

Expert Insights

Product-Ready but Market-Blind: Why Smart Founders Still Struggle

Are you marketing globally without knowing what your buyer actually wants?

Many MSMEs rush to expand globally once the product is ready. But even good products get rejected when there's no market context. Most founders underestimate how much cultural nuance and buyer psychology matter. The difference isn't just in what you sell—but how you connect it to the buyer's need. Keep scrolling to see how one founder missed key signals—and what could've changed everything.

Scroll down to learn how export-ready MSMEs can avoid costly missteps using smarter market research and storytelling.

Knowledge Source

Wadhwani Foundation Expert Session | Feb 4, 2025

This session was designed to help Indian MSMEs prepare for global expansion by understanding buyer psychology, market alignment, and narrative strategy. It focused on equipping founders with mindset shifts and practical frameworks to market smarter, not louder.

About the Expert: Abhilash Puljal

Abhilash Puljal is a cross-functional leader with deep experience in bridging Indian MSMEs to global markets. As Partner and Country Director, he specializes in strategic and sustainable growth, with a focus on impact-driven market expansion. He has led teams across continents and helped businesses craft resonant market-entry narratives that win trust and traction.

> "Abhilash emphasized that successful global marketing isn't just about advertising—it's about alignment. He introduced concepts like "inside-out branding," cultural intelligence, and the importance of market research that goes beyond data to decode buyer beliefs. Using real-world patterns, he showed how even well-designed products often fail because they lack relevance or emotional hooks in foreign markets."

The Case Scenario & Where It Fell Short

The Case Scenario

Meet Sona, founder of a wellness tea brand from Assam. After perfecting her herbal blends, she aimed for the US and EU markets. She believed her product would resonate with the global health wave. Her packaging was eco-friendly, the story was rooted in Ayurveda, and pricing was premium.

But 6 months into distribution partnerships, she saw little traction. Her emails went unanswered. Distributors liked the product but didn't reorder. Feedback revealed a mismatch: the packaging, though "eco-friendly," didn't speak to what local buyers in Germany or California valued. Her product narrative—centered around Indian tradition—felt alien without context. Her assumption: "If the product is great, it will sell."

Where It Fell Short

1. Misjudged Market Fit: The founder assumed global buyers would interpret "herbal" and "healthy" the same way as Indian consumers.

2. Cultural Disconnect in Branding: Ayurveda-based messaging was used without explaining its relevance or benefits in the local market context.

3. Ignored Buyer Psychology: Focused on product features rather than emotional drivers, daily use cases, or lifestyle relevance.

4. Generic Distributor Engagement: Sent one-size-fits-all communication to distributors, with no customized sell-in pitch or follow-up strategy.

Founder and brand details anonymized to protect privacy.

Root Cause Breakdown

Below are key export missteps and their ripple effects that held wellness-focused MSMEs like Sona's back from achieving meaningful global growth.

Common Mistakes	Consequences
Assumed "health" meant the same globally	Created a mismatch between product promise and local buyer expectations.
Used culturally unfamiliar branding cues	Failed to connect emotionally; buyers didn't relate to the story or packaging.
Focused on features, not buyer emotion	Couldn't trigger interest or recall; low engagement and poor conversion.
Sent generic distributor communication	Distributors saw no relevance; weak follow-up led to loss of potential reorders.

Recommended Solution

To help MSMEs fix mismatches between product value and market reception, the expert outlined four strategic actions:

Step 1: Redefine Health from the Buyer's Lens

Why It Matters: Assuming your idea of "health" matches global buyers leads to misalignment. Understanding their lens ensures your product speaks their language.

How to Execute:

- Research top-selling wellness products in your target country.
- Identify words, claims, and benefits that resonate (e.g., "gut health," "zero sugar," "natural energy").
- Adapt your packaging and communication accordingly.

Sample Prompt to Try: "What do buyers in the USA associate with 'healthy' when choosing beverages or snacks?"

Modify the above prompt: Tailor it to a specific age group (e.g., millennials or senior citizens) and cultural region (e.g., Nordic countries vs. Middle East).

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Insight into preferred health claims, helping you reposition your product effectively.

Step 2: Localize Your Brand Story for Each Export Market

Why It Matters: Global buyers don't just buy ingredients—they buy stories they understand. A familiar narrative builds emotional connection.

How to Execute:

- Retain your origin story but simplify it with universal benefits.
- Translate cultural terms like "Ayurveda" into emotional outcomes (e.g., "calming herbs for daily stress").
- Use local lifestyle analogies to enhance relatability.

Sample Prompt to Try: "Rewrite my Indian-origin herbal tea pitch for a UK buyer focused on reducing stress and sleeping better."

Modify the above prompt: Add local context like climate, daily routines, or wellness habits to enhance relevance.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Emotionally resonant brand narratives that feel native to your buyer.

Step 3: Map Use-Cases Into the Buyer's Daily Routine

Why It Matters: If buyers can't see when or how they'll use your product, they won't buy. Relevance drives action.

How to Execute:

- Identify when during the day your product fits naturally (e.g., post-lunch energy, bedtime wind-down).
- Show the use-case visually on packaging or in marketing.
- Use relatable testimonials or day-in-the-life narratives.

Sample Prompt to Try: "List scenarios where a German working professional would drink a calming herbal tea during their day."

Modify the above prompt: Include buyer personality types or stress levels to tailor messaging further.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Precise use-case anchors to drive messaging, packaging, and shelf visibility.

Step 4: Create Country-Specific Distributor Pitch Kits

Why It Matters: Distributors need to believe your product is sellable in their market. Generic decks and data don't inspire confidence.

How to Execute:

- Build short pitch kits with buyer personas, retail positioning, and price rationale.
- Add market-specific opportunities (e.g., wellness trend reports, shelf competition).
- Include one proven hook that resonates with local buyers.

Sample Prompt to Try: "Create a distributor pitch outline for a calming herbal tea brand entering French organic retail stores."

Modify the above prompt: Include competitive brands and regional buyer trends to sharpen the narrative.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Tailored pitch materials that boost distributor engagement and reorders.

Expected Result

By applying these focused steps, MSME founders can expect measurable improvements in product relevance, buyer engagement, and export traction—based on patterns observed in successful global-facing businesses.

Clearer Product Positioning

Redefining "health" through the buyer's lens helps your product messaging land better and reduces confusion on shelves.

Emotionally Relevant Brand Story

Localized storytelling builds familiarity and trust, leading to stronger first-time purchases and word-of-mouth.

Higher Usage Recall and Repeats

When buyers clearly see how and when to use your product, they're more likely to remember and repurchase.

Improved Distributor Conversion

Tailored pitch kits increase distributor confidence, resulting in faster onboarding and better in-market support.



Insight

> **"Every founder believes their story is enough. But buyers only act when they see themselves in it."**

Your product's origin, tradition, or uniqueness matters—but only after you earn attention through relevance. Global buyers won't decode your meaning; you must speak in their language, reflect their habits, and solve their problems. The real shift happens when you stop showcasing your intention and start highlighting their aspiration.

Founders Please Check

Before you invest in global expansion, pause and ask yourself:

1 **Have I researched how "health" is defined in my target market?**

Your buyer's idea of wellness may differ sharply from your assumptions—are you aligned?

2 **Is my brand story easy to understand across cultures?**

Avoid jargon or tradition-heavy messaging. Keep the benefits upfront and relatable.

3 **Can my buyer visualize exactly when and why they'll use my product?**

Clarity in use-case drives trial and repeat sales—vagueness loses interest.

4 **Have I created a tailored pitch for each distributor or market?**

If your pitch looks generic, expect generic results. Personalization builds conviction.

Learn more

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