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The international sales accelerator: A project management tool for improving sales performance in foreign target markets

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THE INTERNATIONAL SALES ACCELERATOR: A PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR IMPROVING SALES PERFORMANCE IN FOREIGN TARGET MARKETS

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The International Sales Accelerator: A Project Management Tool for Improving Sales Performance in Foreign Target Markets

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Abstract

There is a current research gap in the marketing and management literature regarding the set-up of sales and distribution structures as well as the rollout in foreign target markets in order to establish countrywide presences. Due to this gap, we developed the International Sales Accelerator Model. The data collection and verification of the model took place during a third-party funds project with Baden-Württemberg's business development agency, and environmental agency. The results reveal that the model represents a summary of best practices from different internationalization processes of very large companies. It is a seven-stage project management tool with the objective to improve the sales performance of companies entering foreign target markets.

Keywords: International Market Selection, Sales and Distribution Development in Foreign Markets, Environmental Technology Industry

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1. Introduction to Current State of Research and the Development of the International Sales Accelerator Model

The literature about international market selection is numerous and spread over different disciplines, for example, marketing, strategic marketing and management, marketing research, international business or international economics. In addition, to the widespread approaches from different disciplines, researchers usually focus on one of the market entry modes such as export¹, joint ventures², licensing³ or sales and production subsidiaries⁴ in their studies. *Koch*, however, argues that international market selection and market entry modes selection is not a separate process, there are rather two aspects of one decision⁵. What most of the articles have in common is that they argue for a systematic approach in selecting international markets⁶. *Papadopoulos & Denis* created a taxonomy of statistical approaches to international market selection⁷. They distinguish between two basic statistical approaches of international market selection: market grouping and market estimating approaches. The difference between the two basic approaches is that market grouping approaches cluster countries based on similarities to be selected, whereas market-estimating approaches bring countries in a certain order to be selected.⁸ In 2005, *Brouthers & Nakos* found out that small and medium-sized companies' export performance was higher when the companies used a systematic international market selection approach⁹. Over time, the factors for international market selection grew with each study published. Now, the difficulty for practitioners is to maintain an overview of the relevant factors for international market selection and adopt them to their company. In Table 1, some factors used in studies by researchers are depicted. *Johanson & Vahlne* argue that companies select new markets based on the industrial network of the company¹⁰. Other researchers emphasize the importance of the competitive position of a firm and market attractiveness of a certain product¹¹. Newer studies try to include more factors, or different theories in their studies, for example, *Brouthers et al.* operationalized Dunning's OLI paradigm to select new markets¹². *Martín Marín & Drogendijk* on the other hand include numerous distance measures in their study to select new markets¹³.

¹ cf., for example, Bilkey 1976, Attiyeh & Werner 1981, Brouthers & Nakos 2005.

² cf., for example, Chen & Hennart 2002 or Chiao et al. 2010.

³ cf., for example, Okechuku & Onyemah 1999.

⁴ cf., for example, Armstrong 1970 or Boddewyn 1983.

⁵ cf. 2001. p. 73.

⁶ cf., for example, Kobrin 1979 and Andersen & Buvik 2002.

⁷ cf. Papadopoulos & Denis 1988, p. 40.

⁸ cf. Papadopoulos & Denis 1988, p. 39-44.

⁹ cf. 2005. P. 376.

¹⁰ cf. 1990. p. 18.

¹¹ cf. Attiyeh & Werner 1981, p. 79f and Brewer 2001, p. 169.

¹² cf. 2009, p. 272.

¹³ cf. 2014, p. 107.

Table 1: Overview of Some Selected Studies and Their Identification of Factors for International Market Selection

Author (Year of Publication)	Factors for International Market Selection
Johanson & Vahlne (1990)	Theoretical Work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial Networks • Advantages
Attiyeh & Werner (1981), Brewer (2001)	Theoretical Work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive Position • Market Attractiveness/Market Potential
Brouthers et al. (2009)	Empirical Work: Operationalization of Dunning's OLI paradigm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ownership Advantage</u>: World Wide Sales, Experience, R&D Intensity, Creativeness Rating • <u>Location Advantage</u>: Market Growth Potential, Growth Potential, General Stability, Government Risk • <u>Internalization Advantage</u>: Cost of Contracts, Risk of Dissemination
Martín Martín & Drogendijk (2014)	Empirical Work: Operationalization of socioeconomic and cultural distances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Socioeconomic distance</u>: educational, demographic and economic development distance • <u>Cultural & historical distance</u>: linguistic, religion and colonial distance

Source: Own illustration.

Overall, the literature on international market selection, entry mode and first information / entry points¹⁴ is well documented. The question most companies are confronted with after they have selected a new market is how to set up and develop sales and distribution structures in the new market. This issue has been neglected in the literature. That is why, for example, *Panagopoulos et al.* request new theoretical frameworks for international sales development, more studies about sales and distribution management in emerging and less-developed markets, identification and verification of distribution variables and more research about the interfaces of sales departments with other functional departments¹⁵. In the same year, 2011, *Baldauf & Lee* ask for new sales models and theories as well as research outside of the U.S.¹⁶ They argue that most sales and distribution research has been conducted in the U.S., and some other developed markets such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands¹⁷. In 2016, *Wagner & Szymura-Tyl* repeat the call for research on interfaces manage-

¹⁴ cf. Brewer 2001, p. 169.

¹⁵ cf. 2011, p. 226f.

¹⁶ cf. 2011, p. 212 and p. 216.

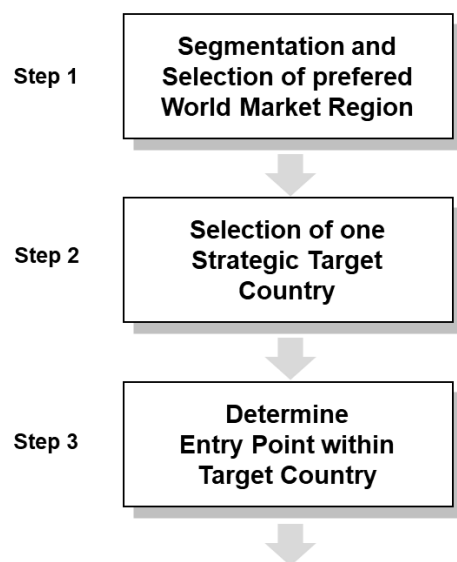
¹⁷ cf. Baldauf & Lee 2011, p. 212.

ment. This time between sales, distribution, marketing and new product development. In addition, they ask for research about the improvements in sales and distribution management and their influence on the overall strategic management.¹⁸

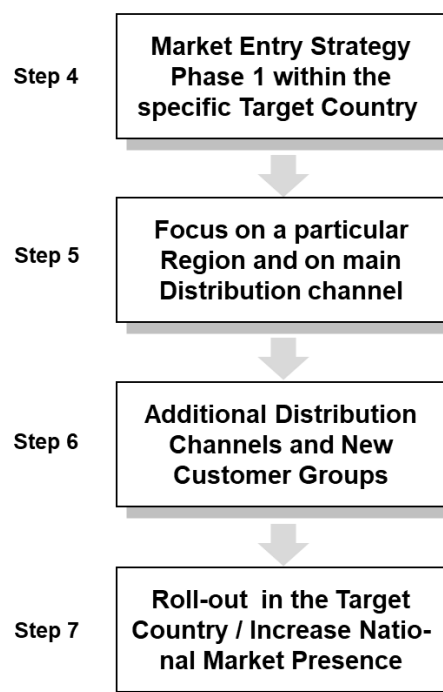
Due to the described research gap, the International Sales Accelerator Model (hereinafter referred to as ISA-Model) was developed. The model is designed to support companies, business development agencies as well as research institutes with their strategic and operative management of foreign market development. The basic underlying process of the ISA-Model stems from the strategic management process¹⁹. According to *Hungenberg*, the strategic management process consists of three steps: (1) strategic analysis, (2) strategy formulation and selection, and (3) strategy implementation²⁰. Figure 1 shows the overall architecture of the ISA-Model. The first three steps of the ISA-Model are the strategic analysis steps. Step number four is the strategy formulation and selection step. The last three steps are concerned with the strategy implementation, i.e. setting up first sales and distribution structures as well as increasing the national market presence.

Figure 1: The International Sales Accelerator Model

Strategic Target Market Selection



Operational Planning of Sales and Distribution Program



Source: Own illustration.

¹⁸ cf. Wagner & Szymura-Tyl 2016, p. 3619f.

¹⁹ cf. Hungenberg 2012, p. 10.

²⁰ cf. Hungenberg 2012, p. 10.

The aim of the article is to present first results how the ISA-Model can be applied, i.e. key issues that need to be addressed in each step. At the end of chapter two and three, the results and best practices of expert interviews with CEOs from twelve environmental technology companies will be presented. In chapter four, the article will evaluate whether companies' internationalization processes can be depicted with the ISA-Model. In Chapter 5, limitations and future research will be pointed out.

2. Strategic Steps of International Market Selection

2.1 Step 1 - Segmentation and Pre-Selection of a World Region

Figure 2: Step 1 of the International Sales Accelerator

Step 1 of ISA Model	Key Issues to be addressed
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Segmentation and Selection of preferred World Market Region </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do we want to do Business outside of Europe? ▪ Which major Region of the World will grow fastest? ▪ Can we effectively manage our Business in more than one continent?

Source: Own illustration.

Gaston-Breton & Martín Martín, for example, propose a segmentation of world regions (see also Figure 2) based on the indicators market size (e.g. GDP etc.) and market development (GDP per capita, etc.)²¹. Sometimes, internal company indicators such as sales volumes define world regions²². During a guest lecture at the University of Hohenheim, the CEO from a large automotive company explained that the company foresees a shift in vehicle sales towards Asia. Thus, the company decided to show a greater presence in Asia. While the share of the Asian turnover was still about a quarter in 2005, the aim of the company was to increase the sales share of Asian business within ten years to about one third. Within the respective region, China, Japan and South Korea were target countries. In contrast, not all companies do expand strategically. Especially, small businesses determine ad hoc a target region or a target country. Investors also proceed by priority groups of countries, and not necessarily by world regions. A

²¹ cf. 2011, p. 274.

²² cf. Expert Interviews IMI 2016.

typical example was the creation of the BRIC countries, which were particularly high-growth target countries in the period from 2000 to approx. 2013²³.

2.2 Step 2 - Selection of a Specific Country as the Priority Target Market

Figure 3: Step 2 of the International Sales Accelerator

Step 2 of ISA Model	Key Issues to be addressed
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>Selection of one Strategic Target Country</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have selected East Asia as the most promising Growth region ▪ Where to go first: China? or Hongkong? or Japan? or Singapore? ▪ Where will be locate our Regional Headquarter for Asia?

Source: Own illustration.

In the second step of the ISA-Model, a company needs to determine a priority target market (see also Figure 3). Medium-sized enterprises often succumb to the temptation to respond to requests from many countries simultaneously. That kind of behavior might lead to a sub-optimal usage of resources. Each target country and its development should be pursued as an independent project. Furthermore, market objectives and milestones should be set. For example, a company can state that it wants to grow in the next 3-5 years at 10 percent p.a. in East Asia. Logically, one country market is taken into the focus of expansion strategies. In recent years, this is often China. For a long time, Japan was at the forefront of the investment efforts of foreign companies. Depending on the industry, this decision can also be different, for example, the commitment to South Korea by an automotive supplier, or Taiwan by an electronics manufacturer. Under certain conditions, it is useful, however, to be simultaneously active in two to three target countries with geographical and cultural proximity. In this case, it is best to coordinate all sales activities in a regional headquarter. For a long time, Hong Kong played an important role as a hub and regional headquarter for the East Asian region.²⁴ There are different methods on how to select new target markets. There is one overview by *Papadopoulos &*

²³ The commitment to the so-called BRIC-states about 20 years ago was introduced by Goldman Sachs in the worldwide investor-community and had led to a self-fulfilling prophecy in the following years. Meanwhile, the country selection is seen in a different light. Especially in Brazil and Russia, the economic development remained significantly below the expectations in the recent years.

²⁴ An example of this is the company BASF, which supervised the business in East Asia for a long time from Hong Kong. Lately, however, the locations Beijing and Shanghai compared to Hong Kong have received a significant upgrading.

Denis that categorizes different international market selection methods into market grouping and market estimation methods (see also Chapter 1)²⁵.

2.3 Step 3 - Determination of Entry-points in the Target Market

Figure 4: Step 3 of the International Sales Accelerator

Step 3 of ISA Model	Key Issues to be addressed
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>Determine Entry Point within Target Country</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who do we know in the respective target market? ▪ Who are the most important promoters of the country in our company? ▪ Is there an important leading trade fair for our industry in the respective country? ▪ Does the Chamber of Commerce have experience with our industry and are there specific contact persons? ▪ Are there entrepreneurs who we are on friendly terms with us that can help us? ▪ Is there a possibility to go on a delegation trip with our government?

Source: Own illustration.

The first entry in an entirely new target market can be compared with an entry to a darkened room. At the beginning, one can see nothing and then, the process of accommodation slowly begins, and one starts recognizing contours, outlines and actors. These actors can be other companies or market experts that have collected experiences in the target market (see also Figure 4). Thus, at an early stage, it must be clarified: Whom do we already know in the relevant target country? Often there are people with experiences in one's own company or even designated promoters²⁶. International trade fairs in Germany and in the respective target country play an important role for establishing first contacts. The local Chamber of Commerce has foreign trade circles in which entrepreneurs and sales professionals with diverse knowledge of

²⁵ cf. 1988, p. 40.

²⁶ In this context, students, trainees and graduates from the respective country as well as those who have studied in Germany play an increasingly important role.

the country work together²⁷. The Foreign Trade Department of the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry has various contacts with Chambers of Commerce in the target country. They have experienced staff, and they are helpful in establishing contacts. Periodically, economic development organizations, state and federal government departments offer delegations in which entrepreneurs receive initial contacts to companies, potential customers and authorities in the destination country.²⁸ See also Brewer's list on informants²⁹.

2.4 Case Examples of Strategic Steps of International Market Selection of Environmental Technology Companies

The investigations in the field of environmental technology show that the first step is often omitted, and the target market selection directly starts with individual countries, i.e. immediately in Step 2 (see also Table 2). Only very large globally operating companies have a portfolio of the world regions as a base of their investment and sales planning. There is a consensus regarding that future growth markets are all outside Europe within the interviewed environmental technology companies. Growth in environmental technology is expected especially in Asia and in North and South America; supplemented by rather long-term market opportunities on the African continent. Company B segmented the world into three regions: Asia, Europe, and North America. At the time of the interview, the company had pre-selected the world region of Asia as their new target region. Company C divided the world into four regions: Asia, Europe, North American and South America. Although Europe was Company C's home world region, the expert said that Europe will become a new region of interest for the company, because the company expects high growth in the maintenance and service business within European markets. This is an interesting point; a region that has been developed can become re-selected. There are several independent institutions that can help companies to get an overview where future growth regions in the world are such as the World Bank or studies by consultants and think tanks.

In Step 2, the selection of a specific country as the priority target market, the interviewed environmental technology companies have specific methods in use that are part of their business development. For example, in the segments of air pollution control, waste and water management, it is most useful to explore awaited tenders for plants all over the world (see Company B, C, D and J). In addition, one company from the waste management segment, Company J, pre-selected countries based on the following criteria: waste volume, landfill ratio, contracts with municipalities, political conditions, probability of citizen's initiatives, industrial environment,

²⁷ As an example, the Foreign Trade Committee of the Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce may be mentioned.

²⁸ In Baden-Württemberg, this is organized by Baden-Württemberg International (bw-i). An important platform also provides the conference Global Connect.

²⁹ cf. 2001, p. 169.

grid connections, fuel use, legal system, corruption index, cultural factors, etc. The results for each country were accumulated via EU statistics and further official statistics such as United Nations statistics. Subsequently, they data was put together in their so-called environmental market selection model. In general, companies that manage to get an early "foot in the door" in project studies and tendering procedures normally have the best chances of being selected. Thus, the interviewed environmental technology companies' market selection process depends largely on being selected. To be selected the companies have to invest and prepare a lot of money and time. Company A's business does not depend on public tenders. They have three strategies on how they select new target markets: First, follow your customers. Second, define strategic relevant target markets for your industry. Third, observe important emerging target markets for your industry. Companies can also rely on official studies from their government to find new target markets. The latest study of Umwelttechnik BW und Baden-Württemberg International, for example, contains a country ranking for the markets of environmental technology. The top priority countries are: China, USA, India, Brazil and Turkey. This study also provides highly differentiated assessments of the expected market trends in the individual segments, for example, water technology, waste and recycling, etc. Each of the top five target countries was backed by detailed information on specific strengths and weaknesses, to environmental legislation and investment requirements. In a further priority step, five other target markets were highlighted: South Korea, Australia, South Africa, United Kingdom and France. Additional information on the evaluation and assessment of strategic target markets offer Germany Trade and Invest (GTAI), the German Water Partnership (hereinafter referred to as GWP), RETECH and the professional associations of the VDMA. The GWP has organized eight countries' districts where water technology companies exchange information regularly and support each other in certain target countries.

For companies that want to enter a new target market, the entry point is crucial (Step 3). The entry point can be a business partner, a trade fair, a chamber of commerce, a business development agency, a trade institution, an industry magazine, a location, etc. In Table 2, Company D is classified as not taking part in the step that is because Company D is a service company. They are planning water projects, but they are not implementing the projects. Some experts select business partners with extensive experience in the respective target country to guide them as a mentor (e.g. Company G). Others meet business partners at specific trade fairs (Companies B, E, F, H and L). In the environmental technology industry, the trade fair IFAT in Munich, for example, is one of the most important trade fairs worldwide. The trade fair is so important that IFAT spin-offs in key target markets for the environmental technology industry such as China, India, Turkey and Brazil, are organized in two-year rotations. There are also specialized trade fairs for the segments water and waste management, which play a central

role for individual segments.³⁰ One of the companies (Company C), which is active in the water management segment, prepared a first market entry for China on the IFAT in Munich as well as with the GWP. The contacts there, and the subsequent participation in two other conferences of water technology in China has led to important business contacts and was later the basis for the establishment of a sales office on site. Other companies contacted business development agencies (Company I), Chambers of Commerce (Company J) or industry magazines for collecting information about the new market.

3. Operative Steps of Sales / Distribution Development in Foreign Markets

3.1 Step 4 - Market Entry Strategy for the Target Market

Figure 5: Step 4 of the International Sales Accelerator

Step 4 of ISA Model	Key Issues to be addressed
<div data-bbox="229 1182 587 1352" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Market Entry Strategy within the specific Target Country </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get to understand Business rules and Legal requirements ▪ Become embedded in Local Expatriate community ▪ Independent Distributor or own Sales office? ▪ Evaluate and Select Local Distributor(s) ▪ Determine Legal Structure ▪ Participation in Joint Venture Arrangements? ▪ Greenfield Investment or Aquisition? ▪ Extent and Sequence of Investment ▪ Expatriate or Local Managers?

Source: Own illustration.

After the selection decision for an international market, a phase of exploration starts for which one can estimate 6-12 months (see also Figure 5). Law firms, accountants and Chamber of Commerce inform about important country-specific conditions regarding legal forms and

³⁰ In the study by Prognos (2015, p. 22f), there are profiles of the top five target markets for each segment. In addition, in another study by Umwelttechnik BW (2016, p. 44), there is also a list of the most important local environmental technology trade fairs.

choosing the appropriate market entry strategy. Usually, in the early stage of a foreign market entry, companies will seek access to the market via a sales representative or a distributor. The key is to consider several potential candidates, and to conduct personal interviews on-site and then select the most suitable candidate. Usually an agreement over two years will be arranged in which specified targets for further business development will be defined. Companies that successfully went through this process in other countries, have routines, how to systematically develop the relationship between parent company and local distributor. Other issues, which must be considered in Step 4 are listed in Figure 5. These include reflections on partnership agreements, joint ventures and business relationships with important first customers. It is crucial that a roadmap for the expected sales growth and breakeven is set. A step-by-step plan for investments and market support measures is as important as the question of how the optimal staffing looks like. *Belz & Reinhold*, for example, argue that the market entry strategy should be in line with the overall pursued strategy of the parent company: (1) international strategy – e.g. export, (2) global strategy – e.g. franchising and / or e-commerce, (3) multinational strategy – e.g. joint venture, (4) transnational strategy – e.g. sales subsidiary and / or competence center³¹.

3.2 Step 5 - Focusing on Core Regions and Primary Distribution Channel

Usually, companies initially search for a location in a city where other companies and service institutions (Chamber of Commerce, consulting firms) of their home market are located. There is also a difference whether the company enters a large country (e.g. USA, China or Brazil), a city-state (e.g. Singapore) or a country with one dominant center (Great Britain or France). In large countries, in which possible federal structures are prevalent, the early determination of the location has a strong influence on what types of business and user areas are successfully initiated. According to *Homburg et al.*, companies have two basic options of distribution structures: direct and indirect distribution channels³². The difference is that a direct distribution channel is managed by an employee of the company, whereas an indirect distribution channel is managed by an external partner. At the beginning, it is important to focus on one specific distribution channel (see also Figure 6). The structure and the importance of distribution channels in the foreign market might vary from the home market. For example, in Germany in the sanitary business, wholesale and sanitary trade dominate over retailer trade. In other countries, DIY outlets prevail as the dominant sales channel. Thus, a company should quickly gain insights into the structure and business practices of the main distribution channels of their industry in the foreign market.

³¹ cf. 1999, p. 98.

³² cf. Homburg et al. 2012. p.51.

Figure 6: Step 5 of the International Sales Accelerator

Step 5 of ISA Model	Key Issues to be addressed
<div data-bbox="231 548 582 712" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;"> <p>Focus on a particular Region and on main Distribution channel</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In most Countries, one or two Cities are chosen first by international investors ▪ Urban center with a strong network of other firms from Germany helpful ▪ In Consumer goods, specific Distribution channels and Customer behaviour must be well understood ▪ For Investment goods / Infrastructure projects one must understand the written and unwritten rules of the project selection process ▪ Often firms select one dominant Distribution channel or a specific sequence of Project acquisition in order to get an early stronghold in the new environment

Source: Own illustration.

The determination of a distribution channel should be carried out before the selection of a distributor / sales representative, because distributors are often specialized on a specific distribution channel. Thus, a company should know their preferred distribution channel before contacting any distributors. Distributors in a target market usually have a good network of contacts in certain sectors. A newly entering company will benefit from these contacts but the company must be careful to not get "locked-in" when it wants to open up to other user sectors in which the distributor does not have enough contacts. Distributors often try to obtain exclusive distribution rights; thus, it may be advisable to limit their activities to certain target groups and user groups. It may be advantageous to establish business relations with other trading partners in the target country that tap complementary applications, distribution channels and regions. For German companies in the industrial and supply business, other German companies are often „door-openers” for an overseas market. A process of gradual ramp-up must be coordinated with the local distributor. Close communication about the sequence of steps to winning customers and sales support is particularly important. Even the best technical product cannot sell itself, especially as one moves on foreign soil. It is also important that ambitious and realizable objectives are pursued. The sales volume should be set and reviewed at certain points in time. For example, a small business with its distributor agrees that sales will slowly be increased from 50 K € in the first three years to 200 K €. The monitoring of the early growth

process and the communication between the foreign partners and the sales management at the parent company is crucial for success. The greatest danger is when multiple foreign markets are opened up, and then, they develop with a relatively small sales volume.

3.3 Step 6 - Development of Additional Distribution Channels and Customer Groups

Figure 7: Step 6 of the International Sales Accelerator

Step 6 of ISA Model	Key Issues to be addressed
<div data-bbox="228 913 576 1070" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;"> Additional Distribution Channels and New Customer Groups </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being focused on a particular Customer group or just one Distribution channel sets limits to growth ▪ Headquarter has set target for sequential growth for each Target country / Actual figures are below target ▪ New and Complementary Distribution Channels need to be penetrated ▪ Winning new Customer groups with similar product and service demands ▪ Leverage investments for Advertising and Branding ▪ Build strong Local Subsidiary that manages the Growth agenda for the next three years

Source: Own illustration.

Once a first distribution channel is established, one should think about how the local sales organizations can be further optimized (see also Figure 7). Companies gradually develop additional distribution channels to reach different customers groups. The difficulty in adding distribution channels is to add distribution channels with the greatest possible complementarity.³³ *O'Keefe*, for example, also distinguishes between single channel, multichannel, cross channel and omni channel management³⁴. According to *O'Keefe*, a company's goal should be to establish an omni channel system where customers can order via the internet one of the products of a company via a local store, for example³⁵. The ultimate goal is that customers can order

³³ cf. Gillespie & Hennessey 2016, p. 406ff.

³⁴ cf. O'Keefe 2016.

³⁵ cf. O'Keefe 2016.

products from anywhere they like. This might be a goal for certain consumer goods, but not for large environmental plants.

3.4 Step 7 - Rollout in Target Market / Countrywide Presence

Figure 8: Step 7 of the International Sales Accelerator

Step 7 of ISA Model	Key Issues to be addressed
<div data-bbox="228 819 587 981" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;"> <p>Roll-out in the Target Country / Increase National Market Presence</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a major recognized Brand ▪ Attain Country-wide Presence in the major Industrial regions ▪ Become one of the Top10 major players in this industry in the Target country ▪ Build a strong national organization with local Manufacturing, Procurement, and some R&D ▪ Continuous Monitoring of a stable Growth path ▪ Become a major foreign location highly recognized by Corporate headquarter

Source: Own illustration.

In the last step of the ISA-Model, companies must manage their market penetration strategies. Some companies rely on establishing a major recognized brand to build up a market presence throughout the foreign market (see also Figure 8). Other companies add different locations for sales, production and R&D within target markets. Especially when the target market is big and fragmented, different locations with different functionalities are helpful for gaining market share.

3.5 Case Examples of Operative Steps of Sales / Distribution Development of Environmental Technology Companies

In step 4, the market entry strategy for the target market needs to be implemented. Typical market entry strategies are, for example, export (Company E, H and K), distribution and sales partner (Company F, I), own sales representation (Company G and L), joint venture (Company J) and own production (Company B, C and J). Sometimes, a company has entered different

countries with different market entry strategies. Thus, market entry strategies should always be adjusted to the respective market. Large environmental technology companies have business development departments that regularly inform business units about potential opportunities (Company B and L). The expert from Company B explains that they entered the Chinese market with their core business unit. After the business unit had established their business, other business units of the company followed. In addition, the business development department regularly identifies new technology trends. Company L has a similar approach regarding the adding of business units to already existing sales and production subsidiaries. If they enter a market for the first time, they analyze what business unit is best for the new market, and then they start looking for a distributor. Usually, the company finds distributors for the respective markets via trade fairs (see Step 3). Once the company finds a distributor, they offer them an exclusive market contract for five to ten years. The exclusive market contract gives the distributor planning security. If the distributor is doing well, the company employs the distributor permanently. Company C operates with components for water treatment for industrial companies and for municipally-run water treatment plants. For the market entry into China, the company focused initially solely on a few industrial customers from German companies that planned production plants in China, because the public sector was considered to be much more difficult to access due to expensive international tenders and the dominance of established Chinese water technology system companies respectively. Since the majority of their customers settled in the Shanghai area, the water technology company opened a sales office next to Shanghai. Then, a Chinese employee was selected as the director, who had previously worked in Germany. He had also a degree in water and municipal economy from a German University. In addition to the sales activities, a small laboratory was set up to carry out its own series of analyzes and tests at the Shanghai site. The GWP supported the project. The managing director and the head of the sales unit in China regularly attended the Country Working Group China GWP. They introduced the Chinese subsidiary, for the first time, at the stand of GWP during the IFAT in Munich. Potential Chinese customers and multipliers got to know the company on the fair. In 2015, IFAT Shanghai was opened, and since then the local trade fair has been used to develop more contacts with potential clients. The company used two reference projects with German companies from the mechanical engineering and metalworking to do business locally with other German investors of the same industries. A well-functioning expatriate community through regular meetings and local information circles facilitated the networking. Moreover, it was the desire to meet comparable Chinese engineering firms and metal processing plants. Given the fact that increasingly strict regulations were enforced for the treatment of industrial process water in China, Chinese industrial enterprises for techniques that were already used in subsidiaries of German companies in the same industry. In this way, the medium water technology provider first spoke to Chinese industrial companies and offered

them appropriate tenders. The reference of other well-known German investors on site, the quality image of German equipment and the fact that distrust was spread amongst Chinese water technology companies, allowed the access to several industrial customers in China. The application laboratory was an additional argument in order to offer customers fast measurements for water quality. The results on the reference projects of Chinese industrial enterprises were documented in brochures and presented at trade fairs and regional congresses. Over time, more customers from these two industries in China have been won. At the time of the interview, Company J had recently entered two foreign markets – Great Britain and France. In Great Britain, the company build up a waste incineration plant. At the beginning, the company needed to apply for tenders in Great Britain. In order to submit an offer, the company had to spend around two Mio. GBP. After they won the contract, the company send 20 employees from Germany to the foreign market. In addition, five local employees were hired. To build up a waste incineration plant, the interviewee summarized that they needed a team with the following competences: sales managers, waste material specialists, engineers, fuel market experts and financial experts. In France, they had established a joint venture with a French company. At the beginning, the joint venture partner employed the companies' French employees, and they started to write offers for public tenders. Further market entry strategies were via export and initial distributors (Company E, F, G, H, I and K).

Once the market entry strategy is determined, a core region with a primary distribution channel needs to be developed (Step 5). Company B, for example, entered the Indian market about three years ago with an own sales subsidiary in one of the Indian states. Within this subsidiary, for each business unit one or two local sales engineers were hired that had preferably studied in Germany. They were trained at the German headquarter and then send to the Indian subsidiary. If the local sales engineer has successfully acquired a project for the first time, the German headquarter will assess how much Know-how needs to be transferred. In the following project, the headquarter might need to support the local sales engineers only with 30 to 40 percent. In the end, the sales engineers do not need support from the headquarter anymore. Company III entered the Chinese market near Shanghai with a local sales engineer, who built up first contacts to customers. Companies G, I and L build up first distribution channels via distributors. Company J sold their energy via an own sales representation in the county of Devon.

In Step 6, companies need to add further distribution channels to win additional customers. Company J, for example, added to their initial waste incineration plant a biomass power plant with a sales office to sell energy to British customers.

In the last step, step 7, companies can establish further offices within the country to manage a countrywide rollout of their products (Company B). To grow the market share within a country,

the company needs to establish a strong brand (Company C and E). Company B entered the Chinese market in Shanghai by adding their environmental business unit to the already existing production and sales office. Afterwards, they build up different sales offices throughout the country where key customers had built up their production. Over time, Company B established a strong brand image within the environmental technology industry. Since they always focused on quality instead of low-price versions of their plants, they managed to gain a respectable reputation. Together with their reputation and brand image, they managed to acquire key customers with high sales volumes. Thus, they were able to build up more and more locations within the target country. Company C and E have not yet established different locations within one target country, but they also focused on a strong brand management and quality leadership instead of cost leadership. Over time, both companies managed to gain higher market shares within their target countries.

4. Summary of Results and Discussion

In Table 2, the results of the expert interviews with environmental technology companies are summarized within the framework of the ISA-Model. In total, twelve expert interviews with CEOs from different segments of environmental technology industry were conducted. The companies had different company sizes: six very large companies, two large companies and four medium-sized companies. In general, very large companies follow the steps of the ISA-Model more often than large and medium-sized companies. Company D is an exception; they offer environmental services. This could be a reason why the company's internationalization process differs from that of the other companies under consideration. The biggest accordance with the ISA-Model throughout the sample can be seen in the steps 3 and 4. Almost all companies conducted these two steps. The next biggest agreement can be read off in step 5. Nine out of twelve companies focused on a core region and set up of a primary distribution channel in the beginning. Step 2 is implemented five out of twelve times. Then, step 6 and 7 follow with three out of twelve times. Finally, step 1 is implemented only by two out of twelve companies.

Table 2: Extent of Implementation of the Steps of the ISA-Model in Environmental Technology Companies from Baden-Württemberg

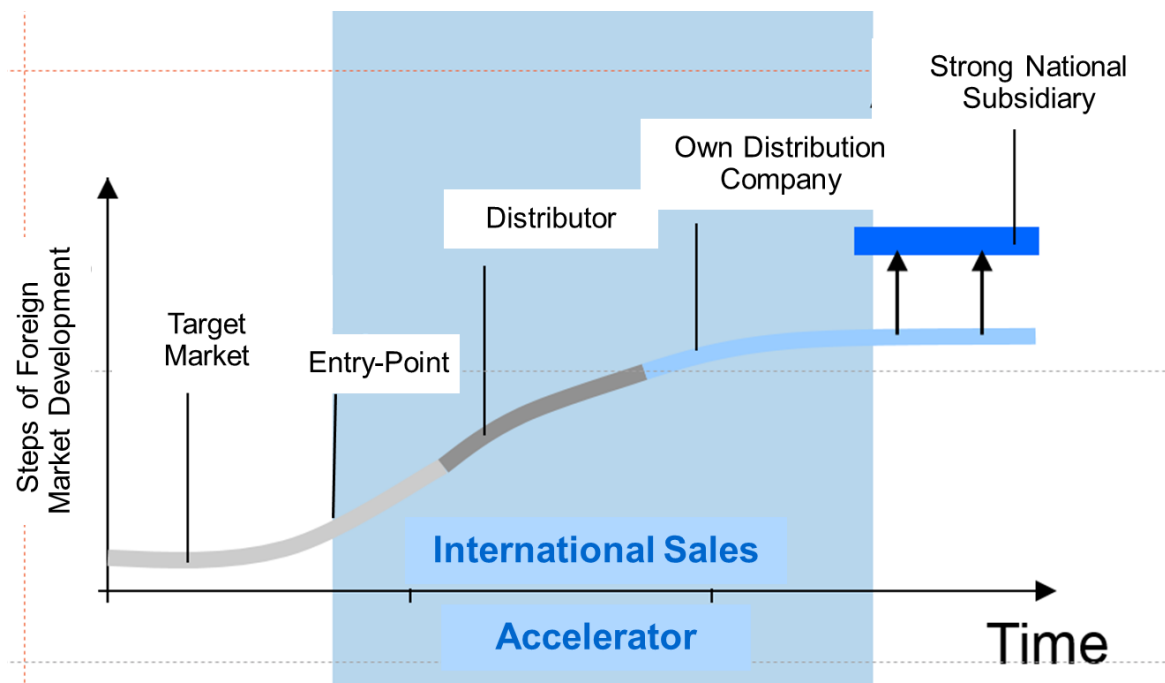
Company	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Company Size ³⁶	Very large	Very large	Very large	Very large	Medium	Large	Large	Medium	Medium	Very large	Medium	Very large
1. Segmentation and Pre-Selection of a World Region	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. Selection of a Specific Country as the Priority Target Market	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○
3. Determination of Entry-points in the Target Market	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
4. Market Entry Strategy for the Target Market	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
5. Focusing on Core Regions and Primary Distribution Channel	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	●	●	○	●
6. Development of Additional Distribution Channels and Customer Groups	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○
7. Rollout in the Target Market / Country-wide Presence	○	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

● = Step is implemented by the company ○ = Step is not implemented by the company. Source: Own illustration based on Expert Interviews IMI 2016.

³⁶ Categorization of companies by Orbis 2017.

In Figure 9, recommended organizational structures of the ISA-Model for companies are depicted. Since companies often omit the first step, the recommendation starts with the target market selection. Afterwards, a company should select their entry point and an initial distributor. Over time, the company should invest in their own distribution company. As sales develop and the company gains experience in the market, the company should invest in building a strong national subsidiary.

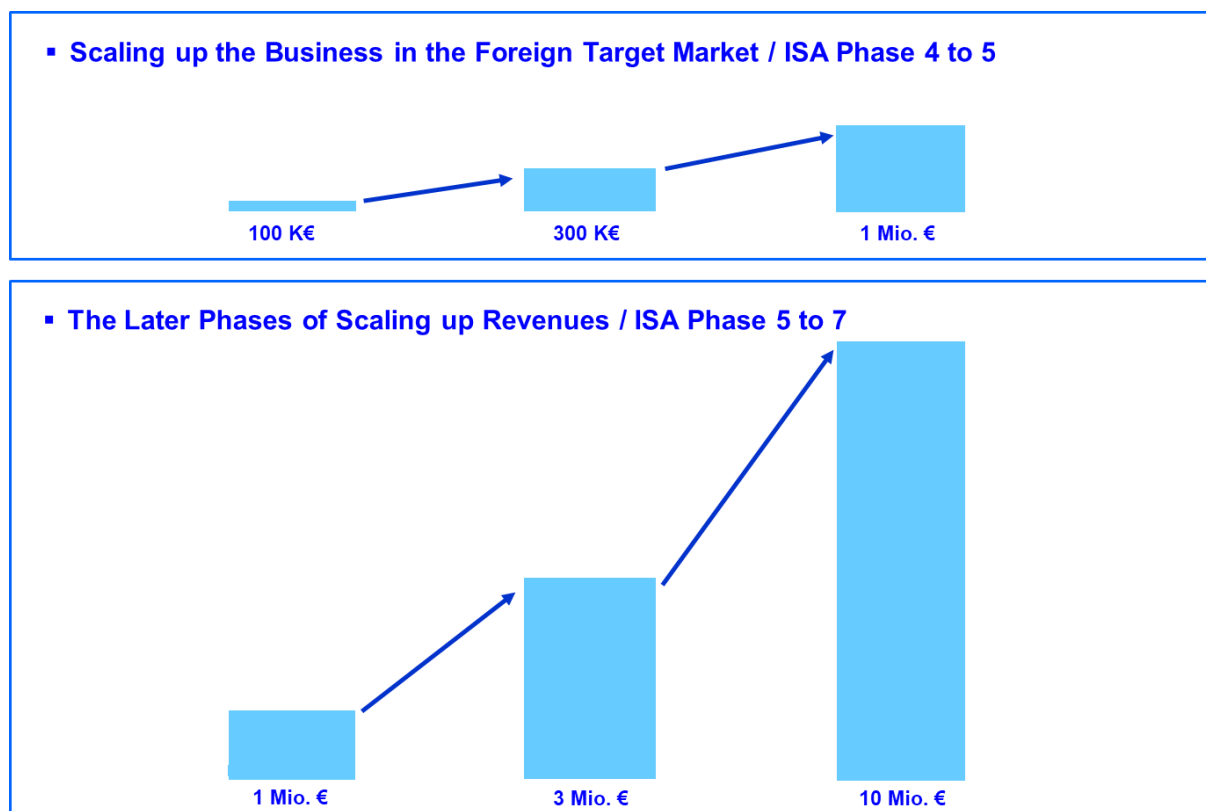
Figure 9: Organizational Structures in the Expansion of a Strong Market Presence in a Foreign Market over Time



Source: Own illustration.

Figure 10 presents a first draft on how companies might be able to evaluate in which phase they are in the ISA-Model and when they should proceed to the next step. The ideas therefore came from Company C. Company C scales up their foreign business in a systematic way. If the sales volume is developing from 100 K € to 300 K € via exports, the company starts getting interested in the target market. To develop the turnover from 300 K € to 1 Mio. €, the company looks for first distribution partners in the target market. To get the sales turnover from 1 Mio. € to 3 Mio. €, additional distribution partners are acquired, or an own sales office is established. Finally, the company scales up their foreign business from 3 Mio. € to 10 Mio. € by adding their own production to their sales office, or by building up a brand/reputation in the foreign market, or by adding additional distribution channels.

Figure 10: Recommended Combination of ISA-Model and Revenues



Source: Own illustration.

5. Conclusion

The ISA-Model is an attempt to fill the research gap of international sales and distribution development in foreign markets. As *Koch* states that international market selection and market entry modes selection is not a separate process, it is rather two aspects of one decision³⁷; the decision might contain also three or more aspects. Especially when one regards the importance of the sales and distribution development as described in this article. The model seems to fit to the internationalization approaches of very large companies. Thus, small and medium-sized companies might use the model as a guideline of best practices to develop their own foreign target markets. There are so³⁸me limitations of the current work. For example, the focus is on the environmental technology industry. The implementation of the ISA-Model might vary from industry to industry (see company D from the environmental service sector). In the future, an objective method for the assignment of internationalization steps of the companies to the ISA-Model needs to be developed.

³⁷ cf. 2001, p. 73.

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