

From the Amazon to the World? The Challenge of Top Amazon in the Face of Internationalization

Lucas Baesso and Ariane Cristine Roder Figueira

The COPPEAD Graduate School of Business at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Eduardo Russo

Rio Grande College of Business, Sul Ross State University, USA

Abstract. This case examines the core challenge at the heart of Top Amazon Cosmetics, a female-founded Brazilian SME that has gained acclaim for turning traceable Amazonian ingredients into premium, socially responsible haircare products while explicitly committing to local community benefits and gender-inclusive employment. Participation in Brazil's *Elas Exportam* program catalyzed learning while exposing export-readiness constraints, including production capacity limits, costly certification and logistics, and fragile cash flows. These pressures push Top Amazon, known for ingredient traceability and environmental stewardship, to balance growth with preserving product authenticity and social commitments. Unsolicited foreign interest and the export program together place the founder at a decisive and time-sensitive crossroads. The case invites students to evaluate competing priorities, namely growth versus stewardship and short-term revenue versus long-term social commitments, and to design an internationalization path that preserves the firm's mission. Designed for undergraduate and graduate courses in international business and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: SME internationalization, export readiness, effectuation and causation, sustainable entrepreneurship, emerging markets.

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1. Introduction

By February 2025, Top Amazon faced a pivotal strategic decision triggered by events that unfolded a few months earlier. In November 2024, the company's founder and CEO, Eusa Marques, participated in an export-promotion fair in São Paulo. *This shortened version of the article is for promotional purposes on publicly accessible databases.*

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Paulo, Brazil's main business hub, as part of the *Elas Exportam* (Women Export) program. Launched in 2023, the program provides technical support to women-led firms seeking to enter foreign markets. During the preparation process, Eusa worked closely with José Barros, a consultant at the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (Apex Brasil), who helped prepare the firm to begin exporting.

At the fair, Eusa presented Top Amazon's full hair-care portfolio, highlighting its best-selling product, *Regenere Cupuaçu* (Exhibit 1). She approached the event cautiously, viewing it primarily as an opportunity to learn and gauge international demand rather than to secure immediate deals. The market response, however, exceeded expectations. Importers from Colombia and Poland expressed concrete interest and requested follow-up conversations.

After the presentation, Anna Novak, a Polish importer, approached Eusa and asked, *"How much and how quickly can you deliver? This fusion of innovation, sustainability and forest is exactly what we are looking for in Europe right now. We need 50,000 bottles, and we are prepared to agree on a clear delivery timeline and payment terms so we can move forward promptly."* Shortly afterwards, Catalina Gómez, a Colombian importer, told Eusa, *"I see strong potential for these products across Latin America. We would be interested in 10,000 bottles to start, and we can connect you with regional distributors to scale volumes if the initial launch proves successful."*

For Eusa, the initial excitement quickly gave way to unease. *"When I heard those words, I froze,"* she recalled. *"I asked for four weeks to run a feasibility study and develop a plan. At that point a thousand questions ran through my mind."* She remembered that scaling production was far from straightforward for a company based in Rondônia. *"If we were having difficulty distributing to Brazil's Southeast, imagine other countries. But I love challenges — if others are doing it, why can't Top Amazon too?"* What unsettled Eusa was not the interest itself, but the fact that responding to it would require very different ways of operating beyond Brazil.

Eusa's forward-looking attitude had already driven Top Amazon to expand geographically. In 2022, the firm began distributing in the state of São Paulo, Brazil's largest and most economically dynamic market. The move confirmed the brand's appeal in larger markets but also exposed the operational strain of serving customers more than 2,200 kilometers from its Amazon-based production hub. Further expansion inside Brazil remained possible but increasingly complex, offering closer access to bigger consumer markets and a practical test bed for scaling capacity while simultaneously raising supply-chain challenges and costs.

Top Amazon's limited operational capabilities, including production of about 100 bottles per day in a 165 m² facility, a weekday-only team operating approximately 300 days per year, and tight financial resources, meant that any strategic choice entailed substantial compromises. Pursuing Europe promised scale and higher margins but would require costly certifications, complex