DIGITAL ARTICLE | GLOBAL MARKETING & STRATEGY

How to Discover, Quantify and Select Global Markets for Your Product

By Prof Arun Sehgal | Visiting Faculty, JBIMS and ICT Mumbai | October 2026

The largest country is not necessarily the best market. The relevant question is not how many people live there, but how many users need the specific solution, can afford it, consume it regularly and can realistically be reached. A defensible international expansion plan begins with a transparent calculation of end users and usage, then tests competition, substitutes and the ability to convert interest into repeat purchases.

IDEA IN BRIEF

The problem: Global market estimates often confuse population, demand and realistically obtainable sales.

The insight: Purchasing-power-qualified end users and annual usage establish a physical demand baseline.

The action: Model twenty markets and derive five-year obtainable volume from a defensible sales funnel.

Abstract

A scientifically excellent innovation can fail when directed toward the wrong buyers. This article proposes a bottom-up, 20-country market-screening approach that converts end-user populations, purchasing power and annual consumption into addressable demand, then tests competitive substitutes and realistic five-year market capture.

1. From ASSURED to demand discovery

ASSURED helps evaluate readiness; market discovery identifies who experiences the problem and has the ability and willingness to pay for a solution. Define the end user, technical evaluator, purchaser and payer separately. Interview prospective users and examine how they currently solve the problem, what they spend and what would persuade them to switch.

2. Select the top 20 relevant markets

Build a longlist from product-specific consumption, installed industrial capacity, trade data, population of relevant users, purchasing power, regulation and distribution feasibility. The top 20 are not automatically the largest countries by population or GDP. Rank them by relevance to the specific application, then gather comparable data for one reference year.

3. Estimate demand in physical units

For each country: Eligible end users = total relevant end users × share with purchasing power and access. Annual potential volume = eligible end users × annual consumption per eligible user. For B2B chemicals, replace people with qualified plants, production lines or machines and use annual consumption per installation. Do not double-count users or substitute products.

4. TAM, SAM and five-year SOM

Total Addressable Market (TAM) is the total potential volume under the defined product use case. Serviceable Available Market (SAM) excludes markets inaccessible because of regulation, specifications, geography, channels or other constraints. Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM) is the volume realistically won within a specified period. Year-t SOM = sum of country-specific serviceable volumes × achievable shares in year t. Revenue equals volume × realized net price. Five-year forecasts must separately model market growth, customer qualification, sales coverage, retention and competitive response.

5. Worked illustrative example

Suppose a country has 2 million relevant households, 40% of which have the purchasing power and access required, and each eligible household consumes three units annually. Annual potential volume is 2.4 million units. If only half can be served through available channels, SAM is 1.2 million units. A 1% obtainable share would imply 12,000 units. These figures are illustrative assumptions, not market evidence.

6. Competitors and substitutes

Direct competitors are not the only threat. A different molecule, process, material, equipment design or the option to do nothing may satisfy the same need. Compare price, total cost of ownership, technical performance, switching cost, regulatory acceptance, service, delivery and buyer trust. A credible market-share estimate must be supported by a reason customers would switch.

7. Credibility, sustainability and referenceability

Credibility is the buyer's confidence in the supplier's claims, documentation, ethics and capacity. Sustainability means the ability to deliver economically, operationally and responsibly over time. Referenceability means that successful applications, independently verifiable trials or authorized customer references reduce perceived risk for new buyers. These concepts should be tested through evidence, not asserted as marketing slogans. Never disclose a customer's name without consent.

8. Five-year capture model

Build a conversion funnel: prospects identified, relevant contacts engaged, technical evaluations, approved customers, first orders and repeat accounts. Forecast obtainable market share from account wins, average annual purchases and retention rather than applying arbitrary percentages. Prepare

conservative, base and ambitious scenarios, and reconcile each with production capacity, distribution, inventory and cash requirements.

9. Country scorecard

Weight potential volume, purchasing power, price realization, competition, substitutes, qualification time, regulatory access, payment risk, distribution capability and strategic fit. Test how rankings change when assumptions change. The largest TAM may not be the best first market; a smaller country with rapid qualification and strong reference customers may be preferable.

Student application

Build a 20-country spreadsheet showing eligible end users, annual usage, TAM volume, SAM exclusions, competitors and substitutes, obtainable share for Years 1–5, revenue and evidence sources. Select three priority countries and explain the decision.

1. Why the twenty-market exercise is product-specific

A ranking based on GDP alone ignores whether the country actually consumes the product. Industrial demand may depend on semiconductor wafer starts, pharmaceutical manufacturing, polymer production or installed machinery. Consumer demand may depend on age, income, climate, culture and category penetration. Every market screen should be built from the causal drivers of the selected product.

2. Building a reproducible data dictionary

Before gathering country data, define the end-user unit, annual usage unit, relevant income or budget threshold, exchange-rate convention, reference year and treatment of substitutes. This prevents apparently precise tables from combining incompatible numbers. Each input should carry a source, publication date, coverage note and confidence rating.

3. Estimating purchasing power responsibly

Purchasing power is not equivalent to national average income. The analyst must consider the distribution of income or organizational budgets, local price levels, financing and accessibility. For B2B products, a company may have substantial revenue yet lack approval to purchase a novel material. Eligibility should therefore include technical and procurement readiness.

4. Triangulating physical demand

Where direct end-user counts are unavailable, estimate demand through at least two independent routes. For an industrial ingredient, compare facility counts multiplied by typical usage with downstream output multiplied by formulation loading. Investigate differences caused by exports, inventories, substitute technologies and variations in capacity utilization.

5. Separating physical and monetary market size

Volume and value answer different questions. Physical units indicate manufacturing and logistics requirements, while net realizable prices determine revenue and contribution. Local retail prices should not be applied directly to a manufacturer's export volumes. Channel margins, taxes, discounts, duties and service costs must be separated.

6. Competition beyond the visible supplier list

Direct suppliers may be visible through trade data, but substitutes may be more important. A cleaning chemical may compete with mechanical cleaning, a packaging resin with paper or metal, and a diagnostic reagent with an alternative testing method. The economic comparison should include reliability, changeover costs and customer qualification risk.

7. Constructing a credible acquisition funnel

Begin with the number of identifiable eligible accounts. Estimate how many can be reached, how many will engage, how many will test samples, how many will approve the product and how many will reorder. Each conversion rate should be benchmarked against actual experience or explicitly labelled hypothetical. The funnel provides a defensible basis for market-share assumptions.

8. Referenceability and permission

Reference customers can reduce perceived uncertainty, particularly in technically demanding markets. Referenceability may take the form of permitted case studies, anonymized trial results, independently verified performance or distributor testimonials. Confidential customer names and approval claims should never be published without authorization.

9. Five-year cohort economics

Customers won in one year may continue purchasing in later years, increase their usage or stop ordering. A five-year forecast should model cohorts of acquired accounts, average annual volume, retention, expansion and price changes. This is more informative than simply applying a rising share percentage to a growing market.

10. Scenario and sensitivity analysis

A base case is not a forecast guarantee. Model slower regulatory approval, lower consumption, price erosion, competitive retaliation, delayed distribution and currency movement. Identify the assumptions to which contribution and cash flow are most sensitive, then prioritize research that reduces uncertainty around those assumptions.

11. Country selection and strategic sequencing

The country with the largest TAM may have the longest approval cycle or weakest achievable margins. A smaller market with concentrated customers, credible distributors and quicker referenceability can be an attractive beachhead. A weighted scorecard should be complemented by judgment about strategic learning and option value.

12. Implementation and investment decision

The final decision should connect market attractiveness to execution capacity. A five-year SOM projection is credible only when the required number of customers, production volume, technical staff, channel partners and working capital can be supplied. The report should distinguish measured facts, sourced estimates and management assumptions.

A Decision Framework for Practitioners

The market-sizing spreadsheet should have one row per country and separate columns for relevant end users, eligibility rate, annual consumption, TAM volume, access exclusions, SAM volume, expected share in each of five years and realized price. Every number needs a source, a unit and a date. Missing information is an uncertainty to investigate, not a zero.

Illustrative example: 2 million relevant households × 40% financially eligible × 3 units per year = 2.4 million units of annual potential demand. If only half of this demand is reachable through compliant channels, SAM is 1.2 million units. Capturing 1% of SAM implies 12,000 units. The 1% assumption must be supported by customer acquisition capacity, not chosen for convenience.

SOM means Serviceable Obtainable Market: the portion of the Serviceable Available Market a particular company can realistically win. If a specialty chemical has TAM of 10,000 tonnes and SAM of 6,000 tonnes annually, an illustrative five-year plan of 30, 60, 120, 210 and 300 tonnes implies market shares of 0.5%, 1%, 2%, 3.5% and 5%. At US$20/kg, Year 5 sales of 300 tonnes represent US$6 million. These are hypothetical teaching figures, not a market forecast.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you define the relevant end user for a product with multiple applications?

2. Why might a country with lower TAM offer greater obtainable profit?

3. What customer-level evidence would justify a Year 5 market share assumption?

4. How do credibility, sustainability and referenceability affect the customer-conversion funnel?

References

World Bank (n.d.) World Development Indicators. Available at: https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators (Accessed: 31 October 2026).

International Trade Centre (n.d.) Trade Map. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/ (Accessed: 31 October 2026).

United Nations (n.d.) UN Comtrade. Available at: https://comtradeplus.un.org/ (Accessed: 31 October 2026).

Sehgal, A. (n.d.) The Winning Edge: articles on international marketing. Available at: https://thewinningedgeindia.com/blog.php (Accessed: 31 October 2026).

About the Author

Prof Arun Sehgal is Visiting Faculty at JBIMS and ICT Mumbai. His articles on global marketing, business strategy and entrepreneurship appear on The Winning Edge.