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**Marketing to Overseas Buyers – Can your Company Go Global?
by Michelle Bruno**

Marketing to international buyers can be an attractive way to boost attendance in domestic shows. It makes particular sense for exhibitions with a global appeal, such as consumer products or emerging industries like alternative fuels, where overseas interest is high. Current market conditions in the U.S. favor international buyers. Attendance from U.S. buyers is dropping off in some sectors, making the prospect of filling the gap with overseas buyers attractive to many exhibition organizers. The U.S. dollar is weak against most foreign currencies, providing international buyers with more buying power. And, while the restrictions have not eased entirely, the processing of obtaining visas for international visitors to the U.S. has become more expedient.

Margaret Cassilly, vice president, international operations for the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) believes there are other compelling reasons to include international buyers as part of a comprehensive audience promotion strategy. "In large [trade] associations with serious domestic agendas, the trade show division has to approach the industry as a whole and include international attendees. It's a global market place. If you are serving members of an industry, why leave the rest of the world out?" she says. While conceding that it is "different in every industry," Cassilly says, "The international elements are very important to the success of NAB."

Over the years, Cassilly has developed a number of strategies and tactics for marketing to international buyers. She has shared these in presentations to colleagues, at industry meetings and now in her role at NAB. Her advice to exhibition organizers hoping to attract international buyers includes the following:

- Make sure the organization as a whole supports the inclusion of international attendees with the appropriate budgeting, staffing and prioritizing that is required to execute an effective promotional program. Such support often involves a multi-year commitment to the plan.
- Engage in-country partners including American consulates and embassies, counterpart trade associations, auxiliary staff, universities and even tour operators to research the level of interest in the local market, and utilize them to build mailing lists and research publications, exhibitions and other opportunities to promote the U.S. show.
- Design promotional campaigns that reflect an understanding of the specific needs, interests and cultural differences of each new market. Timing ads so that they are viewed by potential attendees when they are most relevant, and far enough in advance to obtain visas and make travel arrangements, is critical.

NAB's international attendee marketing campaigns differ each year. Recently they have placed more ads in local publications and broadened the campaign to target new converging industries and specific users such as engineers, distributors, worship content creators, media editors and others. Cassilly has scheduled an upcoming media tour in three cities in India to draw attention to NAB initiatives and gather first hand knowledge about the Indian economy, regulatory restrictions, penetration of home entertainment, consumer demographics and other metrics she relies on to develop promotional campaigns that best suit this important emerging market.

"One of the most important tools for marketing to international buyers is the NAB Web site," according to Cassilly. Her advice to colleagues is "to take yourself out of your comfort zone and pretend for one minute that you are in [the international attendee's] shoes." She says, "Making sure the site is easy to navigate, understandable and relevant is critical." NAB's user-friendly web site includes a virtual brochure in multiple languages and numerous content areas specifically targeted to international attendees. Cassilly puts her own contact information on the web site in

order to demonstrate the importance of customer service. "Give the attendee your full attention. Make it more of a personal experience before they get there and you have a better chance of having them attend," she explains.

Reed Exhibitions launched ISC365.com during last year's ISC West exhibition as a way to expand the reach of the exhibition to overseas buyers. Reed's senior vice president, Dean Russo explains, "ISC365.com contains all of the components of the physical show, online, for access regardless of time zone. These components include product information, educational sessions, audiocasts and news from around the world. Through our search optimization efforts, we are able to expand our already robust database of potential buyers through the ISC365.com site." Reed also employs an extensive network of overseas agents in addition to its U.S.-based personnel to assist with local marketing, translations, business development and cultural understanding.

"These agents work with us in the U.S. to bring trends, information and government association contacts to the local buyer prospects. We also have dedicated U.S. -based staff who travel overseas several times a year for face-to-face meetings with companies, government groups, trade associations and magazines to help organize and support buyer delegations," says Russo.

The International Fuel Ethanol Workshop and Expo (FEW) was named in Tradeshow Week's 2007 Fastest 50 list of the fifty fastest growing shows. The effects of global warming, the "green" movement and the world's search for alternative energy sources have placed FEW in the international spotlight. In its 24th year, the event has grown into the world's largest ethanol conference with 5,400 attendees, nearly 600 exhibits and representation from 34 countries. "This conference is in a strong position for the global ethanol market," says Dave Blazer, marketing manager for BBI International, a leading company in the field of biomass utilization and the organizer of the Fuel Ethanol Workshop and other events. "FEW is a one stop shop for international companies and organizations to get information and develop relationships," Blazer adds.

According to Blazer, the international audience promotion for FEW is handled differently each year. They have a large data base which they use for the direct mailing of postcards, "teaser" brochures and full conference prospectuses. They also utilize broadcast email campaigns. Since much of the work in the biofuels industry involves plants, BBI also works through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and their international channels. Their project development division, devoted to locating, developing and financing biofuels projects around the world, participates in trade missions and helps BBI understand the dynamics of emerging markets and identify potential buyers and conference participants.

Marketing to international buyers can be challenging. Blazer cautions exhibition organizers interested in attracting attendees from overseas to pay close attention to the nuances of the language and learn the vernacular of each country's industry. He relies on the American chambers of commerce located in various countries around the world, to research potential attendees and help craft communications that are appropriate to the local market. NAB's Cassilly advises that each region is different and urges organizers to apply tactics that are appropriate and culturally sensitive to each country. "The range of options can be anywhere from personalized invitations sent by courier to invitees to any number of guerilla marketing techniques," she adds.

With global attitudes toward the United States having shifted in some circles, the ways in which communications from U.S. companies are perceived is more critical today than in the past. "On one hand, things haven't changed in the way we do business and, on the other hand, we are operating under a completely different set of circumstances. The challenge is not insurmountable if you graciously and sensitively persevere," says Cassilly.

A Staged Solution to the Catch-22

by Andrei Hagiu and Thomas Eisenmann

Companies launching two-sided platforms—businesses that connect two groups of users, as credit card companies do—have often subsidized one group to get it to use the platform. This is a risky approach, because it requires a big up-front investment. A staged approach is safer: It establishes the platform in two distinct steps. Some of the Internet's biggest success stories have been launched this way, including Google and Amazon.

The staged approach addresses a catch-22 faced by any company hoping to capitalize on a two-sided platform. Prospective users on each side will avoid the platform until they are confident that the other side will have enough users to make it worth their while. Who's going to sign up for a new type of credit card if no merchants accept it? And what merchant will accept the card if no customers carry it? (For more detail see "Strategies for Two-Sided Markets," by Thomas Eisenmann, Geoffrey Parker, and Marshall W. Van Alstyne, Harvard Business Review October 2006.)

A company using a staged strategy begins by selling products or services to customers on just one side of a potential two-sided platform—products or services whose value to that side does not depend on the existence of the other. Once the company has built a big base of customers on the first side, it can target the second side for development.

Google used this strategy: It originally launched as a vendor of web search services, operating Google.com and licensing its search engine to Yahoo and other portals. Initially Google.com carried no advertising; its sole (and modest) source of revenue was licensing fees. But after amassing end users, Google added advertisements and became extraordinarily profitable by serving searchers on one side and advertisers on the other. It brought new functionality to existing services as a means of transitioning to a two-sided platform.

An alternative approach is to provide more of the same—to broaden a firm's existing product line by hosting third parties that market similar goods and services, as Amazon did. Charles Schwab deftly managed such a transition years ago by adding third-party mutual funds and independent financial advisers to its in-house offerings.

Staged strategies reduce investment risk but can be tricky to implement. Companies must earn the trust of new platform users. Third-party suppliers, for example, may worry about ceding control of their customer relationships to platform providers, who can favor their own products. Likewise, close communication is essential to maintaining the confidence of existing customers, suppliers, employees and investors who may be confused or alienated when a firm fundamentally changes its value proposition. Although Google successfully transitioned into a platform through improvisation rather than a careful plan, the road is littered with the casualties of poorly executed platform strategies. Think of eight-track cassettes, RCA's VideoDisk, and IBM's OS/2. By studying platform strategies that have worked, companies can hedge their bets.

Reputation – Does it Matter?: How to Build a Strong Reputation that Improves Bottom Line Performance.

by Michelle Bruno

A company's reputation is one of its most bankable assets. Research has found that an organization's reputation with a particular group such as investors, employees or customers, for example, is an important indicator of future performance. In that way, reputations are an important way to set the expectations of stakeholders and help people to select the companies they would like to do business with or avoid. Customers tend to purchase more products from companies they feel they know and trust. Investors invest more heavily in companies that demonstrate sound decision-making and employees are far more attracted to companies that they perceive as having a positive corporate image or identity. All of this goodwill is translated for most companies into larger profits.

For example, According to a *California Management Review* article, "Corporate Reputations, Should you Compete on Yours?," quoting earlier articles in *Corporate Reputation Review* and *Strategic Management Journal*, author Grahame R. Dowling states, "Good reputations are valuable because they enhance trust and confidence in the organization such that the individual feels that it is safe to do something with that organization"—such as purchasing its stock, applying for a job, buying its products and services, not boycotting during a crisis and so forth. These outcomes can benefit the organization in its various markets, namely for employees, customers, and public opinion. Various research has also shown that companies with a good reputation (relative to others in their industry) are better able to sustain superior profit outcomes over time."

One need not look far for example after example of how reputation plays a role in a company's success. Think about the foreign car manufacturers such as Toyota, Volvo and Mercedes-Benz, all of which have alternately given U.S. car manufacturers competitive headaches over the years because of their strong reputations for quality and reliability. Last year, Toyota was listed as number one in customer satisfaction according to a J.D. Power survey with 65% of buyers trading in their used Toyota for a new one. This compares to Chevrolet at 56% and Pontiac at 28%. The financial plight of U.S. carmakers has been widely reported in the media. Toy makers Fisher Price and its California-based parent company Mattel, have endured a wave of criticism over poorly manufactured toys from China. The company reported fourth quarter charges of \$42 million related to the recalls, with more expected.

The value of a good reputation and the costs of a bad one are also evident within the exhibition industry. Stephen Evans, director of trade events and meetings for the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) based in Chicago, explains the repercussions of developing a poor reputation among suppliers. "A prime example," he says, "is an event that has a signed obligation with a specific venue and then cancels. Once you do that, there is a stigma attached and other cities will doubt whether you intend to hold your event there in the future." Hotels and general contractors, for example, express their distrust of clients in a number of ways according to Evans. They may impose more stringent contractual obligations such as attrition clauses and cancellation penalties, charge higher rates or request larger deposits. "I personally feel better working with people I trust," Evans says.

Various different methodologies have emerged for valuing a company's reputation. The Reputation Institute, a network of academics and practitioners that study corporate reputations, has developed a "Reputation Quotient" to help quantify how a company's reputation is developed. The Institute surveys a company's stakeholders on six key areas:

- **Emotional Appeal:** How much the company is liked, admired and respected.
- **Products and Services:** Perceptions of the quality, innovation, value and reliability of the company's products and services.

- **Financial Performance:** Perceptions of the company's profitability, prospects and risk.
- **Vision and Leadership:** How much the company demonstrates a clear vision and strong leadership.
- **Workplace Environment:** Perceptions of how well the company is managed, how good a company it is to work for and the quality of its employees.
- **Social Responsibility:** Perceptions of the company as a good citizen in its dealings with communities, employees and the environment.

The Reputation Institute has also developed five principles for building a good corporate reputation. They state that strong reputations result when companies are able to distinguish themselves from their competitors through effective brand building, when they focus their "actions and communications" around a single core theme (trustworthiness, for example) and when they are consistent in their actions and communications to their clients, employees, investors and other "resource-holders." Companies also build good reputations by "acting in ways that are consistent with espoused principles of identity" and by "being transparent in the way they conduct their affairs." Advertising and public relations can only go so far if they are not connected to a company's identity, while companies that "disclose more information about themselves and are more willing to engage stakeholders in dialogue," are often those with the best reputations, according to the Institute.

NMMA's Stephen Evans offers some good advice in the context of his own experience in the industry. "Be an organization of your word. Just because you have a signed contract doesn't mean it will be fulfilled," he says. Having a good public relations team as he has at NMMA, may not help you overcome a bad reputation according to Evans, but it can help you communicate positive information about your organization to the media and your customers. He believes that working to correct problems by going "straight to the top" of the impacted groups, such as suppliers, and "having a sincere dialogue about how to solve the problem," is always important. "We view our vendors as partners to contribute, generate ideas and critique us. It's important to lay your cards out on the table," he says. In the end, Evans adds, "Realize that your word is all you have."

CASE STUDY:

United Nations Agency Boosts Collaboration, Extends Knowledge Base with Portal Solution

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has pledged to help cut poverty in half by 2015. To help achieve this important strategic goal, it needed to improve collaboration among its country offices in Asia Pacific. The agency relied primarily on e-mail messages for communication between offices, and network storage for sharing information. To increase its collaborative capability, UNDP deployed Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007 together with Windows Server® 2003 R2, Microsoft® SQL Server® 2005, and Microsoft® Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2004. This solution delivers a secure collaboration platform from UNDP Asia Pacific regional centers in Colombo, Suva and Bangkok, with reliable access to country offices and NGOs across the region. The agency is increasing its staff efficiency by creating, sharing and re-using information across the whole region.

Situation

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works in more than 160 countries worldwide to help alleviate poverty and prevent crises, to promote democratic governance and sustainable environmental practices and to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS. Its three regional centers in Asia Pacific serve as hubs for its services to 24 offices across Asia Pacific, and to a range of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that work in tandem with UNDP.

With development issues increasingly cutting across national borders, UNDP Regional Centers in Asia Pacific offer an ideal opportunity to tap into and share existing knowledge. Their regional scope allows the centers to act as hubs to translate both global knowledge and diverse country-level experiences into comprehensive policy advice.

This advice is used to design valuable programs at the country and regional levels. In turn, these programs bring countries in the region closer to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with the key objective being to cut poverty by half by 2015.

The centerpiece of UNDP strategy is to leverage a common set of online tools to develop connected communities, and to provide access to expertise and knowledge resources across geographically-dispersed offices.

“For us, IT and technology solutions are part and parcel of the work that we do—we need to put IT at the disposal of the countries, to make it affordable. ICT for development is part and parcel of what we do,” says Elizabeth Fong, regional manager, UNDP Regional Center, Bangkok.

“By providing a virtual collaborative workspace we can encourage experts to share knowledge and expertise,” she adds.

However, UNDP was hampered by a lack of a common platform for collaboration, and no standardized, effective way of sharing information. Instead, offices had variable levels of information and communications technology development.

This lack of IT collaboration capability was highlighted after the 2004 tsunami, when it became clear to the organization that it was not satisfied with its ability to identify experts quickly, coordinate its efforts, and react to this major disaster in the region. “This is what really kicked us into gear to fix our collaboration issue; it made us realize that the important point was people expertise, the right type and rapidly deployable” says Fong.

To improve its knowledge-sharing and communication capabilities, UNDP embarked on several projects to modernize its IT environment. However, the variable skill and technology profile of its different country offices made regional e-government development and project management

difficult. This led to a number of separately developed stand-alone country-level IT implementations.

Previously, all UNDP offices used e-mail messaging as their primary collaboration tool. To store and make available commonly used documents, they used shared network hard drives. This very basic solution meant UNDP had little control over the consolidation or efficiency of its information base. All important local information typically stayed on a local hard drive and was often lost if the user left the organization. External partner and NGO participation in the various Communities of Practice (CoPs) was rare or non-existent.

“At UNDP we have a special mandate to provide a bridge from an emergency, through to recovery, and then on to development. UNDP has to help Rebuild Back, Rebuild Better, by connecting people, organizing and distilling information. Those were the big lessons from the tsunami,” says Fong.

Solution

After considering a number of alternative solutions, including other Microsoft software, UNDP made the decision to build its Solutions Network of Asia Pacific (SNAP) portal using Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007, supported by Windows Server® 2003 R2, Microsoft® SQL Server® 2005, and Microsoft® Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2004. UNDP recognized that it needed a more powerful solution to cater to the many challenges of effectively collaborating across such a wide geographic area. To ensure the portal's success, UNDP chose to leverage the strength of Microsoft Solutions Sharing Network (SSN), a program created by Microsoft to drive the sharing of IT solutions and best practices within public-sector technical communities.

SNAP is hosted by the three UNDP Asia Pacific regional centers: the Regional Center in Bangkok, Thailand (RCB); the Regional Center in Colombo, Sri Lanka (RCC); and the Pacific Center in Suva, Fiji. The architecture allows users in the three Centers to experience the three portal sites as a single environment. In 2008, access will be extended to the 24 country offices in the regions, and then to external practitioners, allowing the access to UNDP CoPs on important development issues such as HIV/AIDS, local governance, gender equality, and environmental degradation.

This is effectively implemented by tailoring SharePoint 2007 to regional center needs while ensuring technical interoperability within UNDP, and full alignment to corporate branding and Web-based 'look and feel'. “We needed to best connect our people and knowledge from all over the world,” says Fong.

The development of the SNAP portal was undertaken by a team of dedicated professionals from the Microsoft Global Strategic Accounts team, Microsoft Government Engagement Team, Microsoft Consulting Services (MCS), and development partner C2X. UNDP staff from the regional centers, UNDP headquarters in New York, and other professionals from country offices also worked to help complete the project for phased rollout from December 2007.

“Our good regional relationship with Microsoft allowed us to develop, at low business risk to us, knowledge sharing, SharePoint 2007, and our virtual workplace,” says Norman Sanders, Regional ICT Officer at UNDP Regional Center, Bangkok.

Customizations tailored to UNDP knowledge-sharing and collaboration processes were incorporated to extend standard Office SharePoint Server 2007 features. These include the development of user-friendly Web pages which aggregate key knowledge and information from local office, country office, regional and global levels.

UNDP users also have the ability to invite external partners to collaborate, through special workspaces for practice area communities. Additional collaborative Web pages will exist for

connecting country office knowledge and for supporting cross-regional center work—including for the regional center Management Board Team and project workspaces. Training will be tailored to target groups of end users, workspace owners and system administrators.

Benefits

The SNAP portal will greatly enhance sharing of UNDP information and intelligence across Asia and other UNDP regions. The SNAP portal will empower development professionals in the region with information and knowledge that leads to enhanced efficiency, closer participation in governance, more transparency and increased accountability in situations such as the 2004 tsunami.

“With a consolidated portal offering expertise and knowledge, we can now make more effective policy, financial and management decisions,” says Marcia Kran, officer-in charge, UNDP Regional Center, Bangkok.

Enhance Availability

SNAP is an interoperable system that facilitates the easy sharing of information across regional centers and Communities of Practice. It can be extended to link country and other UNDP offices, including its headquarters in New York. Through the portal, UNDP is better equipped to create, share, re-use and distribute its freely accessible and valuable development assets. The new system allows UNDP to build operational and workflow processes across 24 countries, to connect everyone and to improve their efficiency. “We hope that SNAP will become the knowledge management hub and a new IT platform where other UNDP regions (like Latin America and the Caribbean) can post and share valuable information. Our partnership with Microsoft is providing that platform,” says Fong.

Extend Expertise

By providing an open forum for practitioners to share expertise and information, the SNAP portal empowers individuals with knowledge in key areas of interest and practice. This sharing of knowledge extends outwards to external partners such as NGOs, governments and academic partners. This open communication creates larger and more diverse practice areas rich in intelligence information, which helps policy makers access in-depth knowledge and compare how other successful programs operate.

Exchange Information

The ease of access and rapid availability of information to policy officials allows them to make decisions that have the greatest positive impact on their community. The SNAP portal allows UNDP regional centers to deliver more data, better services and greater interaction within the 24 country offices in the Asia Pacific region and UNDP headquarters in New York.

Promote Collaboration

Internal collaboration has improved tremendously since the introduction of SNAP. “From simple file sharing, e-mail messaging and phone communications, we have moved on and now have the capacity to share document libraries, participate in real-time discussion boards, have centralized communities of practice and execute document check-in check-out using SharePoint Server 2007,” says Sanders. With this information exchange environment, UNDP is now in a position to develop more meaningful policy discussions with client nations.

Future Plans

Following the 2008 rollout in regional centers and Communities of Practice, the SNAP portal will be extended in stages to country offices and other UNDP offices globally including its headquarters in New York. UNDP is also investigating the possibility of further development of the environment to include the creation of a workflow process to publish a flagship UN publication, the *Regional Human Development Report*, plus the integration of other UNDP collaboration tools such as Solution Exchange, developed by UNDP India country office.