

Fresh Frontiers



A study into the new global
opportunities for trade





Smart businesses are investing the time to strategically and sustainably plan their trading path, ensuring that they are best placed to take advantage of global trade opportunities.



Over recent decades the rapid rise of globalisation has yielded more opportunities for businesses to trade internationally than ever before. Businesses around the world have overcome the differences in distance and geography to forge productive and successful trading relationships.

In the context of the dynamic global trade landscape, American Express has commissioned this study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) to understand more about how businesses currently view the international prospects available to them and how they are navigating through the challenges in pursuit of global growth.

In addition, American Express undertook a survey to gauge how business leaders are feeling about their international trade plans and prospects. Interestingly, the survey found that when it comes to international trade, local economic conditions had little or no effect on trade appetite. The message from businesses of all sizes in all markets surveyed is clear; international trade is at the top of their agenda. A staggering 89% of companies surveyed reported that international trade remains vital to their business success, and 83% fear they would lose competitive advantage if barriers to trade increased.

Trading patterns are also set for change. According to the Cebr study, the USA tops the list of global trade targets, but the report reveals a plethora of newer entrants that offer significant and untapped trade potential in the future.

Nonetheless with expanded trade opportunity comes increased complexity. Unsurprisingly, according to the survey, exchange rates and currency fluctuation were cited as major hurdles for businesses trading overseas. However, businesses also admit that the administrative burden of heavy paperwork and complexity over making and receiving overseas payments are also placing considerable strain on internal resources.

In summary, the study clearly shows that smart businesses are the ones that are investing the time now to strategically and sustainably plan their trading path, ensuring that they are best placed to take advantage of global trade opportunities in the future.

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Photo: The Peak, Hong Kong by Alex Taitmon

Methodology

Global trade has grown remarkably since the late 1990s. A substantial part of this was supported by the increase in trade openness and by decreasing transport and communications costs. Milestones such as the signature of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which then evolved into the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the creation of the European Union are examples of how much trade liberalisation has evolved.

Nevertheless, the recent backlash against globalisation poses fresh challenges. While tariffs are still at relatively low levels, the sharp increase in non-tariff barriers has created new challenges. Within this new environment it is important for countries to realise that trade is not a zero sum game, and that it continues to be an important link in fostering global growth, prosperity and goodwill.

A considerable part of this report focuses on trade opportunities, suggesting which trade partners may be relatively under-utilised, even after taking into account factors such as distance and economic size. The rankings drawn up should not be seen to dictate which relationships should be prioritised over others. Instead, firms in the relevant geographies should see all the ranks as being complementary to existing trade flows, answering the question of where additional growth may come from. Sometimes existing relationships suggest future growth potential, while at other times future growth potential can be seen to exist in relatively niche, under-explored markets.



This report summarises two pieces of research, brought together to provide a snapshot of attitudes to trade amongst businesses and the opportunities for new and evolving trade relationships around the world. It examines six key markets: Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico, Singapore and the UK.

Market research specialists Vitreous World conducted 1,509 online interviews amongst financial decision makers within organisations that trade internationally. A minimum of 250 interviews were conducted in each of our six markets in October 2017.

Separately, the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) worked to identify a list of the markets with the most untapped potential for trade globally, and also for trade with each of our six key markets.

Cebr examined key trade relationships using two methodologies:

A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH
which identifies current relationships that have the potential to be optimised further under current trade constraints.
This list represents the 'low-hanging fruit' and is useful for assessing shorter-term opportunities.

A TOP-DOWN APPROACH
which captures a less constrained view of trade flows, by analysing potential trade patterns based on economically prescriptive drivers, many of which are widely accepted in economic theory as key trade drivers.
These look at business environment, corruption and transparency, culture and institutions, demography, economic performance, talent, trade barriers, regional trade agreements and current trade flows.
This list represents the 'higher fruit in the tree' and is useful for assessing longer-term trade opportunities.

Cebr then developed a combined list, bringing together these two approaches to give an overall view of 'untapped' trade potential and a more holistic view. For the purpose of this report, we have used the combined lists to highlight trade potential globally, and for each of the six key markets analysed.

The global outlook

International trade is integral to business success and growth

The importance of international trade amongst the Financial Decision Makers (FDMs) we spoke to cannot be underestimated with 89% of these stating it is important to their organisation's success. This is reiterated with 85% of the survey audience saying international exports are either a 'significant factor' or 'crucial' to their organisation's growth and 87% saying the same about their international import structure.

On average, FDMs believe that international trade is accountable for 50% of their organisation's revenue. This was very similar across both SMEs and large businesses, underpinning the importance of international trade for both businesses small and large. As a result, it appears that organisations are highly diligent about their international trade strategy, with 80% stating that their organisations review the geographies they trade with on at least a quarterly basis.

We also found a strong correlation between the level of confidence respondents have in their organisation's trade strategy and the importance placed on international trade for their organisation. This perhaps indicates that the perceived level of importance placed on international trade affects the strategies themselves.

International trade is expanding in volume and reach but perhaps cautiously

Well over half (59%) are looking to increase their levels of international trade in the next 12 months – and this is not just amongst markets they already trade with. A substantial number of organisations (54%) are also looking to trade with new markets during this time.

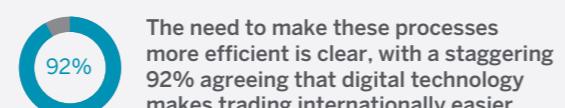
This further supports the levels of confidence and importance placed on international trade seen throughout the research. This confidence is also highlighted in the new markets that organisations are looking to trade with, a number of which are developing markets. In fact, China topped the list of new markets that organisations felt they would be trading with in the next 12 months (14%) and beyond (13%). However, proximity and cultural alignments are clear, with 83% agreeing that they only trade in markets they know well or have partners in.

Digital technology is required and the tools used to manage international payments affect the confidence FDMs have in their international trade strategy

It is clear that respondents questioned across the six markets in this research believe that international trade puts a significant strain on internal resources and is considered time consuming and laborious by FDMs:



This may be resulting in slower payments overseas, perhaps supporting the fact that logistics and supply chain is seen as one of the major challenges of an organisation's current (24%) and future trade activity (20%). This is further supported with 83% of respondents agreeing that delays in making overseas payments negatively affects the supply chain.



Digitising the process is likely to put less strain on internal resources and speed up payments. This reduces the strain on the supply chain and allows partners to work more efficiently and be more flexible, potentially enabling customers to negotiate early payment discounts.

Further to this, 89% of FDMs state that the tools and products used to manage international payments is a factor in the level of confidence in their organisation's international trading strategies. These statistics might suggest that the implementation of digital is why almost half (44%) of FDMs feel international trade will become easier in the next 12 months – whilst only 22% feel it will become more challenging in spite of 80% saying that international trade is becoming increasingly complex.

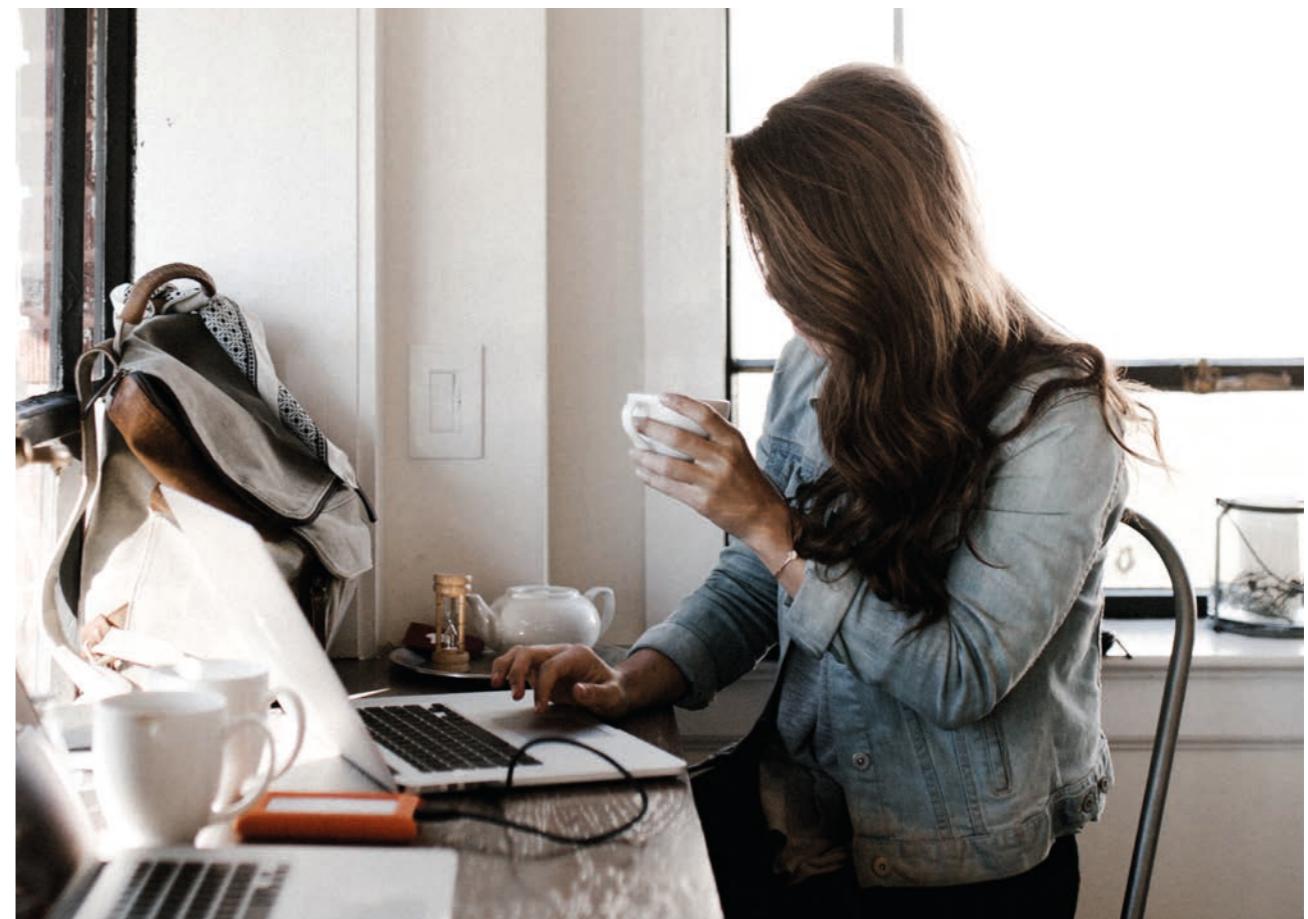


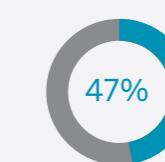
Photo: Andrew Neel

Currency valuation/exchange rate volatility is considered a major challenge, factor and influence on confidence in the decision-making process of international trade

Exchange rate volatility is seen as one of the most prevalent current and future challenges for international trade. This was the second most likely factor (33%) identified as a challenge to an organisation's current trade activity. It was also the second biggest barrier to an organisation's future trade activity (33% as well).

Furthermore, fluctuating exchange rates are one of the biggest concerns when trading with a new international market. It is no wonder that 88% see Foreign Exchange (FX) rates and volatility as relevant to their confidence levels around international trade and that 85% say currency volatility/exchange rates affect their organisation's international trade strategy.

Furthermore, fluctuating exchange rates were also identified as one of the challenges of trading cross border. Many organisations are currently or planning to implement strategies to combat this. It's clear that they affect many aspects of the decision-making process and inform most organisations' international trade strategy. This may be why we are seeing such a high uptake of FX volatility tools such as forward contracts and options:



Almost half of the organisations involved in this study (47%) currently use FX forward contracts to mitigate against volatility and over a quarter of FDMs will be employing this tool in the next 12 months (26%)



29% currently use FX options to mitigate against volatility. A third (33%) of FDMs will be employing this tool in the next 12 months

This in itself is likely to be putting a strain on internal resources, and new processes – or digitisation of them – are likely to be welcomed.

The global **outlook**

Where businesses are looking for new trade opportunities

When asked about the countries they are looking to for new trade opportunities, China is the top target, with 14% looking to trade there in the next 12 months. The USA and Japan are in second and third place respectively.

Looking further ahead and beyond the next twelve months, Australia joins the list of top five trading targets, while China remains top of the list indicated by our respondents. But there are signs that India is set to rise in importance, as it moves up the list into second place.

| New markets businesses are looking to trade with across the next 12 months | New markets businesses are looking to trade with beyond the next 12 months |
|--|--|
| 1. China | 1. China |
| 2. USA | 2. India |
| 3. Japan | 3. USA |
| 4. India | 4. Japan |
| 5. UK | 5. Australia |



Photo: Shibuya, Japan by Daryan Shamkhali



Fresh Frontiers – where businesses should consider looking for untapped trading potential

Comparing the views of our survey respondents with the wider economic analysis undertaken by Cebr reveals both some interesting alignments and potential opportunities.

According to this, many businesses are right to be focusing on growth in China, with the country ranking as a top trade target for three of our six markets. However globally it comes in at number 12 for trade attractiveness – although this is still a relatively high ranking, it might have been higher if it weren't for existing trade constraints.

When it comes to the top markets for trade potential around the globe, the USA takes the top spot – and also features in the top 10 for each of our six countries. As the largest economy in the world in terms of nominal GDP, and third largest in terms of population, it's also home to a comprehensive institutional infrastructure and relatively low trade barriers, making it a potential top trade partner.

But what's clear from this diverse list of countries is that when it comes to trade potential, businesses shouldn't ignore some of the smaller wealthy markets in Europe – particularly in and around Scandinavia. EFTA countries are relatively small economies but their relative trade attractiveness seems to outweigh the size constraint. And given their geographical position, businesses could leverage existing single market relationships with other larger European countries to take advantage of opportunities.

| | |
|----------------|-------------|
| 1. USA | 11. India |
| 2. Australia | 12. China |
| 3. Japan | 13. Iceland |
| 4. New Zealand | 14. France |
| 5. UK | 15. Canada |
| 6. Norway | 16. Ireland |
| 7. Luxembourg | 17. Israel |
| 8. Finland | 18. Cyprus |
| 9. Denmark | 19. Spain |
| 10. Sweden | 20. Uruguay |

Australia

With exports totalling 316.6 billion AUD and imports worth almost 353 billion AUD¹ it's perhaps not surprising that international trade is key for those Australian businesses that trade overseas. A huge 88% of Australian organisations currently trading internationally say this is important to their success and more than half believe that their organisations will increase their volume of trade over the next 12 months.

In terms of where that additional trade will come from, according to the Australian businesses surveyed, they are looking to the UK for trade opportunities over the next 12 months, followed by the USA and Canada, Japan and Germany. Beyond 2018, China seems to be the most popular market for Australian businesses, with the UK and USA remaining in the top three targets.

When compared to the list of markets with the biggest additional trade potential for Australian businesses identified in our economic analysis, it seems that both the USA and China are sensible targets for future trade. These markets take third and fourth spots respectively in the Fresh Frontiers list for Australia, highlighting that there is plenty of trade potential to be explored in these regions.

Top 20 untapped markets for trade with Australia:

| | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Luxembourg | 11. Uruguay |
| 2. New Zealand | 12. Korea |
| 3. USA | 13. Philippines |
| 4. China | 14. Sweden |
| 5. Japan | 15. Indonesia |
| 6. Norway | 16. Solomon Islands |
| 7. Finland | 17. Singapore |
| 8. UK | 18. Botswana |
| 9. India | 19. Lithuania |
| 10. Chile | 20. Canada |

It may surprise businesses to learn that it's in fact Luxembourg that has been identified as the market with the most untapped relative potential for trade with Australia.

Luxembourg ranks highly thanks to factors such as low corruption, press freedom, trade openness and GDP per capita. And despite the significant geographic distance between the two markets and Luxembourg's relatively small economic size, Cebr's analysis suggests that there is plenty of untapped relative trade potential to be explored between the two countries.

More intuitively though, Luxembourg is also a significant gateway to the broader European single market, thus potentially scaling up its value. This also ties into the observation that Norway and Finland are part of the top ten, with both of them also being potential gateways to Europe.

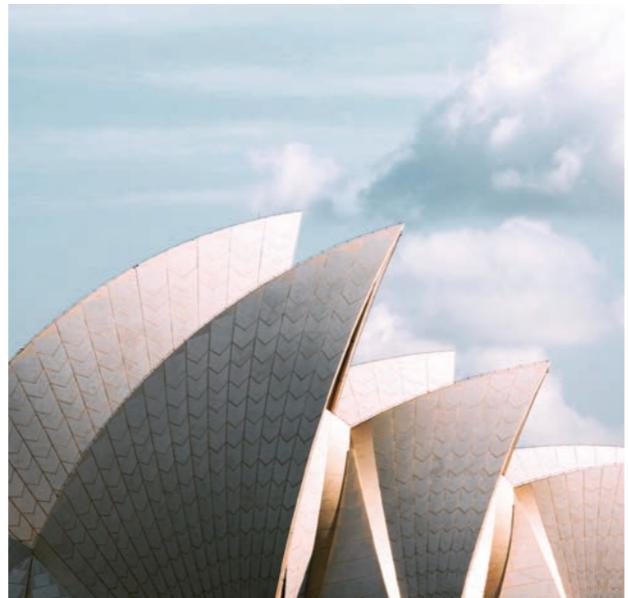


Photo: Annie Spratt

New Zealand ranks second for trade potential with Australia. Despite its close proximity, the analysis suggests that Australia may in fact be under-trading with its neighbour in a relative sense, but also that it is an attractive market for Australian trade based on institutional factors and future integration potential.

The strong showing of the USA in Australia's Fresh Frontiers list is driven by size, demographic strength and economic dynamism, as well as the fact that Australia is a leading global commodity exporter, while the US is a leading commodity importer. These complementary commodity flows are also true for Australia's trade with China and Japan.

Norway is also a surprising market in the top ten, as a relatively small but wealthy economy. However, taking into account the free trade agreements it has in place, the generally low trade barriers, a strong business environment and high transparency levels, its trade attractiveness rises and seems to outweigh in part the small size of its economy.

Australian businesses seem justified in setting their sights on the large global economies such as the USA and China. However, the analysis shows that there are lucrative opportunities both closer to home, in New Zealand, and in other pockets of the world – from Europe to South America – that businesses would be wise to explore.

Australia itself also remains an attractive market for other countries to trade with, with its own position as second, just under the USA, on the global Fresh Frontiers list of markets with untapped potential. Its success here is driven by its strong economic performance, sound institutional background and favourable proximity to large and growing markets in East Asia – all of which point to a positive future when it comes to international trade.

<https://icm.americanexpress.com/au/content/foreign-exchange/>

Canada



Photo: Dan Newman

The levels of confidence and ambition in Canadian businesses are high. Half (51%) of Canadian businesses currently trading internationally plan to increase their volume of trade over the next 12 months, with a similar number (56%) expecting their revenue from trade to increase in the next year.

Furthermore, more than eight in ten (85%) believe that opportunities for international trade are increasing, and 49% are looking to trade with new markets in the next 12 months.

International trade plays a key role in Canada's economy – with the vast majority (89%) of Canadian organisations stating it is important to the success of their business.

In terms of which markets they are targeting, Canadian businesses surveyed in our research listed the United Kingdom, China and Japan as their top three target markets for the coming year.

According to the Fresh Frontiers analysis, there is clear scope for Canada to look closer to home for additional trade opportunities – with the USA coming out as Canada's top potential trade opportunity, followed by a number of European geographies such as France, Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and the UK.

Top 20 untapped markets for trade with Canada:

| | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. USA | 11. Australia |
| 2. France | 12. Panama |
| 3. Luxembourg | 13. Singapore |
| 4. Israel | 14. Qatar |
| 5. Sweden | 15. Cyprus |
| 6. Denmark | 16. Iceland |
| 7. Switzerland | 17. Portugal |
| 8. United Kingdom | 18. India |
| 9. Ireland | 19. Norway |
| 10. Finland | 20. Spain |



Photo: Zia Syed

<https://business.americanexpress.com/ca>

¹<http://dfat.gov.au/about-australia/australia-world/pages/trade.aspx>

Hong Kong



Photo: Aaron VanPoole

As a global trade hub, international trade remains crucial for businesses in Hong Kong. A huge 93% of businesses in Hong Kong currently trading internationally say that imports and exports are a crucial or significant factor in their organisation's growth.

Given how central this activity is to their businesses, companies in Hong Kong are feeling ambitious for the future. More than half plan to increase their volume of trade over the next 12 months and the majority believe that opportunities for international trade are increasing. Furthermore, more than half (56%) are looking to trade with new countries in the next 12 months.

It seems that businesses in Hong Kong are looking close by for those opportunities, with those questioned identifying the Chinese and Indian markets as the top trade targets over the next year. Other countries around Asia, including South Korea and Japan, are also high on the list.

When looking to the Fresh Frontiers identified by our economic analysis, the mix of countries is somewhat more varied.

This analysis identifies the markets around the world with the most untapped relative potential for trade. Given that much of Hong Kong's trade liberalisation is unilateral, Hong Kong acts as a nerve centre for global and regional trade.

It highlights that businesses in Hong Kong are right to target China, with it coming in at number two on the list of countries with the most trade potential. Hong Kong's proximity to China and growing institutional links are a major factor in explaining the presence of the mainland in the list of top markets for trade with Hong Kong, and this shows the success of economic integration between the two.

However, the top country identified for trade with Hong Kong is in fact Norway. Despite the significant geographic distance, Norway's institutional strength and transparency standards boost Norway's untapped relative trade potential. As a global free-trade hub, Hong Kong is well-placed to realise trade growth opportunities coming from trade deals with countries in the European Free Trade Association.

And with these countries being home to generally low trade barriers, strong business environments and high transparency levels, they become very attractive trade partners, despite their small size.

With just 1% of businesses surveyed looking to trade with Norway in the next year, it seems that businesses in Hong Kong would benefit from looking beyond their traditional trade partners for additional opportunities. However, this could also be part of a broader outreach to European countries, given that Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Ireland also feature in the top ten of the Hong Kong rankings.



Photo: Tommy Liu

Top 20 untapped markets for trade with Hong Kong:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Norway | 11. Luxembourg |
| 2. China | 12. Canada |
| 3. Iceland | 13. Denmark |
| 4. United States | 14. United Kingdom |
| 5. Sweden | 15. Cyprus |
| 6. New Zealand | 16. The Bahamas |
| 7. Finland | 17. Lithuania |
| 8. Qatar | 18. Austria |
| 9. India | 19. Brunei Darussalam |
| 10. Ireland | 20. Slovenia |

<https://business.americanexpress.com/hk>

Mexico



Photo: Raphael Ben-Ari

Businesses in Mexico appear to be some of the most ambitious and confident in the world when it comes to international trade. The majority of those businesses (72%) currently trading internationally plan to increase their volume of trade over the next 12 months – that's compared to a global average of just 53%. With two thirds (68%) believing they will be trading with more markets in the next 12 months, it seems that this growth will be coming from tapping into geographies outside of the Americas.

In the short-term, Canada tops the list of trade targets for the businesses surveyed – followed by Brazil and the USA. In the longer term, businesses are looking to both Argentina and Spain as their top targets, although Brazil and the USA remain important. Given the geographical proximity of the USA and these South American countries, and the shared language with Spain, it's understandable that Mexican businesses are looking to these markets for new opportunities.

However, the Fresh Frontiers analysis highlights that the top markets with untapped potential for trade with Mexico share neither a common language nor a border. In fact the top nine are all in Europe, with Norway coming out on top.

Top 20 untapped markets for trade with Mexico:

| | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Norway | 11. Australia |
| 2. Iceland | 12. Botswana |
| 3. UK | 13. Cyprus |
| 4. Sweden | 14. Spain |
| 5. Denmark | 15. Poland |
| 6. France | 16. Croatia |
| 7. Finland | 17. Serbia |
| 8. Lithuania | 18. UAE |
| 9. Latvia | 19. China |
| 10. USA | 20. Peru |

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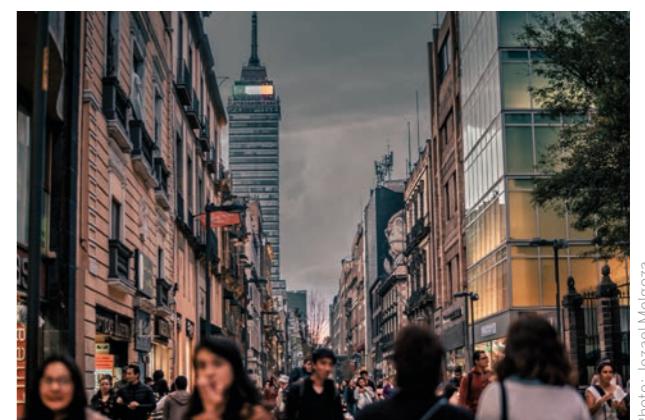


Photo: Jezzael Melgoza

Singapore



Photo: Annie Spratt

Singapore is regularly cited as one of the best places in the world to do business² – and as a global trade hub, the opportunities for international trade are sizeable.

Given how crucial this activity is, it's good to see high levels of confidence and ambition amongst Singaporean businesses when it comes to international trade. Over half (59%) of businesses expect their revenue from trade to increase in the coming year, and another 57% are looking to trade with new markets in the next 12 months. Almost nine in ten Singapore businesses trading internationally (89%) say this activity is important to their success.

In the short-term, Japan tops the list of trade targets for Singaporean businesses, with China and Australia also high on their hit list of countries to trade with. Looking further ahead, those we spoke to in Singapore businesses are looking towards China, India and Japan in first, second and third place respectively.

These choices make sound commercial sense given their geographical proximity – but the Fresh Frontiers analysis shows that there are also plenty of untapped trade opportunities further afield, too.

Top 20 untapped markets for trade with Singapore:

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Iceland | 11. Malaysia |
| 2. China | 12. Chile |
| 3. USA | 13. Israel |
| 4. Finland | 14. Japan |
| 5. Sweden | 15. Ireland |
| 6. Luxembourg | 16. Indonesia |
| 7. India | 17. Trinidad & Tobago |
| 8. Denmark | 18. Pakistan |
| 9. Canada | 19. New Zealand |
| 10. UK | 20. Lithuania |



Photo: Nicholas Loo

<https://www.americanexpress.com/sg/content/foreign-exchange/articles/>

²<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IC.BUS.EASE.XQ>

The United Kingdom



Photo: JJ Jordan

The Fresh Frontiers analysis also indicates significant untapped trade potential for the UK much closer to home that could also be worth exploring. Luxembourg ranks second, due to factors such as low corruption levels, press freedom, trade barriers and GDP per capita. It is also a country our survey indicates UK businesses are currently overlooking in their trade strategies.

Aside from the US, countries drawn from continental Europe are prominent on the list of untapped trade markets for the UK, which is a reflection of both their large economic size and performance, along with the deep levels of market access the UK enjoys through current EU membership.

Similarly, the UK remains a lucrative market for many other countries to explore – ranking fifth on the Fresh Frontier's list of untapped trade markets globally.

This position is driven by the UK's strong business environment, low levels of corruption and trade barriers, and its strong economic performance. The UK also remains a uniquely connected major economy, and whilst negotiating Britain's withdrawal from the EU will bring its own challenges, it is well positioned for the future if it can maintain and build on existing relationships, particularly across continental Europe.

Overall, the UK appears somewhat justified in setting its sights on the USA as a high-potential trade partner, but the analysis also shows the UK shouldn't overlook lucrative opportunities closer to home with its European neighbours. And with 39% of UK businesses presently trading internationally planning to increase their volume of trade over the next 12 months, and almost half (44%) expecting their revenue from trade to increase within this period, there is clearly no shortage of ambition when it comes to international trade.



Photo: Tom Parkes

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