WHITEPAPER

Bridging the Atlantic

A Strategic Framework for European B2B Manufacturers Entering the US Market

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Executive Summary

European manufacturers building a name in North America usually don't fail because the product is wrong. They stall because the go-to-market approach that worked at home doesn't translate — and because the default fix, hiring a full-time US marketing lead or leaning entirely on a distributor, is often the wrong first move.

This paper lays out a framework for closing that gap: how to build US market credibility before you have US headcount, why distributor relationships and marketing strategy are two different problems, and what a phased, senior-led approach to market entry actually looks like in practice.

It's written for founders, VPs of Sales, and business development leaders at European B2B manufacturers — particularly in advanced manufacturing, aerospace and automotive, and medical devices — who are past the exploratory stage and need a real plan for the US market.

The Bridge Problem

Most European manufacturers enter the US market through one of two doors: a distributor relationship, or a first US sales hire. Both are necessary. Neither is a marketing strategy.

A distributor sells product. They are not positioned, incentivized, or resourced to build your brand's credibility with a new market's buyers — and expecting them to is the single most common reason a strong European product goes quiet in the US after a promising launch.

A first sales hire, meanwhile, is usually judged on pipeline within a quarter or two. They don't have the mandate — or the time — to build the positioning, content, and market-facing presence that makes their own outreach land.

The result is a gap: European product quality that US buyers never quite discover, because nobody owns the job of translating it for a market with different buying committees, different compliance expectations, and a different tolerance for generic messaging.

A Framework for US Market Entry

Closing the bridge gap comes down to four areas working together, not four separate projects.

1. Positioning built for a US buyer, not a translated EU one

US industrial buyers respond to specificity — named use cases, named sectors, concrete outcomes — over the broader, more technical positioning that often works in European B2B. Messaging built for a European trade audience rarely converts as-is; it needs to be re-built for how US procurement and engineering teams actually evaluate a new supplier.

2. A compliance-aware foundation

Email, data handling, and marketing regulations differ meaningfully between the EU and the US — and getting this wrong early damages credibility with exactly the enterprise and defense-adjacent buyers who scrutinize it most closely. This isn't a legal afterthought; it's part of how a new entrant earns trust.

3. Direct-to-account marketing alongside distributor and sales motions

Distributor enablement and direct account-based outreach solve different problems and should run in parallel, not in sequence. For manufacturers targeting a small, named universe of strategic accounts, precision ABM outreach — not broad channel marketing — is usually the higher-leverage move.

4. Proof before pitch

US buying committees increasingly include younger, more digitally-native stakeholders who expect to self-educate before a sales conversation ever happens. Case studies, technical content, and a credible market presence need to exist before outreach starts, not be built reactively once a prospect asks for them.

Why Fractional, Why Now

A full-time US marketing hire is a real commitment: recruiting time, ramp time, and a fixed cost regardless of how the market responds. For a manufacturer still validating its US positioning, that's a lot of risk to carry before the strategy is proven.

A fractional model — senior strategic leadership without the overhead of a full-time seat — lets a manufacturer move at the pace the market actually demands: fast enough to capture early traction, flexible enough to redirect if the first approach doesn't land, and without the sunk cost of a hire made before the go-to-market thesis is tested.

The strongest version of this model isn't a rotating agency team, either. It's continuity: one senior strategist who knows the account history, the sector, and the market — end to end, engagement after engagement.

Getting Started

Before committing to a US marketing investment, most manufacturers benefit from answering four questions honestly:

1. Is our current positioning built for US buyers, or translated from our EU messaging?
2. Are we treating our distributor relationship as our whole US marketing strategy?
3. Do we have proof — case studies, content, credibility signals — a US buyer can find before we ever reach out?
4. Are we prepared to meet US compliance expectations for how we communicate with prospects?

A manufacturer that can't answer all four with confidence isn't ready to scale US spend yet — but is very likely ready to start building the foundation.

About ELIKYA Digital

ELIKYA Digital is a fractional Chief Marketing Director consultancy that helps European-headquartered B2B manufacturers enter and grow within the North American market, with service reach across North America, EMEA, and LATAM. Founded in 2011 and led by Séverine Rigaud, the firm brings 28 years of hands-on industry experience to sectors spanning manufacturing, aerospace and automotive, medical devices, and professional services.

Every ELIKYA engagement is led by one senior strategist, start to finish, not a rotating account team.

Fractional CMD Retainer	Agile & On-Demand	Distributor Support
Ongoing senior strategic leadership for market entry and growth.	Flat-fee or per-project creative production, on demand.	Sales and marketing tools — and communication — to grow distributor revenue.

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