

Do's and Don'ts for **Startups** **Entering** the U.S. Market

Structured insights for early-stage international startups preparing for or entering the U.S. market.

Section 1: Before Entering the U.S. Market

1. Explore the market before you enter

Do: Make use of business missions often organized and paid by European governments to create export opportunities for national businesses. They have many local contacts in the US to help you make your first entrance steps and evaluate if your go-to-market strategy assumptions are right.

Don't: Follow their programs blindly as much might not be useful to you but focus on what you need to know to make a proper validation of your assumptions, pivot business plan and decision if it is the right time for you to enter.

2. Secure Adequate Budget

Do: Ensure at least \$2 million in funding to cover 18-24 months of burn rate. This allows time to navigate the learning curve, build traction, pivot without immediate pressure, and develop your leads to become self-sustaining.

Don't: Attempt market entry on a lean budget. Without sufficient funds, you risk wasting time, energy, and damaging stakeholder confidence.

3. Founder Commitment & Presence

Do: Be as founder physically present in the U.S. (at least 70% of the time during the first year). Active founder involvement is critical for storytelling, market validation, and pivoting fast.

Don't: Try to manage remotely from a different continent. Time zones and distance erode trust and slow down critical decision-making.

4. Smart Initial Hiring

Do: Hire senior, autonomous sales talent who can build trust, navigate ambiguity, and iterate with you. Ideally, hire two who are complementary and encourage healthy competition.

Don't: Hire junior sales reps or generalists expecting them to wear multiple hats. Sales needs focus, not distractions like marketing or research.

5. Clear Role Definition

Do: Separate sales from business development. Sales should focus on managing customer relationships and closing deals; BD should navigate and create marketing tools while exploring partnerships and new channels.

Don't: Merging these roles leads to diluted accountability and often weak outcomes in both areas.

6. Understand Regional Cultural Differences

Do: Treat the U.S. like a continent, not a country. Regional business cultures vary drastically between New England, New York, the Midwest, deep South, West Coast, Florida, and everything in between.

Don't: Assume a single strategy will work nationally. Customize your messaging, approach, and even pricing per region.

7. Regulatory Readiness

Do: Prepare for state-specific certifications, especially in hardware or health-related sectors. Understand federal vs. state regulation landscapes.

Don't: Assume compliance in one state allows nationwide sales. Each state may require unique permitting or safety validations.

8. Outsource

Do: outsource all tasks that are not your core value, take too much time and are distracting.

Don't: Waste your time on things you need to dive in to understand well enough. Bookkeeping, company registration, other legal items, HR, payroll etc all need to be outsourced from the start.

Section 2: Once You Have Entered the U.S. Market

9. Daily Team Syncs for the First 90 Days

Do: Hold daily check-ins to manage expectations, refine messaging, learn and pivot, and adjust to real-time customer feedback.

Don't: Wait for weekly updates hoping for good outcomes. Details are lost and early momentum fades without tight iteration loops.

10. Set Transparent & Collaborative Targets

Do: Break down annual and quarterly goals into weekly milestones and collaborate with your team to define them. Celebrate small wins.

Don't: Rely solely on top-down directives. Ownership and understanding come from co-creating goals.

11. Think in Funnels & Numbers

Do: Visualize the full sales funnel (e.g., 1000 prospects → 100 conversations → 10 offers → 5 customers). Ensure your team knows the math.

Don't: Let assumptions go untested. Without numbers, you can't troubleshoot weak conversion points.

12. Learn from Every Customer Conversation

Do: Use early meetings to listen, validate assumptions, and gather objections. Translate learnings to team strategy.

Don't: Jump to conclusions after a few rejections. The early stage is about refining product-market fit which can take months.

13. Prioritize Customer Experience

Do: Deliver a respectful, seamless customer journey from discovery to onboarding to delivery. Pay attention to drop-off points and feedback.

Don't: Let internal chaos or poor communication degrade the customer experience. First impressions are lasting, especially crucial when you are new on the market.

14. Trust is Earned in Person

Do: Invest in conferences, in-person meetings, and network introductions. Be visible and build relationships face-to-face.

Don't: Rely entirely on cold emails or digital outreach. U.S. buyers want to see the founder, understand the team, and build rapport.

15. Focus Locally, Then Expand

Do: Start in one city or state and dominate it. Get known in the local ecosystem before expanding.

Don't: Spread too thin. National expansion without a strong local base burns budget and yields little return.

16. Map Your Trust Circles

Do: Start with who you know. Tap into warm leads, personal introductions, and friend-of-a-friend networks before scaling.

Don't: Begin from scratch in a new city without connections. Relationships drive early traction.

17. Hire experts

Do: Make use of local mentor networks, accelerators, or fractional executives / VPs with a track record who can give you an instant launch. Hit the ground running.

Don't: Think you know better or cut corners financially as working with these local experts will accelerate your learning and bring you faster to revenues and results. Time is money.

Closing Notes

- This handout reflects years of experience helping startups navigate the U.S. market.
- Use it as a living document. Review it before key hiring decisions, board meetings, and every major pivot.
- Coming Next: Webinar Part II will cover scaling operations, metrics tracking, capital raising, marketing and legal.

For additional guidance or consulting, contact the webinar host or reach out via LinkedIn.