EMERALDTECHNOLOGY

The Global Hiring Playbook for Founders

How to build winning teams in new markets without the risk

Why Global Hiring is a Founder's Superpower

Scaling globally used to mean setting up shop, opening an office, and hiring a local HR team, not anymore.

Today's high-growth companies go borderless from the beginning. You don't need a legal entity to win in new markets. You just need the right people, quickly, compliantly and without the overhead.

Whether it's building a go-to-market team in the US, finding engineering talent in Eastern Europe, or setting up a customer support hub in Asia, hiring internationally gives you a competitive edge; speed, market proximity, efficiency, and valuation impact.

But global hiring can also go very wrong, especially when founders jump straight to setting up entities, misclassify contractors, or forget to protect their IP.

This is where this playbook is here to help you.

We'll walk you through the decisions, models, and markets that matter, so you can build the right team in the right place at the right time, without the stress.

> I didn't realise how easy it could be to hire in Germany without opening a GmbH. Emerald helped us do it in 2 weeks, without the legal admin or risk.
>
> — Founder, Series A SaaS company

The 5 Foundational Questions to Ask Before Hiring in a New Country

Founders often start hiring in new markets without a plan, or worse, copy what a competitor did without knowing if it's right for them.

Before you expand, ask yourself:

1. Do I need to set up a legal entity?

If you're hiring just one or two people, probably not. Setting up a legal entity can take 3-6 months, requires hands on local directors, tax filings and lots of ongoing admin.

A better route: use an EOR (Employer of Record) to hire and pay people compliantly, without needing a local presence.

Discover our EOR vs Entity guide.

2. Am I compliant with local employment laws?

Every country has different rules on notice periods, benefits, holidays, sick pay, and termination. If you don't follow them, you could be liable. Even if your team is remote.

That friendly contractor agreement? It might not cut it in France or Brazil.

3. What's the total cost of hiring (not just salary)?

Benefits, taxes, social security, 13th month pay, mandatory bonuses, it adds up.

Try our Employment Cost Calculator for free.

Budgeting for global hires means looking beyond the base salary.

We've seen founders underquote total cost by 25-40% in new markets.

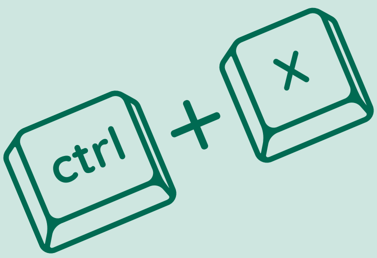
4. What are the risks of misclassifying a contractor?

It might feel easier to pay someone as a freelancer, but if they act like an employee (set hours, core tools, exclusivity), you risk serious penalties.

In the US, this means IRS audits. In the EU, it means fines or forces reclassification, plus back-pay on benefits.

5. How fast do I need to move?

If you're in a live fundraising round, just signed your first enterprise client, or building a team around a tight go-to-market deadline, you don't have time for red tape.



Shortcut: Use this rule of thumb:

- Contractor: OK for short-term, non-core roles and testing markets
- EOR: best for quick, compliant hiring without legal setup
- Entity: Use when scaling a full team or building long-term operations

Hiring Models, Explained

There's no one-size-fits-all route to global hiring. What matters is choosing the model that fits your stage team and appetite for complexity.

Here's the breakdown:

Contractors

Best for: short-term needs, market testing, freelancers.

Paying someone as an independent contractor might seem like the fastest route, no benefits, low overhead. But, here's the catch, many countries have strict definitions of what counts as a "contractor." If your freelancer acts like an employee (set hours, core systems, reports to a manager), you could be on the hook for fines, back pay, and even legal action.

Use contractors for non-core roles or early market tests. Don't rely on them to build your GTM team.

Employer of Record

Best for: fast, compliant hiring without setting up a legal entity.

An EOR becomes the legal employer of your global hires, but you retain control of their day-to-day work. They handle payroll, benefits, compliance and contracts locally, so you don't have to.

This is the go-to model for most scaleups entering new markets with a lean headcount, or when speed matters more than infrastructure.

💡 Emerald can onboard talent in 160+ countries via EOR — sometimes in as little as 48 hours.

Local Entity Setup

Best for: long-term, multi-hire expansion in a strategic market.

Setting up a local entity makes sense when:

- You're hiring 5+ people in one country
- You need local procurement and contracts
- You plan to establish a regional HQ

But be warned: entity setup takes time, money and ongoing admin. You'll need accountants, tax filings, statutory directors, and a local payroll provider.

It's a serious commitment, and often not the right move.

Hybrid Model

Best for: balancing speed, compliance and long-term scale.

Many scaleups use a mix of models; EOR for fast entry, contractors for short-term projects, and entities where scale justifies it. What matters is knowing when to switch and keeping your hiring infrastructure clean as you grow.

"We used EOR to hire our first GTM lead in Portugal, then set up an entity once we hit 6 people. No disruption, no risk."

— COO, Series B SaaS scaleup

How to Hire Your First GTM Team Abroad

Global expansion isn't about dots on a map, it's about revenue. That's why most founders start by hiring go-to-market (GTM) roles in new countries.

Think: sales, customer success, marketing.

Here's how to do it right.

Priorities, outcomes, not headcount.

Before hiring, ask: What needs to happen in this market in the next 6-12 months?

- Do you need pipeline?
- Do you need local support for existing clients?
- Are you providing product-market fit?

Your hires should align to outcomes, not org charts.

Hire senior, local, and revenue focused.

Don't hire an SDR and hope they figure it out.

Your first hire in a new market should a senior, autonomous operator. Someone who knows the region, the buyers, and how to sell your product.

Titles to look for:

- Sales Director/ Country Manager
- Customer Success Manager
- Head of Marketing
- VP of Sales EMEA
- Sales Engineer

Use EOR to move fast and stay flexible.

If you don’t have an entity in the market yet (or aren’t ready for one), use an EOR to hire legally, onboard quickly, and avoid compliance nightmares.

This keeps the team agile while you test the market.

Set up the support around them.

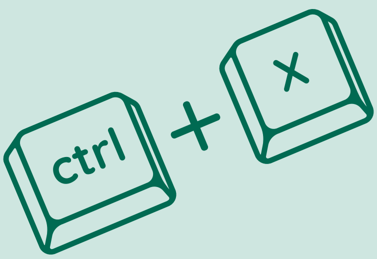
Global hires are only as good as the structure around them.

Make sure you’ve got:

- Clear reporting lines
- Tools and processes that work across time zones
- Localised onboarding and enablement
- Regular feedback loops into HQ

Give them the right runway.

Your first GTM hires need time to build, and founders often panic too early. Set realistic expectations for ramp and traction, 6-9 months to real momentum is normal in new regions, especially if your brand isn’t known locally.



Shortcut:

- Start with one senior GTM hire under EOR
- Layer in more employees to validate traction
- If it works > scale
- If not, no sunk costs, no entity overhead

EOR 101: Your Shortcut to Global Hiring

If you want to hire in a country where you don't have a legal entity, without breaking laws, drowning in admin, or delaying growth – Employer of Record (EOR) is your secret weapon.

What is an Employer of Record (EOR)?

An Employer of Record is a third-party provider that legally employs your team on your behalf in another country. They take on the compliance, payroll, benefits, tax and legal responsibility, so you don't have to set up an entity or risk getting it wrong.

In short: you get the talent, or use a talent provider like Emerald, then we take care of everything else.

When is EOR a smart move?

EOR isn't for everyone, but it's ideal when:

- **You want to move fast.**
  Test a new market or build a team in weeks, not months.
- **You're not ready for an entity.**
  Skip the cost, paperwork and ongoing maintenance.
- **You're hiring remote-first.**
  Access the best talent, wherever they are.
- **You want compliance, without complexity.**
  Avoid misclassification and local legal pitfalls.
- **You're converting contractors.**
  Transition 1099 or freelance workers into full-time employees to avoid IRD penalties or loss of control.

How Emerald makes EOR founder-friendly

We've built our EOR service around the need of scaleup leaders:

160+ countries covered: From the US and UK to the UAE and Australia — we've got global reach and local expertise.

Real human support: No ticketing only systems or support queues. You get a dedicated team who knows your business and your goals.

Flexible scale: Whether you're hiring one remote engineer or an entire go-to-market function, we scale with you.

Speed to hire: We help you onboard new team members in days — not weeks or months.

Built-in legal protection: From IP assignment to data compliance, we make sure every hire is secure and investor ready.

Case Study Snippet: Global Hiring at Scale

A high-growth SaaS company needed to build a go-to-market team across Europe and Asia. They didn't have time (or budget) to set up new entities — and they didn't want to risk contractor misclassification.

Emerald hired 40+ employees for them across 5 countries, handling contracts, payroll, benefits, and compliance in markets including Germany, India, and the UAE.

The result? A fully operational GTM team up and running in <6 weeks, without any legal delays or surprises.

💡 Think of EOR as your global hiring infrastructure — already built, ready to deploy. With Emerald, it's the easiest way to grow your team across borders, without slowing down.

Your Hiring Playbook: Country-by-Country checklist

Hiring globally isn't about finding the right person, it's about navigating the laws, expectations and red tape in each market. Miss a step, and you could lose your IP, misclassify a hire, or end up with unexpected liabilities.

Here's what founders need to know before hiring in the some of the most popular markets for scaleups.

United States

The US offers top tier talent but is also one of the most complex hiring markets.

Key considerations:

- Work classification is critical: Misclassify a 1099 contractor and you could face IRS penalties
- Employment is state based: Regulations vary massively from California to Texas
- Benefits matter: Candidates expect health insurance, paid-time off and a 401(k) even at early-stage companies
- At will employment sounds flexible but be careful. You still need compliant contracts and offboarding

Germany

One of Europe's most talent-rich (and regulation-heavy) countries.

Key considerations:

Pro Tip

Germany is high-compliance and employee-friendly, so having a strong legal framework in place is non-negotiable.

- Termination is hard: even poor performance may not be grounds for dismissal
- IP ownership isn't automatic: You must explicitly assign it in the contract

Ireland

A popular hub for tech companies expanding into Europe.

Key Considerations:

- 12-month service rule: Employees with over a year of service get strong dismissal protection
- Pensions and benefits: Not mandatory, but increasingly expected for tech talent
- Data protection: Contracts need to comply with GDPR and local DPC regulations

Pro Tip

Ireland's proximity to the UK makes it attractive post-Brexit, but don't underestimate local compliance nuances.

United Arab Emirates

Fast-growing tech scene, with flexible hiring, but it's not the Wild West.

Key Considerations:

- Visa and sponsorship: All expat hires require visa sponsorship and local compliance
- No income tax: But you must register for payroll and labour contracts through the Ministry
- IP assignment and NDAs: Not automatically enforceable — contract language matters

Pro Tip

UAE is great for regional growth but it's vital to get employment contracts reviewed locally.

Red Flags, Risk Zones & Investor Readiness

Even the most seasoned founders trip up when they start building team internationally. The stakes are high, one misstep can derail your timeline, drain your budget, or trigger unexpected legal risk.

Here are the mistakes we see most often, and how to avoid them:

Setting up entities too early

Founders often rush to set up a legal entity the moment they enter a new country. But this brings a lot of work before you've even proven market fit.

Fix it: Use EOR as a low-risk way to validate new markets. Set up entities only when you've hit scale and have a real reason to stay.

Treating global hiring as an ops task, not a growth lever

Global hiring is often dumped on HR or Finance, with little input from leadership. But international talent isn't a checkbox, it's a strategic lever for speed, resilience and competitive edge.

If you only think about costs, you miss the upside.

Fix it: Treat global hiring like go-to-market strategy. Where are the best people? Where can you grow fastest? Where do you need presence now to win later?

Hiring the wrong person in a new market

Your first hire sets the tone for you team, your brand and your reputation in-market. But too many founders hire too junior or too cheap.

One poor hire in a new region can cost 6-12 months of momentum.

Fix it: Hire senior, autonomous talent with local knowledge. They should be able to operate without daily oversight and start building traction from day one.

Not planning for tax, IP or data compliance

You've hired someone in Germany. But where are your IP rights assigned? Who owns the code they're writing? Are you GDPR compliant?

Global hiring creates a web of risk – especially if you're using contractors or remote workers without proper contracts and protections.

Fix it: Partner with experts who understand employment law, data privacy, and IP in each country. Emerald does this as standard with every hire.

Underestimating global payroll complexity

Hiring one person in France? Easy. Hiring ten people in five countries, with different tax systems, benefits and deadlines? Now you've got a payroll and compliance headache.

Fix it: Consolidate global payroll with one partner (like us). We'll handle the calculations, benefits, payslips, filings — everything. You get one invoice.

💡 Remember: Global hiring isn't just about expansion — it's about opportunity.

Done right, it's your shortcut to better talent, faster deals, and more resilient growth.

Bonus: What Investors Really Want to See

Whether you're raising Seed or Series C, these are the hiring-related questions investors are silently asking:

- "Do you own your IP in every market?"
- "Are your people legally employed and protected?"
- "Will this structure scale?"
- "Is anything going to break due diligence?"

Founders who can answer confidently and clearly get funded faster. That's where we come in, making sure nothing in your global hiring stack raises red flags.

> Most of the risk in cross-border hiring comes from things founders don't know to ask. We remove the guesswork.
> — Adam DeSanges, Emerald Technology

What Founders Often Forget

No matter where you're hiring, these four blind spots can create major risk if ignored:

- IP ownership: Always explicitly assign IP in employment contracts — in some countries, it's not automatic.
- Probation periods: Many countries cap the length of probation and limit dismissal rights even during this time.
- Benefits expectations: What's "optional" in your country may be mandatory (or standard) elsewhere. This affects your offer acceptance rate.
- Offboarding risks: Ending a contract wrongly can trigger legal claims, reputational damage, or delays to re-hiring.

💡 This is exactly why Emerald exists — we handle these details so you don't have to.

Want to check a country before making a hire? Let's talk — we've got hiring guides for countries across all major regions.

Your First 100 Global Hires

Sample hiring plans for GTM & tech teams

Your early hires set the trajectory of your business — and getting the first 100 right, across borders, is more important (and harder) than most founders expect.

Here’s how to think about building high-impact teams globally without getting buried in admin, compliance, or poor cultural fit.

Go-To-Market (GTM) Team Hiring Plan

Goal: Drive revenue in key markets, fast, with local presence and context.
Ideal for: VC-backed teams entering the US, Europe, or APAC.

Role	Location	Why It Matters
SDR	US (East/West), UK, Germany	Start pipeline generation in time zones that match your buyers
Account Executive	US, DACH, Nordics	Close deals in-region, with language and cultural fluency
Customer Success Manager	Ireland, UAE, Australia	Retain and grow accounts in local time zones
Marketing Manager	UK, Canada	Align messaging and demand gen across regions
RevOps/ SalesOps	Remote (UK, Poland, Spain	Give Sales the infrastructure to scale

Use EOR to hire in-region before setting up an entity. Scale up or down flexibility based on traction.

Tech & Product Team Hiring Plan

Goal: Build a resilient, high-performing product team across hubs — with time zone overlap and low attrition.
Ideal for: Product-led companies and platform start-ups.

Role	Location	Why It Matters
Full-Stack Engineer	Poland, Portugal, Argentina	Great talent pool, strong English, good cost/value ratio
DevOps Engineer	Romania, Czech Republic, India	Keeps your infrastructure running smoothly 24/7
UX/UI Designer	Germany, Netherlands, UK	Cultural nuance + user insight = better product
Product Manager	US, Ireland, UK	Closer to your users and business goals
QA Engineer	Serbia, Colombia, Philippines	Round-the-clock testing and delivery

Hiring across time zones doesn't mean hiring blindly. Use structured scorecards, async interviews, and clear onboarding plans to set everyone up for success.

Don't Forget These Roles Early On

Even in lean teams, it pays to think ahead on these hires:

- People / Talent Ops Lead: Helps avoid early compliance or culture risks
- Finance Ops / Payroll Admin: Prevents back-office bloat and risk as headcount grows
- Regional Team Leads: Gives you in-country decision-makers who understand local needs

Exit-ready From Day One

Setting up clean hiring ops for due diligence

You might be hiring your first five employees now, but future investors, acquirers, and even your own finance team will care a lot about how those hires were made.

Sloppy contracts, unclear IP ownership, misclassified employees, or scattered payroll records? All of them are due diligence red flags. And they slow deals down.

Here's how to avoid them:

Build with your future acquirer in mind

Investors and acquirers will want to see:

- Every hire has a signed employment contract
- IP and invention rights are clearly assigned
- Payroll, taxes, and benefits are compliant
- No misclassified contractors in key markets
- A clear, auditable trail of hiring decisions

Don't wait until Series B or acquisition talks to fix it. Start clean, stay clean.

How Emerald helps you stay investor-ready

Whether you're hiring with EOR or through your own entity, we make sure:

- You use locally compliant, audit-proof contracts
- IP clauses are watertight and founder-safe
- Your payroll and benefits stack are due diligence–ready
- There's one central record of all your global hiring activity

Need to show your board how many FTEs you've hired in EMEA under compliant terms? Done in two clicks.

Scale up without compliance baggage

Founders often scramble when:

- A buyer wants to see contracts from 5 years ago
- An employee sues over benefits they were never entitled to
- A VC flags IP risks in a region where hiring was "informal"

But if you build your global team through Emerald, every hire is covered.

You'll have a clean record of who, how, and under what terms every team member was onboarded — and that's gold in the eyes of investors.

Your clean ops = your valuation lever

You wouldn't ship a product without version control. Don't scale a team without compliance control.

Emerald makes sure your hiring infrastructure isn't just fast — it's built to support your exit strategy.

Top Takeaways

1. Don't start with entities — start with outcomes.
2. EOR = the fastest way to hire without breaking the rules.
3. Local rules can disrupt your offer (IP, benefits, misclassification).
4. Your first GTM hire should be senior and local.
5. Clean hiring ops = faster fundraising, better valuation.

We help founders hire globally without the stress, risk, or red tape.

Speak to our team - Explore our EOR - Explore our Talent Services