MARKET ENTRY BRIEFING

BUILDING AN OPERATIONAL BUSINESS IN INDIA



How to Move from Market Entry to a Working Business, Quickly and Efficiently



Article 8 of the Doing Business in India series.
September 2026

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GUIDE STRUCTURE

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From Market Entry to Operations

Across this series, we have worked through the major decisions involved in entering India: structure, incorporation, registrations, tax, recruitment and employment.

This final edition is about execution.

FIVE QUESTIONS MATTER NOW

01 How can you shorten the path to operations?

02 Which local partners do you actually need?

03 How should you choose legal, accounting, HR and payroll support?

04 Should you start with flexible workspace or a dedicated office?

05 What should realistically happen in the first 90 days?

THE OBJECTIVE

The objective is not to create the perfect India organisation on Day One.

It is to create an operation that can hire, transact, pay, report and make decisions without repeatedly waiting for the next missing piece.

01 Incorporated Does Not Mean Operational

The company exists. But then the first real events arrive.



And suddenly five previously separate workstreams have to connect.

Consider the first employee. The candidate is ready. But:

- Who employs them?
- Is payroll ready?
- Is the CTC approved?
- Who signs the employment contract?
- Can the company actually pay them?

Recruitment may have moved quickly. The operation did not. The same can happen with capital, customers and vendors.

The final mile of market entry is not incorporation.

It is getting the first operating cycles to work.

02 How Do You Speed Up Market Entry?

One of the easiest ways to lose time is to treat market entry as a linear process:
Step 1 → finish → Step 2 → finish → Step 3.
Some dependencies genuinely require that sequence. Many do not.

WHAT CAN START EARLIER?

Don't wait for...	Start this earlier
Incorporation to finish	Bank selection and KYC preparation
Entity to become fully operational	Priority recruitment
Employee joining date	Payroll and onboarding setup
First customer	India contract/tax workflow
Office requirement to become urgent	Address-document review
First transaction	Accounting and reporting setup

FIVE WAYS TO SHORTEN THE CRITICAL PATH

01 Control foreign documents once

Create one India KYC/Corporate Pack containing parent-company records, ownership structure, UBO information, directors/signatories, addresses and corporate authorities. Give one person at headquarters ownership of it.

> **Three advisers working from three versions creates avoidable rework.**

02 Prepare banking while incorporation is moving

The account cannot be activated before the entity exists. The preparation can.

Prepare ownership, UBOs, signatories, source of funds, expected flows and cross-border transaction profile.

> **Choose the bank for the business you intend to operate, not simply for account-opening convenience.**

03 Decide the employment route before the offer

Before the preferred candidate reaches offer stage, know:

- Who employs them?
- What is the approved CTC?
- Who signs the employment contract?
- When will payroll be ready?
- Is an interim EOR route genuinely required?

India's employee notice periods provide useful setup time.
Use it for implementation, not for deciding the operating model.

04 Check the address before signing the office

For flexible or managed premises, request the actual documentation available for registered-office use, GST/address use where applicable, NOC/consent, ownership evidence and utility evidence.

Do this before the commercial agreement is final.

05 Appoint recurring providers before the first transaction

Do not wait for the first salary to appoint payroll, the first invoice to appoint accounting, or the first payment to define approvals.

Set the process before the transaction creates urgency.

03 Where Speed Is Really Lost

Most delays are hand-off problems. The work itself is not always slow. The next person simply did not receive what they needed.

What happens	What actually went wrong	Better approach
Bank KYC starts late	Bank chosen after incorporation	Shortlist bank during setup
Same documents requested repeatedly	No controlled document pack	One HQ owner and one version
Capital arrives but next actions unclear	Post-remittance process not mapped	Agree sequence before funds move
Candidate selected but cannot join	Employer/payroll not ready	Confirm route before offer
Office cannot support registration	Address checked too late	Review documents before signing
Month-end becomes reconstruction	Accountant appointed after transactions	Configure accounting before launch

ONE QUESTION EXPOSES MOST AVOIDABLE DELAY

"What exactly are we waiting for?"

If it is a regulatory dependency, plan around it.

If it is a missing internal decision, escalate it.

If it is a document sitting at headquarters, assign ownership.

If it is simply 'we planned to do that next', ask whether it can start now.

Speed in India is often less about making the statutory process faster and more about removing the waiting time around it.

04 | Which Local Partners Do You Actually Need?

A foreign company does not automatically need a large ecosystem of advisers. It needs the **smallest capable team** that covers its actual operating dependencies.

USUALLY NEEDED EARLY — THE CORE TEAM TO GET YOU OPERATIONAL

Partner	Why They Matter
Lead India coordinator	Connects workstreams, owners and deadlines.
Company Secretary / corporate adviser	Corporate actions, governance and MCA matters.
CA / tax & accounting adviser	Accounting, GST/TDS, tax and HQ reporting.
Bank / AD bank	Banking, funding and cross-border transactions.
Payroll / HR support	Required before employees begin joining.

ADD WHEN THE BUSINESS REQUIRES IT — DEPENDS ON YOUR MODEL, SECTOR AND SCALE

Commercial lawyer
Material contracts or specialist legal issues.

Recruitment firm
Difficult/senior hiring or insufficient internal sourcing.

Customs/import adviser
Goods-based operations.

Sector specialist
Regulated products or industries.

Real-estate adviser
Significant office, warehouse or industrial search.

IT/security support
Local systems, data or security requirements.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Do not appoint eight providers because eight categories exist. Appoint the providers your first operating cycles actually require.

ONE COORDINATOR. MULTIPLE SPECIALISTS.

The company secretary may not own payroll. The payroll provider may not own accounting. The bank will not manage your FEMA/corporate reporting calendar.

What matters is that someone owns the hand-offs.

The launch coordinator should maintain one view:

TASK → OWNER → DEPENDENCY → DEADLINE → ESCALATION

The coordinator does not need to perform every service. They need to know when one provider's output becomes another provider's input.

05 How Should You Choose Your Support Providers?

Brand, references and fees matter. But for an early India operation, one question matters more:

"Can this provider show us exactly how our first real process will work?"

ACCOUNTING & TAX

Ask: "Show us our first month-end."

A credible provider should explain how the process works from documents to reporting.

Documents received → Transaction review → GST/TDS treatment → Bank reconciliation → Payroll / intercompany entries → Close → P&L + balance sheet → Tax position → HQ reporting

Also ask:

- Which accounting software holds our books?
- Who reviews GST/TDS?
- What does HQ receive monthly?
- What is included in the fee versus billed separately?

PAYROLL

Ask the provider to map the end-to-end process.

Employee inputs → Validation → Payroll register → Approval → Bank file → TDS/statutory contributions → Payslips → Accounting entry → Employee queries

Key point: The provider should not only calculate salaries, but also explain who owns the steps immediately before and after payroll.

LEGAL SUPPORT

Give the adviser a real transaction: a likely customer agreement, an intercompany services agreement, or an employment contract.

Ask:

- What requires India-specific adaptation?
- What would you change and why?
- Does anything need tax/FEMA input?
- Who coordinates that input?

Watch for: A global contract called "India-ready" after only changing the governing-law and jurisdiction clauses.

HR SUPPORT

For the first few employees, distinguish HR administration from a full HR function.

An early operation may need onboarding, employee records, leave/attendance administration, basic policies, joining and exit processes, and payroll coordination, but may not need a large outsourced HR retainer.

Ask:

- What do we need at 5 employees?
- What changes at 20?
- Which services can be added later?

Watch for: A three-person India team sold an HR infrastructure designed for 100 people.

THREE QUESTIONS ACROSS EVERY PROVIDER

01 Who owns it?
Not which firm.
Which person or team?

02 What exactly is included?
"Accounting", "payroll" and "legal support" can mean very different things between proposals.

03 What happens at the hand-off?
If one provider's output is needed by another, who sends it, when, in what format, and who checks it?
That is where operating gaps usually appear.

06 Coworking or Dedicated Office?

For many service, technology and sales businesses, the first India workplace does not need to be the permanent office.

COWORKING / MANAGED vs DEDICATED

Factor	Coworking / Managed	Dedicated
Move-in	Fast	Slower
Initial capex	Lower	Higher
Headcount flexibility	High	Lower
Fit-out control	Limited	High
Facilities burden	Provider	Company
Best fit	Early / uncertain team	Stable / specialist operation

BEFORE SIGNING

Confirm whether the provider can supply the documentation required for company/address registrations.

Ask for the documents, not the assurance.

"Other international companies use this location" is not the same as "Here is the document pack your entity will receive."

DECISION RULE

If a dedicated office does not solve a current operating requirement, flexibility usually has greater value during the initial phase.

06A IT, Systems and Digital Setup

This is frequently treated as an afterthought, but for a new India operation several practical IT decisions should be resolved before or alongside the first hires.

INDIA DOMAIN AND EMAIL

Decide whether Indian employees will use the global domain or a local one; configure email, calendar and collaboration tools before onboarding.

ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE

Must support Indian GST invoicing, TDS, and statutory formats; confirm with your accounting provider before transactions begin.

06A | IT, SYSTEMS AND DIGITAL SETUP • CONTINUED

PAYROLL SYSTEM

Must handle Indian salary structures including CTC components, PF, ESI, Professional Tax and TDS on salary. Confirm compatibility with your payroll provider.

HRMS / EMPLOYEE RECORDS

Even a basic system for leave, attendance and document management prevents manual tracking from Day 1.

ERP / CRM

If the India entity will transact with customers or manage a supply chain, decide whether it uses the global system, a local system, or a configured instance.

DATA AND SECURITY

Assess DPDP Act obligations (Article 4) and configure access controls, backup and data-residency arrangements as needed.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The most common IT gap is not software.

It is that systems are configured after people join, forcing the first month of operations to run on spreadsheets and email, which then have to be reconstructed into the proper system later.

07 | Who Can Act? Local Authority and Controls

A company can have an Indian entity, bank account, office and employees, and still lose days because every routine decision travels overseas.

Before operations begin, agree a simple Delegation of Authority (DoA).

WHO DECIDES WHAT?

Decision	India Could Own	HQ Retains
Vendor payments	Within approved limit	Above limit
Expenses	Within policy	Exceptions
Recruitment	Budgeted roles	Senior / unbudgeted
Pricing	Approved range	Material deviation
Contracts	Approved form / value	Strategic / material
Capex	Agreed threshold	Major spend

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Local speed requires local authority.
Local authority requires clear controls.

08 The First 90 Days

The 90-day plan should change with the operating model. A service company may be transacting within that period. A manufacturer may still be progressing site and approvals.

The objective is not "everything complete by Day 90". It is "every critical dependency either works or has a clear owner and path."

DAY 0 — DAY 30 — DAY 60 — DAY 90

DAYS 0 – 30 | DECISIONS LOCKED

In the first 30 days, the focus is on the core decisions and foundations that enable the India operation to move.

OPERATING MODEL
What India will sell, buy and perform is clear.

BANKING
Bank selected, KYC/UBO information substantially prepared; signatories agreed.

PEOPLE
First roles, compensation approach and employer route agreed.

PROVIDERS
Core corporate, finance/tax and payroll support appointed.

WORKPLACE
Location chosen or shortlisted; address-document requirements checked.

IT / SYSTEMS
Email, accounting software, payroll system and core tools configured or in progress.

TRANSACTIONS
The likely first capital flow, customer transaction, vendor payment and employee journey have been mapped.

DAY 30 TEST

Can management explain what India will sell, buy, employ, receive, pay and report?

If not, the operating model is still incomplete.

DAYS 31 – 60 | MAKE THE ENTITY USABLE

In the next 30 days, the focus shifts from planning to making the entity operational.

BANKING
KYC materially progressed; payment/ signatory arrangements agreed.

FUNDING
Amount, purpose and post-remittance reporting sequence agreed before funds move.

FINANCE
Accounting workflow, tax review, expense process and HQ reporting format configured.

PEOPLE
Offer documentation, employment contract, payroll calendar and onboarding process ready.

Continues on next page: Commercial, Workplace, Authority and Day 60 test.

08 | THE FIRST 90 DAYS • CONTINUED

COMMERCIAL	First customer, vendor and intercompany documents adapted where required.
WORKPLACE	Premises usable and address documentation in place.
AUTHORITY	India/HQ approval limits agreed.

DAY 60 TEST

Could the business sign, hire, pay and prepare an invoice tomorrow without redesigning the process?

For a simple operation, the answer should be approaching yes.

DAYS 61 – 90 | PROVE THE FIRST CYCLES WORK

The final phase is about testing the setup already built.

CUSTOMER-TO-CASH	Contract → Invoice → Collection → Accounting → Reconciliation	Can the correct entity sign and collect?
PURCHASE-TO-PAY	Vendor → Tax review → Approval → Payment → Accounting	Can the business pay correctly without an ad hoc approval chain?
HIRE-TO-PAY	Employment → Payroll inputs → Approval → Salary/tax → Payslip → Accounting	Can the first employee be paid correctly and repeatedly?
RECORD-TO-REPORT	Bank reconciliation → Receivables/payables → Payroll → Tax balances → Close → HQ report	Can headquarters see what actually happened?

DAY 90 TEST

What works? What remains conditional? Who owns each open item?

Day 90 is not about declaring the launch finished.
It is about knowing whether the operation is under control.

09 What Can Realistically Take Longer?

Not every delay means the launch is badly managed. There is an important difference between avoidable waiting and genuine complexity.

USUALLY AVOIDABLE

01	**BANK PREPARATION**	Begins only after incorporation.
02	**FOREIGN DOCUMENTS**	Circulate in different versions.
03	**EMPLOYMENT READINESS**	Candidate reaches offer before employer/ payroll readiness.
04	**WORKSPACE**	Signed before address documentation is checked.
05	**ACCOUNTING**	Begins after transactions.
06	**COORDINATION**	Multiple advisers work without one coordinator.
07	**AUTHORITY**	Routine decisions wait unnecessarily for HQ.

GENUINE COMPLEXITY

01	**SECTOR APPROVALS**	Sector-specific approvals.
02	**GOVERNMENT APPROVALS**	Approval routes where applicable.
03	**BANK KYC**	Enhanced bank KYC.
04	**PRODUCT / IMPORT**	Product and import requirements.
05	**SITE / FACTORY**	Factory/site permissions, utilities and fit-out.
06	**RECRUITMENT**	Specialist recruitment and employee notice periods.
07	**REGULATED FACILITIES**	Additional requirements for regulated facilities.

> **Avoidable waiting should be designed out.**
> Genuine complexity should be identified early and built into the launch plan.

10 The Final Operating Test

Before calling the India operation ready, ask:

01	Can the right person sign?
02	Can we invoice and collect?
03	Can we pay a vendor correctly?
04	Can we hire and run payroll?
05	Can finance close the month?
06	Can headquarters see reliable numbers?
07	Does every recurring process have a named owner?

> **IF THE ANSWERS ARE YES,**
> the company has moved beyond setup.
> **You no longer simply have an entity in India.**
> **You have an operating business.**

Keep the company's corporate documents, contracts, banking information, accounting records, tax workings and employee records accessible to the company itself. Advisers may change. **The operating history should stay with the business.**

11 Final Perspective

From "Why India?" to "How Do We Make India Work?"

This series began with the strategic case for India.
It ends with execution.

The strongest India launches are not necessarily the ones that incorporate fastest.
They are the ones where:

- the first employee does not trigger a payroll scramble
- the first remittance does not create an unexpected reporting problem
- the first customer does not force a redesigned transaction process
- the first office does not create an address-registration issue
- the first month-end does not require finance to reconstruct what happened from emails

THE WRONG QUESTION IS:

"How quickly can we set up in India?"

THE BETTER QUESTION IS:

"How quickly can we build an India operation that actually works?"

You do not need the final India organisation on Day One.
You need enough structure to:

START CORRECTLY
Put the right entity, people and systems in place.

TRANSACT CLEANLY
Invoice, pay and record transactions without workarounds.

HIRE AND PAY PEOPLE
Run a compliant and reliable payroll process.

GIVE LOCAL MANAGEMENT APPROPRIATE AUTHORITY
Allow decisions at the right level, with clear limits.

REPORT RELIABLY TO HEADQUARTERS
Provide accurate and timely financial and operational information.

SCALE WITHOUT REPEATEDLY UNDOING FIRST DECISIONS
Build a structure that can grow with the business.

Entering India is the decision.
Building an operation that works is the execution.

Disclaimer: This article provides practical orientation for India market-entry execution and does not replace legal, tax, regulatory, employment or other professional advice. Requirements and timelines depend on the company's ownership, structure, sector, location and proposed activities. Manufacturing, regulated and import-intensive operations may require additional approvals and longer implementation periods. Information reflects the operating and regulatory framework as understood in September 2026.

INDIA MARKET ADVISORY

Entering India successfully requires more than market interest – it requires the right structure.

Whether you are evaluating India for the first time or ready to move, the right tax strategy, compliance readiness, and operational structure can shape long-term outcomes. GSRA & Associates works with international businesses to build that foundation.

HOW WE SUPPORT BUSINESSES ENTERING INDIA

Trusted advisors for India market entry, structure, compliance, and operations. GSRA & Associates supports international businesses with India entry, structuring, regulatory compliance, and day-to-day operational readiness.

- Entry structure & incorporation advisory
- Tax planning & transfer pricing strategy
- GST, withholding tax & remittance planning
- Regulatory compliance & FEMA / RBI advisory
- Accounting, payroll & compliance support
- India market entry coordination & ongoing advisory

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If your business is evaluating India, let's have a conversation.

We help international companies structure entry, manage compliance, and build an operationally sound India presence.

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