



**LAUNCHING 6 MARKETS
IN 12 MONTHS**

THE INTENTION WAS TO GO SLOW, BUT
THAT PLAN WAS TOSSED ASIDE.
RASMUS SKJØTT, SØSTRENE GRENE

HOW TO

**SUCCEED
ABROAD**

CONVERSATIONS WITH E-COMMERCE
PROFESSIONALS SHARING LEARNINGS
ACROSS MARKETS.

2023



Succeed Abroad
October 2023
Created by MakesYouLocal
www.makesyoulocal.com

MAKES_{YOU}LOCAL



YOUR COMMUNITY OF
E-COMMERCE PROFESSIONALS

MAKES LOCAL

WELCOME.

Behind every ambitious brand's successful launch in a new market lies a million strategic decisions.

We have been exploring the themes of expansion, localisation and technology with top e-commerce professionals with the idea to dive into the core challenges and concerns faced by brand owners today and share learnings from their journeys.

Over the past months we ran in-depth interviews with founders, CEOs and e-commerce specialists from across markets. Along with a long-form qualitative survey of 200+ webshops across European markets, we can now share a sample of the interviews and some of the learnings and themes we see across businesses and markets.

Thank you to the many people who contributed their time and insights to make this happen.

We hope you will feel as inspired as we are and find actionable learnings to unlock your own path to success abroad.

Enjoy!

Max Riis Christensen



Max Riis Christensen
CEO at MakesYouLocal

58%

The biggest concern of market expansion is how to localise your website and products to local culture.



There is always the question: should we grow in the existing markets or invest in expanding into new markets?

Thomas Vangsgaard
CEO at Spejder Sport

60%

Of e-commerce professionals plan to expand their business to new markets within the next 6 months.

HOW TO SUCCEED ABROAD

MARKET EXPANSION

IS THERE A PLAYBOOK FOR THIS? | Yes and no, according to e-commerce experts across our community. Unpack the strategies, tips, tricks and tactics they have built up expanding across markets.

LOCALISATION

LEARNING THE LINGO | The bad news? There are no shortcuts to true localisation. The good news is that the challenge is the same for big and small brands alike. And perhaps you can expand sustainably? Jump in!

TECHNOLOGY

IS E-COMMERCE READY FOR AI? | From chatGPT and AI to WhatsApp and beyond - technology offers dazzling opportunities to deliver quality at scale. But what's right for you? And when is the right time to test it?

WHAT TO EXPLORE NEXT

UP NEXT | This space moves fast and our explorations have already unlocked compelling new challenges to crack. Add your voice to the conversation taking e-commerce to the next level.



MARKET EXPANSION

LEARNINGS & REFLECTIONS.

Each company's expansion looks different. But there is a lot we can learn from their strategic decision making processes.

How do you move outside your home market? Which market to start with? And then how to penetrate it and get traction? These are all questions to answer when planning for success abroad.

From expanding close to home like Danish Spejder Sport - to Polish women's fashion brand DeeZee's different strategies for Western and Eastern markets - it's clear that you should be adaptable and ready to challenge your assumptions about what will work in each new market. For Danish Søstre Grene, their cautious plan was tossed aside when COVID hit.

“MANY BRANDS STILL MISJUDGE THE TIME IT TAKES TO FIND TRUE SUCCESS ABROAD.”

Joachim Latocha
Co-founder at BARONS



68%

Plan to expand to new markets within the next 6 months.

42%

Of respondents use existing team when entering new markets.

55%

Of respondents decided to be present in local physical stores in local markets.

18%

Of respondents most recently expanded into Germany.

OSCAR JACOBSON.

DECISION MAKERS: UNLOCKING NEW MARKETS

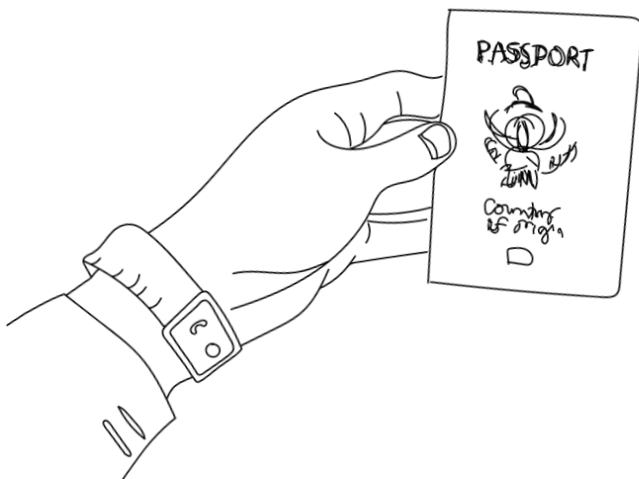
Oscar Jacobson is a 100+ year-old men's fashion brand with a modern growth story.

Founded in Sweden back in 1903, the company ships across the whole EU but is building its presence on the ground in new markets with localised websites in Norway and now Denmark. Next, they're looking ahead to opening their next market.

E-commerce manager Jacob Thorén shares his learnings on market expansion tactics, localisation, and technology across markets with our learning community.

The Playbook: How we decide which market to open next

For brands planning to expand to a new market, there are a hundred decisions to make: Which market should they go for next? How should they decide which one to focus on? And then, what does success look like?



Each brand is different and there is no rule book that can tell you exactly what is right for your business when it comes to international expansion. But there is a lot we can learn from our peers' approach to decision-making.

Fresh from Oscar Jacobson's launch in Denmark, the team is already talking about which market is next. So what do they base their decisions on?

One consideration is that what seems like the easiest or most obvious choice still warrants rigorous appraisal to test assumptions and ultimately, move with confidence.

Jacob tells us that although it can be quite natural to look at markets that are geographically close, like Finland for example in their case, they still need to evaluate which is the right path to take based on the data and signals they have.

"We're looking at buying behaviour and the patterns we can see in the sales we currently have," Jacob tells us.

"We try to build a case around it and gather as much information and have as well-defined a strategy as possible before making the decision."

"Localising and maintaining a presence is a substantial job and we want to be quite sure before taking that step."

'Nice to have' growing pains

Of course, with the benefits of building a local presence and engaging with customers comes new challenges for growing companies.

For Oscar Jacobson, this will mean maintaining content in Swedish of course, but also Danish, Norwegian and all the other EU languages on both desktop and mobile.

This means the work in their CMS will naturally become more complex, but it is of course a 'nice to have' growing pain, as the business continues to deepen its roots across Europe.

While we know each brand's international growth story is different, there is a lot we can learn from Oscar Jacobson's European expansion.

Key takeaways include doing as much, if not more, due diligence on a market that seems like the obvious choice; embracing chatbots to scale customer service, and engaging potential customers where they are on social media to talk about your product.



“ THE SIZE OF THE COMPANY DOESN'T MATTER. WE FACE EXACTLY THE SAME CHALLENGES AS THOSE THAT ARE 10, 20, 100 TIMES LARGER THAN US ”

Jacob Thorén
E-commerce manager at Oscar Jacobson



MESSYWEEKEND.

LEARNING TO SUCCEED ABROAD – SUSTAINABLY

Succeeding abroad is one thing. Today, brands need to be able to prove they can build success outside their home market in a way they can sustain.

MessyWeekend is an ambitious five-year-old Copenhagen-based business selling high-quality sunglasses and snow goggles at an affordable price, to a global audience.

While you may have seen concessions in Magasin and brand collaborations ranging from airline Norwegian to the global elite skateboarding event CPH Open, co-founder and CEO Marc Østerskov tells us building an international e-commerce brand from scratch has been anything but straightforward.



“IT TAKES A YEAR TO BUILD AN ONLINE PRESENCE”

Marc Østerskov
Co-founder and CEO at MessyWeekend

Being bold and spending money

So how did opening a B2B business line impact the company’s internationalisation strategy? The story goes back to the start.

MessyWeekend began life on Kickstarter with an influencer-based campaign for sunglasses and ski goggles. The campaign generated traffic, conversions and data points and, with global e-commerce booming, they got bold.

The team decided to launch 20 international websites, turn up performance marketing and success would be “just around the corner”.

“The plan was to spend a lot of cash to grow the top line as fast as possible,” says Marc.

With performance marketing on social media, they generated revenue, but it was expensive.

Around the same time, the company was thinking about raising fresh funds to sustain expensive growth, but then COVID hit. The company needed a new plan.

It was clear that online sales were expensive and they decided to explore B2B, testing selected retail points and wholesale, around the world.

It was quickly obvious to them that this was a profitable way to support online sales and today the business is 50:50 wholesale and retail versus online sales.

The company also had to reconsider its internationalisation plans and prioritise.

The team decided to focus on the core markets of Denmark, England, Germany, and Japan with strongest brand awareness and invest locally in retail and wholesale there before building up internationally.

“Not only was the move to wholesale more profitable, but it also helped us identify which markets to look at next,” says Marc.

SURVEY DATA

IF SUCCEEDING ABROAD WAS EASY, EVERYONE WOULD DO IT

Is your brand represented in physical stores in local markets?

And is your wholesale business affecting your decisions to invest in localising within a market?

Survey respondents show an almost 50/50 split in the prioritisation of physical stores.

Similarly, the level of impact on the local webshop performance shows a significant difference as responses are distributed across the scale.

Testing markets with distributors

Today, the strategy is to start with an agent or distributor and find out what kind of traction there is in that particular market. What do customers say about it? What is the return rate? What products are selling? Once they find that there is traction there, they can start localisation efforts.

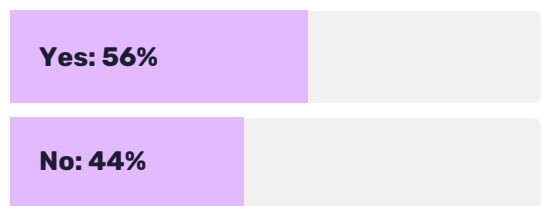
MessyWeekend’s growth is now sustainable.

True localisation still takes a heavy investment in time, people and money, the team will only commit to a new market when the data shows enough traction on the ground.

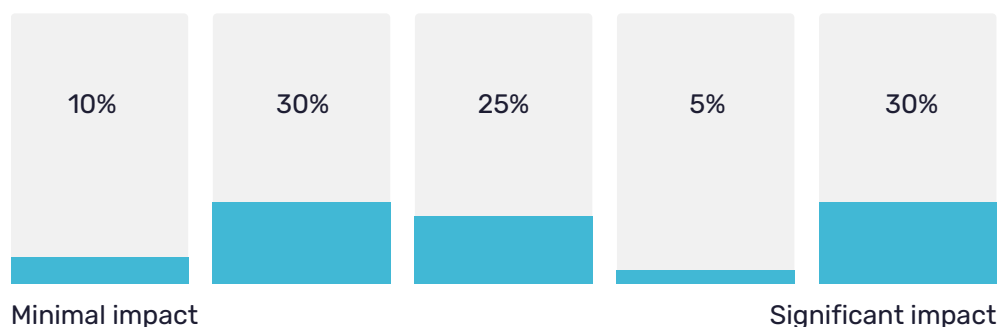
“We’ve learned that it takes a year to build an online presence. As soon as we see a profitable opportunity in a market, we invest and scale up,” says Marc.



ARE YOU PRESENT IN LOCAL PHYSICAL STORES?



HOW MUCH DOES PRESENCE IN PHYSICAL STORES IMPACT THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR LOCAL WEBSHOP?



BARONS.

EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITY IN INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION

BARONS is a well-known Copenhagen-based men's fashion brand. They offer high-end timeless shirts for busy professionals online, with the mission to 'do simple better'.

Now live in Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands apart from the home market of Denmark, co-founder Joachim Latocha tells us that finding success abroad is anything but simple for brands today.

The goalposts for success keep moving.



“MANY BRANDS STILL MISJUDGE THE TIME IT TAKES TO FIND TRUE SUCCESS ABROAD.”

Joachim Latocha
Co-founder at BARONS

Great expectations

“One of the biggest barriers for brands looking to succeed abroad is learning how to manage their own expectations.”

Joachim believes there is a level of competence, organisation and brand strength that is necessary before you can expect to succeed abroad.

Ambitious brands might assume they can replicate the success from their home market. But they overlook the fact that this success was a 10-year journey of incremental steps and - in most cases - good fortune.

“Why would you expect to reach the same success within 24 months? Many might underestimate this,” says Joachim, and includes himself in the early days.

BARONS is live in three foreign markets, but considers them to be in trial and error.

Along with a growing maturity in the global e-commerce market, the challenges of finding success abroad have evolved.

Starting out, Joachim thought they could copy the best practices from their home market, like building a great website and getting a native-speaking to oversee it.

Now he sees this as the most basic prerequisites for succeeding abroad.

In the past, entering Germany for example, was about whether you ship with GLS or DHL, translations, and having the right email flows and payment setup.

“These were important things in the past, but not nowadays.”

The growing sophistication of logistics means the technical side of things is no longer the biggest hurdle.

“Many think success depends on the setup rather than factors like distribution, brand equity and distributing marketing content,” he explains.

“But there is also sales distribution, which is tough for a small company, and there is marketing distribution to build interest and trust.”

Localisation < brand resonance

Scaling a brand is tough. Joachim believes expansion efforts should not come at the expense of the home market and become a drain on the company.

It is about expanding sustainably.

He highlights that it is dangerous to get into the line of thinking that you need to do something different in each region. For small teams, this gets complicated, fast.

It is more important to figure out what brand elements resonate with consumers in a new market, and then scale from there.

“We came to the conclusion that either you need very deep pockets, or you need to go back to the core of your brand, your visual DNA and core narrative. This is where it becomes less relevant which language you communicate in,” he says.

“The elements that make you interesting to some customers, you can incorporate into your DNA and into your marketing.”

Splashy campaigns can end up cannibalising your brand

BARONS has run a big campaign with brand ambassador and former Barcelona and Real Madrid legend footballer, Michael Laudrup, who was awarded as the greatest athlete of all-time in Denmark.

While this kind of strategy can be powerful, it is important to have your brand fundamentals in place, and it works best once your brand is established.

These kinds of campaigns should amplify your brand, not eclipse it.

Joachim explains that brands with low local brand awareness are likely to get eclipsed.

“It’s different for brands like Louis Vuitton with huge distribution networks. It is almost irrelevant whether they use a campaign with Zendaya or Julia Roberts,” he says.

Everything big brands do naturally has high brand value, but they also have 10,000 sales channels. They can afford to do this.

“You need to have a firm grip on your brand’s identity because you don’t want it to become a private label for a big star,” he says.

Let’s say you find a huge celebrity in Sweden, for example like Zlatan. No one has heard of you, but everyone has heard of Zlatan. So you just become ‘his’ underwear or whatever it is. People don’t see you, they just see Zlatan.

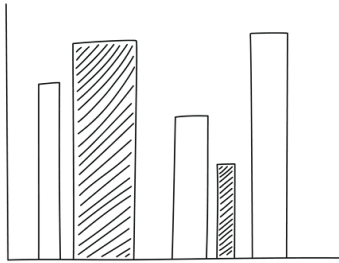
Can you translate that into selling shirts or have you just obtained some white noise that doesn’t have a commercial value?

And can your brand stand on its own without a superstar like Zlatan?

“It’s about figuring out what your core is”, says Joachim. “Then you can figure out where to invest your energy so that you don’t spread yourself too thin.”

SURVEY DATA.

IF SUCCEEDING ABROAD WAS EASY, EVERYONE WOULD DO IT



We asked the community:
What are the biggest
barriers to growth for your
company's e-commerce
effort?

THE RESPONDENTS SAID

- Legislation and trade terms
- Rising expenses
- Time and cost of translating
- More IT resources needed
- To get the most value out of all the martech tools
- Shipping costs
- Competition and price wars
- How to reach our audience in the best ways
- Local distributors in many countries
- Staff and cost of staff
- Lack of e-commerce budget
- Global inflation causing customers to spend less
- General crisis in the world



SPEJDER SPORT.

HOW TO PICK YOUR EXPANSION STRATEGY

Starting out life as a uniform depot for Danish Scouts in 1945, today the Spejder Sport brand has simply become synonymous with outdoor life.

From hiking and trail running to mushroom hunting and, yes, scout expeditions, the company sells goods from top outdoor brands and also developed its own ranges including Asivik.

Thomas Vangsgaard, CEO of Spejdersport shares his learnings.



“THERE ARE MANY ROADS TO ROME BUT IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE FUEL OR POWER IN THE CAR WHEN WE DRIVE DOWN THEM”

Thomas Vangsgaard
CEO at Spejder Sport.

Around 20% of Spejder Sports sales come from its webshop. Like all brands looking for future growth, there are many options to consider.

The biggest challenge in new markets is the competitive landscape and for retailers like Spejder Sport, which sells a lot of inventory from third-party brands, winning over local customers is challenging.

“If you target customers online, there are two ways to win them over. One is through content and service, and the other through price. If we enter a market where no one knows Spejder Sport, it's difficult to avoid the price war,” he says.

As the old saying goes, you often have to spend money to make money when it comes to unlocking growth.

The question is: on what?

“Should we even consider market expansion when we could instead strengthen Denmark, or should we try to enter into a red ocean?” he asks.

In Sweden for example, there is a competitor where Thomas says there is a 90% overlap with the brands they carry.

“It's important that we are honest with ourselves about the likelihood of success in pursuing new markets,” says Thomas.

One thing is whether they should compete head to head with local competitors with a similar offering, or whether they should open more stores in Denmark instead.

Another question is whether they should go all in with their own brands like Asivik, put them on a partner program and find a distributor in Eastern Europe where he sees a big trend around outdoor activity.

Competing with brands you sell

Another consideration is the delicate and symbiotic relationship with brands that also have their own online stores.

"That's where we sell based on content rather than price," he says. "This is possible when we have brand recognition. And it is a conversation we have with the brands we work with.

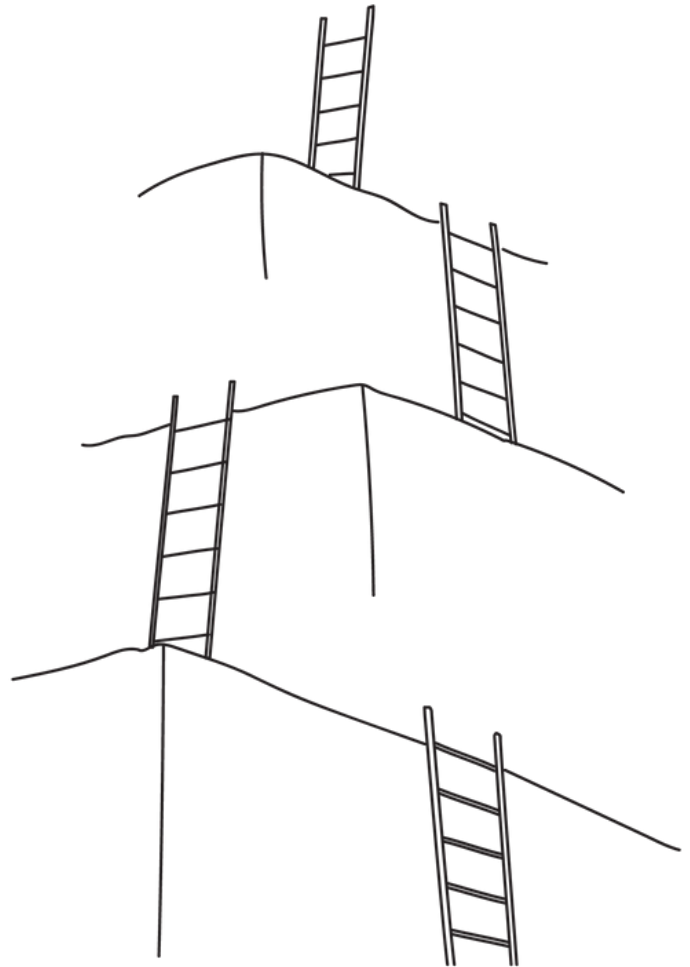
"Do they actually want our assistance, or do they prefer having their own distribution? That's a question they struggle to answer."

The outdoor equipment, gear and clothing business looks to be going through the same process as fashion retail went through a few years ago.

While brands ideally want to control the entire customer experience and the context in which their products are presented, many ultimately accept giving up some control because of the valuable upside they get from being distributed through marketplace and department store-type shops.

It is however likely that the market will settle around a few big dominant online retailers, like Zalando in fashion.

So the question becomes: do you want to enter new markets and build more of a brand store for yourself, or attempt to focus on translating the success of your brand in your home market and ultimately build a brand for your suppliers?



"There are many roads to Rome," says Thomas.

"It's important to identify and choose the main roads. And important to then have fuel enough to also drive down those roads."

There is always a question about growing in volume in the existing markets or to invest expanding into new markets.

MARKETPLACES.

FRIEND OR FOE? EVERY BRAND HAS ITS OWN MARKETPLACE STRATEGY.

Skechers: Treat marketplaces with caution.

For brands looking to build awareness quickly in new regions, marketplaces can be a good option to connect with new customers, fast.

Martin Vad Jespersen tells us that although Skechers sells products through Zalando in Germany and Amazon in the UK, it is a very controlled product assortment.

“In general, marketplaces are not part of our future growth strategy,” he says.

He explains how marketplaces require work on things like product data and customer experience resources, and Zalando takes 5-15% commission - even on returned items.

With a 40% return rate in Germany, the commission effectively becomes 10% to 30%.

Although marketplaces can be a valuable channel for awareness, your time could be better spent building brand independently with local target audiences.

Third-party marketplaces can be a powerful tool in the short term, but consider whether the cost is worth it in the long run.



Martin Vad Jespersen
Head of e-commerce at Skechers

DeeZee: Different strategy for Eastern v Western marketplaces

Like many online retailers, deciding on the role of online marketplaces is a big question.

DeeZee CEO, Maciej Marchwicki, tells us about the strategies for Eastern v Western markets.

In Poland, DeeZee is not present on marketplaces. Its offering is almost only available through its own store.

“We don't want to hand over our brand recognition to Allegro or Amazon. Being a mono-brand and investing in our own store brings much greater benefits.”

In Western markets, the strategy is to integrate with marketplaces.

“Western markets are difficult and expensive for building awareness,” he says.

The current collection dedicated to Zalando performs well, generates real-time data about which products that sell, price levels, countries and return levels.

Zalando provides excellent reports, that help them make market expansion decisions.



Maciej Marchwicki
CEO at DeeZee

SAVICKI.

HOW FAILURE IN THE UK PAVED WAY FOR SUCCESS ABROAD

Savicki is a Polish luxury jewellery brand selling across nine international markets with a string of successful international launches in countries including the Czech Republic.

In an interview, CEO Tomasz Osman shares how it was the almost “total” failure of its UK launch that paved the way for success in other markets.



“ I'M MOST PROUD OF THE FACT THAT WE DREW SIGNIFICANT LESSONS FROM OUR INITIAL FAILURE IN THE ENGLISH MARKET. WE DIDN'T GIVE UP AND INSTEAD, WE OPENED UP THE CZECH MARKET ”

Tomasz Osman
CEO at Savicki

While Brexit definitely didn't help, Tomasz says two key things surprised the team about UK shoppers and ultimately meant its online stores didn't align with how the Western market makes purchases.

Although the online store is still available there, they decided to cut their losses and not spend resources on the UK market.

“We had to accept that it didn't work out,” he says. “But our ambition was still there.”

In 2020, Savicki expanded into the Czech Republic, deciding to focus on a market with a culture more similar to Poland.

“We approached it differently after the failures in the UK. We didn't enter the UK market blindly; we knew how it functioned, and had a rough idea of the advertising costs, but we were perhaps too confident about our brand.”

“We didn't know that cultural differences would be so significant.”

A blueprint for expansion

In the Czech Republic they faced different challenges like language, and hired a local team.

They didn't have any brand recognition there and with no offline presence, they had online sales, but no reviews or online information.

However, they started investing in advertising and gradually built their reputation through reviews.

The Czech Republic showed the team that they could start building sales organically and it was developing well in terms of profitability.

After one year, they saw positive growth, and then implemented it in Slovakia. Both markets are now served by the same Czech-Slovak team, and Tomasz says the team is more cautious, and organic approach is paying off.

After focusing mainly on those markets in 2020 and 2021, the team expanded further in 2022, opening Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria. This year, the team has opened Greece and Croatia.

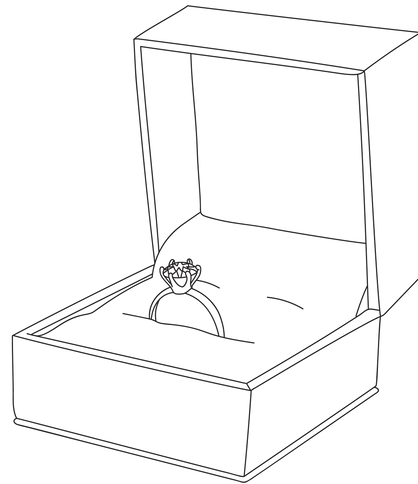
Tomasz says Romania is showing great potential. After a year, it is already exceeding the Czech market's turnover.

"International sales now account for over 33% of our total turnover, which is promising. The mistakes we made in the beginning were necessary to accelerate the business today."

Savicki plans to translate its webshop into Spanish to target a broader global audience and unlock growth in new markets across the world.

They have learned to not take anything for granted when figuring out the best way to reach local customers.

"Sometimes the channels can surprise us, and we have to explore new ways of reaching our customers. In every market, we need to look for local channels to reach customers."



Three learnings from UK

I. Cultural differences

Savicki has permanent collections where most products are displayed in a list format, as its customers in the home market of Poland are used to. They did not have the product configurations and customisation that customers expected in a shopping experience in the UK.

II. Cost differences

The second clash was that they didn't directly realise how significant the cost differences were between entering the Western market and the Polish market. For instance, the cost per click (CPC) on Google Ads was 2 PLN for one click in Poland, but in the British market, it was 20 PLN.

III. Brexit, shipping & customs

Finally, Brexit further limited the company because suddenly they couldn't ship goods within four hours and had to deal with new customs procedures.

SØSTRENE GRENE.

COVID CHANGED THE GAME: 6 MARKETS IN 12 MONTHS

If opening new markets is all about hypotheses and preparation, then part of that is being prepared to adapt when all your assumptions are dashed.

For Danish high street darling Søstrene Grene, purveyor of beloved goods for house and home, its international expansion looked totally different to the plan they had laid.

Chief digital officer Rasmus Skjøtt tells us the story of how the team wanted to be pragmatic and take it slow but ended up doing the complete opposite because of COVID.



“THE PLAN WAS TOSSED ASIDE AND THE NEW PLAN WAS TO OPEN AS MANY MARKETS AS POSSIBLE WITHIN 12 MONTHS”

RASMUS SKJØTT
CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER AT SØSTRENE GRENE

From slow roll-out to as many markets as possible in 1 year

So how did that happen? Rasmus tells us Søstrene Grene’s go-to-market strategy was to go live in Denmark first, make a lot of mistakes and learn a lot.

The intention was to be live in Denmark for 6-12 months and then start looking at expanding. But then COVID hit just two weeks after opening their webshop in Denmark.

“The plan was tossed aside and we ended up doing the complete opposite,” he says. “We opened Denmark in March, Germany in June, Netherlands in September, France in December, Sweden in January and Norway in March.”

The company chose those six markets since they represent around 85% of its total business and they are also countries where they have brand recognition and a relatively strong partner structure.

Opening 6 markets in 12 months must be some kind of record and the journey wasn’t without its hurdles.

“We had just closed 60 stores in Germany,” he says. “We were missing a turnover of 100 million on a monthly basis. So, we went live in Germany fast.”

“That's where we made our first big mistake. We went live without PayPal. That was a huge setback,” he says.

“We had discussed payments, but I think we underestimated how much it mattered.”

While the team at Søstrene Grene were working on better payment solutions and an agreement with PayPal for the German markets, their customers were not all too happy.

“The customers don't know that we are working on it. And that's where we stumbled,” he says.

“We had many setbacks in Germany. And we made the same mistakes in the Netherlands.”

France was a different story.

They had the payment methods live, but chose a distribution agreement through DHL, just like the company had in other markets.

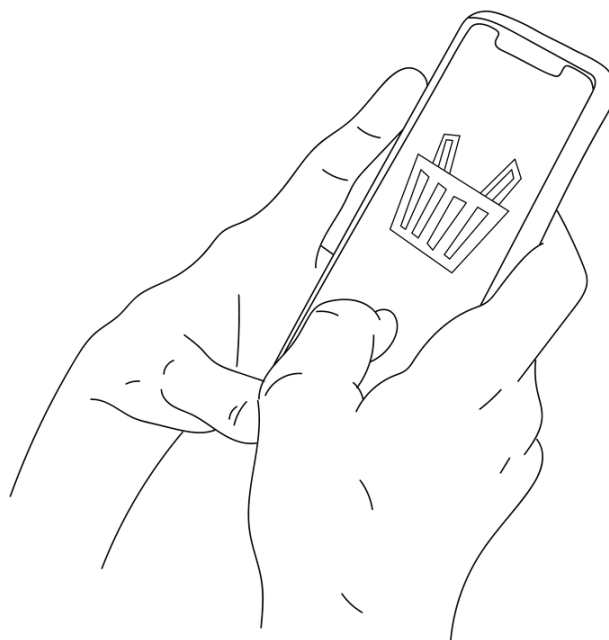
“It seemed logical to us, however, the customers thought it was a crappy product. And we didn't know that when we were working on it. We didn't understand the French customers' preferences.”

“Denmark and Sweden went more smoothly,” he says. The issues here were more about returns in-store and the online-offline connection.

“For example: If you pay online via Klarna with a 30-day credit, you don't have to pay upfront, but then you go to a store and return the product and technically you have not paid for it yet.”

Initially, they didn't have integrations with cash registers in stores meaning they had to give customers their money back in stores and then ask them to still pay their Klarna bill later.

“You get the money here, but you have to pay your bill. It's completely illogical.”



Realistic market expectations

Søstrene Grene has insourced marketing efforts a lot and has a media team located in Denmark that handles all marketing across all 15 markets, as well as marketing for the many physical stores across all markets.

“The allocation of budgets and budget sizes is different because we know that building something takes time,” he explains.

“Our go-to-market strategy is different in each market. The media channels are the same, but the communication messages are a bit different. We need to educate people more if we want to gain their trust.”

The expectations for new markets and creating brand awareness are high but realistic with a three-year scope.

“We fully understand that the new markets won't generate much in the first year. However, we expect them to perform well in years two and three.”

But online stores are not the full picture plan. More online stores will mean opening more physical stores in continuation.

"It's our entire e-commerce expansion that goes hand in hand with our online expansion," he says.

Søstrene Grene plans to open 40 physical stores in the UK.

"Right now we have eight stores in the UK, and it's a big country so no one knows us yet," he says.

"But when we open 40-50 stores across the UK in the next two years, then it's clear we also need an e-commerce business to go hand in hand with that."

If the UK expansion looks anything like other markets that Søstrene Grene has entered since COVID hit, they will expect to see organic growth - through opening their physical stores as well as in their online business.

"A store opens down on High Street, 200 meters from where you live, and the obvious thing to expect is that people living nearby will Google it."

Another marketing challenge ahead of Søstrene Grene is language and when to spend resources on language localisation efforts.

"Optimising with local language is somewhere on the maturity curve further into the journey," he says.

First, they see how the markets are doing and then language is part of the refinement.

"We want to see some more market maturity before we invest in a 5-person team," he explains.


"And we have to define what market maturity looks like before each market would deserve a custom treatment."

And next up for Søstrene Grene

"We have finally closed the worst gaps, but our online stores were still a ship taking in water. So we actually spent a year and a half on operational optimisations, payment solutions, changing our French distribution agreement, and building other things making it more robust. It may sound boring, but it's crucial for us to be able to approach the next markets."

And that is where Søstrene Grene is today. They gained a lot of experience, some of it quite costly, but they now have enough learnings to open new markets and expand further.

"We're going live with the next bundle, which consists of our mid-markets; Belgium, Austria, and Ireland, which are already live now, then Switzerland and the UK, and then the small markets from there."



ARTE DOMESTICA.

THE KEY TO SELLING PREMIUM PRODUCTS ACROSS MARKETS

Arte Domestica is a Lithuanian wholesale business selling premium products, including household appliances, sport and leisure, home cooking, B2B goods, and retail across the Baltics and beyond.

In our latest Succeed Abroad spotlight story, we sit down with Domantas Zickus, managing director at D.one.It (part of the Arte Domestica family) to talk about what he believes is the secret to finding success abroad.

For him, it boils down to this: premium products require premium customer service. Whether it is physical stores or webshops, it is about figuring out what it takes to deliver the same quality customer experience across each new market you enter.

“If you sell a premium product, the first thing is to meet the manufacturer’s standards,” he says.

“The second thing is to have a full assortment, and the third is taking pride in it.”

“We have unique standards only for our needs, so we invested in those things. We invest in the competence of people so that they know everything about it.”

For him, it’s also important that customers on the ground in each market can get information about each product, however they want.

“We set goals for distributors to decide how the product should be delivered, what information should be provided, and what to tell the customer about the product,” he says.

This is then supported with “real human beings” in customer service, available in each country.

“It really takes more time to build brand trust,” he says.

What does it come down to? Scaling not just the reach but also quality of your brand across markets, and delivering a service that you can be proud of.

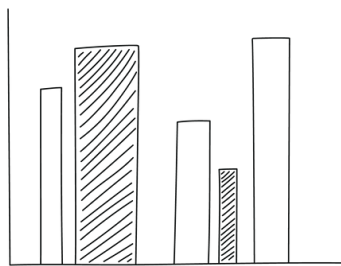


“ IT REALLY TAKES MORE TIME TO BUILD BRAND TRUST ”

Domantas Zickus
Managing Director at D.one

LOCALISATION

LEARNINGS & REFLECTIONS



How do brands learn to speak the same language as their customers across markets? And how important is it for you?

Even for global super brands like Skechers, understanding local customer behaviour remains the No 1 challenge when entering new markets.

That is according to Head of E-commerce at Skechers, Martin Vad Jespersen, who shares his reflections on connecting with local customers in this chapter, along with experienced e-commerce companies like Gents, Med24, Jula and more.

While you can focus on developing a 'playbook' for localisation, it is also key to have a mindset ready to invest time and resources in finding out what makes local customers tick.

Join us as we dive into tips, tricks and key takeaways from top e-commerce companies' localisation journeys.

58%

The biggest concern of market expansion is how to localise your website and products to local culture.



For global giants and ambitious young webshops, it's critical to understand customers. It's painstaking and the work is never done.

Martin Vad Jespersen
Head of E-commerce at Skechers

SKECHERS.

THINK LIKE A FINN WITH GLOBAL SUPER BRAND SKECHERS

If you don't own a pair of Skechers yourself, you definitely know someone who does. Founded in California in the early 90s, Skechers grew into one of the biggest shoe brands on the planet and remains as popular as ever today.

Yet even for global super brands like this, understanding local customer behaviour remains the number one challenge when entering new markets, according to Head of E-commerce, Martin Vad Jespersen.



“ **ONE OF THE BIGGEST IMPACTS ON CONVERSION OPTIMISATION IS LOCALISATION** ”

Martin Vad Jespersen
Head of E-commerce at Skechers

No playbook for localisation

When it comes to optimising conversions in international markets, there is no playbook - it is simply about a deep understanding of the local customer journey.

“If the website works in the domestic market, it will work in foreign markets too with great localisation,” he explains.

Martin tells us it's about investing in understanding the specific behaviour in each country. And drilling down even deeper, it's about being able to visualise specific customer journeys in that region.

First, identify the journey for each segment and product group. Then, measure not only purchases but also page views, 'add to cart', 'start checkout', delivery page.

“One of the biggest impacts on conversion optimisation is localisation.”

But this is easier said than done.

“For global e-commerce giants and ambitious young webshops, it's critical to understand what moves customers on the ground. It's painstaking and the work is never done.”

Even for a hugely successful brand like Skechers, understanding local customers is the most challenging part of entering new markets.



Think like a Finn

Sweden is Skechers' most successful market, while Finland has been the most challenging. These markets might be located in the Nordic region and are geographically close, but customer behaviour is completely different and the brand needs to adapt its strategy accordingly.

"Understanding the market culture is crucial," says Martin.

"It's necessary to zoom in on details such as media habits among the different target audiences."

As "the growth engine" in Skechers, Sweden has also shown to be a market with its own personality.

In the Swedish webshop, there is no gender division among the products, reflecting the expectations of its target customers in Sweden.

In Finland, Martin explains that customers tend to ask more questions and the team spends more time in trust-building activities. The trust is key to establishing a lasting relationship with customers on the ground there.

Understanding these nuances is key to Skechers' localisation strategy.

WHILE SOME MARKETS ARE GEOGRAPHICALLY CLOSE - CUSTOMERS MIGHT NOT BE

Sweden is Skechers' most successful market, while Finland has been the most challenging.

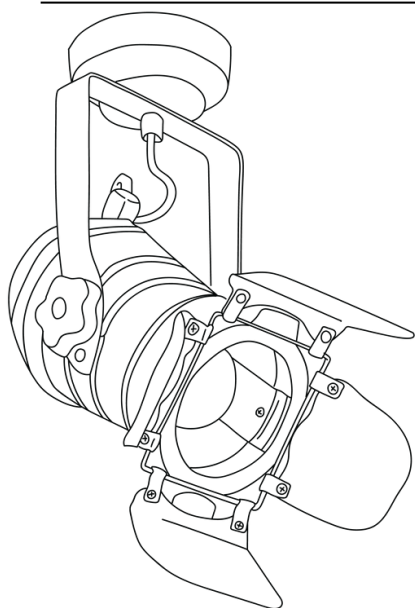
These markets are geographically close, but customer behaviour is completely different and the brand needs to adapt accordingly.

Swedish gender equality

In the Swedish webshop there is no gender division among the products, reflecting the expectations of its target customers in Sweden.

Finnish trust is hard to come at

In Finland, meanwhile, the team spends more time in trust-building activities to establish a lasting relationship with customers.



MED24.

NILS TRÆHOLT ON HOW THEY OUTCLASS LOCAL COMPETITION

Entering a new market with a product that is not unique poses special challenges.

You need to not just match but outperform rivals: from discovery all the way to delivery.

This simply takes time and investment.

Med24 is the biggest, low-price online health store in the Nordics, and this is what they are learning from their journey across the region.

Co-founder & CEO Nils Træholt chose a strategy focusing on the markets closest to home.



“ THE COMPETITION IS SO FIERCE THAT YOU CAN'T JUST COME OUT WITH LESS ”

Nils Træholt
Co-founder at Med24

Rather than rushing into 'bigger' markets like Germany, he believes they will drive growth and profitability by cementing their position in the Nordics and focus on beating local rivals.

Pick your next market - Are you unique or similar to competitors?

For some businesses, patience can be more profitable than speed.

Med24 believes the Nordics can become a billion DKK market if they continue to invest in becoming truly local. That is why they focus on cementing the position in Denmark, Sweden and Norway instead of rushing into bigger markets like Germany.

“There is enormous potential in the markets we work with. If we shift focus away from the markets we're in, we're just wasting too much,” says Nils.

You might be selling a lot of a particular product in a new market, but unless you have invested in being able to understand why, you won't be able to capitalise on it.

It's all about understanding customers, data and the region.

“The challenge is how you become local because the competition is so fierce. If you are selling similar products, it's all about understanding the trends.”

His advice? Invest in becoming truly local takes time, but for businesses like Med24, it will pay off in the long run.

“If you want great success, you have to go beyond your borders. But you have to be aware of the challenges and willing to acknowledge that it probably affects other things, including profitability,” he says.

Beating rivals with delivery time

In Med24’s situation, selling products that you can buy elsewhere requires you to be sharp on price, trends, new products and delivery.

Marketing is a key piece of the puzzle, and while Nils says Google is relatively easy to localise, nailing local campaigns is more challenging.

The team spends a lot of time in Norway customising campaigns and looking for local products that customers expect to buy.

This investment is paying off.

“We can see that campaigns are becoming more important. With good campaigns, we can almost empty our inventory,” says Nils.


Acquiring new customers is the first step, but being able to deliver fast each time is what keeps customers coming back.

This makes delivery time the team’s biggest KPI today.

That million budget you have for Google, you just can’t make it work unless you get people to come back. In our case, delivery time is the key to all the other things,” he says.

To ensure this, Med24 bought a local pharmacy and set up a warehouse in Norway last year.

It means a big upfront investment, but today they are already starting to reap the rewards.



SAVICKI. LUXURY BRANDS CAN AFFORD LONGER DELIVERY

For the often once-in-a-lifetime items that Savicki sells, fast shipping is not something that customers prioritise, but it is still something the team is optimising.

“With lower basket value products, like fashion items, there are enormous expectations for fast delivery,” he explains.

“In the luxury segment with products made as individual orders, we have a 14-day delivery window. Shipping is not an issue for us.”


The company is building a sizeable product warehouse in Poland, and most products are already in stock.

“Even foreign markets benefit from our warehouses in Poland, and we deliver most products within 48 hours. We prioritise comfort and logistics, and we handle shipping for most foreign markets with air freight.”

When preparing for entry into a new market, it is always a leap of faith, and there is often more to learn from what goes wrong than what goes right.

For Savicki, failure in the UK made them even more ambitious, yet with a cautious approach.

They now challenge their assumptions about what it takes to grow a brand in a new market, and have built a blueprint to unlock new markets and accelerate international growth.



JULA.

DON'T GET STUCK IN THE COMPARISON SWAMP

Jula is a 40-year-old brand that started life on a Swedish farm and has carried everything from noodles to canons on its inventory list, but today focuses on selling DIY and home improvement products.

The company has physical stores and webshops in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Poland, plus a webshop in Austria, which the company is using as a test market to smooth its entry into one of the most lucrative but complicated markets in Europe: Germany.

Jula's E-commerce Expansion Lead Daniella Arvidsson shares her insights and approach to market expansion.



“ THE GLOBAL MARKET IS UNIQUE IN ITS OWN WAY. COMPARING WHAT YOU'VE DONE IN FINLAND WITH WHAT WORKED OUT IN AUSTRIA MAY NOT HELP MUCH ”

Daniella Arvidsson
E-commerce Expansion Lead at Jula

Austria - a launchpad for the Germany market

For e-commerce brands, Germany's size makes it a juicy target, but is one market notoriously difficult to crack.

Daniella tells us Jula decided to enter Austria first and use learnings to pave the way for a smoother entry to Germany.

“There's a lot to learn, to be able to scale up and be more prepared to launch with quality in Germany. Using learnings from Austria made it a two-step launch into the German market,” she says.

The project ran alongside its launch in Finland but Jula used two different strategies since Austria was purely e-commerce and Finland was e-commerce plus stores.

This required a totally different strategy and in Austria the focus was on heavy localisation, building their own channels and adapting to the local market.

Jula set up a team specifically working on Austria, and later also including Germany.

The line-up includes a German e-commerce specialist who is the store manager for e-commerce located in Sweden. They also have a customer service specialist and a SEO specialist focused on SEO for Germany and Austria.

"They are all local or native Germans. They have the knowledge and expertise. It's a privilege to have that," she says.

When it comes to localisation, the devil really is in the detail, and the team is already delivering value in areas like adapting activation and campaign content for local audiences.

While they are similar, there are big differences between the German and Austrian markets, especially when it comes to language, says Daniella.

She says Jula jumped 100 spots to seventh place on Google by changing the wording for a wheelbarrow - thanks to knowledge from the localisation team.

Test, test, test, then scale

One of Daniella's biggest learnings is: one word can make the difference in connecting with customers. The team runs tests on a continuous basis and even tiny adjustments can have a huge impact on sales.

"It's the small scale local aspects - that you can tweak and it has a huge effect," she says.

"The small things become the big things in the overall picture."

While companies want to move as fast as possible, Daniella says it is important not to lose sight of the fact that getting localisation right takes time.

"One should not underestimate this work," says Daniella. "We all want to skyrocket from day one, but you realise that these small improvements build something significant over time."

Since Austria is the company's first e-commerce-only market, there are challenges in integrating pure e-commerce processes into the larger machinery of the business.

"We have local people and without them, we wouldn't be where we are today with our expansion into Austria."

Don't compare learnings across markets

While companies learn a lot from each new market launch, Daniella says you should not assume the same tactics will work in different countries.

Jula has started working on personalisation in Austria using on-site triggers. With this initiative, they can identify and communicate with customers in a more personalised way.

It's a service that they have only worked with in Austria but now they will try to implement it in Finland as well.

But she knows it's not guaranteed to work.

"It's important not to get stuck in the comparison swamp," she says.

"The global market is unique in its own way. Comparing what you've done in Finland with what worked out in Austria may not help much."



CRITICAL TO LOCALISE

WHEN YOU NEED TO FIGHT OFF COMPETITION AND BUILD TRUST

Med24: It is key to understand customers, data and the region

“There is enormous potential in the markets we work with. If we shift focus away from the markets we’re already in, you will waste too much,” says Nils.

You might be selling a lot of one particular product in a new market, but unless you’ve invested in understanding why, you won’t be able to capitalise on it.

It’s all about understanding customers, data and the region.

“The challenge is to become local because competition is so fierce. If you are selling similar things it’s all about understanding the trends.”

His advice? Investing in becoming truly local takes time, but for businesses like Med24, it will pay off in the long run.

“If you want great success, you have to go beyond your own borders. But be aware of the challenges and know that it will affect other things, including profitability,” he says.



Nils Træholt
Co-founder & CEO at Med24

Najell: What ‘gut feel’ has to do with localisation

For Najell, localisation and getting communication right is the difference between a local customer trusting them with their baby or not.

Selling products from baby carriers and baskets to pregnancy pillows, the Swedish company is looking to build a personal relationship with customers at an important time in their lives.

Understanding the nuances of local culture, society and way of life is critical to success and, according to marketing manager Margrét Rúnarsdóttir, this can not be outsourced.

“Everything from creating awareness to generating interest to converting to the first purchase is damn difficult. It’s clearly the biggest barrier. How many products have you bought from a brand you’ve never heard of?”

“I think that if you live in a country, you have a bit of an idea about what it is. Something that feels right in your gut is something that we listen to.”



Margrét Rúnarsdóttir
Marketing Manager at Najell

GENTS.

HOW CUSTOMERS HELP CRACK LOCAL MARKETS

Gents is the leading online retailer of male grooming products in Scandinavia, shipping accessories, beard and skincare products worldwide with local sites in Germany, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

Reporting annual growth of 35% and more than 300k monthly website visitors, Gents is well on its way towards its vision of becoming number one in the world.

Yet the tactics that have unlocked new markets Gents has entered outside its home market of Sweden have been very different, ranging from setting up customer boards in Norway to experiments with localised video and product samples in Germany.



“YOU CAN'T GET TO KNOW YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE BY SITTING IN SWEDEN. GO THERE, FEEL THE PULSE AND TALK TO PEOPLE”

Sofie Okstad
Marketing Director at Gents

While you can of course have a kind of playbook for opening new markets, it's more about having a mindset ready to invest time and resources in finding out what it takes to make local customers tick, according to marketing director Sofie Okstad.

Read the story to understand how Gents maintain the feeling of a premium brand without making compromises as it expands internationally.

You can't get to know Norway sitting at home in Sweden

With personal grooming products ranging from beard wax and razor blades to toothpaste, translations are as much about understanding local culture as it is about pure language.

“A product called something in Sweden can be translated to something completely crazy in German,” says Sofie.

“It simply takes more time than you ever expect to get to know a local audience.”

Translations are one of the most time-consuming aspects of internationalisation at Gents, which has a living inventory of 4k products, 1k texts and categories that need to stay up to date.

For brands obsessed with delivering the same quality in new markets as they do at home, there are simply no shortcuts when it comes to localisation.

“You can't get to know the target audience by sitting in Sweden. You have to go there, feel the pulse, and talk to people.”

“Truly understanding local shopping culture will enable you to build strong connections with the target audience”, says Sofie.

“Understand how they shop, how they consume and what is important to them. It's very different,” she says.

For example, the team has noticed Swedes do a lot of shopping during working hours while Germans definitely do not.

In Germany, they shop in the morning and in the evening. That means you can pause your marketing spend during certain times.

How engaged customer boards unlocked Norway for Gents

While localising its products for the Danish market included on-location shoots that would make images more ‘relatable’ to Danish customers, in Norway localisation involved recruiting customer ‘boards’.

Gents created a board of Norwegian customers. They meet four times a year to discuss topics including what's happening in the market, how they perceive the brand and how its communications are received.

The board includes customers ranging from 27 to 55 in age and reflects Gents’ customer personas. Members of the board receive a gift card, but Sofie explains they are primarily motivated by helping to develop the brand.

“We were recently in Oslo and got great discussions and ideas,” Sofie says.

“They keep sending me ideas on what to explore and who to contact. It's really fun.”

There are no shortcuts in building meaningful relationships with local customers.

3 TACTICS THAT MADE GERMANY THE FASTEST-GROWING MARKET

Finding the key to unlocking success in a market is the result of a growth mindset - and investing time in identifying impactful tactics.

Sofie shares three tactics:

Using samples to upsell popular local products

They heavily promoted products that the team noticed are unique in Germany, enticing customers with the offer of a cheap sample - something Sofie says nobody else is doing there. Customers who try a sample typically come back for the full-sized product.

Experimenting with discounts

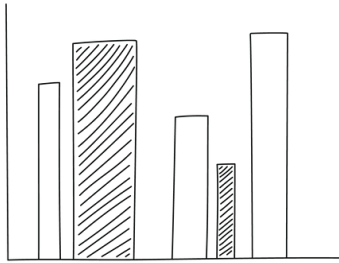
Another tactic is discounts. This time, the team tried something different at the checkout: giving new customers a one-day 10% discount.

Creating German language videos to showcase expertise

Gents launched on Amazon.de to establish credibility. This helped drive early traffic, but Facebook is where Gents gained traction. The team made German videos to showcase their experts and products. This has also boosted rankings on Google, which is Gents’ best traffic source.

SURVEY DATA.

IF SUCCEEDING ABROAD WAS EASY, EVERYONE WOULD DO IT



We asked the community:
Could you share key insights regarding your strategic marketing approach across different markets?



THE RESPONDENTS SAID

- Go to market bold and get results ASAP
- Thorough research, adjusted offering, tailored marketing
- Standardise - and only customise the things that really need customisation
- Influencers and athletes
- E-mail partners, local experts and social
- Google, Google, Google
- Strong marketing partners who know each market and do lots of testing
- At the moment we are using well-known marketplaces such as Allegro or Amazon
- Cross-channel campaigns do better
- Top-funnel is the most important. Otherwise, we target those who already know us
- Google is great, but you also need review sites. And price comparison sites
- We can do a lot of analysing, but in the end, it's about testing. We start from our home market and work from there

NAJELL.

WHAT 'GUT FEEL' HAS TO DO WITH LOCALISATION

Localisation means different things for different companies. For Najell, getting communication right in international markets is the difference between a local customer trusting them with their baby - or not.

Selling products from baby carriers to pregnancy pillows, the Swedish company is building personal relationship with customers at an important time in their lives.

Understanding nuances of local culture is critical to success and according to marketing manager Margrét Rúnarsdóttir, this simply cannot be outsourced.



“ WE TALK A LOT ABOUT MOM SHAMING AND NORMS ”

Margrét Rúnarsdóttir
Marketing Manager at Najell

“Everything from creating awareness to generating interest to converting to the first purchase is damn difficult.

“How many products have you bought from a brand you've never heard of?”

Country managers hold the key

Najell's biggest markets are Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Germany is its largest growth market and the company is also live in France and the Netherlands.

Najell is highly localised for each market with a fully translated website, local payment methods and localised logistics. Unusually, the company has also chosen to have at least one community manager local to each region on the team.

Tasks include translations, communications, and optimising local websites and content.

For Najell, creating content and explain its products is important and having local expertise is critical to success.

“We don't have simple products,” she says.

“We have products that are important in terms of safety and understanding. With baby carriers, for example, you have to understand why ours are better than others.”

But it is a process that takes time - a common challenge brands find when they start investing in localisation.

"The biggest challenge is finding time to do everything we want to do," she says.

Culture: Aligning values

As a value-driven brand, empowerment and gender equality are at the heart of its messaging. A key area for country managers is working with opinion leaders and influencers. They help spread the word about Najell's products and values in a way that will resonate with local customers.

"I think that if you live in a country, you have an idea about what it is. The themes that feel right in your gut are always what we choose to talk about," says Margrét.

Margrét's advice to brands who want to work with local influences is to look for a genuine connection with people who share your brand's values and love your products.

"We want people to genuinely like our products. That's the best approach to collaboration," she explains.

Identifying the right people is where country managers spend a lot of time.

"They create a relationship and talk to them often. The relationship begins when people are pregnant and then they have their child. It becomes a longer period."

Same, same but different market

It's important to understand the nuances in local culture around gender, parenthood and society to understand the context in which you are selling products.

"We talk a lot about mom shaming and norms," says Margrét.

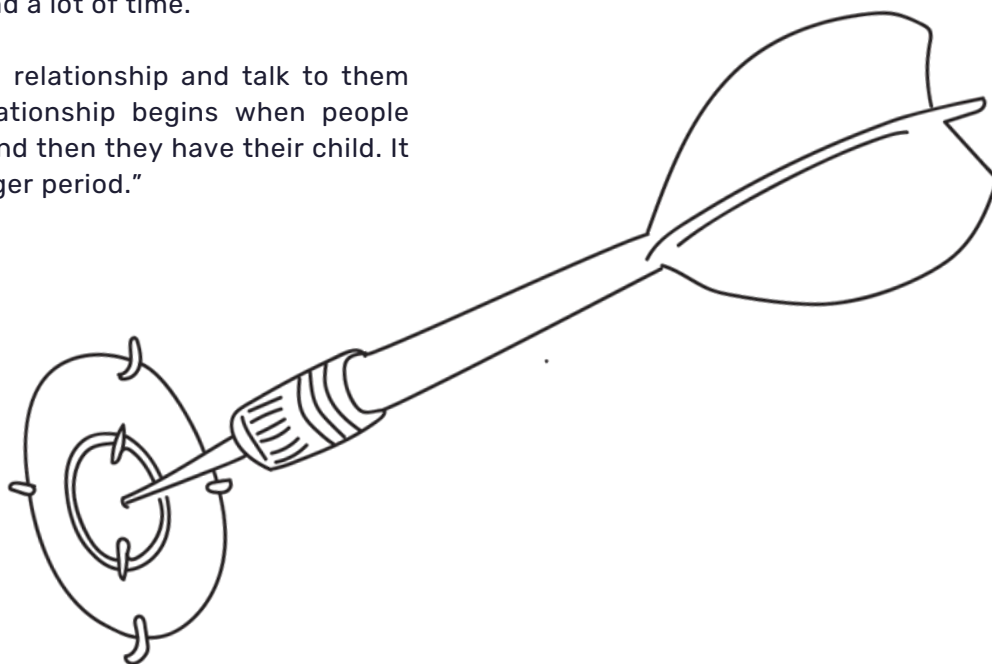
"In some countries, they haven't progressed as much as in Sweden, so you're often very surprised about what is expected, mostly of mothers."

Najell runs a test-fast-learn-fast approach to communications, having learned that this is a process that can simply require a few rounds of iterations before they click with local customers.

Sometimes you struggle to communicate with products, and then suddenly you find the right way, she says.

"That applies to both products and communication," says Margrét.

"That's also what has made us successful. We dare to try and if it doesn't work, we make changes. Either in the communication or the product. It's exciting."



TAKT.

BUILDING A VALUE-BASED COMMUNITY ACROSS MARKETS

TAKT is an online furniture shop rethinking the way to design, build and sell furniture for the mutual benefit of people and the planet.

Founded in the furniture design capital of Europe, TAKT is an exclusively e-commerce brand from Denmark with pan-European reach and global dreams.

Jens Jermiin, CMO and co-founder of TAKT shares insights from their growth journey.



“OUR TARGET AUDIENCE IS MORE VALUE-BASED. AND THAT'S WHO WE'RE TRYING TO BUILD A COMMUNITY AROUND”

Jens Jermiin
CMO and Co-founder at TAKT

52% of its turnover comes from abroad and the company sells to 21 international markets with Germany, The Netherlands and Switzerland as its primary markets outside of Denmark.

Starting out as direct-to-consumer, today its business is 60-40 selling to businesses through architects and direct-to-consumer.

Segment on values v geography

Like any retailer expanding internationally, the question of when, how and indeed whether to localise are big questions.

The conventional wisdom of launching in tough markets like Germany is that it demands hyper localisation to serve the more conservative shopping population.

Jens and his team challenge this assumption.

As a small company, their goal is to be 'simple and delightful', and focus on modernising and scale the business.

Should they have a German website? Or communicate in German?

While Germans are more inclined to buy when in local language, TAKT views itself as a value-based brand that speaks across borders.

"We address a modern lifestyle, sustainability, quality and price-conscious consumer who is digitally accessible, culturally aware, and active," he says.

Their target audience is not geographically segmented as much as value-based.

"We have like-minded people in Berlin, Hamburg, London, Paris, Copenhagen, and other places. That's who we're building a community around."

Right now, they are opting for a one-size-fits-all approach, he says.

"The communication we send out is value-based. In other words, we ask algorithms to find people interested in what we want to talk about across markets," says Jens.

Calculating the ROI on localising

TAKT has proved that it can reach target customers in new markets based on its English language site and target customers based on values.

The question is not whether the company could sell more with the local language, but how much more?

"That's the big question. And how do we assess the value, both in terms of investment and, most importantly, resource management of establishing the language platforms and driving acquisition in different languages," he explains.

"We know what we're selling today, but what could we sell if we were fluent in languages? That's something we find difficult to quantify. And when we ask different people, we actually get somewhat conflicting answers."

In Germany for example, he says there are some who say that it's crucial to have a German platform and a German payment provider.

And then there are others who say that young people (in age and mindset) are quite comfortable with English and it doesn't matter much.

SEO is an area where they need to optimise the webshop to the local language since people search in their native tongue. The same goes for Google Ads, he says.

But it's about quantifying the cost of adding more complexity to the business at this stage with the cost of potential lost sales.

"Clearly, there comes a point where doing the same thing, but in the local language, would be better. It's just a matter of how much better it would be," says Jens.

The value of local PR

TAKT has found success investing in local PR to connect with its target customer base, especially in the German market.

The company works with an English PR agent who prepares releases and news, which are then translated and shared with media contacts by their local agent in Germany.

This secures feature articles about design, circular thinking and product launches.

The PR effort generates follow-up inquiries and TAKT can select relevant media outlets for interviews and brand awareness.

Next up, the company is keen to explore the US and Asian markets, and has already partnered with a seller of traditional furniture in Japan.

When TAKT expands to Japan, Asia or the US on a larger scale, it will require a different and more local inventory setup.

We are excited to follow this journey onwards.



DEEZEE.

CEO OF DEEZEE: TAKING RISKS CAN PAY OFF IN NEW MARKETS

DeeZee is an online store selling affordable women's wear, footwear and accessories for any occasion. It was founded in 2005 by Dominika Zac on the belief that fashion should be a right, not a luxury.

The Polish company currently sells across 16 markets and plans to expand into new regions including Croatia, Greece, Slovenia, Italy, Austria and France.

Nearly 20 years into its growth story across Europe, CEO Maciej Marchwicki talks us through the different strategies the company implemented.



“SOME MARKETS SURPRISE US WITH THEIR SCALE, WHICH FROM A DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE SHOULD BE MUCH SMALLER”

Maciej Marchwicki
CEO at DeeZee

Localisation is not just about websites but products

DeeZee's strategy for localising its offering for new markets is twofold: start lean and be prepared to adjust the product offering.

The team first prepares the entire back office to be able to launch quickly.

They do this with a very lean setup with automatic translations and logistics done through intermediaries.

Then, when they have the scale, they can switch to local solutions such as local couriers, local logistics hubs and proper translations.

“We are also learning to adjust the product to each specific market during the international expansion,” he says.

For example, they have experienced that in Ukraine, winter shoes require much more insulation than Polish customers would prefer.

He says customers in Eastern markets are also much more daring when it comes to fashion, something they adapt to in their product offerings.

For DeeZee, localisation is more about getting to know the preferences and desires of shoppers and tailoring the product offerings.

Local market research tells you half the story

Like any brand entering a new market, DeeZee invests in deep research of consumer behaviours, but Maciej tells us that sometimes it's worth taking a risk.

And launching in even seemingly less attractive markets.

"It might surprise you."

This was the case with Slovakia which turned out to be a very nice surprise.

"Sales in Slovakia are much higher than what we expected," he tells us.

At the outset, DeeZee crunches data provided by Google and Facebook about the market.

They analyse demographics, consumer behaviours and they run through all available reports relevant to the market.


However, in his experience, the data and recommendations they get from their business partners don't always align with reality.

"For example, some markets surprise us with their scale, which from a demographic or e-commerce market perspective should be much smaller," he says.

Some surprises are of the good kind.

"Slovakia, for instance, is a significant market for us, although the reports would indicate that other markets should be more attractive to us," he explains.

"This 'reconnaissance by force' has its advantages in that we can sometimes be positively surprised."



LOCALISING - EVEN TWEAKING PRODUCTS TO FIT LOCAL PREFERENCES

"We are learning to adjust the product to each specific market during the international expansion," he says.

For DeeZee, localisation is about learning the preferences and desires of shoppers and tailor not only marketing, pricing, language and logistics - but even tweaking the product offerings.

Winter shoes in Ukraine

DeeZee have experienced that the preference of insulation in winter shoes varies across markets. In Ukraine winter shoes require much more insulation than what their Polish customers prefer.

Daring fashion in Eastern markets

They have also found that customers in Eastern markets are much more daring when it comes to fashion. This has also tweaked their offerings.

TECHNOLOGY



LEARNINGS & REFLECTIONS

How does technology help fast-growing companies manage complexity and deliver high quality, at scale, across markets?

AI seems to be dominating the headlines and one obvious application is customer service: creating new possibilities to deliver quality at scale.

In our conversations we find different opinions and concerns.

And although many are experimenting with AI products internally, only a few have implemented on the customer side. Yet.

Med24 co-founder Nils Træholt tells us how he has been experimenting with some new workflows using ChatGPT and feels almost stressed by the possibilities for the business.

“ ONLY OUR IMAGINATION SETS THE LIMITS NOW IN TERMS OF WHAT WE CAN OPTIMISE IN THE ORGANISATION ”

Nils Træholt
Co-founder & CEO at Med24



39%

Almost half of respondents are offering customers to interact with a chatbot.

40%

Standard email is still the winner, but tools like Zendesk, Dixa and Freshdesk are gaining terrain.

BILLIGT ARBEJDSTØJ.

THE POWER OF NAMES & CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ON TECHNOLOGY

From flame retardant underwear and welding gloves to workwear for nurses and chefs and gear for hunting expeditions.

Since starting in 2010 by Tommy Søndergård, Billigt Arbejdstøj has been on a mission to become the number one online seller of work, leisure and protective wear.

They sell high-quality gear to suit every budget, and has grown into 110 employees based at the headquarters on the windy west coast of Jutland in Denmark.

The company operates a global, English-language store serving all of Europe and has also launched local webshops in six markets.



“ WE HAVE BEEN QUITE SATISFIED WITH NOT TAKING A BROAD APPROACH AND FOCUSING ON THE COUNTRIES WE REALLY BELIEVE IN ”

Tommy Søndergård
Founder at Billigt Arbejdstøj

ChatGPT can't handle everything yet

We are curious to talk to ambitious and growing e-commerce companies about the technology they use to make their operations run more smoothly.

For any company managing large volumes of inventory, simplifying processes can become something of an obsession.

For Billigt Arbejdstøj, warehouse optimisation is already very important.

But what about the technology it uses internally?

Tommy says, that the company is not using chatbots and AI products on the customer side yet.

But internally the team at Billigt Arbejdstøj are beginning to experiment with different tools and use cases.

However, they are taking the hype around new AI products with a pinch of salt.

“It's something we're looking into, but we're cautious about relying on new AI tools entirely,” he says.

“If Google can tell that it's a machine generating everything, it affects our ranking.”

He does not expect the human element to be eliminated from the translation process in the near future.

"The alternative to writing a translation yourself is to have it reviewed by someone who understands it, which can be easier than saying something is wrong and approving it," he says.

"It's a new world in that regard."

Expanding slowly but steady

The cautiously optimistic approach to technology has not slowed this company down.

The first new market Billigt Arbejdstøj entered was Sweden in 2016 and looking back on its expansion over the past years, Tommy says he is happy with their decision to invest in a few markets at a time rather than going for a scattergun approach.

"Going into countries with local language for example - we haven't regretted that," he says.

"We hear about companies that have been in 25 countries and then they have to start cutting countries that don't work."

"But we have been satisfied with not taking a broad approach and focusing on the countries we really believe in."

That doesn't mean expansion hasn't come without challenges.

Billigt Arbejdstøj opened in both Norway and Germany back in 2020. Tommy says that the team found pricing to be a challenge in both countries, as expected.

In Germany, the team was well aware that there were challenges in competing with local rivals selling similar goods. Some products can be bought cheaper there, even though they are Danish-made.

"In Germany you need to win shoppers' trust first before you can really make an impact," he explains.

What's in a name?

In Norway, meanwhile, Tommy says the challenge around pricing was mostly due to the company being called Billigt Arbejdstøj (Cheap Workwear).

"Norway is one of those countries where "cheap" is not necessarily the word you want to associate with things you buy," says Tommy.

"We have sometimes been asked why we are called "Cheap Workwear" because it's cheaper elsewhere, but we are not called "Cheapest Workwear," we are called "Cheap Workwear."

Still, the team is debating whether to use a different name outside its home market, focusing on the purpose of the gear it sells rather than price.

Today, exports account for one third of revenues, with Sweden driving the most powerful revenue growth overseas. Like many e-commerce companies right now, however, the team is focusing on optimising its core home market.

SØSTRENE GRENE.

THE BENEFITS OF A YOUNG TECH STACK

Søstrene Grene is an established brand with physical stores across markets, but they are only now celebrating the 3-year anniversary of their first online store.

Rasmus Skjøtt is Chief Digital Officer of Danish high street darling Søstrene Grene, purveyor of beloved goods for house and home.

Rasmus shares the story of how Søstrene Grene opened their first online webshop. And what is up next on the online webshop journey.

The initial Go-to-Market strategy was to go slow and test the webshop in Denmark for 6-12 months before deciding what would be next.

But with COVID hitting the world just before launching their very first webshop in the home market, all their plans to go slow were tossed aside.

Now, the plan was to open as many markets as possible.

They ended up opening 6 markets in 12 months.

"I think we've come a long way, but we're still in our infancy compared to many of our competitors," he says.

"We just celebrated our third anniversary in Denmark, and all other markets are less than three years old. That is very young in the world of webshops."

Anyone building online stores understands the challenge of being a brand in a new market or building up trust and awareness.

But there has also been a great advantage, as Rasmus Skjøtt explains.

"We had no legacy systems," he explains.

"We could basically start with a completely blank canvas, and discuss what would be the very best way of building this online platform."

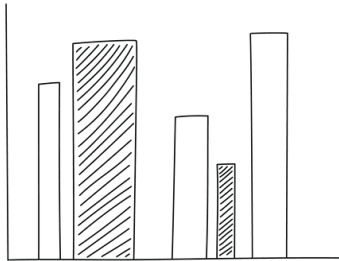
"And that has been a huge advantage."

Rasmus Skjøtt
Chief Digital Officer



SURVEY DATA.

IF SUCCEEDING ABROAD WAS EASY, EVERYONE WOULD DO IT



We asked the community:
What are the most time-consuming tasks for your e-commerce team?

THE RESPONDENTS SAID

- Content creation
- Adding products
- Learning to use the existing tools in the best way
- Customer conversations
- Managing products such as categories and images
- Repeating manual admin work
- Campaign planning and executing
- Producing the content for multiple digital activations
- Influencer campaigns
- Keeping everything aligned across our different markets
- Finding the correct keywords



CELLBES.

CULTIVATING CUSTOMER CLUBS TO BUILD LOCAL LOYALTY

The world is moving fast these days and for ambitious e-commerce brands with big ambitions, building a loyal customer base has never been more important.

Cellbes is a Swedish fashion brand that started life as a mail order business founded by a husband and wife team.

More than 70 years later, the company is live in Norway, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, outside its home market with a turnover of more than 600m SEK.

Cellbes' E-commerce Manager Pia Adermalm talks about how the company uses technology and loyalty clubs to evolve along with their customers.



“ WE HAVE TO TAKE A LOT OF DIGITAL ACTIONS ON THE WEBSITE AND IMPLEMENT TECHNICAL INTEGRATIONS TO MAKE IT WORK. BUT THE INVESTMENT IS WORTH IT ”

Pia Adermalm
E-commerce manager at Cellbes

Investing in digital platforms and technology integrations

How are the most ambitious brands working on increasing the repurchase frequency of their target customers?

One tactic Cellbes is actively working on to cement customer loyalty is the concept of a customer 'club'.

The idea is simply to create three categories of customers based on how much they spend. And then to essentially give them more benefits the more they buy on the website.

Benefits might include free shipping for example with the idea that this will encourage them to buy more, more often.

“Of course, simple solutions are often not so simple to set up and the clubs require a lot of upfront investment,” Pia explains.

“We have to take a lot of digital actions on the website and implement technical integrations to make it work. But the investment is worth it.”

The team has rolled out a successful pilot in its home market of Sweden. They now plan to roll out country by country as the company looks into deepening its relationship with local customers.

Good data = good commercial decisions

In a fast-moving world, ambitious e-commerce companies need to figure out how to keep up with customer trends in real-time. Pia tells us that the team's process of constant data evaluation enables Cellbes to make the right decisions at the right time.

"We are a large organisation and we spend a lot of time on sales analysis and commercial actions. Which campaigns to run, when to run them, how they perform," she says.

"We have a strong focus on sales. It takes a lot of time, but it should," says Pia.

While the team always has a plan, they are also ready to adapt it based on nuances in the data around their target audience's behaviour. The team works in blocks of several weeks and plans accordingly. If something is not working they can take action and make changes quickly.

"That's where we also have the opportunity to adapt to changing circumstances," says Pia.

"Even though we have made a commercial plan for the next year, it's not set in stone until the day we decide to implement it."

Germany is tough but rewarding

Like many brands today, Cellbes is focusing on deepening its roots in markets where it is already present rather than prioritising opening new ones.

For Cellbes, that includes Germany, the most recent market it went into.

As well as having its own website, Cellbes is live on Zalando there.

Pia tells us the marketplace accounts for 11% of the total sales and Germany is its biggest market there.

The marketplace is a good fit for Cellbes as their ideal customer profile is found here.

German customers are in general very loyal, and that makes the marketplace a good way to reach a lot of people simultaneously.

For obvious reasons, this makes it a valuable strategy for entering a new market.

While Zalando is a strong channel and a good entry point for the brand in a new market, Cellbes will now prioritise brand loyalty outside the marketplaces.

By building brand loyalty directly with local customers, they will cement the company's position in the local communities.

Consensus across the board seems to be that Germany is tough but worth investing in getting right for ambitious European e-commerce brands.

Meanwhile, there is plenty to get inspired about by a 70+ year-old brand building its modern growth journey.

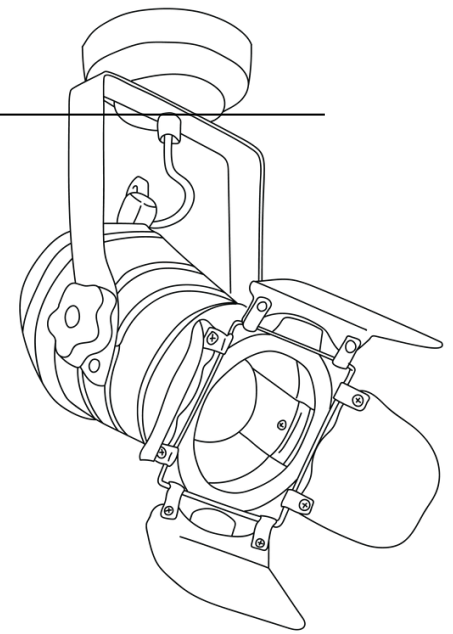
We could all learn something from a mindset that enables the team to adjust campaigns in tune with changing customer needs.

And spend marketing budgets where it really matters.



MED24.

CHATGPT + A NEW MINDSET WILL SCALE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND BEYOND



Entering new markets means you need to be able to scale your customer service delivery without compromising on quality.

This is where technology can come to your assistance.

The best companies are always thinking about how they can help their customer teams scale without losing the human touch.

But how are companies using new tools to improve customer service offerings?

For Med24, these ideas come from the top. Co-founder Nils Træholt has been experimenting with new technology and workflows.

To the point where he has felt almost stressed out by the many possibilities that technology can unlock for the business.

“Only our imagination sets the limits in terms of what we can optimise in the organisation.”

As an example, Nils tells us how he used ChatGPT to analyse customer emails and suggest actions that customer service teams can then approve. This set in motion a flow that will action the request and reply to the customer. Almost automatically.

He says that if they can implement this with 15 internal processes, 80% of all their inquiries can be automated.

That is a significant optimisation.

Nils believes that building this optimisation-oriented and entrepreneurial mindset into all levels of the company will play a big role in its success - at home and abroad.

“If you're not forward-thinking enough, you simply won't produce enough forward-thinking work,” he says.

“We need to change our mindset,” he says.

Nils Træholt
Co-founder at Med24



NEW TECHNOLOGY.

WHY THE COST OF CUSTOMER SERVICE IS ABOUT TO GO DOWN

Customer service is a vital aspect of any business, but it often comes with significant costs.

However, with the advancements in technology and changing consumer behaviour, the cost of providing customer service is expected to decrease in the future.

Here we explore four key reasons why offering customer service will become more affordable going forward.



“ADDING NEW TECHNOLOGY TO YOUR STRATEGY, MIGHT BE THE KEY TO FINANCIAL BENEFITS AND A HIGH QUALITY CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.”

Max Riis Christensen
CEO at MakesYouLocal

1. Increase in consumer and seller experience = fewer interactions

As consumers and online sellers become more experienced, there is a noticeable reduction in the need for extensive customer service interactions.

Across various industries, the ratio of customer conversations to orders has significantly decreased over the years.

This can be attributed to improved consumer knowledge, fewer mistakes in the buying process, and proactive communication from sellers.

As a result, the decreased customer service load translates to lower costs.

2. Pre-written quick responses

One of the most effective ways to streamline customer service operations is by implementing quick responses.

These pre-written answers to frequently asked questions can significantly improve efficiency.

Though they require initial time investment for preparation and maintenance, quick responses means that customer service can handle more inquiries per hour.

With an optimised response time and increasing productivity, you can now reduce the cost per customer interaction.

2. AI auto-tagging conversations

Advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning have paved the way for automated tagging of customer conversations.

With this technology, you can instantly categorise and route inquiries to the appropriate department or employee. By eliminating the manual sorting process, we can now save valuable time and resources.

Auto-tagging also provides you with detailed insights into the reason why the customers are contacting you, helping the customer service team to quickly address and resolve the issues.

Once auto-tagging is implemented in your customer service, you can start fixing the root cause of many inquiries - and future customer issues can be avoided.

This improvement will of course also decrease the costs of your customer service.

3. Automated customer service

Automation is already providing many companies with faster response times and lowering variable costs.

The use of chatbots and other automated systems can handle a wide range of customer inquiries without any human intervention.

This would cover simple tasks like providing product information, guiding customers through processes, or addressing basic concerns that can be handled by these intelligent systems.

Automated customer service is also offering you the advantage of 24/7 availability. The swift responses can improve the customer experience while it reduces costs for you.

And what does this mean for your future customer service?

Technology can make us optimistic about the future of customer service.

It can improve the quality and speed of the service. And it can reduce costs.

With the increasing consumer and seller experience, the implementation of quick responses, auto-tagging of conversations, and automated customer service, I believe that the overall cost of great customer service is bound to decrease significantly.

While every e-commerce business is different, there are ways for everyone to test and embrace the coming advancements in technology.

Including new technology into your growth strategy might become a key to unlocking financial benefits of streamlined customer service, as well as a high quality customer experience.

Adapting to these changes requires proactive planning and investment in the right tools and technologies.

The opportunities lie ahead.



WHAT TO EXPLORE NEXT

LET'S PUSH THE INDUSTRY FORWARD

The world of e-commerce moves fast. Add your voice to the conversation taking our craft to the next level.

At the heart of our Succeed Abroad community, events and cross-market explorations, is the idea that while every company's international expansion journey is different, there is a lot we can learn from our peers on similar journeys as us.

Across our conversations and surveys with brands big and small, it is clear we all dream of success in big markets and we love to see the level of ambition!

Regardless of the size of the market we aim for, the core challenge is how to actually attract visitors to our websites. The fact is that competition is fierce and the bar has never been higher.



Our explorations and discussions have pointed to a new set of questions and challenges across our community:

- How do we raise the level of creative communication in social media?
- How do we create content that is relevant?
- And that speaks directly to our target group in the specific country?
- Do tools like ChatGPT hold the answer or are they just another part of the puzzle?
- And then how to build brand awareness in new markets with a toolbox of both traditional online channels?
- And should every brand be thinking of influencers and brand collaborations?

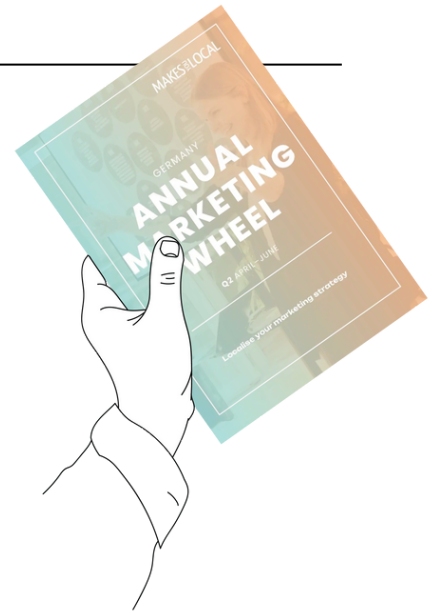
Join our Succeed Abroad community to stay in the loop!

Got an opinion? We are always looking for brand owners and retailers that want to share their stories (like a call for e-commerce professionals willing to share their learnings and insights with the community).

Join our learning community of ambitious e-commerce professionals for events, interviews and insights from across our network.

ANNUAL WHEEL.

LOCALISE YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY



Do you know what conker nostalgia means to Brits, what Sinterklaas means to the Dutch - and more importantly, when?

If not, this can be a useful tool that saves you a lot of headache.

With the Annual Wheel, you will see all local and culture-specific important dates, events and traditions across 11 markets.

Local information is key for your success abroad. We hope this will help you connect even better with local customers.

And if you find an important cultural event missing - let us know!



“EVERYONE STRUGGLES WITH LOCALISATION, AND IT CAN BE PAINFUL TO PLAN A LAUNCH DURING A NATIONAL HOLIDAY OR A BIG CULTURAL EVENT.”

Lotte Andkjær Christensen
Head of Product & Marketing at
MakesYouLocal

And for those of you who are curious:

WHAT CONKERS NOSTALGIA IS IN THE UK

During October, conkers is a favourite school playground game. This autumn tradition has spanned generations. Even though fewer children engage in it nowadays, likely due to safety concerns - using pictures of the game is a great way to appeal to nostalgia, and evoke memories of their childhood.

WHAT SINTERKLAAS MEANS TO THE DUTCH

Sinterklaas is the biggest holiday in the Netherlands and is celebrated from mid-November to December 5th. This makes November the best retail month. It's similar to Santa Claus and Christmas, but has its own traditions. The celebration ends December 5th, when families enjoy an evening of gifts.

MOTHERS DAY - 10 DIFFERENT DATES.

Check your calendar twice. Once to make sure you got your mother a bucket of flowers for Mother's Day - and twice to make sure you're not kicking off your Mother's Day campaign prematurely. Mother's Day is celebrated on 10 different days throughout spring across Europe. From early February in Norway to late May or early June in France. Mother's Day is good for business - are you getting a piece of the pie?



SUCCEED ABROAD EVENTS.



We believe there is great power in bringing ambitious e-commerce minds together in real life.



How do you communicate to an audience abroad in a trustworthy and compelling way? How do you set realistic targets for new markets? How do you use technology to do so cost-effectively? Ultimately, how do you succeed abroad?

Join your peers in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Vilnius to hear top e-commerce professionals share their stories from stage while e-commerce specialists facilitate market specific discussions during the day.

“ LOTS OF USEFUL INFO - BOTH STRATEGIC AND ALSO A LOT OF INSPIRATION THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IMMEDIATELY ”

Jens Kristensen
E-commerce Manager at byACRE -
Attendee, Succeed Abroad 2023

COPENHAGEN

Attendees rated Succeed Abroad 2023 with 4.6 / 5 and say the event was inspirational and well-organised. Join us in March 2024.

STOCKHOLM

Uncover strategies to create brand awareness and conversions in new markets in the company of top e-commerce professionals.

VILNIUS

Get actionable insights and inspiration from Europe's top e-commerce professionals to take your business to the next level at our Succeed Abroad event.



HOW TO SUCCEED ABROAD

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CELLBES
OF SWEDEN

BLUEPACK

WOOLMAN

BARONS

HOOKED

ISH

SKECHERS

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Watery

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MAIDINA

SEPHORA

Curamando



YOUR COMMUNITY OF E-COMMERCE PROFESSIONALS

MAKES BY LOCAL