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LIVE LIKE LOCALS

IF YOU WANT TO DO RESEARCH OR MARKET A PRODUCT IN A NEW COUNTRY, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED GOOD LOCAL HELP

FINDING EFFECTIVE LOCAL

marketing and marketing research help in foreign countries starts with knowing what you want, where to look and what to look for in potential partners. And it should be done while keeping in mind one overriding principal—one size doesn't fit all.

"The hardest thing for people to understand is you can't take a U.S. experience and project it to other countries around the globe," says Reg Baker, chief operating officer for Livonia, Mich.-based research company Market Strategies International, No. 20 on *Marketing News*' Honomichl Global 25 this year (see page 57). "Do not underestimate the degree to which differences exist in the countries you work."

A local partner can teach you about local issues and help you overcome local market challenges. To find the right help, do

your homework: Check references, understand market conditions and connect with knowledgeable associations. Once you've narrowed a list of local possibilities down to your finalists, examine how closely each candidate's strengths align with your own needs.

Asking around for referrals can help uncover hidden talent centers. While establishing an operating footprint in Asia Pacific and Africa during the last six or seven years, Ford Motor Co. examined research vendors made available through a number of regional marketing associations. It also turned to non-auto business partners such as Sony and Paramount for guidance, says Bangkok, Thailand-based Graeme Whickman, executive director of marketing for Ford's Asia Pacific and Africa division.

Before MSI became experienced in finding local research help country by country, it often relied on U.S.-based businesses that connect marketers to agencies on the ground; examples of such businesses include Gazelle Global Research Services LLC in New York and MRops in Doylestown, Pa. Help also is available via the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA), which has more than 270 member companies in 48 countries. Marketers can search through an online database to find agencies matching target marketing verticals and countries, says Matthias Caesar, a GALA board member and general manager of Dortmund, Germany-based technology-specific localization company Locatech GmbH.

Finding willing agencies abroad isn't so difficult, MSI's Baker says, but finding an agency with the right criteria is a bit trickier. MSI's research is typically centered around healthcare issues and technology, so it's important that MSI's local partners have access to physicians and IT managers. Bonus points go to companies that can handle certain methodologies, such as online panels, Baker says. For MSI's focus areas, a local partner who understands specific healthcare policies and how technology is bought and sold in a targeted country is crucial.

When searching for research partners, Ford's Whickman looks at results that agencies have delivered for other clients. He also likes to see a diverse roster covering blue-chip multinationals and local clients, indicating sophistication in domestic and international partnerships.

Whickman gets a better feel for a team's abilities by talking not only to its business representative, but also to the people actually carrying out the research, such as a focus group moderator and an analytical person.

Sales clearly indicate whether a part-

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nership is working, but there are other benchmarks. MSI's Baker says measuring a partnership comes down to discovering how responsive an agency is when problems arise. "As you watch a company perform under deadline, you get a real sense of how good they are at what they need to do," he says.

Matt Biespiel, senior director of global brand development for Oak Brook, Ill.-based McDonald's Corp., says to build success with its creative teams abroad, a company needs to be very clear about what its expectations are, thus ensuring both parties constantly are on the same page.

At the same time, a strong creative partnership doesn't come from a client calling all the shots. "The worst thing you can do is hire an agency and say, 'I want you to make this purple, so make it purple,'" Biespiel advises. "Give the agency the leeway to translate strategy into creative expression, to captivate the imagination of customers."

It's also important to be candid with your researcher, says Shawn Warren, vice president of marketing for Kraft Foods Asia Pacific in Shanghai, China, a division of Kraft Foods Inc. "We have to make sure we act like owners together and make sure to a certain degree that we tell it like it is," Warren says about Kraft's relationship with creative teams in developing markets. "A partnership that is open and conclusive and strong inspires trust."

Kraft establishes qualitative goals as metrics strictly around key values, encompassing no more than a single-page document for better comprehension. It also changed its business arrangement with agencies in China, from a media commission model to a compensation-for-business model, banking that the move would be a greater incentive for a successful partnership. "When we win, it's important that agency partners win too," Warren says. "This approach has really enabled us to drive much better thinking and much better integrated marketing." **m**

THREE CONSIDERATIONS FOR FOREIGN MARKETS



See Each Country Differently:

In Brazil, McDonald's is deemed a family destination, while in Russia, it's primarily a spontaneous experience, McDonald's Matt Biespiel says, so marketing measures must be customized. Guidance from local suppliers in foreign markets is essential.



Cater to Your Customer: Following research, Kraft Foods learned that Chinese consumers thought the Oreo sandwich cookie was too sweet and the package size wasn't accommodating. In 2005 Kraft tinkered with the formula and repackaged Oreos in small and economy sizes. China is now the brand's second largest market, Kraft's Shawn Warren says.



Make Changes Within: Ford's Asia Pacific and Africa division comprises Indian, Taiwanese, Chinese, South African, Indonesian and Malaysian employees, an attempt to comprehend cultural identities among its customer base. That's a vast difference from seven to nine years ago, when the staff primarily consisted of North Americans and Australians, Ford's Graeme Whickman says.