

MARKETING ON FOREIGN SHORES – a Checklist

Louise Fenwick

There's a huge difference between international online sales and overseas marketing. Luckily, language is rarely a barrier, but what often lets us down is ignorance about the culture we're working in.

If committing to a foreign market or opportunistically exporting due to the economic climate, take the following into account:

1. Which market?

Choose a market similar to your home market where customers are psychologically similar; similar buying behaviours, incomes/ revenues... If their needs and wants are the same, you'll know how to meet them.

2. Research, research, research

A hunch about a market is not good enough. Know as much about the country you're considering as you do about your home market. Assumptions made at home become risks overseas.

3. Competition

Know and choose your competitors. Learn what you can about them, their products, services and trading terms. They're probably on their home turf, therefore at an advantage - you need to be one step ahead.

4. Targeting

Learn about your target customer: Disposable income/ expenditure? Typical lifestyle? Payment terms? Seasonal variations?

Delia Smith's recipe books sold in Calgary, Canada include longer cooking times to compensate for the high altitude! Assume nothing and find out more.

5. Communication & Negotiation

Be respectful of another nationality's values; religious or cultural - these determine the pace and nature of transactions. In some cultures bartering is expected; in others silences in a conversation are just as important as the words you hear.

6. Branding

Does your branding/ product name translate? Is it pronounceable and does it make sense? Opel infamously launched its Nova in Europe, which failed in Spain, as "no va" means "no go" – not appealing for a car!

7. Marketing materials

Consider cultural nuances and symbolism in your creative work, plus regulations and legislation – it's illegal to advertise to children in France. The marketing mix may change, too: postcode analysis is not practical in France or Germany; radio and outdoor advertising works well in Australia with the outdoor lifestyle.

Previously responsible for materials in 22 languages, I implore you: professionals don't cut corners. "Spit roast chicken" is not "chicken spit", as one Chinese menu claimed!

Marketing your business overseas is an exciting opportunity, but takes careful planning. It is all achievable and can reap rewards... Bonne chance, buena suerte, cǎi tóu, viel Glück...

Louise Fenwick
Coalition Communications Ltd
01243 60 40 43