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Going Global with Confidence

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The New Global Growth Equation

For decades, going global meant one thing: moving production offshore. Lower labor costs justified long supply chains and complex logistics, and delays or quality issues were accepted as part of the trade-off for scale.

Today, that trade-off is being reconsidered. Tariffs, supply chain disruptions, tighter quality standards, and rising compliance costs have changed the equation. What once seemed like a cost advantage now often carries hidden risks, delays, and rework.

At the same time, international markets remain essential. U.S. exports of goods and services reached approximately $3.43 trillion in 2025, yet fewer than 1% of U.S. small businesses currently sell products overseas. With 96% of global customers living outside the United States, the opportunity is significant, but capturing it requires more than ambition.

Companies that succeed internationally are aligning four strategic decisions:

1. Where to produce, assemble, or distribute
2. How to identify and reach international buyers
3. How to fund the cash flow demands of cross-border growth
4. How to structure the business for long-term scalability

This guide explores each of these decisions and how they connect — because international growth is not a single step. It is a series of connected choices that, when aligned early, position companies to scale with more control and confidence.

Going global no longer starts with the cheapest production. It starts with the most controlled, compliant, and responsive supply chain.

Rethink Where You Build

The old logic focused on labor cost. The new logic focuses on total cost, including shipping delays, regulatory exposure, inventory risk, and quality failures. After years of disruption, many business leaders now value reliability and speed as much as unit price.

This shift is already visible. One Latin American industrial supplier had produced components abroad and shipped finished goods into the U.S. Rising tariffs and longer lead times slowed deliveries and frustrated customers. Rather than expand offshore, it partnered with a U.S. manufacturer to assemble products locally; improving delivery timelines, reducing compliance issues, and creating a more predictable cost structure. The momentum is national: 244,000 U.S. manufacturing jobs were reshored in 2024, contributing to over 2 million since 2010.

In aerospace and defense, the stakes are even higher. Precision, certification, and compliance drive reshoring decisions; and the barriers to entry are strict.

"There are compliance requirements for manufacturers looking to bid on defense and aerospace contracts, including cybersecurity certifications. These are strict, no loophole mandates that can prevent a company from doing any work with the U.S. government."
— Matt Rocco, President, South Florida Manufacturers Association

Demand is also expanding beyond traditional government work.

"Aerospace work has become commercialized. It's no longer just NASA as your customer, and this is providing a strong tailwind for companies that know how to work with exotic raw materials and highly challenging technical requirements."
— Anthony DiMauro, President, South East Machine

In food and beverage, the drivers are different but the conclusion is the same. Labeling requirements, food safety standards, and state-by-state regulations make offshore production difficult for U.S. distribution.

"The U.S. market provides governance stability and consumer trust, which is especially relevant in food and beverage. Regulatory alignment, labeling control, and consumer confidence in U.S. manufacturing standards become competitive advantages."
— Fernando Mendoza, CEO, Think Wise Solutions

Export growth is strongest when it is planned, researched, and supported by the right advisors, programs, and funding.

Plan Before You Export

Once the production strategy is clear, the next question is how to reach international buyers. The opportunity is vast, but successful exporting rarely happens by chance. It starts with a structured plan.

An export marketing plan helps leadership teams identify priority markets, tailor entry strategies, understand regulatory and logistics requirements, price appropriately, and adapt products to local demand. Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) can help companies build this type of plan and prepare for the realities of operating across borders.

How can companies connect with international buyers?

Several established programs accelerate access to qualified buyers. The U.S. Commercial Service's Gold Key Service schedules meetings with pre-screened buyers and supports trade mission participation. Industry trade shows bring international buyers directly to U.S. businesses. And IDB's BID for the Americas fosters business opportunities with Latin America through ConnectAmericas.com, matchmaking events, and project financing.

Organizations like the World Trade Center Miami play a critical role in helping companies move from planning to execution.

"At WTC Miami, we help companies move from interest to execution by connecting them with the right vetted partners and international business opportunities. When businesses take advantage of structured programs such as trade missions and trade shows, they enter new markets better prepared, reduce risk and position themselves for sustainable growth."

— Alice E. Ancona, COO, World Trade Center Miami

Funding support can also reduce the upfront cost of expansion. Programs such as SelectFlorida and the SBA State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) help offset costs related to marketing, trade shows, trade missions, and credit insurance. The Market Access Program (MAP) provides similar support for food and agricultural exporters.

Successful exporting starts with a plan, the right advisors, and the right funding.

Fund the Growth

International expansion creates financial pressure long before revenue is collected. Companies often need to commit cash upfront for raw materials, inventory, and shipping — while waiting weeks or months for payment. This timing gap can severely strain cash flow, particularly for small and mid-sized businesses.

The right financing strategy bridges that gap. Export working capital loans, trade credit insurance, letters of credit, foreign exchange contracts, EXIM Bank programs, and Foreign-Trade Zones can each address a different part of the internationalization challenge.

International Growth Financing Toolkit

- Export working capital: Fund export-related receivables, inventory, and operating expenses to fulfill larger orders without disrupting domestic cash flow.
- SBA Export Working Capital Program: Short-term financing for export orders with flexible terms designed for small businesses.
- EXIM Bank working capital solutions: Working capital backed by EXIM Bank guarantees to help businesses fund export receivables, scale production, and manage cash flow.
- Trade credit insurance: Protect against nonpayment by foreign buyers and improve borrowing capacity.
- Letters of credit: Ensure payment when agreed terms are met, reducing transaction risk.
- Foreign exchange contracts: Lock in exchange rates to protect margins from currency fluctuations.
- Foreign-Trade Zones (FTZs): Defer or exempt duties on certain imports, improving cash flow and reducing landed costs.

Consider the case of a foreign company in industrial machinery and agricultural tools that set up a U.S. entity to expand into key export markets. Long lead times and increasing working capital needs limited its ability to offer competitive payment terms, putting it at a disadvantage against larger distributors.

International expansion requires capital that matches the timing, risk, and complexity of cross-border trade.

By implementing trade credit insurance on its export receivables, the company was able to access financing for both receivables and inventory through an asset-based lending facility, significantly improving liquidity.

“Export financing isn’t just about getting a loan — it’s about finding the right banking partner that is willing to take the time to understand your business and provide the right solutions that can turn a cash flow challenge into a growth advantage.”

— Angel Piedrahita, General Director, Agro Industrial Center

Market entry is only the beginning. Sustainable growth depends on aligning legal, tax, reporting, and capital foundations early.

Structure for Scale

For foreign companies entering the U.S. market, early success can mask deeper challenges. Demand builds, revenue follows, and expansion feels validated — but as growth accelerates, many encounter unexpected friction. Not because the strategy is flawed, but because the underlying structure was not built to scale.

The most common mistake is treating U.S. expansion as a single operational decision rather than a coordinated, multi-track process.

"The key is to treat it as a multi-track legal project spanning corporate structuring and tax, trade compliance, workforce planning, regulatory permits, and a fit-for-purpose compliance program, rather than as a single business decision."
— Gabriel Saade, DarrowEverett

Tax planning is another foundational component that directly affects financial performance.

"Foreign companies entering the U.S. market need to clearly understand that a meaningful portion of their business success will be subject to tax, and those tax consequences must be understood deliberately, not merely assumed."
— Ricardo Aramburo Williams, International Tax Principal and Global Markets Leader, Mowery & Schoenfeld

These early decisions also influence access to capital. Lenders need a clear view of ownership, cash flow, and how funds move across entities. Companies with strong revenue can still struggle to qualify for credit if intercompany documentation is inconsistent or financial reporting does not clearly demonstrate performance. Transitioning from tax-based financials to GAAP-based reporting — and eventually CPA-reviewed or audited statements — becomes essential as companies grow.

Five Foundations for Scalable U.S. Expansion

1. Legal entity structure
2. Tax planning
3. Intercompany agreements
4. Financial reporting systems
5. Capital strategy

Partner with an expert bank in international expansion.

Grow Across Borders with Confidence

Entering new international markets involves a series of connected choices about where to produce, how to reach buyers, how to fund expansion, how to manage risk, and how to build a structure designed for long-term success.

Companies that approach global growth strategically are better positioned to:

- Strengthen supply chain control and production reliability.
- Enter new markets with a structured export plan.
- Connect with qualified international buyers through proven programs.
- Protect cash flow during long international payment cycles.
- Manage payment, currency, compliance, and financing risk.
- Build legal, tax, reporting, and capital structures that support scale.

The opportunity is significant — but opportunity alone is not enough. Businesses need planning, capital, structure, and the right advisory relationships to move from interest to execution.

First American Bank works with manufacturers, exporters, distributors, and foreign-owned businesses navigating cross-border expansion. We help companies model cash flow, understand capital cycles, structure trade financing, and build credit solutions for both immediate and long-term needs.

Your Path Forward

International expansion rewards companies that plan with precision and execute with alignment. Decisions around supply chain design, market entry, financing, and operational structure are most effective when they are considered together, not in sequence.

Organizations that take this integrated approach are better positioned to reduce cross-border risk, improve cash flow visibility, adapt to changing trade conditions, and scale efficiently as global demand evolves. Success in international markets is not only about entering new geographies. It is about building the operational and financial infrastructure required to support sustained growth.

First American Bank supports manufacturers, exporters, distributors, and foreign-owned businesses at each stage of this process, from export financing and working capital strategy to trade solutions and cross-border banking support. With the right strategy and the right partners, companies can move forward with greater clarity, control, and confidence in global markets.

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