

How to be more successful running events outside of the United States

All of us have handled domestic events, and a subset of us have ventured outside of North America to attend or even run events. For many trade show organizers, the world outside the USA represents an unknown scary thing, full of unknowns.

The tradeshow and conference world outside of the USA is an actually exciting place, if you know what you're doing. The ability to extend your business, grow international market segments and gain new customers is well worth the effort, both in good times and in bad. In the situation where you have the opportunity to run events overseas from the US, or provide a large amount of event support for shows with partners, some of the ideas in this week's column may help you make the events much more successful.

I recently had a conversation with, 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 tradeshow. Mary is Irish, and I am English, and since both of us have had extensive experience in running events overseas, here are 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 and convention staff. Failure to do so often results in miscommunication and bad times....

2) Setting up the show

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 setting things up, lugging boxes etc.). Make 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 important elements for the event (keep the originals of as many show pieces so you can reproduce them).

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 delegates and 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 run 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) 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 market.

7) Provide people something to eat and drink

People attending events overseas are used a minimum level of hospitality (coffee on the show floor, etc). Make sure you check with your local partners when you are planning the operations for the event so that your hospitality is at least as good (if not better) than the local standard.

8) 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 brands and influence.

Keep your sense of humor and enjoy!

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