

Worldwide Partners : The Entrepreneurial Way

| By Patricia J. Fiske |

Our first column must begin with our appreciation of ADM's invitation to Worldwide Partners to write a column about locally owned marketing communications firms. In doing so ADM recognizes the success that locally owned agencies have brought to their local, regional and global clients as well as the immense contribution they have made to the industry.

This column will celebrate the intelligence and creativity exercised by locally owned, entrepreneurial agencies working in partnership with their clients. Future columns will share insights about marketing communications trends and how locally owned agencies apply cultural sensitivity to make them successful for their clients. And it will bring you examples of local, regional and global campaigns that build brands with culturally appropriate marketing communications.

As the CEO of Worldwide Partners, I have the privilege of working with locally owned firms in fifty-five countries who serve markets on every continent. The founders of locally owned marketing communications firms often

gained their experience and initial successes by working in foreign-owned agencies. Once they became confident in their professionalism and talent, their entrepreneurial spirit came alive and they left the confining environment of the foreigner to create an agency where their expertise and local intelligence would be critical to the success of the client's brand.

Entrepreneur is a robust word that describes a person who develops, organizes, operates, and assumes the risk for a business venture. A person who owns his own business is aware of what it takes to build and maintain business and to be responsible for its success. Thus the entrepreneur understands and is empathetic with the business needs of its clients.

To an entrepreneur, planning is the natural beginning of a successful business. He or she is a business thinker who participates on client management committees at the start of the product development and marketing process.

An entrepreneur is proactive. He or she readily brings relevant observations, ideas and recommendations to build awareness and loyalty for the brand. When the market

changes, or when a competitor moves in, or when a change in strategy is needed, the entrepreneur is flexible and prepared to act fast to implement what needs to be done.

Why is it easy for locally owned agencies to be so agile? It is simple. Client decision-makers talk to agency decision-makers, and new ideas can be implemented quickly.

Mostly an entrepreneur is a client's partner and is willing to be measured and profit by the results of his or her work.

As I travel, I am an avid student of the marketing communication campaigns that surround me. And, I like to meet with managers or staff of the local offices of foreign-owned agencies. It is rare for a branch office of a foreign-owned agency to serve a global client with the breadth of its local expertise. Translations and adaptations of foreign developed strategies and creative remain the majority of the content of global marketing communications across this planet. The European Manager of Grey Advertising recently told a German audience that his agency knows that "global advertising is 30%

less effective than local advertising" ...but, he rationalized, "the efficiency was worth it."

The industry must ask several questions about that point of view -- foremost, efficiency for whom -- the agency or the client? The cost of media for most campaigns in most markets is a significantly larger portion of the budget than the combined cost of strategic planning, ideation, creativity and production. And what is the measure of effectiveness of running a campaign that is not culturally sensitive to the local consumer? We've all seen ads in which the voice-over never matches the facial movement of the actors but tries to make a friend of us by speaking our language. We've all seen ads in which the actor's come from another culture. We've all laughed at the translations of headlines that are super strange. An ad that is not fully sensitive to the local culture can never reach the consumer's heart. It is not effective in building relationship that leads to a purchase. It cannot contribute to maintain the consumer's loyalty.

You, like I, by the circumstance of our birth, belong to a culture. A culture that has core values that we learned by osmosis when we were growing up. Our respective cultures gave us the core values -- ways of being, thinking, dreaming, working, relating to others...in short, living -- that make up the essence of who we are. Having those core values gives us an identity and sense of belonging.

We can move around the planet, experience other cultures and enjoy their products at home or abroad ... but our roots remain firmly planted in the values we learned in our homeland and the messages to us that will build loyalty will honor our roots.

It is my firm belief that as trade barriers

come down, our roots become even more important and our cultural barriers instinctively go up. Let me give you an innocent example of what I mean. The Swedish people have experienced the development of the European Community and though they don't like it and have voted it down, many feel that the coming of the Euro to Sweden is inevitable. I was in Stockholm recently and happily spent some time with my dear friend, Annika. She told me with a clear and honest pride that she was spending her days hand sewing a set of clothing -- trousers, shirt, vest and jacket -- with smocking and embroidery like the clothes worn by their ancestors from their birth village, to give to her older brother on his birthday. She was not sure he would prefer wearing it, rather than a tuxedo, to official functions, but she wanted him to have the choice. As her economic world becomes Euro-centric, Annika's roots are ever more important to her...and she thinks they are important to her older brother as well.

Marketing messages that will build loyalty can only be those that honor our backgrounds and cultures.

What is driving the advertising industry today? We once thought that the client and/or brand was the driver of our industry. Those were the days of mass marketing. And they are over.


We once thought that technology was the driver. It is not. Technology is merely the tool the consumer uses to exercise choice. With hundreds of TV channels, thousands of specialty magazines, and news on-line, consumers are oblivious and impervious to our efforts to reach them. Our own behaviors are indicative. We read our specialty magazines, use TiVo to record our favorite TV programs

without the commercials, and use the Internet at our discretion.

The basic change driving the entire industry is that the consumer has choice and exercises that choice. So understanding and honoring the empowered, informed consumer is driving all that we think and do in building brands.

Marketing communications has become an idea industry. It's disciplines...public relations, advertising, direct, promotions, trade shows, brand identity, media planning, production are tools we use to implement our basic product...the idea that will move a consumer to first try and then become a loyal customer of our clients products.

The idea might be produced within films, books, art, speeches as well as ads, public relations and, hopefully, word of mouth. It captivates, educates and entertains. Above all, it will honor and respect the core values of the local consumer.

Remember the story of Annika for it is representative of stories of people all over this planet and illustrates the importance of communicating to people in ways that touch the roots of who they are. As consumers, we know when a brand has adapted its centrally produced "one-size-fits-all" global message -- for whatever reason of convenience or economics. Developing effective local campaigns in the countries and cultures where those campaigns will be seen requires the high degree of sensitivity that genuine local knowledge -- entrepreneurial knowledge -- can provide. 

Worldwide Partners is a corporation equally owned by entrepreneurial marketing communications firms located in 55 countries. Its mission is to multiply the power of the idea by extending the reach of the lead agency. Its commitment is to create customers with marketing communications that respect and honor the consumer. With US\$4.1 billion dollars in billings and employing more than 5,000 people, Worldwide Partners is the 10th largest marketing communications firm on the planet.
(<http://www.worldwidepartners.com>)