

Forms and Methods of Internationalization of Enterprises – The Case Study of Polish Manufacturer of Household Furniture

Formy i metody internacjonalizacji przedsiębiorstw: studium przypadku polskiego producenta mebli domowych

Streszczenie. Niniejsza publikacja odnosi się do problemu kształtowania strategii ekspansji firmy na rynkach zagranicznych – przykład stanowi polska firma produkująca meble. Dlatego też podjęto się scharakteryzowania rynku meblowego w Polsce i opisanie sposobu ekspansji wybranej polskiej firmy meblarskiej. Uwzględniono w niej elementy takie jak motywy internacjonalizacji firmy, metody oceny i wyboru rynków zagranicznych, formy rozwoju na rynki międzynarodowe oraz metody określania efektów działalności firmy na rynkach zagranicznych. Powyższy problem zostanie wyjaśniony dzięki dostępnym źródłom wtórnym z branży meblarskiej oraz badaniu własnemu z udziałem przedstawiciela firmy produkującej meble domowe w północnej Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe: internacjonalizacja przedsiębiorstw, strategie marketingowe, kształtowanie strategii ekspansji firmy na rynkach zagranicznych, rozwój przedsiębiorstwa, zarządzanie rynkami.

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1. Introduction

The development of internationalization and globalization processes has increased economic links between particular countries, regions and enterprises.¹ Not only large enterprises but also small and medium-sized ones are already involved in the internationalization processes. Regardless of their size, they are forced to compete. Even if Polish companies, which refrained from entering the foreign market, due to the increasing competition on the domestic market of foreign competitors, forcing them to take action to take into account the aspect of expanding their operations to international markets. It should be noted here, that in such a situation, companies, especially small ones, are forced to drastically restructure their organizations, products and technologies to create conditions for development on foreign markets, and to face up to the current competition there.² In such situation companies often lack knowledge and experience resulting from the lack or small internationalization of their company's activity.

This publication refers to the problem of shaping the company's expansion strategy on foreign markets – a Polish company manufacturing furniture is used as an example. Therefore, it was undertaken to characterize the furniture market in Poland and describe the method of the selected Polish furniture company's expansion. It took into account such elements as motives of the company's internationalization, methods of assessing and choosing foreign markets, forms of development into international markets and methods of determining the effects of the company's activities on foreign markets.

Given the above problem, it will be explained by available secondary sources from the furniture industry and own research with a representative of a company producing household furniture in the north of Poland.³

1 J. Rymarczyk, *Internacjonalizacja i globalizacja przedsiębiorstw*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2004; B. Liberska, *Współczesne procesy globalizacji światowej*, "Bank i Kredyt" 2000, no. 59.

2 K. Przybylska, *Formy internacjonalizacji polskich małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw*, [in:] Z. Dach (ed.), *Ekonomiczno-społeczne problemy transformacji systemowej w Polsce. Polska wobec problemów globalizacji*, Polskie Towarzystwo Ekonomiczne, Kraków 2008, pp. 132–152; A. Zorska, *Ku globalizacji? Przemiany w korporacjach transnarodowych i w gospodarce światowej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1998.

3 The research was carried out in 2018 using a standardized electronic survey, sent directly to the representative of the analyzed company, who agreed to participate in the study. The consent to the study was agreed by phone or e-mail.

2. Furniture market in Poland – conditions and its importance in foreign expansion

The furniture industry is one of the most important sectors of the Polish economy. It contributes as much as 2.17% of Polish GDP, whereas the average for EU countries is 0.55%. According to the KPMG report “Furniture market in Poland 2017”, the value of furniture production in our country amounted to PLN 42 billion.⁴

Over 90 per cent of furniture produced in Poland is exported.⁵ Apart from China, the United States, Germany and Italy, Poland is mentioned as one of the most important countries for the furniture industry.⁶ Poland is the 4th exporter of furniture in the world and the 6th largest producer of furniture. The main markets for Poland are European markets, and the largest among non-EU countries – the United States.⁷

The companies that have mastered the furniture market in Poland are mainly micro and small enterprises, a large part of which are family businesses. They engage in working not only different generations but also, what is most important, they pass on their expertise and share their experience. Such management allowed the furniture created in Poland to be considered unique and appreciated all over the world.⁸

Polish furniture brands on the world market are still little recognized. A large number of companies only manufacture furniture for foreign contractors or intermediaries, who later sell it under their brands. Introducing a new brand on the furniture market in Poland is not an easy task and also requires legal protection of their products. However, looking at the rapid development of the furniture industry, it is worthwhile to produce furniture under one’s brand, because it allows to earn much more, as well as to give your company good prospects for the future.⁹

During the 590 Congress in Rzeszów, 17 November 2017, T. Wiktorski, the Manager of the Polish Furniture program in the Department of Polish Development Fund Sector Programs said:

4 M. Sodolski, *Foreign expansion of Polish furniture industry*, <https://www.e-point.com/news-and-ideas/foreign-expansion-of-polish-furniture-industry> (accessed: 24.04.2018).

5 J. Bereźnicki, *Polscy producenci mebli idą na rekord. W planach na ten rok obroty 50 mld zł i trzecie miejsce na świecie*, <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wiadomosci/artykul/polscy-producenci-mebli-ida-na-rekord-w,116,0,2397556.html> (accessed: 2.02.2019).

6 Report *Branża meblarska. Wzrost znaczenia polskich producentów na świecie, luty 2019 r.*, PKO BP, https://wspieramyeksport.pl/api/public/files/1506/PKO_BRANZA_MEBLARSKA_2019_final.pdf (accessed: 2.02.2019).

7 *Strzelecki: Polska jest 4. eksporterem mebli na świecie*, PAP, <https://www.pb.pl/strzelecki-polska-jest-4-eksporterem-mebli-na-swiecie-929887> (accessed: 2.02.2019).

8 Sementak, *Analiza: Rynek meblowy w Polsce*, <https://semtak.pl/analiza-rynek-meblowy-w-polsce/> (accessed: 2.02.2019).

9 *Ibidem*.

The purpose of the “Polish Furniture” program is to develop the image of Polish furniture as a manufacturer of high-quality brand products. Our ambition is to occupy, by the end of 2020, the first place in Europe when it comes to the value of furniture exports. We also want to become the leading European furniture manufacturer in terms of value by the end of 2030.¹⁰

3. Characteristics of the company – manufacturer of household furniture

The analyzed company produces household furniture. The company has over 25 years of experience in the furniture industry. It is a family business. Its highly qualified staff, its knowledge and commitment allows the firm to supply the market with furniture at a high aesthetic and visual level.

It can be observed that the surveyed company follows the trends in the furniture market. This is also confirmed by the report prepared by KPMG, which shows that aesthetics (97%), functionality (92%) and simplicity (89%) will shape the furniture industry the strongest. The furniture will be kept mainly in light shades of wood, white and grey (81%). The furniture will be maintained primarily in light tones of wood, white and grey (81%). In the coming years, the client will pay attention to the representativeness and lightness of forms and shapes of furniture proposed to them (81%).¹¹

The analyzed household furniture company, as it claims itself, has hundreds of ways to make its products from the best selected Italian leathers through natural and synthetic materials. All this, combined with professional advice and an experienced team of craftsmen, allows the company to provide its customers with an unusual and unique product. The company’s offer includes a wide range of upholstered furniture models. It offers sofas, corners, armchairs, pouffes in leather and fabric, modular furniture, benches, wall units, tables, chairs and stools, beds, mattresses and frames. In the offer of the company, there is a possibility to choose accessories to the purchased furniture such as a vase, carpet, lamp etc.

Referring to the KPMG report *Furniture market in Poland 2017*, it can be concluded that the most often indicated type of furniture bought by the

10 Report *Condition and prospects of the Polish furniture market – Polish Development Fund Special Report*, <https://mediapfr.prowly.com/25227-condition-and-prospects-of-the-polish-furniture-market-polish-development-fund-special-report> (accessed: 6.02.2019).

11 KPMG, *Rynek meblarski w Polsce*, June 2017, <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/pl/pdf/2017/06/pl-Raport-KPMG-Rynek-meblarski-w-Polsce-2017.pdf> (accessed: 30.01.2019).

respondents was furniture for a living room (40%). Kitchen furniture (36%) and bedroom furniture (35%) are the subsequent most popular types. Upholstered leisure furniture (29%), garden furniture (20%) and children's or youth furniture (20%) were exchanged slightly less frequently by respondents. However, 18% was noted for the category of built-in furniture or hallway. Office furniture is the least popular with only 6% of respondents.¹²

According to the above information, it should be noted that the enterprise vision also includes their declaration, the company operates with passion. Since the beginning of the company's establishment, the passion has been caring for details and product quality, which in effect allows to create unusual, unique, in terms of form, and ergonomic furniture.

It should be noted that customers, when choosing furniture, are mostly guided by its functionality (88%), durability performance (87%) and the price-quality ratio (84%). The last factor mentioned also has a significant impact on furniture manufacturers and distributors, making the price an important element of the struggle for the customer.

Surveys of the furniture market show that as many as 82% of all respondents declared that high quality of the product, as well as the ability to adjust it to their individual needs, have a significant impact on their purchasing decisions. For eight out of ten Poles, it is essential to be able to return or complain about the furniture purchased, as well as to have an attractive appearance.¹³

The analyzed company as its market advantage considers the fact that it provides its customers with virtually unlimited interference in the final product. The company has an individual approach to each client. They provide their customers with professional advice, transport and assembly, availability and lead time, the possibility of payment in instalments, guarantees the sold products.

The company has a modern machine park, digitally operated cutting tools and many other technological solutions.¹⁴

The analyzed company declares that it is a recognizable brand on the domestic and foreign markets. The company's furniture can be seen not only in partner salons in Poland and Europe, but also in the company's showroom located in the south of Poland. The company also has an electronics store. Although it should be mentioned here that this form of furniture sales is in the upward phase (according to KPMG research, 28% of respondents buy furniture online).¹⁵

The presented company has the organizational and legal form of a limited liability company. The company meets the conditions for large companies, taking

12 *Ibidem*.

13 *Ibidem*.

14 *Polskie firmy meblarskie coraz mocniej wchodzą na zagraniczne rynki*, Interia Biznes, <https://m.interia.pl/biznes/news,2510718> (accessed: 30.01.2019).

15 KPMG, *op. cit.*

into account the criteria for classifying companies into different size groups. It employs nearly 300 people, and at the same time, its annual turnover is in the range of EUR 3–10 million.

4. Company's operations on foreign markets

The company's stable position on the domestic market allowed it to focus its efforts on international markets using one of the least risky forms of expansion – direct export.¹⁶

The described furniture manufacturer has over nine years of experience in operating on foreign markets, which probably results in their knowledge about the specificity of these markets and can motivate the company to expand further. Perhaps, in the future, the company should consider using more advanced forms of development in order to better “infect with their passion” the customers of products abroad.

The company operates mainly in European countries. The researched representative of the company mentioned such markets as Germany, France, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary, Switzerland and Russia.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the company is expanding into foreign markets, however, currently only within the borders of Western and Eastern Europe.

The owner of the company is responsible for planning, implementation and accuracy of decisions made in the company. On the other hand, within the area of marketing on foreign markets, there is an individual organizational unit that is responsible for it.

4.1. Research methods to assist in the selection of market expansion

The presented company declares that they conduct research before they decide to enter the selected foreign market. The company's employees usually study the future international market. They are supported by reports from research institutions, industry magazines, their own experience and knowledge of the industry.¹⁷

¹⁶ See more: J. Rymarczyk, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Preparation of an expansion strategy requires earlier research on foreign markets. Information on potential sales markets can be collected by the company by conducting research based on secondary and/or primary sources. Secondary sources in international research are more important than in primary market research. For more information see, inter alia: J. Schroeder,

The research methods used by the company to support the company's decisions regarding the choice of the company's expansion market are BCG (Boston Consulting Group), comparative analysis and concentration analysis.¹⁸ These methods enable the company to eliminate unattractive markets.

It should be noted that the company has considerable autonomy in its operations and performs current control of its operations. This way of operating should be assessed positively, as it foretells the company's future failure in foreign markets before they decide on more risky forms of entering foreign markets.

4.2. Motives and aim of the surveyed company's activities on foreign markets

The main objective of the companies entering foreign markets was to increase sales of products, but the company also wanted to enlarge the range of its activities. Therefore, it can be stated that the objective was not only economic.

The representative of the researched company also determined the importance of motives influencing the decision related to the selection of future foreign markets.¹⁹ Cost, procurement and political motives were the most frequently mentioned. To a lesser extent, the representative referred to factors within market motives. For the surveyed company, the reason for entering a foreign market was not the problems on the domestic market or the expansion of international business partners. Moreover, the unsatisfied demand on the selected global market was not the motive for taking action there. However, within the market motives, the task of the company's representative has a lower intensity of competition on the foreign market and a high intensity of competition on the domestic market.

M. Bartosik-Purgat, H. Mruk, *Międzynarodowe badania marketingowe*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego, Poznań 2013, pp. 41–69; W. Grzegorzczak, K. Szymańska, *Strategie marketingowe polskich przedsiębiorstw na rynkach zagranicznych. Studia przypadków*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2018, pp. 12–17.

18 For more information on how to select expansion markets see, inter alia: J. Schroeder, *Badania marketingowe rynków zagranicznych*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej, Poznań 2007, pp. 90–97; J.W. Wiktor, R. Oczkowska, A. Żbikowska, *Marketing międzynarodowy. Zarys problematyki*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2008, pp. 97–101.

19 In the literature on the subject more about different forms of motives for entering foreign markets see, among others: G.S. Yip, *Strategia globalna. Światowa przewaga konkurencyjna*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 1996; J.H. Dunning, *Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, New York 1993.

4.3. Expansion models of the researched company on foreign markets

The analyzed company admitted to two models of expansion into international markets, and this is determined by the strength of the company and its experience and the specificity of potential foreign markets.²⁰

The company admitted to using an unconventional internationalization model, which consists of the company entering several markets at the same time. The company also mentioned a network model, taking into account the company's connections with different foreign environment entities. Over time, contacts with partners in networks in international markets develop and, as a result, the process of learning, knowledge acquisition about foreign markets, sharing knowledge of these companies takes place within a formal or informal network. This model speeds up the company's internationalization process. Bearing in mind that the company operates in geographically and culturally close markets, these expansion models seem to be justified.

4.4. Marketing strategies of the researched company in foreign markets

The interview with the company's representative shows that the company undertakes modifications in marketing instruments, taking into account the specificity of the selected foreign market.²¹ This means acting in accordance with a polycentric or region-centric orientation. According to their declarations, the company approaches the needs and requirements of customers in an individualized manner. The company undertakes to diversify its customers mainly as a result of demographic, economic and socio-cultural factors. It should be noted here that strategic coherence has maintained on the part of the company, which also proves its maturity as a company that knows what consequences associated with disregarding customers can emerge.

Changes in marketing instruments mainly concern the manufactured product, price and distribution channels. Depending on the requirements of new customers about the product, most changes are made in the packaging, brand and shape of the product. Product changes are reflected in price changes. This is due to the incurred costs of manufacturing the product, proposed prices of competitors on foreign markets, or the size of demand.

20 K. Fonfara (ed.), *Marketing międzynarodowy. Współczesne trendy i praktyka*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2014; G. Karasiewicz, *Marketingowe strategie internacjonalizacji polskich przedsiębiorstw. Podejście holistyczne*, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2013.

21 See more: J.W. Wiktor, P. Chlipała (eds), *Strategie marketingowe na rynkach międzynarodowych*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2012, pp. 20–21.

Within the marketing instrument – distribution, it should be mentioned that the company has its company shop in Poland, but also has its electronic shop. This second way of reaching customers is more significant for distant foreign markets. The company delivers its product to the consumer.

According to the company's representative, promotional activities are carried out on foreign markets, and the company is responsible for them independently. Promotional activities are adapted to the specificity of a particular region. The tools used by the company to communicate with the recipients on the serviced foreign markets are usually brochures/newsletters, folders, events or trade fairs. The choice of promotion tools depends on the group of buyers, competition activities or the life cycle phase of the product on the market.

5. Analysis of the effectiveness of operations

The company recognizes the need for rational planning of strategic actions to translate into a competitive advantage in selected foreign markets, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the distribution channels used, and the company's participation in internationalization processes. This also translates into the use of marketing metrics to monitor the effectiveness of undertaken activities.²²

The big advantage of the analyzed company is the awareness of the need to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of actions. In order to assess activities at the strategic level, the company uses indexes such as market share and sales growth dynamics.

Much more indicators are used by the company to assess sales effectiveness and distribution channels.

The company measures the following factors: the sales trends, the share in shops handling the brand, the average sales per points of sale, they calculate the price index, determine the profitability threshold, and determine the price elasticity.

It must be mentioned that the assessment of activities here generally refers to the final effects of the company's operations, mainly related to sales. Meanwhile, it is

22 See more: B. Pera, *Miary internacjonalizacji przedsiębiorstw – przegląd wybranych koncepcji i badań*, "Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach" 2017, no. 319, pp. 184–198; D.E. Thomas, L. Eden, *What Is the Shape of the Multinationality-Performance Relationship?*, "The Multinational Business Review" 2004, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 96; G. Karasiewicz, *Marketingowe strategie internacjonalizacji polskich przedsiębiorstw. Podejście holistyczne*, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2013, p. 185; M. Szymura-Tyc, *Measuring the Degree of Firms' Internationalization at the Early Stages of International Commitment*, "Journal of Economics and Management" 2013, no. 13, p. 106; R. Kozielski (ed.), *Wskaźniki marketingowe*, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2017.

also necessary to monitor current activities aimed at strengthening the company's position on the market. In order to analyze the share in internationalization processes, the presented manufacturer uses mainly measurement of the share in sales on foreign markets in comparison with the total sales made by the company as well as carries out an analysis of the share of profit from operations on selected foreign markets to the total profit achieved by the company.

The choice of these indicators also seems to confirm the previous conclusion that the company mainly focused on measuring sales activities, without a more in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of short-term and medium-term actions to be undertaken.

6. Conclusions for the researched company

The company has long-term experience in foreign market activities, which enabled it to acquire customers from Eastern and Western Europe. The company understands the specificities of each supported market by differentiating the customer and customizing the product. The company can start thinking of a more serious entry into foreign markets and more distant markets than Europe instead of just sticking to export. If the company decides to enter more distant international markets, it may be necessary to apply more advanced and capital intensive activities. However, its technological development and organizational cohesion suggest that it has sufficient resources to succeed with more risky forms of action (e.g. its own branch) or to operate in countries outside Europe. The company also puts great emphasis on building its brand in Poland and abroad. In addition, to assess the effectiveness of the actions undertaken, the company uses basic marketing metrics, which should be broadened. It will then be possible to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of actions better and more objectively.

7. Summary of the furniture industry

Summing up, the company is moving in the right direction according to the prevailing market trends.

Based on market research of the furniture industry, it is possible to list a few elements which have a significant impact on the success of Polish furniture companies on foreign markets. These elements include:

- company experience – Polish producers have rich, long experience in cooperation with foreign markets;
- individual approach to the client – companies understand the necessity of meeting the high requirements and expectations of today's customers, companies show great flexibility about customer requirements, allow the customer to create products;
- location – the furniture market in Poland has a great view of Western Europe, where there is a huge number of furniture buyers, which facilitates cooperation;
- organizational development – an active improvement of design as well as work on the growth of own brands;
- technological development – Polish companies introduce newer and newer technological solutions for furniture production;
- investments – intensive use of all EU investments and funds;
- costs – relatively low production and labor costs;
- resources – the good location of the base of materials used for furniture production (wood, etc.)²³

However, one of the most serious challenges related to international expansion is organizing the logistics: this is the crowning moment of a purchasing process in e-commerce. Transportation is one of the bottlenecks in the case of online purchasing of expensive goods such as furniture. However, it can become another tool for building a competitive advantage for the Polish company.²⁴ The automation and robotization of production, the integration of the value chain, material, functional and design innovations, and direct services for individual and institutional customers have the potential to become a driving force for the development of furniture industry.²⁵

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Dunning J.H., *Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, New York 1993.

²³ KPMG, *op. cit.*

²⁴ M. Sodolski, *Foreign expansion of Polish furniture industry*, <https://www.e-point.com/news-and-ideas/foreign-expansion-of-polish-furniture-industry> (accessed: 24.04.2018).

²⁵ Report *Condition and prospects of the Polish furniture market – Polish Development Fund Special Report*, <https://mediapfr.prowly.com/25227-condition-and-prospects-of-the-polish-furniture-market-polish-development-fund-special-report> (accessed: 6.02.2019).

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