

Managing the promotional marketing aspect of a global brand: The role of the expatriate brand manager

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In the field of global marketing management, the matter of standardization has received significant attention over the past few decades, particularly in the area of international advertising and the ideal promotional management strategies. Academics and practitioners continue to debate whether it's best to use the same promotional programs worldwide or adapt to the preferences, tastes, and values of local cultures. For the multinational corporation (MNC), the benefits to standardize brand communications are clear: they allow for a consistent corporate brand image, economies of scale on creative development, production and management, and greater ownership of original creative ideas. Conversely, adaptation permits MNCs to customize advertisements using the lifestyle appeals of local cultures. This approach can lead to increased persuasiveness and likeability among stakeholders and thus generate higher sales.

While adaptation may appear to be a preferred approach, brand managers must also consider the specific marketing objectives of a region while ensuring any adaptation attempts do not negatively impact a brand's identity. Brand managers must protect a brand's corporate image, ensuring consistency and coherency of core values in all public communications as the public is now a 'global' audience. A brand manager favouring short-term sales over consistency, runs the risk of de-valuing the core aspects of a brand which may create confusion among consumers resulting in a loss of confidence and trust. The brand manager is tasked with creating acceptance of a brand in new markets while strengthening its overall positioning on the global stage. Many MNCs select expatriate brand managers (EBMs) to handle international marketing



management efforts. This article will examine the role and challenges EBMs face, specifically in regards to the advertising and promotion of a global brand. It will identify some common strategies to support EBMs in their quest to balance corporate and local market objectives while preserving a brand's global image. It concludes with a discussion of the skill-set required to ensure successful performance in an EBM position.

Importance of brand identity and the EBMs role in brand preservation

Advertising is considered a cultural phenomenon influenced by popular culture, host country culture, or both. There are major obstacles to overcome when considering the impact a specific advertising campaign may have in a certain market. The common ones involve language barriers and the ability to address culturally sensitive issues regarding religion and politics. It is very challenging to create relevant and timely global advertising themes, positioning, and stories supporting a brand that also appeal to consumers around the world. Creative messages must be consistently delivered across all consumer touch points in order to build brand identity. While it is impossible for global brand advertising to capture the individual peculiarities of every market, locally designed advertising must often sacrifice a consistent global message and lose out on economies of scale. According to Wind et. al (2013), the solution to alleviate such tension resides in the pursuit of a 'glocal' advertising strategy. This involves locally adapting a universally embraced central creative idea that can resonate in any market around the world. This strategy is built on three pillars: 1) creating a global concept addressing a universal human motivation; 2) a unified brand vision respectful of local nuances that empowers local consumers; and, 3) an organizational architecture consisting of culture, technology, and dedicated resources that allow for effective collaboration among the creators of the global strategy and local strategists and implementers.

The EBM tasked with the development and execution of successful promotional programs in foreign markets, would have an ongoing commitment to perform the following:

- ✚ Acquire and develop knowledge of local cultures: EBMs must become immersed in the local culture within respective markets.
- ✚ Determine the relevance and appropriateness of creative strategy for specific markets: EBMs must choose between standardized, adaptive, or hybrid approaches regarding creative strategy (actual advertising messages and execution).
- ✚ Gain familiarity with global media choices: EBMs must be educated on the media consumption habits of local consumers and on how media planning and buying practices may differ in specific markets.

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- ✦ Gain familiarity with global advertising regulations: EBMs must understand how foreign regulations inhibit the how, when, and why of advertising in local markets.
- ✦ Selecting an advertising agency partner/s: EBMs must develop and maintain relationships with agency partners as mandated by headquarters or recommend local agency partners to assist in promotions.
- ✦ Assess opportunities for Global Integrated Marketing Communication (GIMC) initiatives: A GIMC system allows for active promotional management coordinating global communications from a horizontal (country to country) and vertical (promotion tools) perspective. The EBM must keep current on developments occurring in other business units to improve efficiencies through the harmonization of as many promotional and communication disciplines as possible.

Strategies to assist the EBM in achieving objectives while preserving a global brand image

- ✦ Get immersed in local culture: Brand managers must be knowledgeable in the cultural nuances of specific cultures with respect to dominant behaviours involving lifestyle, politics, and religion. Being unaware of how promotions may be received could lead to negative responses from consumers or even break laws. As heterogeneity increases in every market and global message exposure is always 'just one tweet away', all brands must think globally or face the consequences.
- ✦ Minimize the impact of the 'not invented here' (NIHS) syndrome by host countries: Often times local ad agencies, consumers, and businesses reject standardized communication approaches simply on the basis they were not the creators of the idea (Global Marketing Today, 2012). To overcome this, EBMs might consider research involving local partners and consumers in the development of promotional strategies and messages for communications.
- ✦ Become familiar with the best media options and their availability in chosen foreign markets. Media choices may vary as well as the rules concerning how to purchase (e.g. some markets may require that a certain percentage of broadcast and print content be original, national content) limiting what is available for MNCs to purchase. In some countries, media selection may be of greater importance than the creative aspect of the promotional program itself (Global Marketing Today, 2012).
- ✦ Research the advertising regulations in foreign markets prior to developing any campaign materials. Knowledge of permissible content in terms of message and execution (advertisements may need to adhere to specific advertising codes) will help avoid legal implications and save valuable time and money.

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- ✚ Consider selecting an advertising agency within a large international network. Choosing an agency with an international network can be more efficient as they will have offices in many markets where MNCs conduct business. These agencies will have local staff and therefore, a better understanding of market dynamics. Today, many agencies participate in mergers and acquisitions that create global media agencies; partnering with a single full-service agency provides marketers the option of having all of their markets served faster and more cost effectively

Qualifications of the EBM

EBMs are not only responsible for building and maintaining positive interactions with consumers, they must also cultivate strong relationships among local partners, government officials, and other stakeholders involved in the distribution of their brands. Finding the right people with the right mix of interpersonal and technical skills is a big challenge for the HR function of MNCs. Many firms will invest in training expatriate candidates prior to deployment to ensure they possess the necessary technical, management, cross-cultural, and language skills. According to Mead & Andrews (2009, Ch 21, p. 364), the following skill-set is required to perform an EBM role:

- ✚ Understanding of local cultures.
- ✚ Effective communicator and negotiator (knowing the local language is a bonus; if not spoken, there may be increased dependency on interpreters/translators).
- ✚ Comfortable/adaptable living within a foreign environment for an extended period (the average post being 3-5 years).
- ✚ Problem-solver.
- ✚ Self-motivated.
- ✚ Emotional maturity to tolerate uncertainty (in the event 'culture shock' may be experienced)

Equally important to providing sufficient training throughout the selection process, MNCs must also provide EBMs with clear objectives on how their performance will be evaluated and offer strong support during their post and upon return to headquarters. Having an effective 'debriefing' process is instrumental for MNCs to help repatriate employees and allow for knowledge dissemination into the firm.



Discussion

Successful global advertising programs must begin with simple and powerful ideas that address universal human motivation capable of crossing cultures. Such human emotions include the desire to be healthy and safe, acquire higher education, provide well for one's children, and achieve one's aspirations. Once motivations have been determined, a positioning must be chosen that extends beyond a brand's attributes. Top global brands like Apple ('Think Different'), Coca-Cola ('Open Happiness'), IBM ('Solutions for a small planet'), and McDonald's ('I'm lovin' it), serve as examples of firms who have developed the right 'glocal' mind-set. This article has focused on the promotional aspects of marketing a global brand and the key functions performed by the EBM, instrumental to the process. The EBM handles all aspects of a brand's promotional strategies; these strategies must achieve both corporate and local objectives. At times the EBM will face pressure from headquarters to employ standard approaches from the global supply-chain, and other times will experience local tensions to adapt. Ultimately, the EBM must strike the balance between the two. Fundamentally, EBMs must allow local participants to have greater involvement with promotional programs and continue to act as 'Brand Enforcers' ensuring a brand's core values are protected. Preserving a brand's identity is key to building a global brand. Today more than ever, firms must reorganize for the global stage; casting the right EBMs as principal performers will allow for a successful production.

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