



THE STEP UP GUIDE

TIPS & ADVICE FOR
GROWING YOUR BUSINESS



INTRODUCTION

Britain's army of young businesses is larger than it has ever been. In the first half of last year, entrepreneurs were starting new companies at an astonishing rate of 80 per hour. From hand-crafted products to innovative services, the UK is buzzing with entrepreneurial zeal.

This is testament to the fact that it has never been easier to start a business. Technology has allowed businesses to flourish quickly and without huge swathes of investment. It has enabled ideas to take flight from kitchen tables and garages up and down the country – keeping overheads low without compromising on connectivity. But while the home is a great starting place, there comes a time to move on.

This is a notable moment for every young company, not just home businesses. It heralds the next chapter. With proof of concept in the bag, it's time to grow. Time to invest in sales and marketing. Time to meet new suppliers and approach bigger clients. Time to **step up**.

At Vonage, we understand the importance of this moment and the challenges it brings. Following on from the success of The Start Right Guide, we're seeking to help new businesses in their search for growth. The Step Up Guide will offer advice and inspiration on taking those next steps.

Bringing it to life, we've got entrepreneurial insight from those who have done it before. We'll hear from the founders of BorrowMyDoggy.com, SuperJam and Cobra Beer. Their experiences will no doubt encourage and inspire Step Up businesses everywhere.

S Burckhardt

SIMON BURCKHARDT
MANAGING DIRECTOR, VONAGE UK



STAY INFORMED:
for more advice
and information

www.vonage.co.uk

WELCOME

TO THE STEP UP GUIDE

You've started the business of your dreams. But now that you've got it up and running - how do you take it to the next level?

Starting a business is an exciting time. Getting your enterprise off the ground requires huge energy and attention to detail and there's nothing more rewarding than seeing your first orders coming in or serving your first customers.

But what happens next? Once you're trading it's time to consider growth. This could mean moving out of the home office or hiring a salesperson. It could require an improved marketing plan or diversification of your product line.

We call businesses at this stage "step ups". These are the businesses actively seeking to grow and looking for new opportunities. This guide is designed to help them.

The Step Up Guide is the latest publication in our series which aims to offer advice and inspiration to entrepreneurs and ambitious new companies.

It follows the Start Right Guide, which set out to help those in the earliest stages of a business idea - from creating the business to marketing a new product.

It also comes on the back of the Heart of Home Business Britain report and its community, the Home Business 100. These pieces of work sought to champion home-based entrepreneurs, spotlight the vast contribution they make to the national economy and understand the challenges that they face.

So if you're a young business looking for growth, you've come to the right place. Get ready to step up.



GET INSPIRED:

www.homebusiness100.co.uk

OUR FIRST BOOKLET:
The Start Right Guide

[www.vonage.co.uk/
useful-info/starting-guide/](http://www.vonage.co.uk/useful-info/starting-guide/)

Introduction

from Simon Burckhardt, MD, Vonage

3

Welcome to the Step Up Guide

4

Top ten tips for growth

6

MOVING OUT

8

Moving out: checklist

10

Founder's tale: Claudi & Fin

12

Ask the expert: Rikke Rosenlund

14

founder of BorrowMyDoggy.com

ACCELERATING YOUR SALES

16

Accelerating your sales: checklist

18

Accelerating your sales: focus on sales

20

Dragon's digest: Peter Jones CBE

21

Founder's tale: Cornerstone

22

Ask the expert: Fraser Doherty

24

founder of Superjam

GROWING INTERNATIONALLY

26

Growing internationally: checklist

28

Founder's tale: Lavolio Boutique Confectionery

30

Ask the Expert: Lord Bilimoria

32

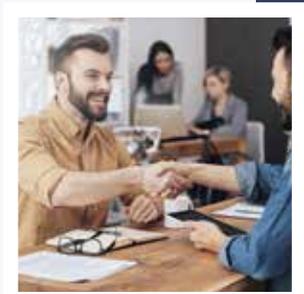
founder of Cobra Beer

Vonage: how we can help

34

Directory

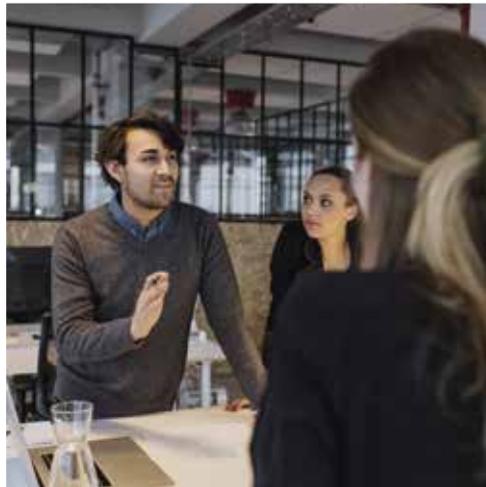
35



TOP TEN TIPS:

GROWTH AT A GLANCE

Congratulations, you've successfully started your own business. This guide is jam-packed with advice and inspiration on the next steps as you seek to grow. Here are our quick fire top ten tips:



1 TIME IT RIGHT

Before you take that first step out of the home, ask yourself: why now? There might be a lack of room for your product, a need to smarten up your meeting space, or to get closer to your clients, but you must make sure that your business is ready for it.

2 BE PREPARED

Finding your first business premises requires a lot of preparation. Make sure you do your research and investigate any regulations, laws or added costs which might crop up. You do not want any unwanted surprises to knock you off your stride.

3 GET HIRING

Your business is growing. You are ambitious and you're meeting your goals. To keep up this momentum, hiring talent could be the best thing you've ever done. It will free up your time, bring in fresh ideas, and enable your business to grow.

4 TELL THE RIGHT STORY

Every business has a unique tale to tell. Get your story straight and it can become your secret weapon - attracting press interest, gaining trust from customers and helping to hire talent.

5 LOOK SHARP

Your website and social media accounts are often the first point of contact people have with your business. Your website needs to look good and communicate your business clearly. Make sure what you're saying online is relevant and insightful with a consistent tone of voice.

6 BE CONSIDERATE

Treat your suppliers and partners well. You will need to deal with them day in, day out, so keep things positive and you will see that it leads to better quality, fewer mistakes, speed and trust.

7 BE SAVVY

Your competitors may have bigger budgets than you, but you've got plenty of tricks up your sleeve. Market to a target audience and choose which channel is best for them rather than trying to reach everyone.

8 LISTEN TO ADVICE

It's vital that you keep an open mind when you're trying to take your next steps on the path to growth. You will need to listen to advice and feedback from people around you - their comments could be your ticket to success.

9 THINK BIG

Don't hesitate to approach large suppliers or bid for corporate contracts - you might be small but you're agile and have something to offer. You just need to be confident.

10 LOOK ABROAD

You will always be on the hunt for new customers, but they may not be staring you in the face. They may not even be in the same country as you. Don't be afraid to explore overseas markets - this could supercharge your growth.





MOVING OUT

YOUR FIRST BUSINESS PREMISES ARE A BIG STEP TOWARDS GROWTH



1.5M
people in the UK run home businesses

YOU STARTED AT HOME BUT IS IT TIME TO FLY THE NEST?

When you're starting a new business, one of the best ways to keep overheads low is to set up from home. Thanks to technology, home businesses have been able to thrive over the past few years, with a record 1.5 million people in the UK currently running a business from their kitchen table or garage. But for many home businesses there comes a time to move into a commercial office space or shop. It may be that they've outgrown the space, they need to be closer to clients or attract talent to the business - whatever the reason, recognising this moment and handling the move well is crucial for small businesses on tight budgets.

This chapter is designed to offer advice and guidance to these home businesses. We'll go through a checklist for those unsure about whether they should move or not. Then we'll take a look at the next steps and key objectives to keep in mind when looking for new premises. Lastly we'll dive into the nitty-gritty and consider legalities and costs.

GET INSPIRED:
These well-known businesses all moved from home offices

www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/the-rise-of-the-home-business/



CHECKLIST:

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

PLANNING

Ready to move out of your home office?
This checklist should help you to decide.

Have you outgrown the space?

This is the most obvious reason to leave a home office. Whether you need to hold more stock, add another few desks or bring specialist equipment in - you know when you've outgrown the home.

Interruption and procrastination

Working in your living space can make it difficult to focus and opens you up to interruption from family members. A space of your own can help you to concentrate on building the business without distraction.

Increase professional appearances

Need to hold client meetings at the office? A residential home might not be the best place for this. It may also benefit you to have a business address which doesn't immediately give away your start-up status.

Recruitment

Hiring talent when you're working in a kitchen or living room can be tricky. Employees generally like to work in professional spaces.

PREPARING

What

Once you've decided it's time to move, you need to start researching your options. It might be the case that you chose to move the business into a shared workspace rather than your own office. This can be a great way of keeping costs down and can also connect you with like-minded entrepreneurs. If you'd rather have space of your own, you can search on platforms such as Search Office Space.

Where

Think hard about where your business should be based. It might be that you decide to move closer to suppliers, clients or customers. But you need to balance this with the costs of certain areas - the centre of town might make sense for the business but can you afford it?

How

It's important to consider whether you have everything you need in the new office. Speak to your IT and telecoms suppliers to make sure your new office will work for the running of the business.

PRACTICALITIES

Legal

Make sure you go through your lease terms with a fine-tooth comb. Are there any unusual clauses? Could you take advantage of landlord incentives or perks? Are there service charges? Have you thought about negotiating a rent-free period?

Business Rates

You can find details of business rates on the government website. Make sure you don't overpay on rates - you can find a wealth of information on The Valuation Office Agency website. If you want further reassurance, ask other businesses or look into local authority appeals.

Insurance

If you have any employees, including part time, you must have Employers' Liability insurance. It's also important to consider Public Liability insurance - this will protect you if someone is injured or their property is damaged because of your business.

Get the lowdown on managing your business finances from the ICAEW's Business Advice Service, which offers a free consultation with a Chartered Accountant

Vonage

Now may be a good time to get a business phone system from Vonage. Hassle free installation, no engineer and multiple lines will help your growing business.

Find out more at vonage.co.uk or call us on 0207 993 9000

HEADCOUNT HELP:

Six things you must do when hiring staff for the first time

www.gov.uk/employing-staff

THE SPACE RACE:

Free search service for office space across the UK

www.searchofficespace.com

COVERING UP:

Simply Business specialises in insurance for small business

www.simplybusiness.co.uk



“We found a new team member who brings fresh ideas and enables us to concentrate on what we need to drive the business forward.”

FOUNDERS' TALE

CLAUDI & FIN

Frozen yogurt lolly makers Claudi & Fin know how difficult it can be to make the leap from a home office, but in their case, the need for extra space left them with no choice.



MOVING OUT

“You can only fit so many freezers in a house!” explains co-founder Lucy Woodhouse. “So for us it was an easy decision but knowing when to move into an office is hard and it can feel very daunting. Suddenly you have to deal with lots of overheads and you might not see the immediate rewards.”

But according to the entrepreneur, the rewards do come. “It’s not just having additional space that has really made a difference to us. Hosting meetings is much easier now and having the whole team in the same room makes the decision-making process a lot quicker.”

EXPANDING THE TEAM

The choice to move also helped with the hiring of an essential team member. “It’s hard to know when it’s the right time to hire – but equally you don’t want to be snowed under by work,” says Woodhouse. “My co-founder Meriel and I umm-ed and ahh-ed about hiring a new team member, but we have found someone who makes an enormous difference, brings fresh ideas and enables us to concentrate on what we need to drive the business forward.”

NEW PRODUCTS

Claudi & Fin outgrew the first premises and has since moved into a bigger office space. It has also launched some new products, which are winging their way to the shelves of Sainsbury’s and Waitrose. “The idea for our Minis came from feedback from our customers and market research. We’ve created smaller lollies for little hands and for people of all ages who are looking for a healthier dessert in the perfect size.”



PLANNING

The pace of growth in the early days can make it hard to plan but it’s essential to take a step back and consider where you’re headed. “When a business is growing quickly, it can be a little difficult to predict how things will pan out and make a solid strategy,” says Woodhouse. “Our advice is to write down what you do every day for a week and then what you think you should be doing. If the two don’t align, it probably means that you are having to concentrate on things that you shouldn’t as a founder or a CEO.”





ASK THE EXPERT

RIKKE ROSENLUND

Rikke Rosenlund founded BorrowMyDoggy in 2012 after an afternoon spent looking after her neighbour’s dog Aston. The platform, which matches dog owners with dog lovers, has grown to have 600,000 members and counting.

When I came up with the idea for BorrowMyDoggy, a friend advised me to make sure that there was a market for it. I took part in a startup bootcamp weekend, where I pitched my idea and tested the theory. By the end of the weekend I had a basic landing page and within three days

I had 85 sign ups. From an old man in Cornwall who needed help walking his dog, to an Australian student living in London who missed her dogs back home – these people gave me the confidence to start.

WHY TO MOVE OUT

I didn't have an office when I first started BorrowMyDoggy because I hadn't really planned to start a business. I was working full-time somewhere else and spending all of my spare time manually matching our members at the kitchen table.

But moving out made a big difference both psychologically and practically. I certainly didn't have the kind of living room you could bring clients or investors to. Also it helped to make a difference between work and home life.

CONSIDER A SHARED WORKSPACE TO START

When I got my first round of funding, I reached out to my network of tech industry contacts and asked if anyone knew where I could find cheap office space. I got an email back from someone saying they had some extra space. That person actually ended up investing in the business – you can't underestimate the power of contacts.

Moving into a space with other entrepreneurs gives you access to so much advice, tips, contacts and even emotional support. These things are important when you're starting out because you need advice on everything – from hiring, to accountancy, to press. It's very helpful being around others in the same boat.

INTERN OPTION

A guy I met at the bootcamp became my co-founder and helped build and launch BorrowMyDoggy. After that, our first hire was actually an intern, who we got in to look after social media and customer service. She was wonderful and incredibly enthusiastic - having reached out to us to see if she could help.

Hiring our first intern was a financial decision, at that time we had very little money and couldn't afford to hire a professional marketer. But it paid off. We still take on interns today, it's a great learning experience for someone who has just left school or university. As an intern, you can get to grips with every function of a company, grow as an individual and hopefully determine your future career path. For several of our interns this has included growing into a full time role with BorrowMyDoggy.

“Moving into a space with other entrepreneurs gives you access to so much advice, tips, contacts and even emotional support.”



ACCELERATING YOUR SALES

INCREASING SALES IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

1.5M
people in the UK run home businesses



HOW DO YOU FIND NEW CUSTOMERS?

Once you've achieved proof of concept, it's time to look for growth opportunities. This could mean increasing your customer base through sales and marketing, creating new product lines, finding new partners and suppliers and securing corporate contracts. It might also mean hiring more talent into the business – a move which can help to supercharge not just your bottom line, but your ambitions and enthusiasm.

Remember, you're never too small to go after corporate contracts or speak to big suppliers. Firms recognise the value of smaller teams – you're agile, quick on delivery and passionate – you just need to get a foot in the door and prove yourself. Keep in mind, the government has recently set a target to spend £1 in every £3 with small businesses by 2020.

While it's an exciting time, you must maintain quality control when it comes to the people and companies that you choose to work with. It's also key to keep an eye on your rate of growth – it sounds counterintuitive but too much growth, too quickly, can be a serious threat to a business. Make sure you're prepared at every step of the way.

In this chapter we tackle hiring sales capabilities, marketing your brand, increasing sales and looking after your value chain.



GET INSPIRED:
The Federation of Small Businesses could help you to make new connections

<http://www.fsb.org.uk/>

CHECKLIST:

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT



EXPERTISE

When you start a business, you end up wearing many hats. You're often chief executive, sales manager and marketing director all rolled into one. But when you make your first hire, chances are it'll be a salesperson – after all, they'll probably make the biggest difference to your bottom line.

This is a critical hire and you've got to get it right. Not only do you want the best seller on the street, you need to remember that this person is on the frontline and they will have more day-to-day contact with your customers than anyone else. With this in mind, hire carefully and make sure that your sales staff understand the business, its culture and the way you want it to be perceived – first impressions last.



MESSAGING

1 How should you market your brand? Before you start doing this at scale, you need to consider your tone of voice and the clarity of your message. Simple brands with a simple message often find the best cut-through. You should think about what your unique selling point is and make this clear on your website, in your marketing efforts and when your team speaks to people.

2 Your online presence plays a big role in how your brand is perceived – if this isn't up to scratch, your marketing efforts may be in vain. For those who don't think they need an online presence at all, think again. It doesn't matter what your product or service is – if you're not online, you're missing out.

There are many easy-to-use website builders out there so a fantastic looking website doesn't need to break the bank.



3 When you're evaluating your online presence, you should think long and hard about what it needs to do for you. Is it simply pointing to a physical store? Or do you want customers to be able to buy online? Make a watertight list of requirements before you build.

LOGISTICS

A value chain is a set of activities a company performs in order to deliver a valuable product or service to the market. It is the very fabric of any business and so you should always understand its elements. By doing a value chain analysis, you can investigate your costs and make changes where necessary. This includes a list of: supplies and materials, manufacturing and operations, shipping logistics, customer service, marketing and sales.

As you grow, so will your value chain – make sure you keep on top of it.



Thinking about hiring? Vonage offers a phone system that scales with you. You can easily add new extensions or lines as you grow. Your team can work virtually and make phone calls from laptop or mobile - wherever they are.

Find out more at vonage.co.uk or call us on 0207 993 9000

TALENT TIME:

You can use professional recruiters, but this can be costly and there are free means to advertise vacancies, such as the Government's Universal Jobmatch platform

www.gov.uk/advertise-job

and websites including:

www.gumtree.com

WHOLESALE HEROES:

Want to find a set of wholesale partners?

This directory is a good place to start:

www.thewholesaler.co.uk



FOCUS ON SALES

If you've achieved proof of concept, chances are you've already got a number of customers. But if you want to grow your business, you'll need to increase sales. There are a number of ways you can achieve this. Two important options to consider are:

- 1 Finding more customers
- 2 Increasing your product line



FINDING MORE CUSTOMERS

Getting your product, premises and online presence just right is important. But at the end of the day it's meaningless if you don't have customers. Finding new customers is the number one concern for small business owners. Here's how you can try to find more.

Know your customer and target them

Start by building a profile of your target customer. Who are they? Think about where you can reach these people and what might appeal to them. This information can help you market your product in a targeted and efficient way. Are they on Facebook or Instagram? Do they shop online or in physical stores?

Marketing

Social media is one of the most cost-efficient mediums for small business advertising. Create a campaign and start by putting a small budget into it. If this works – add more budget. This way you'll never plough a chunk of your funds into something that doesn't bring results.

Network

Going to trade events and industry networking opportunities can be a useful way to find new customers. You never know which new contacts will introduce you to clients or become customers themselves.

INCREASING YOUR PRODUCT LINE

A second way of increasing sales is to offer your existing customers more reasons to buy. You could think about branching into related products or services. Start by making a list of potential additions and think about which ones would be easiest for you to make. It might be that you can use existing resources to create something new.



EXTRA ADVICE:

The government has a handy advice section for business owners looking for growth

www.gov.uk/growing-your-business/plan-for-growth



DRAGON'S DIGEST

PETER JONES CBE

GOING FOR GROWTH

So you've started your new business and turned those dreams into reality. Well my advice would be if you're going to continue dreaming, then dream big. Each milestone reveals another so you've got to have vision and you've got to plan – these are the essential factors in realising big ideas.

First things first: planning. Forecasting for growth enables business owners to scale without running out of cash. And cash is the key factor in effective growth management. Scalability comes down to the amount of money you have to reinvest in the company. If you feel you're ready to reinvest, it is time to focus efforts on the areas that are working and outperforming others.

As you grow the business – remember that building loyalty among customers is vital. If you're going to achieve sustainable growth, you need an engaged and happy customer base. In industries where customer service is poor, there is no loyalty. By providing a new choice and backing it up with great customer service, you'll reap the benefits.

Peter Jones CBE, founder of the Peter Jones Foundation and star of Dragons' Den.



FOUNDER'S TALE

CORNERSTONE

Going up against the likes of Gillette in the shaving product market meant new entrant Cornerstone had to be clever about marketing in the early days.



MARKETING

"When we launched we were strapped for cash – our seed funding round was just £160,000 and most had been spent on stock, building the website and securing trademarks," explains founder Oliver Bridge. "I took the approach of spending small amounts of money on lots of different marketing campaigns to work out which ones delivered the most customer sign-ups."

In the end it was a viral campaign on Reddit that gave Cornerstone the cost-effective boost it needed to take on the big boys. "It helped us to sign up several thousand customers for just a couple of pounds each. In turn, this secured extra funding and we were able to plough more into marketing on Facebook and Twitter."

Cornerstone has a unique subscriber business model and digital marketing has helped it to grow from zero to 110,000 members in just two and a half years. Not trying to emulate the traditional advertising of its larger competitors has been a real boon. "Our online presence has been very important to us," says Bridge. "Our growth has been achieved largely through direct marketing, focussing on digital marketing channels such as Google and Facebook, rather than the print advertising routes the big brands heavily utilise."

SUPPLIERS

The young company works with multiple suppliers and manufacturers and has found that approaching large, established partners has been a big help. "We have deliberately picked experienced suppliers who have worked with much larger, successful brands," says Bridge. "The team that makes our skincare products supply some of the top beauty brands in the world. This means we can't outgrow them. They have the expertise in product development and manufacturing capacity to produce what we need." That's not to say Cornerstone only works with large partners. "For smaller suppliers, it's key to be clear about our expected order volumes so everyone can plan ahead."

SUPPLY CHAIN

One of the biggest challenges Cornerstone faces is the speed of its supply chain. Turning new products around quickly can make a big difference for younger brands. "We are constantly getting feedback on our products and we have dozens of ideas each week, which we want to build into our range," explains Bridge. "Frustratingly, manufacturing in the toiletries sector is not geared up to move as quickly as we are and often it can take weeks to get new product prototypes back from the R&D teams." The ambitious brand finds perseverance helps. "Our approach is to push as hard as we reasonably can and examine why things are taking longer. Often we can push our suppliers out of their comfort zone to deliver faster."



TOP TIP

"The most important thing is to treat your suppliers well. From watching The Apprentice you might think your supply chain is there to be beaten up and squeezed for every inch of profit possible.

We have found that a longer term, more collaborative relationship is where the real value is. A more positive way of working together yields better quality, fewer mistakes, speed and trust."



ASK THE EXPERT

FRASER DOHERTY MBE

Fraser Doherty founded SuperJam, the 100 per cent fruit jam company, in 2007. He started the company at the age of fourteen, using his grandmother's recipes. Since then, SuperJam has grown to supply over 2,000 supermarkets in 12 countries around the world, selling millions of jars. SuperJam has been entered into the National Museum of Scotland as an "Iconic Scottish Brand."

When you decide you want to take your new business to the next level, getting the brand and marketing right is essential. It will help to introduce your product or service to new audiences and ultimately help you to boost

those all important sales. Always remember, your product or service probably isn't that unique (and if it is, someone will probably copy you). Your uniqueness is in your brand.

GET YOUR STORY STRAIGHT

I started my company when I was 14 years old and became the youngest ever supplier of Waitrose. My story of starting a business so young, using my grandmother's recipes, captured imaginations all over the world (including South Korea where I now have a cult following). But when I started I didn't understand the power of my story. It's important to work out what yours is and use it to your advantage. Tune in to what people find interesting about your business – it might be about you, where you're from or how you started the business – once you've learned how to tell your story, this can be a huge part of building your brand.

LISTEN TO ADVICE AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO MAKE CHANGES

When I launched SuperJam, I thought it would be powerful to make people laugh, so I created a cartoon character called Jam Boy and put it on my labels. Waitrose didn't like it. They said packaging needs to focus on the one reason people should buy your product. With that in mind, I came up with something more simple, highlighted my 100 per cent natural USP and the rest is history. It's important to listen to the advice and feedback of others. Try not to be offended, their comments can be gold dust. It's very rare to get everything right first go, so don't be afraid to change things – even after you've launched.

BE SAVVY WITH TARGETING

Small businesses don't always have big budgets for marketing. Utilising your unique story is the first step. This can help you to get media coverage. Next you should concentrate on creating your online presence. It's possible to publish a compelling online offering in an hour these days. Once you've done that you can drill down into your audience. If you can work out exactly who your customers will be, you can target your marketing budget, however small, at these people and get great results.



"It's very rare to get everything right first go, so don't be afraid to change things - even after you've launched."



GROWING INTERNATIONALLY

TRADING ABROAD CAN SUPERCHARGE YOUR NEW BUSINESS



100,000 more UK companies trading abroad by 2020

THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER - BUT WHERE TO START?

The term exporting might seem scary for a small business but selling your products overseas is one of the best ways to find meaningful growth. You don't have to tackle this alone. The government is on a mission to get 100,000 more UK companies trading abroad by 2020 so there is plenty of support out there.

The benefits of a move like this are plentiful. You'll be able to reach new customers, you can reduce seasonality of products and by operating in multiple markets you reduce your exposure to individual economies.

Another thing to keep in mind is the appetite for all things British. Brand Britain has never been stronger. Global consumers want products from the UK because they see them as high-quality

and the internet has made it easier than ever for people all over the world to find your products and services.

Of course, you shouldn't rush in unprepared. This chapter will tackle some of the challenges associated with international trade, such as choosing the right market, adapting to local cultures, finding the right partners and managing that supply chain.



GET INSPIRED: The Exporting is GREAT website is packed with helpful advice

www.exportingisgreat.gov.uk/new/

CHECKLIST:

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT



PRODUCT

It's important to choose the right market for your product or service. Often, small companies start exporting to certain countries because they have had inbound interest from there. Or they might have a partner or supplier already operating in a potential market. But if that's not the case, robust research into each market should help you to decide where to start.

Things to take into consideration are: how well-developed the market is, what kinds of products it already imports, languages spoken and cultural differences.

Visit great.gov.uk to get extra guidance – you'll find an opportunity to sign up for seminars and contact details for trade teams at The Department for International Trade (DIT).

PEOPLE

When you first start operating in a new market, you probably don't need to think about in-house skills or people on the ground just yet. Instead, work on finding great partners that you can trust. If you can't find these on your own or through your contacts, DIT is there to make connections for you.

Another useful way to meet contacts and like-minded businesses is by going on a trade mission. The British Chamber of Commerce runs these regularly and they offer a fantastic networking opportunity.

If your international sales start to pick up, it might be worth investing further – this could mean: hiring someone who speaks the local language, creating a local language website or hiring someone on the ground.



PROCESS

Once you've decided where you'd like to target your export efforts, you need to work out how to reach these new customers.

Finding a local distribution partner is one option. These resellers will already have a footprint, a network of contacts and can help you to navigate bureaucratic procedures. But you've got to find the right partner – whichever business you go with will be representing your brand in this market.

If you'd rather take full control of your overseas sales, you can sell direct to the market. This will require in-depth knowledge of the market and local business contacts.

You could also sell direct from your website – to make a success of this, make sure the site is tailored to sales in that market (with correct currency pricing, language and payment methods).

Vonage

Don't forget – technology can help you scale. Vonage offers cloud-based business phone systems that help you increase sales, listen, join and review calls.

Find out more at vonage.co.uk
or call us on 0207 993 9000





TOP TIP ON WORKING WITH LARGE CORPORATES

“When working with established businesses you need to prove your credibility. Be on time, diligent and meticulous – high standards secure contracts.”



FOUNDER'S TALE

LAVOLIO BOUTIQUE CONFECTIONERY

The founder of Lavolio Boutique Confectionery wasn't necessarily planning to sell her products abroad but when overseas requests started pouring in, Lavinia Davolio realised there was a market for her artisan treats outside the UK.

SELLING ABROAD

“We were getting approached by people from the Middle East, Europe and Asia, who wanted to sell our products,” explains Davolio. “Many of these people had found us through our larger resellers, like Fortnum & Mason, but some had seen us online.”

It quickly became clear that having a strong online presence was incredibly important for the young brand. “Having a good website with relevant content and strong visuals has really helped us,” she explains.

“When I drafted my business plan I didn't expect an unknown, edible product such as ours would sell well online but internet sales have more than doubled every year since the business began.”

The success of online sales in the UK convinced her that new markets could be opened using this channel: “Our products are now available exclusively online in Germany and France.”

Davolio has found there are many challenges in selling abroad, from language barriers to different packaging requirements. But online resources and advice from others is invaluable. “We have a specialist export partner in the UK for our Middle Eastern sales and we're keen to start employing more people on the ground in our target markets because we believe local knowledge is so important. On top of that, you must do market research. It does take time, but it's vital. You need to know which other products are already sold there and gain the cultural knowledge to best position your own.”

Although it can be a lot of effort to sell products abroad, Davolio says it certainly pays off: “Trading abroad raises the brand profile and builds credibility for customers and suppliers,” says Davolio. “You need to be careful because it will require investment, but the improved revenue is more than worth it if you're prepared to commit the time and energy to make it a success.”



BIG BRAND STOCKISTS

The brand has doubled its revenues every year since launching in 2013 and has been boosted by a live TV appearance for Davolio. One large factor in the success of the brand has been partnerships with bigger companies. “Our biggest sales partners are Ocado, Fortnum & Masons and Amazon,” she explains. “I think the fear of failure often stops people from approaching household names but I've found big businesses are often actively looking to support small producers and artisans.”

Davolio advises when you do approach a business like Fortnum & Mason, you need to be sure you have a product that wows customers. This includes things such as the smell, texture and look of a product, not just the taste. “If you have an incredible product that delivers quality to customers, suppliers will see this and support you. They aren't looking to invest in something unless they're sure that customers will want to keep coming back for it.”





ASK THE EXPERT

LORD BILIMORIA CBE

Lord Bilimoria founded Cobra Beer 28 years ago. The drink has now been sold in 40 countries worldwide, including India – a nation comprising 1.25 billion people. Going global has been vital to growth.

GOING GLOBAL

I want to make it a national mission to increase exports and make British businesses succeed overseas. I would love to see more British businesses join me in this mission, and I know from experience that going global is an important chapter in their scale-up stories.

The most productive firms in the UK are those who can sell goods and services overseas. However, more than two thirds of UK businesses do not or would not even consider it. It's a great way to secure more orders, create jobs and encourage businesses from overseas to invest in UK supply chains.

KNOWING WHERE TO START

You will need to know which markets are going to buy your products or services and how you are going to reach new buyers.

Foreign markets are huge opportunities for people running their own business. The emerging markets, led by China and India but also countries like Brazil and Russia, are growing in wealth and in their taste for British goods – but you need to know which goods sell best and where.

For those selling goods, you need to learn about the distribution networks you are going to use, and whether you will be able to conduct overseas operations from the UK.

Selling goods and services online is a great way to start, but going to trade fairs and exhibitions in person gives you an unbeatable connection with the market of your choice.

They will be happy to help by inviting you to an international networking event or exhibition, or even connecting you with businesses and organisations overseas who can help you manage operations in new markets. They can offer practical advice and even desk space if you need time to set up your business overseas.

I am also a huge supporter of the Foreign Office's GREAT campaign, which publicises British products and services throughout the world and organises events and exhibitions that offer a wealth of networking opportunities. You must also make the most of the UK's large network of embassies and commissions around the world.

Lord Bilimoria is founder and chairman of Cobra Beer, founding chairman of the UK-India Business Council and chancellor of the University of Birmingham.

DOING YOUR RESEARCH

Fortunately, there is a huge amount of expertise and advice available for those who want to do business overseas. You can call or email the Department for International Trade or one of their partner organisations, such as the UK-India Business Council – of which I am proud to be the founding chairman – or the UK-China Business Council.





HOW CAN WE HELP?

This Guide is brought to you by Vonage, the leading provider of cloud-based business communications services.

At Vonage, we want to help small businesses thrive by transforming how people connect. We help over 600,000 business users every day to revolutionise their communications by making their phone system do more, for less.

If you run a small business, whether you're a one-person team or a growing company, we want to help you give your customers a great service while giving yourself a professional edge. A Vonage cloud-based phone system gives you a business landline number your customers can trust, with a local area code of your choice.

Our phone system integrates with your mobile, or any device you choose, so callers only need one number to reach you, wherever you are. You'll always look the business and never miss an important call again.

We know too that as your business grows, you want a solution that grows seamlessly with you, so when you add new people you can easily scale up and keep your whole team connected wherever they are – at the office, at home, or on the move. Our calling plans give you 'no surprises' billing. And because we're in the cloud, you'll have complete flexibility to manage your services however you choose, with no installation charges, line rental, long contract commitments or hefty upfront setup costs.

Why not join 600,000 other small business users who've already chosen Vonage to help make their small business better?

See how Vonage can help your business:

www.vonage.co.uk

0207 993 9000



Website Builders

- Wordpress** www.wordpress.com
- Moonfruit** www.moonfruit.com
- SquareSpace** www.squarespace.com
- Wix** www.wix.com
- Weebly** www.weebly.com
- Yola** www.yola.com

Accounting Services

- Paid:**
- Kashflow** www.kashflow.com
- Sage One Accounts** uk.sageone.com/accounts
- QuickBooks** www.intuit.co.uk/quickbooks-accounting-software
- Free:**
- QuickFile** www.quickfile.co.uk
- gnuCash** www.gnucash.org
- Wave Accounting** www.waveapps.com

Office space

- Office Genie** www.officegenie.co.uk
- Share my Office** www.sharemyoffice.co.uk
- Prime Find** www.primefind.net
- Regus** www.regus.co.uk

DIRECTORY

SUPPORT AND ADVICE SERVICES YOU MIGHT CONSIDER

Recruitment

- Freelancer** www.freelancer.co.uk
- Upwork** www.upwork.com
- People per Hour** www.peopleperhour.com
- Guru** www.guru.com

Business Advice

- Financial Advice:**
- ICAEW Business Advice Service** www.icaew.com/en/about-icaew/find-a-chartered-accountant/business-advice-service
- Business Advice Networks:**
- Enterprise Nation** www.enterprisenation.com
- Smarta** www.smarta.com
- Start Up Donut** www.startupdonut.co.uk
- Startups.co.uk** www.startups.co.uk
- Great Business** www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/start

Funding

- Start Up Loans** www.startuploans.co.uk
- Business Finance Finder** www.gov.uk/business-finance-support-finder
- British Business Bank** www.british-business-bank.co.uk



Vonage

THE CLOUD-BASED BUSINESS PHONE

www.vonage.co.uk