

More British companies need to go global

The government and big businesses can help smaller players operate on a global basis

After years of doom and gloom in the media, something strange seems to be happening. Finally, we're starting to hear good news about resurgence in the UK economy and growth in markets around the globe. But what can UK entrepreneurs do to take advantage of opportunities overseas and what, if anything, should the government and large companies be doing to help them?

There was a time not so long ago when the idea of operating on a global basis could only be turned into reality by big companies with a substantial infrastructure and a massive budget. But when I started Antal from a claustrophobically small office in Putney, I wasn't even a one-man-and-a-dog operation. Mainly because I couldn't even afford a dog. Yet I'm now the executive chairman of a company with offices in some 29 countries across four continents. It shows what can be done in the modern world if you have the will.

Of course any budding entrepreneur with an eye on overseas expansion would welcome some outside help – be it from large companies or from the Prime Minister's office. Big corporations could do their part by not just buying their services from established players but by looking at small, up-and-coming businesses.



MY KEY IDEA

To help small players expand overseas, the government should include them in trade missions. The government should make a conscious effort to reduce red tape as often small businesses with ambitions of going global get caught up in bureaucracy and aren't able to expand overseas. Big businesses too can help up-and-coming businesses by buying their services and making payments on time.



Big businesses can also help smaller players by paying bills promptly rather than using their financial muscle to impose terms that could be crippling for any fledgling enterprise. The government could help by including smaller companies in trade missions and by cutting red tape, which sometimes makes dealing overseas a nightmare.

Whether you want a business that works with clients and customers in walking distance of your house or on the other side of the world, the only way to make it happen is to get on and build it yourself. And, without unduly blowing the Antal trumpet, we are pretty good proof that a global business can be created from scratch. But how?

Emerging economies

First is the necessity to realise that a big UK presence is not a prerequisite to working on international markets. For the first five years of Antal's corporate life we did no UK business at all and our only office was the decidedly pokey one in south London.

What is essential, however, is to identify where there could be a demand for your products or services and where is not already saturated with established competitors. Goldman Sachs doesn't just talk about BRICs and MINT countries for fun. They also have a 'next 11' of emerging economies that any serious international player should check out.

Finally, do make use of the resources that are already in place. When I started Antal, the first thing I did was to get hold of a database of British companies already operating in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe and mailed them all asking if I could help with their recruitment. A staggering 10% came back and said yes, and the rest, as they say, is history. And that was well before the huge amount of back-up that you can tap into on the internet today. So UK entrepreneurs, get online, find it and, above all, use it!