



# Surfing without drowning

A structured approach to international desk research

 **EXPORTING  
IS  
GREAT**  
BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND

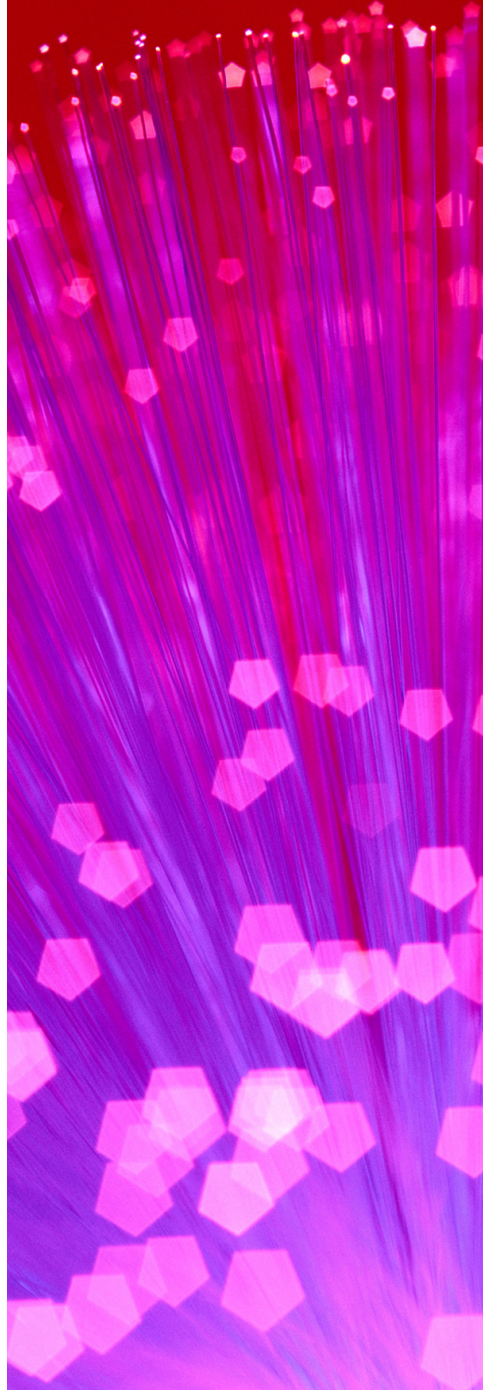
## Introduction

Desk research is the search for information that has been previously collected for some other purpose. It is a useful starting point for all market research projects and it is all the more important when considering overseas markets, where trips to the market can prove costly. In this booklet, we provide advice on conducting desk research for:

1. prioritising existing markets and selecting new markets;
2. gathering information on a particular market.

Most desk research is conducted online, and social media can be helpful in providing export market insight. However, the telephone and platforms such as Microsoft Teams can also play an important part in discussing trends with experts.

The Department for International Trade (DIT), encourages desk research for export markets. A research adviser or consultant can carry out a Market Selection exercise and/or guide you in the conduct of a structured desk research project. DIT can also provide in-country research in over 100 territories via the Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS).



## Prioritising existing markets and selecting new markets

In order to allocate time and limited resources appropriately between the large number of enquiries from overseas markets, you may wish to consider prioritising markets to help determine which markets are most worthy of deeper investigation. The following sources provide information collected in a similar manner across a number of countries, enabling like-for-like comparisons.

### Seven sources of country comparison data

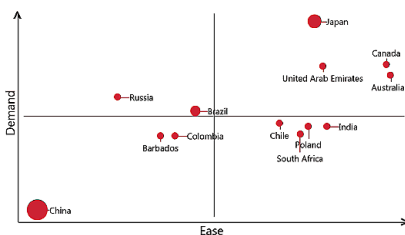
#### 1. DIT- Market Selection

DIT research advisers and consultant partners can help identify and prioritise export markets via a Market Selection diagnostic session analysis and software. The research adviser will help you to identify and agree those bespoke criteria that differentiate overseas markets. In addition to a Market Selection analysis output, you will be given access to an online software tool which provides access to 40 or so, regularly maintained, international information sources such as GDP, GDP growth, political risk, language and culture and many other factors.

In the example below, a well-established exporter wished to know which new markets to prioritise. The exporter sells high end tableware to the hotel and restaurant sectors

The diagnostic session identified the following key demand criteria for that company: a large tableware market with relatively small local competition; the size of the restaurant and hotel sectors; and high GDP per capita (wealth). Minimising red tape, a propensity to speak English and low tariffs were felt to be the key ease of entry criteria.

The software ranks countries according to their relative plots on the Demand and Ease axes. Once this data was analysed the output showed a top four ranking of Japan, Australia, Canada and the UAE; they being relatively larger and relatively easier to access according to the selected criteria. Market Selection allows companies to target finite resources on a short list of opportunities.



## 2. International Organisations that compile their own statistics

### The Central Intelligence

**Agency:** [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook)

Their World Fact Book has over 100 criteria which might be used to prioritise potential markets. Select 'Definitions and notes' under 'references' in the World Fact Book; within 'Resources', select from criteria A-Z at top right then click on the spreadsheet logo to see data for all countries

**United Nations:** [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) and its agencies (e.g. UNCTAD, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF etc.) publish a comprehensive list of comparable statistics – a breakdown of GDP for 216 countries, for example.

### Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):

[www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)  
Browse by topic within the data and then select table within the desired indicator.

### World Bank:

[www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)  
Choose from a list of 250 indicators under the data tag.

### Eurostat:

[www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat](http://www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat)  
In-depth data source across a wide variety of topics relating to the EU states and other European countries.

### World Economic Forum:

[www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org) Wide-ranging analysis across a number of key topics.

### The International Labour Organisation:

[www.laborsta.ilo.org](http://www.laborsta.ilo.org)  
Includes labour statistics for over 200 countries.

### 3. Trade Data

#### International Trade Centre:

[www.intracen.org/tradstat](http://www.intracen.org/tradstat)  
Provides import/export data up to the 6 digit level of the Harmonized System (HS). You will need to register and have relevant tariff codes to hand.

**Comtrade**, hosted by **United Nations**, provides import and export data by industry code and country.

### 4. Statistics websites that compile statistics from many referenced sources

#### Helgi Library:

[www.helgilibrary.com](http://www.helgilibrary.com)  
Thousands of statistics for 80 countries and 16 different sectors.

#### Nationmaster:

[www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com)  
5,000 statistics – sometimes bizarre – for 305 countries.

#### Gapminder:

[www.gapminder.org/tools](http://www.gapminder.org/tools)  
Select 'data' about 500 indicators.

#### Statista: [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)

18,000 sources of statistics.

#### Destatis:

[www.destatis.de/EN/Homepage](http://www.destatis.de/EN/Homepage)  
Many statistics by topic.

#### Michigan University:

[www.globaleddge.msu.edu](http://www.globaleddge.msu.edu)

## 5. Published Market Reports

[www.marketresearch.com](http://www.marketresearch.com) [www.researchandmarkets.com](http://www.researchandmarkets.com)

Here you may find a regional or global published report on the industry or sector you are investigating. Registration is free. You may need to contact the publisher or the Livechat to help you decide whether to buy the report.

## 6. Websites for specific market sectors not already mentioned

Automotive: [www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/](http://www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/)

Food consumption and production: [www.faostat3.fao.org/home/](http://www.faostat3.fao.org/home/)

E-Health: [www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)

Pharmaceutical: [www.abpi.org.uk/facts-and-figures/](http://www.abpi.org.uk/facts-and-figures/)

## 7. Social Media Insights

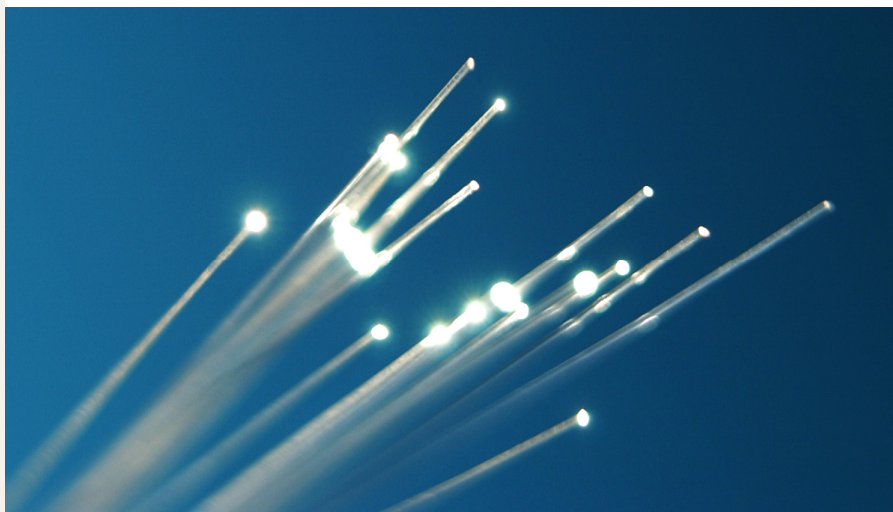
### **Consumer Barometer (Google/TNS):**

Free access. Online usage data by country (demographics, product sectors, countries, online purchasing behaviour).

### **TNS Digital Life:**

Free access. Global internet usage study that provides information on business engagement.

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## Gathering information on a particular country

Once you have identified a market which appears to offer potential for your product/service and you are looking to develop a market entry strategy for that territory, the following information may typically be required and can be collected through desk research.

### Regulations and legislation

- ◆ Product certification
- ◆ Import duties

### General Market Background

- ◆ Demographics, climatic considerations, economic and political factors, industrial profile and outlook
- ◆ Cultural understanding

### Trends

- ◆ Factors which are driving changes in behaviour and attitudes

### Distribution Structure

- ◆ Manufacturers and service providers
- ◆ Channels of distribution
- ◆ Import/export data
- ◆ Agents and distributors

### Marketing and communication

- ◆ Social media
- ◆ Trade shows and events
- ◆ Print-based media
- ◆ Advertising

### Assessing Market Size and Segmentation

- ◆ Industry statistics and import/export statistics
- ◆ Market segmentation (e.g. geographical, product type, end users)

### End user needs

- ◆ Customers and potential customers
- ◆ Financial profiles
- ◆ Company background, strengths and weaknesses, direction, key personnel

### Competitive Data

- ◆ Competitors
- ◆ Market shares of competitors
- ◆ Products (including competitors' technical specifications, patents, range, etc.)
- ◆ Prices
- ◆ Promotional methods used
- ◆ Competitor brochures

Confirm, by writing down, the information you need. It is not possible to say precisely where you will find each of these information needs; suffice to say that a structured search of the trusted and reliable sites on the following pages should bring you close to the answers.



## Ten people to consult

You can supplement your internet-based desk research by consulting with:

1. Existing business contacts; suppliers and customers may have experience in trading with this market.
2. Your local Chamber of Commerce, who may have links with local Chambers in this country.
3. The trade association for your sector and trade mission leaders.
4. Your Independent DIT Trade Adviser.
5. DITs own sector and country specialists.
6. The researchers who contributed to the published market research reports.
7. Bilateral Chambers of Commerce staff.
8. Relevant trade journal editors and exhibition organisers.
9. Your Regional Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).
10. Your local Business Library or the British Library and IP Centre.

## Ten starting points for your desk research

### 1. UK Government

[www.great.gov.uk/advice/find-an-export-market/](http://www.great.gov.uk/advice/find-an-export-market/)

DIT's Exporting is Great website has guidance on factors to consider when conducting market research. DIT has staff and partners in 123 territories, many of which can provide in-country research services. In addition, DIT produces a range of topline country guides at [www.great.gov.uk/markets/](http://www.great.gov.uk/markets/) which provide information on:

- ◆ country economic and political profiles
- ◆ sector opportunities
- ◆ start-up and market entry considerations
- ◆ language and cultural factors
- ◆ legal considerations
- ◆ tax, payment and customs considerations
- ◆ logistical considerations
- ◆ who to contact for more help and information

### 2. Other Governments

#### Departments within foreign governments

[www.libguides.northwestern.edu/ForeignGovernmentList](http://www.libguides.northwestern.edu/ForeignGovernmentList)

Look on this site for details of foreign government departments of relevance to your product/service.

**Foreign Embassies:** [www.embassyworld.org](http://www.embassyworld.org)

Use this site to identify contact details of British and foreign embassies worldwide. In particular the respective foreign embassy in the UK.

**USA Government Statistical agencies:** [www.census.gov/](http://www.census.gov/)

Data on the USA, some reporting at the state level.

[www.trade.gov/international-market-research](http://www.trade.gov/international-market-research)

Similar country information to the UK website but from a US perspective.

**Australia:** [www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries](http://www.austrade.gov.au/Export/Export-Markets/Industries)

Browse the industry reports within countries under the 'Export markets' tab to find trends and opportunities for those markets.

### 3. Trade Associations

[www.taforum.org/trade-asociations/](http://www.taforum.org/trade-asociations/)

Use the directory to find a relevant UK-based trade association, then find out whether they have export information such as research reports available. Contact them to ask whether they have any links (such as a partner organisation) in the country you are targeting.

#### 4. Sectors

[www.mrweb/dnro/](http://www.mrweb/dnro/)

MR Web is the self-proclaimed online home of the UK market research industry. They have prepared and maintain a portal of research information by sector which includes international trade press, international trade associations and information about the companies and the top players in the industry.

Published market research subscription services such as **Euromonitor International**, **Mintel** and **IHS Markit** sell data on both a global and sector basis. Some of this data may be accessible by university students. A limited amount may be available via DIT.

#### 5. Events

[www.tsmn.com](http://www.tsmn.com)

[www.eventseye.com](http://www.eventseye.com)

Search by country (location) and industry to find details of trade shows taking or taken place in the market. You will have to register (free) to get details such as the link to the show website. The show website may have a list of exhibitors (who may be your competitors) and information on attendance.

#### 6. Chambers of Commerce

[www.worldchambers.com](http://www.worldchambers.com)

Search the Chamber Directory to find the contact details of the local, national or bilateral Chambers of Commerce for the area you are researching. Link through to the chambers' websites and see what information they can provide, such as contact lists and sector information.

#### 7. Newspapers/Trade Journals

[www.thepaperboy.com](http://www.thepaperboy.com)

[www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com)

Find the local papers (there is often an English language version) to keep yourself up to date with local events. Look into business archives. There are links to online magazine directories.

[www.tradepub.com](http://www.tradepub.com) Search by keyword or browse by sector. Predominantly US journals but some other international sources listed.

#### 8. Published Market Research

[www.marketresearch.com](http://www.marketresearch.com)

[www.researchandmarkets.com](http://www.researchandmarkets.com)

Find a regional or global published report on the industry or sector you are investigating. Registration is free but you may need to contact the publisher or Livechat to help you decide whether to buy the report.

## 9. Business Directories

[www.mrweb.com/coun-con.htm](http://www.mrweb.com/coun-con.htm)

This market research industry website provides links to yellow pages, white pages and other relevant identified online business directories by country.

### **Global business directories:**

[www.directory.Kompass.com](http://www.directory.Kompass.com)

[www.wqyp.com](http://www.wqyp.com)

**Japan:** [www.mihuzo-sc.com](http://www.mihuzo-sc.com)

**Europe:** [www.europages.com](http://www.europages.com)

**USA:** [www.hoovers.com](http://www.hoovers.com)

or [www.thomasnet.com](http://www.thomasnet.com)

### **Company Registration Sites:**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-registries/overseas-registries](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-registries/overseas-registries)

Companies Houses around the world.

## 10. Online insight (trends, target market, competition, tracking)

**Twitter** [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

#tags – use in advanced search to select tweets (key words, hashtags, etc). Identify influencers within key target companies.

[www.buzzsumo.com](http://www.buzzsumo.com)

Search by keyword for topics being shared across key social media networks. Identify influencers (requires account).

[www.tweetreach.com](http://www.tweetreach.com)

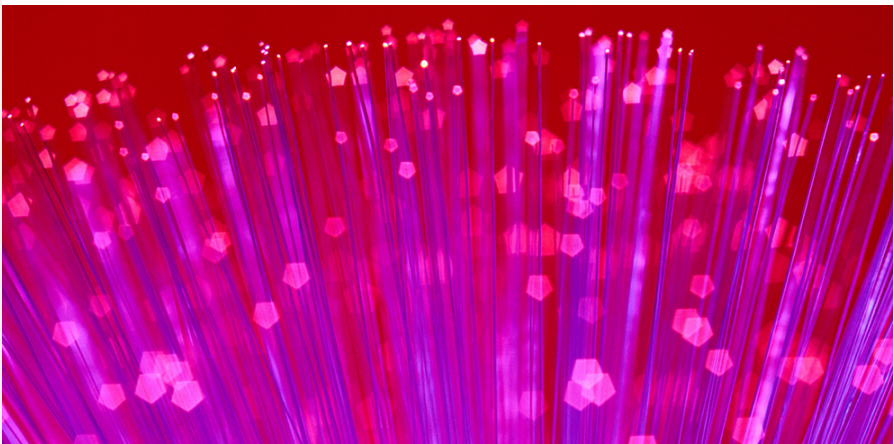
[www.socialmention.com](http://www.socialmention.com)

[www.synthesio.com/blog/social-media-usage-statistics/](http://www.synthesio.com/blog/social-media-usage-statistics/)

Statistics and commentary on social media usage around the world.

**LinkedIn:** [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

Access to 690 million (and rising) global professionals. Identify sector specific/country groups to join in conversations and make enquiries re: market trends, regulations, import barriers etc. as well as developing contacts. The advanced search engine can be used to identify sector players by country/city.



## Ten General Tips

1. Start by listing the information you are looking for.
2. Scope the research by defining your market sector and your target country.
3. Be systematic about your search.
4. Bookmark favourite places for future reference.
5. 'Open in a new tab' links that are in a list – this keeps the list in view.
6. Use a translation machine (google translate or similar) for the gist of a foreign language site.
7. Check the date, methodology and source of the information; lists provided in directories may not be complete (especially if companies have to pay to be included).
8. There are private sector organisations that offer desk research services. Suppliers can be found here: [www.mrs.org.uk](http://www.mrs.org.uk)
9. Use advanced search of the Search Engine; when looking for comparison data, type XLS, PDF or PPT after the search criteria for published data and reports.
10. Advice on marketing research may be available in your region. Contact your Independent Trade Adviser for more information.



# Department for International Trade

great.gov.uk

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## DIT

The Department for International Trade (DIT) helps businesses export, drives inward and outward investment, negotiates market access and trade deals, and champions free trade.

### Research & Advice

The UK Government can support British companies undertaking research in a potential overseas market prior to approaching that market for sales. Such projects are encouraged through the provision of free professional advice, which includes advice on market selection. In-country research can also be provided on a chargeable basis. Contact your International Trade Adviser for more information.

### Legal disclaimer

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