

How to survive and thrive with events outside of the United States

Now that gas prices and the horrible balance of payments situation have created a poor dollar exchange rate, many people are now aware of events outside the fifty states. For many trade show exhibitors, the world outside the USA represents an unknown scary thing, especially when you have to conduct business.

The tradeshow world outside of the USA is actually an exciting place, if you know what you're doing. The ability to extend your business, make new powerful connections and gain new customers is well worth the effort.

I recently had a conversation with a show organizer, Mary Larkin, from Diversified Communications As Group Vice President, Mary Larkin oversees All Things Organic™, Diversified's US integrative healthcare portfolio and Diversified's international portfolio of seafood tradeshows. Mary is Irish, and I am English, and since both of us have had extensive experience in running events overseas, we offer a few tips on how to negotiate foreign waters and have fun with it!

1) Be aware of cultural differences

One thing that Americans notice going overseas for the first few times, is that although many things are the same, many are different. A good tip is to listen and observe what's going on first when you are overseas, especially when dealing with suppliers, convention staff. Not doing so, often results in miscommunication and bad times....

2) Setting up your booth

In many cases, your staff may have to be the 'Jacks or Jills of all trades". Be prepared to do manual work that you are not used to doing in the US(such as building your own staff, lugging boxes etc.), and select your staff travelling to the event who are OK with it too.

Make sure that you understand and adapt to local regulations with regard to set up, work hours and the like, so the local contractors are happy(rather than unhappy) to work with you.

3) Add time to allow for import regulations

Customs regulations in other countries can be byzantine and complicated. Make sure that you add enough time to get your show shipments through customs and that you always have a plan B for major elements of your booth(copies of marketing piece that can be reproduced).

4) Get multi-lingual help

Part of being successful at any event is appearing local with an international reach. To do so in a non-English speaking country, you'll want to hire multi-lingual resources both before the event to translate key marketing documents for the show and during the event so you can fully understand your booth visitors and serve them as you do in the US.

5) You won't get the hang of it until you've done it 3 times

The first three times you go to a particular event will be trying and difficult, as you figure out how to make your experience profitable. Don't give up though, if overseas events are in your strategic plan, keep at it!

6) Make it obvious what your product or service does

This is a secret tip that often eludes most exhibitors. If you don't have a known brand name product or service, make sure that you make it clear both in your booth marketing materials and signage what it is that you do, so you encourage traffic instead of having potential visitors shrug and move on down the aisle.

7) Use British English at European and other foreign events

Most non-American people who learn English learn the British version. Therefore when preparing your materials, try not to use American terms examples (trash-rubbish, aluminum-aluminium, trunk-boot, etc), so again, you fit in better with the other participants.

8) Provide people something to eat and drink

People attending events overseas are used a minimum level of hospitality(coffee in the booth, something to eat). Make sure you check with the organizer when you are designing your booth and putting in your orders for the event to see what the local standard is, so that your hospitality is at least as good(if not better) than your competition.

9) Learn how to deal with jet lag

This is a factor for those who have never had don't expect. I remember traveling with someone to England where she slept most of the week we were there because it

knocked all her systems off so much(I have a picture of her sleeping as the English countryside whizzes by...

Here is a resource to help:

<http://www.healthatoz.com/healthatoz/Atoz/common/standard/transform.jsp?requestURI=/healthatoz/Atoz/hl/sp/trvl/trajetlag.jsp>

Ultimately this list scrapes the top of the issues of doing events overseas. Travelling is fun, and making connections in international markets cannot be matched, so embarking overseas is a great way to extend your business and influence. Keep your sense of humor and enjoy!

Warwick Davies is the Principal of The Event Mechanic!, a consulting company which helps event organizers realize greater revenues and profits by fixing 'broken' events and launch new ones both in United States and internationally . His clients include event organizers in the information technology, healthcare, biotechnology construction and design engineering and executive event markets. Previously, Warwick was responsible for internationally recognizable event brands such as Macworld Conference and Expo, LinuxWorld Conference and Expo, and the Customer Relationship Management Conference and Exposition worldwide. For more information on The Event Mechanic! and past ROI-Q The Event Mechanic! columns please visit <http://www.theeventmechanic.com/resources.html> . He can be reached at Warwick@theeventmechanic.com or at 781 354 0119.