BER by The Nordics AS

Expansion Readiness Checklist

For new store openings, market entries, relocations, and major commercial expansion projects

Are we opening a business that is ready to perform,
or opening a project that merely reached its deadline?
That distinction is where most expansion risk hides.

Baseline Expansion Readiness · thenordics.co

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Introduction

Most expansion projects fail for the same reason. Not because the market was wrong or the concept was weak. Because the organisation was not ready when the doors opened – and nobody had a rigorous method for knowing that in advance.

Investment cases get approved. Locations get signed. Construction gets finished. And then, somewhere in the gap between project completion and commercial performance, the real problems surface: leadership teams not yet aligned, operating models not yet defined, customer journeys not yet tested, financial assumptions not stress-tested against reality.

This checklist exists to close that gap.

It covers 14 readiness dimensions that any organisation should be able to answer before committing to execution – and before declaring a new unit ready to open. It is structured around the questions that experienced expansion leaders ask, and the red flags that signal when a project is moving faster than the organisation behind it.

It is not a project checklist. It is a readiness diagnostic.

The difference matters. A project checklist tracks whether tasks are complete. A readiness diagnostic assesses whether the business is prepared to perform. Completion and readiness are not the same thing.

> **Purpose**
> Reduce the risk of flawed investment decisions, delayed openings, cost overruns, weak operational build-up, and poor first-year performance.
> *Use it before committing to execution. Use it again before opening. Use it during the first 90 days.*

01 Strategic Fit

Core question *Does this expansion clearly support the company's strategic direction?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Strategic rationale	The reason for expansion is clearly defined.
Market role	The unit's role in the wider market is understood: flagship, convenience, growth, defensive, test format, brand presence, profitability engine, etc.
Customer need	There is a validated customer problem or demand gap.
Format logic	The proposed format fits the market, location, customer behavior, and business objective.
Cannibalization	Impact on existing stores, online sales, and partners has been assessed.
Success definition	Clear commercial, operational, customer, people, and financial success metrics exist.
Executive alignment	Leadership agrees on why this expansion matters and what success looks like.

Red flags

- Expansion is driven mainly by opportunity, ego, competitor pressure, or real estate availability.
- The project has revenue targets but no clear strategic role.
- Leadership uses broad statements like "growth market" without evidence.

02 Market and Customer Readiness

Core question *Is there enough verified demand to justify the investment?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Market size	Addressable market is quantified.
Customer segments	Priority customer groups are clearly defined.
Demand evidence	Demand is supported by data, not only assumptions.
Urban/suburban behavior	Customer habits are understood for the specific location type.
Traffic drivers	Key reasons customers will visit are identified.
Frequency logic	Expected visit frequency is realistic.
Basket behavior	Expected average order value, product mix, and service needs are modeled.
B2B opportunity	Business customer potential is assessed where relevant.
Local competition	Competitor presence, positioning, pricing, and customer perception are mapped.
Digital behavior	Online search, ecommerce demand, social signals, and delivery expectations are reviewed.

Red flags

- “High footfall” is treated as proof of demand.
- The customer profile is generic.
- The market study does not explain why customers would choose this concept over existing alternatives.

03 Investment Case Quality

Core question *Is the investment request built on reliable assumptions?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Revenue assumptions	Sales forecast is supported by comparable benchmarks and local data.
Cost assumptions	Rent, payroll, logistics, utilities, marketing, construction, and technology costs are complete.
Margin assumptions	Gross margin and operating margin are realistic for the format.
Ramp-up curve	Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 performance expectations are staged realistically.
Sensitivity analysis	Best case, base case, and downside case are modeled.
Break-even point	Break-even timeline is clear.
Capital expenditure	Capex is detailed, validated, and stress-tested.
Working capital	Inventory, staffing, and pre-opening costs are included.
Risk buffer	Contingency is included for delays, inflation, permitting, and project changes.
Accountability	Owners of key assumptions are named.

Red flags

- The investment case depends on optimistic sales from day one.
- Cost inflation, delays, and recruitment challenges are not modeled.
- The business case assumes operational excellence before the organisation exists.

04 Site and Real Estate Readiness

Core question *Does the site support the commercial and operational model?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Location logic	Site selection is linked to target customers and strategic role.
Accessibility	Public transport, car access, pedestrian flows, cycling, delivery access, and accessibility needs are assessed.
Visibility	Signage, storefront exposure, entrance logic, and customer wayfinding are reviewed.
Rent sustainability	Rent level is viable against expected sales density and margin.
Lease flexibility	Lease terms, exit options, escalation clauses, and landlord obligations are understood.
Building condition	Technical conditions, utilities, loading areas, fire safety, HVAC, and compliance are validated.
Operational constraints	Storage, delivery, waste handling, customer returns, staff areas, and back-of-house flow are assessed.
Permitting	Required permits and approval timelines are mapped.

Readiness Area	Checklist
Construction risk	Fit-out complexity and landlord dependencies are understood.
Future flexibility	Site can adapt to volume, format changes, or service expansion.

Red flags

- The site is commercially attractive but operationally weak.
- Rent pressure forces a product mix or staffing model that damages the customer experience.
- Permitting and construction dependencies are vague.

05 Commercial Model Readiness

Core question *Is the commercial offer sharp enough for the market and format?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Range strategy	Product/service range fits local demand, space constraints, and profitability targets.
Price position	Pricing is competitive and locally relevant.
Top sellers	High-demand items and hero categories are prioritized.
Local adaptation	Local needs, culture, climate, home sizes, business habits, and income levels are reflected.
Service model	Delivery, pickup, returns, planning, installation, financing, and after-sales services are defined.
B2B model	Business customers have a clear offer, sales process, and ownership model.
Campaign plan	Opening campaigns and first-year commercial calendar are prepared.
Digital integration	Website, app, local landing pages, SEO, maps, and ecommerce flows are ready.
Conversion logic	Customer journey is designed to convert traffic into sales.
Sales productivity	Expected sales per square meter, per coworker, and per hour are modeled.

Red flags

- The range is copied from another market without local validation.
- The store depends on traffic but lacks a conversion strategy.
- B2B is mentioned as an opportunity but has no owner, pipeline, or offer.

06 Operational Readiness

Core question *Can the unit run effectively from day one?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Operating model	Day-to-day operating model is defined.
Opening hours	Hours match customer behavior and labor economics.
Staffing model	Staffing levels are based on traffic, service needs, and workload.
Process design	Sales, replenishment, cash handling, returns, customer service, delivery, and escalation processes are documented.
Supply chain	Inbound flow, lead times, stock availability, and replenishment rhythm are validated.
Inventory readiness	Opening stock levels and safety stock are calculated.
Last-mile readiness	Delivery capacity, partners, customer promises, and failure handling are tested.
IT systems	POS, payment, CRM, workforce planning, ecommerce, inventory, and reporting systems are ready.

Readiness Area	Checklist
Facilities	Security, cleaning, maintenance, waste, energy, and emergency routines are in place.
Operational testing	End-to-end process testing has been completed before opening.

Red flags

- Opening readiness is measured by construction completion, not operational capability.
- Workarounds are normalised before launch.
- Customer promises are stronger than supply chain capacity.

07 Organisational Readiness

Core question *Is the organisation built before the business opens?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Leadership team	Key leaders are hired, onboarded, and aligned.
Role clarity	Responsibilities are clear across project, commercial, operations, HR, finance, and country leadership.
Recruitment plan	Hiring timeline, sourcing channels, and critical roles are defined.
Training plan	Training is practical, role-specific, and completed before opening.
Culture build-up	Values, leadership behaviors, communication rhythm, and team norms are established.
Decision rights	Local vs central decision-making authority is clear.
Meeting structure	Daily, weekly, and monthly operating rhythms are prepared.
Escalation paths	Issues can be escalated quickly during launch and stabilisation.
Change readiness	The organisation understands what will be difficult and how to respond.
Retention risk	Early turnover risks are assessed and mitigated.

Red flags

- The team is hired late.
- Leaders are still learning the business during opening.
- Training focuses on systems but not customer situations, problem-solving, and leadership under pressure.

08 Project Execution Readiness

Core question *Is the project governed tightly enough to avoid delay, drift, and hidden risk?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Project governance	Steering structure, decision forums, and escalation rules are defined.
Timeline	Critical path is realistic and dependency-based.
Milestones	Key milestones are measurable and owned.
Risk register	Risks are visible, updated, and actively managed.
Vendor management	External partners, contractors, and suppliers have clear deliverables.
Budget control	Cost tracking and change-order discipline are in place.
Communication	Project communication rhythm is clear across all stakeholders.
Dependency map	Permits, construction, systems, recruitment, training, stock, and launch activities are linked.
Readiness gates	Formal go/no-go gates exist before major commitments.

Readiness Area	Checklist
Executive visibility	Leadership receives honest status, not polished optimism.

Red flags

- The project plan shows dates but not dependencies.
- Risks are described but not owned.
- Bad news is softened until it becomes expensive.

09 Financial and Performance Readiness

Core question *Can performance be measured, explained, and corrected quickly?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
KPI framework	KPIs are defined before opening.
Daily dashboard	Sales, traffic, conversion, average ticket, stock availability, labor cost, customer issues, and service levels are visible.
Financial ownership	P&L ownership is clear.
Cost control	Labor, rent, logistics, marketing, and operating costs are tracked from day one.
Productivity model	Sales productivity and coworker productivity targets are realistic.
Forecasting rhythm	Forecasts are updated regularly based on actual performance.
Variance analysis	Underperformance can be explained by cause, not only reported as a number.
Corrective actions	Actions are assigned when KPIs deviate.
First-year targets	Targets are staged by launch, stabilisation, and growth phase.
Executive review	Leadership reviews focus on decisions, not reporting theater.

Red flags

- KPIs are defined after launch.
- Store performance is judged too early or too late.
- The organisation sees symptoms but not root causes.

10 Customer Experience Readiness

Core question *Will the customer experience work under real opening pressure?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Customer journey	Full customer journey is mapped from discovery to purchase to after-sales.
Store navigation	Layout, signage, product discovery, service points, and checkout flow are tested.
Digital journey	Website, maps, local search, booking, payment, and customer communication are ready.
Service standards	Customer service expectations are clear and trained.
Complaint handling	Escalation process for complaints and service failures is ready.
Opening pressure	Peak traffic scenarios are tested.
Accessibility	Physical and digital accessibility are considered.
Customer feedback	Feedback channels are active from day one.
Local trust	Brand promises are realistic and culturally appropriate.
Recovery process	The team knows how to recover when something goes wrong.

Red flags

- Customer journey looks good in a slide deck but has not been tested physically.
- Peak opening traffic is treated as marketing success instead of operational stress.
- Complaint handling depends on individual heroics.

11 Marketing and Launch Readiness

Core question *Is the launch designed to create demand without overwhelming the operation?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Launch strategy	Launch objectives are clear: awareness, traffic, membership, sales, B2B leads, brand positioning, etc.
Audience targeting	Priority customer groups are defined.
Local marketing	Local channels, partnerships, PR, influencers, community, and paid media are planned.
SEO and maps	Google Business Profile, local search, store pages, and map visibility are ready.
Opening campaign	Campaign message is specific, relevant, and commercially strong.
Lead capture	Customer data, sign-ups, B2B leads, and membership flows are prepared.
Traffic control	Opening traffic scenarios and crowd control are planned.
Internal launch	Coworkers understand the launch message and offer.
Post-launch plan	Marketing does not stop after opening week.
Measurement	Campaign performance is tracked against traffic, conversion, sales, and customer acquisition.

Red flags

- Launch creates attention but not profitable demand.
- Marketing overpromises before operations are stable.
- No plan exists for weeks 2–12 after opening.

12 Risk and Compliance Readiness

Core question *Are material risks known, owned, and mitigated?*

Readiness Area	Checklist
Legal compliance	Licenses, permits, contracts, labor laws, safety regulations, and data protection are reviewed.
Health and safety	Emergency plans, evacuation, workplace safety, and incident routines are ready.
Security	Theft, fraud, cyber, cash handling, and physical security risks are assessed.
Labor risk	Hiring, scheduling, contracts, union/labor context, and retention risks are understood.
Reputation risk	Local sensitivities, community reaction, and media risks are considered.
Supply risk	Vendor and logistics failure scenarios are prepared.
Financial risk	Downside scenarios have mitigation plans.
Operational risk	Key failure points are identified and tested.
Crisis response	Crisis roles and communication channels are defined.

Readiness Area	Checklist
Insurance	Required insurance coverage is confirmed.

Red flags

- Risk management is treated as a compliance document.
- Risk owners are unclear.
- The project has no realistic downside plan.

13 Go/No-Go Readiness Gates

Core question *Should the project proceed, pause, or be corrected before launch?*

Proceed only if – Gate 1: Investment Approval Readiness

- Strategic rationale is clear.
- Demand evidence is credible.
- Site assumptions are validated.
- Financial model includes downside scenarios.
- Capex and operating costs are realistic.
- Executive alignment exists.
- Major risks are visible.

Proceed only if – Gate 2: Execution Readiness

- Project governance is active.
- Timeline and dependencies are realistic.
- Permitting and construction risks are controlled.
- Leadership hiring is on track.
- Operating model is defined.
- Vendor responsibilities are clear.
- Budget control is active.

Proceed only if – Gate 3: Pre-Opening Readiness

- Store/site is physically ready.
- Systems are tested.
- Staff are trained.
- Stock is available.
- Customer journey is tested.
- Marketing is ready.
- Emergency and service failure routines are in place.
- Opening week operating plan is complete.

Proceed only if – Gate 4: Stabilisation Readiness

- Daily KPI rhythm is working.
- Customer feedback is captured.
- Operational issues are tracked and resolved.
- Leadership routines are functioning.
- Financial performance is reviewed weekly.
- Corrective actions are owned.
- First 30/60/90-day plan is active.

14 First 90 Days After Opening

Core question *Is the business stabilising, learning, and improving fast enough?*

Timeline	Focus
Day 1–7	Safety, customer flow, service recovery, stock availability, system stability, leadership presence.
Day 8–30	Conversion, staffing accuracy, customer feedback, operational bottlenecks, campaign performance.
Day 31–60	Cost control, productivity, range performance, B2B pipeline, repeat visits, process correction.
Day 61–90	P&L trajectory, organisation stability, customer retention, strategic fit validation, corrective investment needs.

90-day review questions

- Are customers behaving as expected?
- Are sales coming from the expected categories and channels?
- Is the staffing model correct?
- Are operational costs under control?
- Are service promises being kept?
- Is the team stable and confident?
- Are early results confirming or challenging the investment case?
- What must be changed before scaling further?

From Checklist to Decision Assurance

This checklist tells you what to examine. It does not tell you how ready you actually are.

There is a meaningful difference between reviewing a list and completing a structured diagnostic. Completing a list confirms that someone has thought about the right questions. A diagnostic tells you – with precision – where the gaps are, how serious they are, and what needs to be resolved before you commit to the next phase of execution.

That is what BER does.

Baseline Expansion Readiness (BER) is a structured consulting framework built on 18 years of senior retail leadership experience – including a documented small-format store turnaround with measurable results across productivity, revenue, and organisation. It applies a T−180 to T+90 phase discipline across seven readiness pillars: Competence, Leadership, Operations, Commercial, Marketing, Governance, and Financials.

BER is not a scoring exercise. It is a decision assurance process. It identifies where your investment case is built on solid ground and where it is built on assumption. It names the gaps. It quantifies the risk. And it tells you what to do about it – before the unit opens, not after it starts underperforming.

One of the most expensive expansion mistakes is not choosing the wrong location or the wrong format. It is proceeding with the right location and the right format before the organisation is ready to operate it. BER is designed to prevent exactly that.

Request a BER assessment

If you are preparing to open a new unit, enter a new market, or validate an expansion investment case, BER gives you an honest, structured view of where you stand – and what to do next.

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