owners.
Scale decision	Pilot results, customer satisfaction, margin, cash performance and manageable risk.

The final test

Select the market where your business has the strongest evidence-based ability to serve a reachable customer profitably and responsibly—not necessarily the market with the largest headline opportunity.

Appendix A. Weighted market scorecard

Use this worksheet to compare up to three markets. Rate each criterion from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong). Multiply the rating by the weight to calculate a weighted score. Keep source notes separately.

Criterion	Weight	Market A	Market B	Market C
Customer demand	20%			
Market access / regulation	15%			
Commercial economics	15%			
Competitive position	15%			
Strategic fit	10%			
Partner availability	10%			
Operating feasibility	10%			
Risk and resilience	5%			
Weighted total	100%			

Market A: _____ Market B: _____

Market C: _____ Date: _____

Critical pass/fail requirements and results

_____

_____

Important assumptions that could change the ranking

_____

_____

Appendix B. Market research evidence log

Use one line for each important claim or assumption. Record enough detail for another person to understand and verify the evidence.

Question / claim	Source and date	What it supports	Confidence / gap

Customer interview record

Field	Notes
Organization / buyer type	
Interview date and role	
Problem or need described	
Current solution / alternatives	
Buying process and decision makers	
Budget / timing / procurement route	
Requirements and objections	
Next action and owner	

Appendix C. Market selection decision brief

Complete this short brief after the initial comparison and validation work.

1. Decision sought
Proceed to detailed validation / approve pilot / prepare launch plan / hold / stop

2. Preferred market and rationale

_____

_____

3. Customer evidence

_____

_____

4. Main commercial and regulatory constraints

_____

_____

5. Preferred entry route and partner needs

_____

_____

6. Financial assumptions and resource requirement

_____

_____

7. Key risks, mitigations and unresolved questions

_____

_____

8. Next steps, owners and dates

_____

_____

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