

SELLING IN POLAND

BEYOND THE DISTRIBUTOR

A **practical guide** for international companies
ready to go beyond their distributor



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FOREWORD

Poland has quietly become one of Europe's most consistent and reliable growth markets. Over the past two decades, it has maintained an average GDP growth rate of 4% per year - a track record that few economies on the continent can match.

Yet in our day-to-day work with exporters and commercial teams across Europe, we observe the same situation repeating itself. A company enters Poland through a distributor, achieves early results, and then hits a ceiling. Sales plateau. Visibility on what is actually happening in the market narrows. Direct relationships with end customers remain out of reach. The potential is there, but the commercial structure is no longer fit to capture it.

At **Valians International**, we have supported international companies in their expansion across Central and Eastern Europe for over 25 years. Every project confirms the same thing: the companies that unlock the full potential of the Polish market are those that establish a direct commercial presence on the ground, not necessarily through a subsidiary, but through the right structure at the right stage.

This guide was written to share what we see in the field every day. It is addressed to business leaders, export managers, and commercial directors who are already active in Poland and are now asking the right question:

What comes after the distributor?

Inside, you will find a clear-eyed assessment of the distributor model, practical solutions for building a local commercial presence without heavy investment, and a concrete case study showing how one company tripled its Poland sales in three years by making one structural change.



Cédric Fromont

CEO at Valians International

Poland's commercial opportunity is still wide open. The question is whether your current setup is built to capture it.

SECTION 1

POLAND IN 2026

A HIGH-POTENTIAL MARKET

1.1 Key Economic Indicators

Poland's economic track record is one of the strongest in Europe. The fundamentals are solid, consistent, and well-documented.

So, what makes Poland's economy stand out in Europe?

Key figures at a glance:

- **Population:** 37 million inhabitants
- **EU ranking:** 6th largest economy in the European Union
- **Global ranking:** 20th largest economy in the world, overtaking Switzerland (IMF, 2025)
- **GDP:** Surpassed \$1 trillion in 2025
- **GDP growth:** 2.9% in 2024 | 3.2% forecast for 2025 | 3.3% forecast for 2026 (IMF)
- **FDI inflows:** USD 27 billion in 2024, led by manufacturing, IT, and logistics
- **Unemployment:** 2.8%, one of the lowest rates in the EU
- **Average gross salary:** PLN 8,836.98 / month in 2025 (~EUR 2,083)
- **Minimum gross wage:** PLN 4,806 / month since January 2025 (~EUR 1,130)
- **Currency:** Polish Zloty - 1 EUR ≈ 4.24 PLN

Sources: IMF World Economic Outlook, April 2025; World Bank, 2025; GUS (Statistics Poland), 2025

1.2 Strategic Positioning in CEE

Bordered by Germany to the west and sharing proximity with 8 countries across Central and Eastern Europe, Poland is the natural gateway for companies looking to serve the wider CEE region from a single base.

Three structural advantages stand out:

Logistics infrastructure

EU funding totalling €229 billion over 2007–2027 has enabled extensive development of road, rail, and port infrastructure across the country. Poland's warehousing market consistently ranks in the top five in Europe.

FDI pull

Over the past three years, FDI inflows averaged 3.8% of GDP — significantly above the EU average of 0.2%.

Multimodal connectivity

The CPK megaproject - Poland's new airport and multimodal transport hub under development - is positioned to connect the Baltics to the Balkans, redefining the logistics spine of Central Europe.

Sources: Savills, "Poland Express," 2024; CPK / CEE Summit, June 2025; European Commission, 2025

1.3 Sectors with the Highest Growth Potential

Six sectors stand out as priority opportunities for international companies in 2026:

Sector	Key signal
Defense and Aerospace	Defense spending exceeds 4.5% of GDP NATO's highest relative commitment
Manufacturing	€12B+ FDI driving nearshoring from Germany and Western Europe
Logistics and Infrastructure	36.4M sqm of modern warehouse stock as of Q3 2025 5th largest in Europe
MedTech and Healthcare	Rapid growth supported by substantial government healthcare funding through 2026
IT and Innovation	430K+ BPO/SSC jobs; Google and Microsoft data centres established in-country
Food and Consumer Goods	Consumer demand up 46% over the past decade; further 13% growth forecast by 2029

1.4 Core Takeaway

Poland is not an emerging market. It is a proven growth platform.

Since 1990, Poland has recorded the fastest GDP growth among OECD countries. The market is open, active, and growing across multiple sectors. But the companies that benefit most are not those watching from a distance through a distribution agreement.

They are the ones with a structured, active commercial presence on the ground. The following sections explain how to build that presence, without heavy investment, and without setting up a legal entity before you are ready.



SECTION 2

THE DISTRIBUTOR MODEL

STRENGTHS, LIMITS AND FIELD REALITIES

2.1 Why the Distributor Remains the Dominant Entry Point

For most international companies entering Poland, the distributor or importer is the first commercial structure they put in place, and for good reason.

The model delivers four immediate advantages:

Speed First sales within weeks, using an existing local client portfolio

Low investment No payroll, no office, no legal entity required

Flexibility Distributor agreements may take any form mutually beneficial to both parties

Market testing Validate product-market fit before committing to a fuller structure

The challenge begins when the distributor model becomes the permanent default rather than the starting point.

Source: U.S. Commercial Service, Poland Distribution and Sales Channels Guide, 2024

2.2 A Key Market Specificity: The Absence of Agents

In France, Germany, or Italy, the independent commercial agent is a common and accessible option - a local professional who develops your client portfolio on a commission basis, without the need to hire directly.

In Poland, this model is almost entirely absent. Polish trade partners most often serve their foreign counterparts as distributors, not agents. The independent agent profile, commission-based, multi-principal, commercially autonomous, is rare in the Polish market.

For international companies, this means the middle ground between a distributor relationship and direct employment does not exist in Poland the way it does elsewhere in Europe. The practical options are: rely on a distributor, hire directly, or put in place a structured local representation solution.

Source: U.S. Commercial Service, Poland Distribution and Sales Channels Guide, 2024; Valians International field experience



2.3 When the Model Starts Showing Its Limits

From our experience working with international companies across Poland and CEE, the following signals appear most consistently in the field:

"My sales are stagnating despite a strong product and a growing market."

A distributor managing multiple suppliers will prioritise what generates the fastest return, which may not be your product. Flat results in a growing market are almost always a structural problem, not a product problem.

"I have little visibility on what my distributor is actually doing."

Pipeline status, client contacts, pricing conversations - most foreign companies cannot access this information. The distributor's client relationships belong to the distributor, not to the exporting company.

"I cannot reach end customers or decision-makers directly."

Without direct relationships, pricing negotiations are opaque, technical feedback slows, and strategic account development is out of reach.

"Account development is weak or entirely absent."

Key account management requires a dedicated, aligned resource. A distributor handling dozens of product lines rarely has the bandwidth to develop any single supplier's accounts consistently.

"We cannot build a long-term commercial strategy."

Without a presence on the ground, the exporting company is always one step removed from market reality, and one step too slow to act on it.

2.4 The Core Diagnostic

Relying exclusively on a distributor means outsourcing not just sales execution, but commercial intelligence, client relationships, and control over your own market development. The distributor manages a portfolio. You need to grow a market. Over time, without a complementary presence on the ground, that gap becomes a ceiling.

The next section explains how to break through it!

SECTION 3

REGAINING COMMERCIAL CONTROL

WITHOUT CREATING A SUBSIDIARY

3.1 Why Local Presence Changes the Equation

The difference between a company that is present in Poland and one that operates from a distance is not subtle. It is structural.

Even a minimal local presence changes five things immediately:

- **Client proximity:** Meetings happen faster, relationships deepen, and Polish clients take the partnership more seriously when there is someone reachable on the ground.
- **Credibility:** A local address, a local phone number, and a local contact person signal long-term commitment, which matters significantly in Polish B2B culture.
- **Response time:** Local presence means market signals - competitor moves, client needs, distributor issues - are picked up and acted on in days, not weeks.
- **Direct market intelligence:** First-hand information replaces filtered reporting. You know what is actually happening in your market.
- **Brand perception:** Companies with a visible local presence are perceived as more serious, more reliable, and more committed than those operating exclusively through an intermediary.

None of this requires a subsidiary. It requires the right structure.

3.2 Local Presence Without a Legal Entity

The most common reason international companies delay building a local presence in Poland is the assumption that it requires creating a legal entity - a subsidiary, a branch office, a registered company. This assumption is incorrect, and it is costly.

Setting up a legal entity in Poland takes time, generates administrative obligations, and requires a level of commitment that is not always appropriate at the early or mid stages of market development.

The good news is that a meaningful commercial presence can be established without any of that. We have supported hundreds of companies in doing exactly this - deploying a local commercial resource, registering a business address, and activating the market directly, all without a subsidiary and often within weeks.

The legal entity comes later, when the commercial results justify it. Not before.



A meaningful commercial presence in Poland can be established without a legal entity - a local resource, a business address, and direct market activation, all deployable within weeks. The subsidiary comes later, when the results justify it.

3.3 The Three Commercial Levers to Activate

Based on our experience across 25 years in Poland and CEE, three levers consistently make the most difference for companies looking to regain commercial control:



Direct prospecting and structured lead generation

Rather than waiting for the distributor to bring opportunities, a local commercial resource actively identifies and contacts target accounts, builds a qualified pipeline, and generates meetings with the right decision-makers. This is the fastest way to regain visibility over your market potential.



Key account management and distributor activation

A local presence allows you to work alongside your distributor, attending client visits, supporting negotiations, and ensuring your product receives the attention it deserves. At the same time, key accounts can be managed directly, with the distributor handling fulfilment and logistics while you own the relationship.



Building a long-term commercial strategy

With a resource on the ground, it becomes possible to map the competitive landscape, identify priority segments, set realistic growth targets, and build a multi-year commercial plan anchored in real market conditions, not filtered through an intermediary.

3.4 Working With Your Distributor, Not Against Them

A local commercial presence is not a signal that the distributor relationship is ending. In most cases, it is what makes that relationship work properly for the first time.

The local resource activates the distributor - supporting client visits, generating leads, providing product training - while managing strategic accounts directly in parallel. The distributor remains a valuable partner for logistics and transactional sales. You own the relationships and the long-term strategy.



Local presence and distributor: better together

The local resource activates the distributor - product training, client visits, lead generation - while managing strategic accounts directly in parallel. The distributor handles logistics and transactional sales. You own the relationships and the strategy. Lean, effective, and scalable from day one.

SECTION 4

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

FOR BUILDING A LOCAL COMMERCIAL PRESENCE

4.1 Commercial Representation and Business Development Support

The most immediate and flexible solution. A part-time or shared commercial resource is deployed on the ground in Poland to handle prospecting, lead generation, client visits, and key account follow-up - on your behalf, under your direction.

This model is managed by Valians International, which handles the operational and administrative side, while the commercial resource works exclusively on your market development. Deliverables typically include a qualified prospect pipeline, regular activity reporting, and direct client meeting coordination.

Most appropriate for companies that have validated their product in Poland and are ready to accelerate, but are not yet at the stage of hiring a full-time employee.

4.2 Umbrella Company and Payroll Solutions

When a company is ready to hire a dedicated salesperson in Poland, the umbrella company model allows it to do so without creating a legal entity.

The salesperson is employed through Valians International's structure in Poland. All payroll, tax, and social security obligations are handled locally and in full compliance with Polish labour law. The hiring company manages the commercial activity and objectives. Valians manages the employment and administrative framework.

This model eliminates the need for a subsidiary while providing the stability and credibility of a genuine employment contract, for both the company and the employee.



4.3 Business Domiciliation

A registered business address in Poland is a simple but effective signal to Polish clients and partners that a company is serious about the market.

Valians International provides domiciliation services across its three Polish offices - Warsaw, Kraków, and Wrocław. The address can be used on business cards, email signatures, commercial documents, and official correspondence. For many Polish decision-makers, a local address is a basic marker of credibility and long-term commitment.

Low cost, fast to set up, and frequently the first step companies take before deploying a commercial resource.

4.4 Subsidiary Creation: When and Why

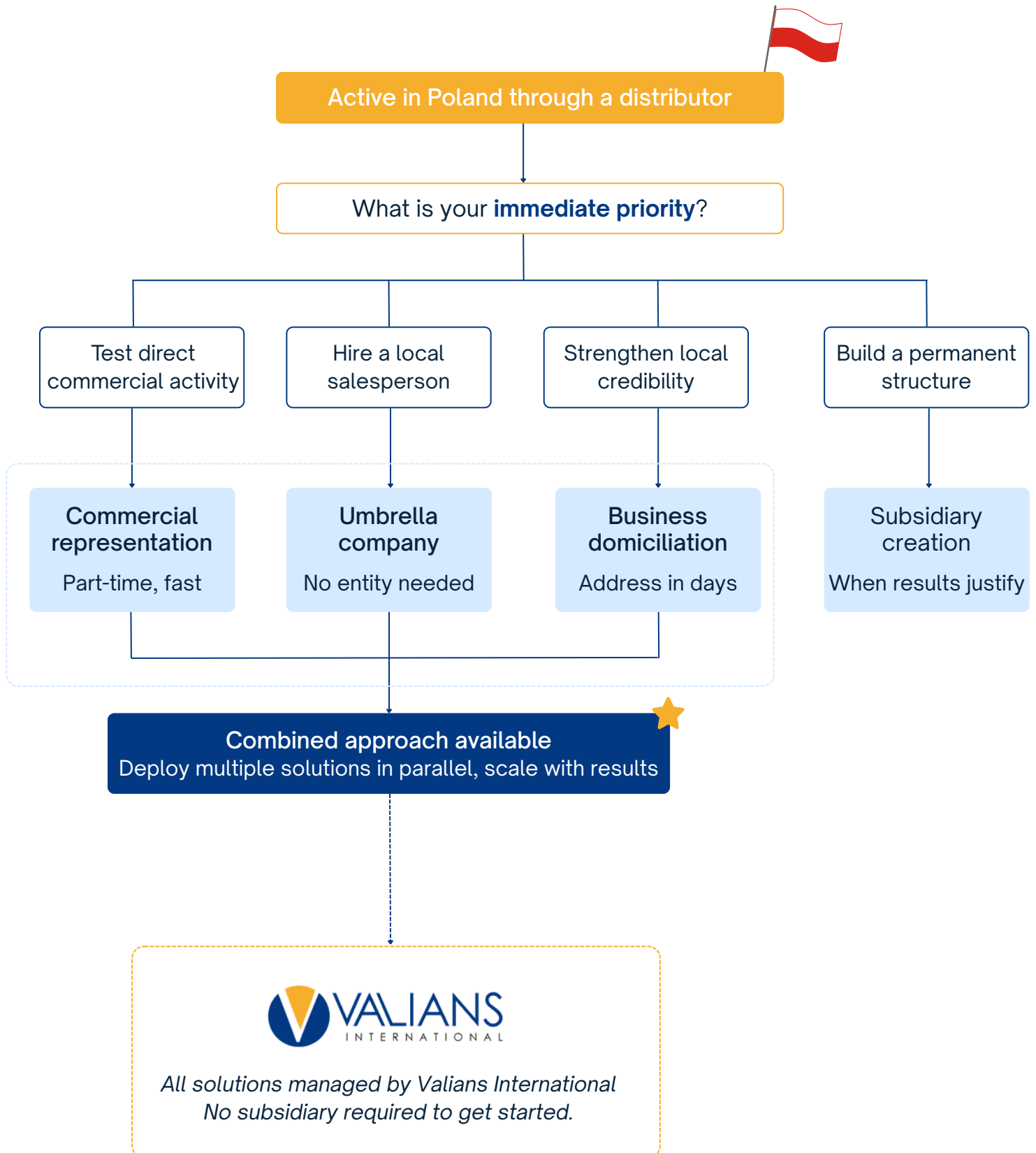
Creating a legal entity in Poland becomes the logical next step when commercial activity has reached a level that justifies a permanent, autonomous structure.

The threshold varies by company, but three signals typically indicate readiness: sustained sales volume that generates a clear return on the administrative investment, a local team of two or more people requiring direct employment contracts, and a strategic decision to treat Poland as a long-term operational base rather than an export market.

The subsidiary is the destination, not the starting point. The solutions above are designed to get you there with results already behind you.



4.5 Decision Framework: Which Solution Fits Your Stage



SECTION 5

REAL STORIES

FROM STAGNATION TO
TRIPLED SALES IN THREE YEARS

First Story

Building a commercial presence from the ground up

THE COMPANY

Acnis International is a French leader in high-performance material storage and distribution - titanium, specialty metals in bar, sheet, and powder form - serving the aerospace, defense, medical, dental, and industrial sectors. Over 80 employees across four continents.



THE STARTING POINT

Despite a long time of international activity, Acnis had around 12 clients and a handful of prospects in Poland. Language barriers and cultural differences had consistently blocked meaningful market development. The potential was clearly there - Poland's aerospace, medical, and dental sectors were growing - but they had no effective way to reach it.

WHAT WE DEPLOYED

- Advisory to move away from an agent model toward structured commercial representation
- Delivery of a part-time Project manager for dedicated lead generation and client outreach
- Polish address domiciliation to strengthen brand credibility locally
- Market analysis including identification and segmentation of key accounts, competitive environment mapping
- Regular outreach to prospects via phone, email, LinkedIn, and industry events
- Organisation of trade missions and B2B meetings in Poland, including MSPO Kielce and sector-specific trade shows
- Coordination, follow-up, and regular reporting throughout

RESULTS - WITHIN TWO YEARS

+250

potential clients identified and contacted

5

trade missions organized - approximately 50 client meetings held

New client acquisition

and expansion of sales with existing accounts

Sales revenue

multiplied by three

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Following these results, Acnis hired a full-time sales representative in Poland through Valians' payroll management services, employed under Polish law, administratively managed by Valians. The model was subsequently replicated in Hungary.

The same approach, scaled - from a part-time resource to a full-time hire, from Poland to a neighbouring market.

Second Story

Reactivating a stagnant distributor relationship

THE COMPANY

An international company producing residential heating solutions, well-established in the Polish market through a long-standing local distributor.



THE STARTING POINT

The brand was known in Poland, that was not the problem. The problem was that the distributor, who had been instrumental in building initial brand awareness, had become progressively less proactive over time. Sales had declined over several years. The commercial relationship had stalled, and the client had no direct visibility on what was happening in the market or why.

WHAT WE DEPLOYED

- Assessment of the current situation and full audit of the local distributor
- Proposal of a strategic plan and hands-on support in its implementation
- Website redesign, including digital strategy and communication improvements
- Marketing and communication support to rebuild brand visibility in the market
- Recruitment of an in-house sales representative to approach the market directly and expand the distribution network
- Ongoing coordination of commercial activities

THE KEY LESSONS

This case illustrates a situation many international companies find themselves in: not a market that has stopped working, but a commercial structure that has stopped performing.

The solution was not to abandon the distributor. **It was to audit the situation, build a complementary structure around it, and gradually restore direct commercial momentum.**

Two different starting points. Two different industries.

One consistent approach: **assess the real situation, deploy the right structure, and build results progressively - without waiting for a subsidiary to justify the investment.**

ABOUT VALIANS INTERNATIONAL

WHO WE ARE

A trusted partner for the development of your business in Eastern Europe

VALIANS International is a consulting and operational support company specialising in **Eastern European markets**.



Based on a strong service ethos and a results-oriented culture, our team assists you at each stage of your development on Eastern European markets with tailored solutions.

Eastern Europe is our business!

The **VALIANS International** head office is located in **Krakow** (Poland), right in the heart of Eastern Europe. We also have offices and business centres in Warsaw, Gdańsk.

With **more than 40 multilingual consultants** implementing our quality control procedures in **over 18 countries**, we are able to coordinate projects across multiple countries simultaneously and provide global, and always personalised, operational support.

+20

years experience in Market Expansion in Eastern Europe

+30

accreditations as international business experts

+40

project managers in 18 countries

+100

clients supported every year



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