



Going Global with Gift Cards: A Practical Guide for Brand Leaders

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The global gift card market is growing fast. Worth around USD 1.24 trillion in 2025, it's projected to hit approximately USD 3.81 trillion by 2034 (Precedence Research, 2025). Asia's digital channels are expanding rapidly, Latin America's payment infrastructure is maturing, and Europe already has solid systems in place.

Retailers and digital brands are finding that gift cards open up new revenue streams, bring in customers, and solve real payment challenges in international markets. Still, plenty of gift card leaders hesitate—wondering if their program is ready, which markets make sense first, or how to deal with varying regulations and local consumer habits.

The reality: global expansion is doable when you approach it thoughtfully. Here's what gift card program managers should know.

Five Signs Your Program Is Ready to Go Global

Before you commit time and budget to an international launch, make sure you have the foundation in place.

Start with a healthy domestic program. If sales are strong and operations are stable at home, you're in a better position to expand. Struggling programs rarely fix themselves by crossing borders. Your processes and technology need to scale and adapt, even if they require tweaks for market-specific differences.

You already have business traction in your target markets. Gift cards work best where customers already know you. Most successful international programs build on existing e-commerce or retail presence and add gift cards on top of that. Trying to use gift cards to break into completely new markets is difficult and often doesn't work.

Your internal teams can support localization. Legal, finance, customer service, and product teams need bandwidth to handle new currencies, languages, tax rules, and settlement flows. If that support isn't there, you're not ready yet.

Your budget covers more than a simple launch. Going global means funding card production, technical integration, ongoing marketing, and—in many markets—consumer education. Cards that sit on shelves without marketing support consistently underperform.

Leadership sees this as a regulated financial product, not just marketing. When you position international gift cards as both a regulatory and compliance project from the start, you get faster buy-in from risk, tax, and legal teams, and you set realistic expectations across the organization.

Clarify Your "Why" Before You Launch

Four reasons typically drive international gift card expansion: solving a payment problem (especially where cash is common), acquiring customers, growing incremental revenue, and building brand awareness. Being clear about your primary goal shapes everything—from which channels you use to how you structure partner agreements to which KPIs you track.

In Latin America, many digital brands use gift cards primarily as a payment method. Credit card penetration is low, so consumers prefer loading value at retail with cash. In Europe, launches tend to focus more on revenue growth and brand awareness. Europe's gift card market was valued at USD 195.7 billion in 2024 and is expected to expand at a 12.4% compound annual growth rate, with Germany, the UK, and France leading adoption thanks to strong financial infrastructure and high consumer spending (OpenPR, 2025).

Choosing the Right Markets

Use a straightforward three-part framework to prioritize expansion: Where is your business already strong? Where does an established gift card or prepaid market exist? And where is regulation relatively manageable?

After the first 20 or 30 markets that make obvious sense, the business case becomes more strategic and timelines get longer. Markets like the UK and Australia tend to move quickly. Brazil, India, and Japan require more upfront work because of local issuer requirements, escrow rules, and tax complexity. Start with a handful of priority markets, build strong relationships with committed partners, and expand step by step.

Regional Realities: Europe, APAC, and Latin America

Each region has its own characteristics. Europe offers mature infrastructure and relatively straightforward regulation focused on product classification and expiration—without the US burden of ongoing escheatment compliance. However, consumers there often prefer experience-based cards (travel, dining, spa) over straight retail.

Asia-Pacific is growing fast but highly fragmented. Australia permits easy foreign issuance. Japan and India require local entities and escrow accounts. Consumer adoption is strong, especially among younger, mobile-first users, though gift cards historically carried a cultural perception of being impersonal—a view that's shifting as practical and digital cards become more popular.

Latin America is smaller but growing quickly, with complex tax and remittance rules in markets like Brazil (where withholding taxes can hit 35 percent without a local entity). But the opportunity is real: in some sectors, gift cards function primarily as a payment method, not just a nice-to-have.

The Path Forward

Global expansion isn't a sprint. Successful brands invest in local expertise, conduct consumer research, and work with regional partners and industry organizations to understand language, product design, and channel strategy. They treat international gift cards as a regulated financial initiative that respects local rules, infrastructure, and culture—not as a simple copy-paste of their domestic program.

For gift card executives ready to take this step, the message is straightforward: the global opportunity is real, but the path forward requires clear strategic intent, realistic planning, and genuine commitment to understanding what each market needs.

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