

Market Entry Is Now an Intelligence Problem

Business development has always required two things: the intelligence to know where and how to move, and the human capacity to build the trust that makes movement possible. AI has fundamentally expanded the first. It cannot touch the second. Understanding both -- and how they work together -- is what defines sophisticated BD advisory in the current era.

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The oldest problem in business development

Before any market is entered, before any partnership is formed, before any deal is structured, there is an intelligence problem. Which market, and why now? Who are the real decision-makers, and what do they actually care about? Where does the competitive landscape create openings, and where does it foreclose them? What are the regulatory, cultural, and relational realities that will determine whether a foreign entity succeeds or stalls?

These questions have always been at the heart of business development. They are not new. What is new is the quality and speed with which they can be answered...and the consequences for firms that are still answering them the old way.

Market entry has always been an intelligence problem. AI has changed what is possible in how that intelligence is gathered, synthesized, and applied. BD advisory that does not reflect this shift is, by definition, operating below the current standard, not because the practitioners lack skill or experience, but because the toolkit has changed around them.

This is a meaningful distinction. AI fluency in a BD context does not mean building models or running data pipelines. It means understanding how AI reshapes what is knowable before you enter a market, how it changes the quality of strategic analysis, and how it extends the reach and depth of advisory that was previously bound by what a team of people could manually research, synthesize, and hold in their heads.

That is the intelligence layer. And it has changed.

The question is no longer whether AI belongs in business development. It is whether BD professionals understand it well enough to use it as a strategic instrument.

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What AI actually changes in BD

The impact of AI on business development is not about replacing research analysts or automating relationship management. It is about what becomes possible at the intelligence layer when the tools for gathering, processing, and synthesizing market information are fundamentally more powerful.

Market intelligence depth. BD work has always required understanding of competitive landscapes, regulatory environments, and sector dynamics in target markets. Previously, the depth of that understanding was bound by available time and accessible sources. AI-enabled research expands both, synthesizing across languages, jurisdictions, and sources that would take human teams weeks to cover. The result is not just faster research. It is qualitatively richer analysis: more variables considered, more stress-tested scenarios, more assumptions surfaced before they become costly.

Entry strategy precision. Identifying where to play and how to position in a new market requires pattern recognition across a large and often noisy information environment. AI accelerates this without replacing the strategic judgment required to interpret it. The BD professional's role shifts from information gatherer to strategic analyst, a more valuable function, not a diminished one.

Risk identification. Cross-border market entry carries political, regulatory, operational, and reputational risk. Many of these risks are visible in the data well before they materialize, but only if the data is being read. AI-augmented analysis surfaces risk signals that manual processes routinely miss, not because human analysts are insufficiently skilled, but because the information environment is too complex and too fast-moving for unaided human review.

Client advisory quality. Ultimately, all of the above compounds into the quality of advice a BD firm can give. Clients engaging a market entry advisor are making significant, often irreversible commitments. The intelligence layer underpinning that advice, how it was gathered, how current it is, how rigorously it was stress-tested, matters enormously. AI raises the floor of what rigorous advisory looks like.

None of this is theoretical. These are practical capability shifts that are already separating BD practices that have integrated AI into their advisory work from those that have not.

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What AI cannot do and why it matters more

Here is where the analysis requires honesty, because the limits of AI in a BD context are not minor. They are structural. And in the markets where the intelligence advantage matters most, emerging economies, cross-cultural environments, high-context relationship cultures, those limits define the difference between a deal that closes and one that never gets traction.

Business development, at its core, is a trust problem. Intelligence tells you where to go and how to position. Trust is what allows you to get there. And trust, in a human sense, is not transferable, scalable, or replicable by any technology that currently exists.

This is not sentiment. It is an operational reality for anyone who has worked across cultures, languages, and business traditions where the formal meeting is often the last step in a process that began months earlier over meals, phone calls, and introductions made through carefully cultivated relationships.

What AI cannot replicate:

Human intuition. Experienced BD professionals carry pattern recognition built from years of cross-market, cross-cultural work that no model is trained on. The instinct that a counterpart's enthusiasm is performative, that a deal structure will not survive internal

approval, that the timing is wrong despite favorable signals, these judgments come from a depth of human experience that remains irreplaceable.

Relationship building. Not relationships as a static asset, but the act of building them, which is effortful, slow, and deeply human. It requires showing up consistently, following through on small things before large ones, demonstrating genuine interest in a counterpart's world rather than just their utility to a transaction. In many of the markets where this work happens, this process cannot be shortened or systematized. It simply takes time and human presence.

Cultural fluency. Understanding a culture intellectually is different from navigating it in real time. The latter requires emotional attunement, reading what is not being said, calibrating directness against context, knowing when to press and when to wait. These are human skills that develop through immersion and experience. AI can provide cultural background. It cannot provide cultural judgment.

Emotional trust. Particularly in global BD, where counterparts are evaluating not just a firm's capabilities but whether a person is someone they want to do business with, the emotional dimension of trust is not a soft factor. It is often the deciding one. People do business with people they like, respect, and believe will stand by their commitments when things get complicated. That quality of trust is built through human interaction alone.

Nearly two decades working inside highly structured institutions, across private legal sectors, Canadian federal government, and state government in the US, made this clear in a particular way. Institutional environments operate within geopolitically defined boundaries.

Relationships are formal, mandates are constrained, and what you can build is bound by what the system permits. Those years produced a precise understanding of what institutions cannot do: they cannot move like people move. They cannot build the kind of trust that crosses borders, cultures, and languages on the strength of a person's word and presence.

That understanding is the foundation of a different kind of practice -- one built across borders and rooted in people.

No algorithm maps the unspoken hierarchy in a Gulf family business. No model reads the room in a Ugandan negotiation. No AI builds the kind of trust that takes three dinners and two years.

The BD professional who understands both

The most valuable BD professional in the current environment is not the one who has been replaced by AI, nor the one who has ignored it. It is the one who understands precisely what each layer does and deploys them accordingly.

This requires a specific kind of fluency: not technical expertise in AI systems, but strategic literacy about what AI changes in the intelligence layer, combined with deep respect for what human relationship-building requires and what it produces. These are not tension. They are complementary, and together they define a standard of advisory that neither alone can achieve.

For SMEs evaluating BD partners and advisors, this framing offers a practical lens. The question is not whether a firm uses AI -- that is table stakes. The question is whether they understand it well enough to apply it where it creates genuine value and experienced enough to know where the work requires something AI cannot provide.

In cross-border and emerging market contexts specifically, where information asymmetry is high, relationship cycles are long, and cultural intelligence is non-negotiable, this combination is not a differentiator. It is a prerequisite.

AI sharpens what you know before you enter the room. Everything that happens in the room is still human.

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A new standard for market entry advisory

The firms that will navigate the next decade of global market entry successfully are not necessarily the largest or the most technologically sophisticated. They are the ones operating with the clearest understanding of what the current environment actually requires.

That means an intelligence layer that reflects what is now possible: AI-augmented market research, entry strategy analysis, and risk assessment that goes deeper and moves faster than anything achievable through manual processes alone.

And it means a human layer that has not been diluted in the name of efficiency: experienced practitioners who have built real relationships in real markets, who carry the cultural and emotional intelligence to navigate environments where trust is the currency, and who understand that in global business development, the work that matters most is still irreducibly human.

Market entry is an intelligence problem. It always has been. What has changed is the full scope of what intelligence now means and the standard to which serious BD advisory should be held.

Tigara Group

International business development consulting for SMEs entering new markets. We work at the intersection of market intelligence, AI-native advisory, and the human relationships that make cross-border business possible.

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