

Localizing Marketing Programs for Diverse Markets

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Since conditions vary from market to market, particularly when a company is selling internationally, it is important to adapt or “localize” marketing programs. This could mean shifting to an entirely new strategy, or just making tactical changes to promotions, copy, language, photos, or other elements.

What You Need to Know

What does localization mean?

Local markets are different in terms of business maturity, infrastructure, economic performance, priorities, and culture. That is why it is vital to think locally. By acting locally, you can create powerful, highly focused marketing campaigns that build on the strength of your main brand, but incorporate localized messages and images that reflect individual market conditions. A coordinated support program can help your branches or distributors compete effectively in their local marketplace.

What to Do

Research Local Market Conditions

Market research can help you to identify the factors that differentiate local markets. These might include:

- economic prosperity;
- market maturity;
- competitive activity;
- customer decision-making process;
- distribution infrastructure;
- quality of marketing services;
- marketing media available;
- awareness of your company.

Decide Strategy

Marketing programs are used to provide local outlets with the support they need to build business in their own marketplace. The programs can operate at two levels:

- programs you run on behalf of all your local outlets
- programs you provide for outlets to run in their own local markets

Certain marketing programs such as promotional offers may “only be available at participating outlets.” This does not imply that they are customized for local use, it only shows that the programs are running in limited areas. Price-based promotional programs are probably the most widely used local marketing programs—local outlets are provided with a standard advertisement format into which they can build their own selection of priced offers together with their own branch information. A further variation of this is the dealer direct mail service, in which an agency holds a central database of local addresses and sends customized mailings to those customers.

Another variation is the promotional kit, which provides general guidelines on developing local advertisements and marketing programs from a series of modular elements. This type of kit contains a guide to planning and operating campaigns plus suggested creative themes and details of any support services available.

Incorporate Mandatory Programs

While customized support programs have benefits for both you and your local outlets, there are a number of programs that are crucial to achieving the right standards of customer service. These programs give you a degree of control over critical local operations. Training programs which improve the quality of customer service should be an integral part of a local marketing support program. Although the courses and the method of delivery can be tailored to suit local markets and the local skills profile, participation must be mandatory to ensure that all branches deliver a consistently high standard of service.

Offer Local Outlets Choice

By offering local outlets a choice of programs, you can tailor your marketing to suit local market conditions. The other programs might include:

- local advertising;
- direct mail;
- product literature

- display material
- merchandising material;
- special offers;
- public relations support.

Many companies have tried to avoid serious levels of support by providing an ad hoc collection of support material. This is not the same as providing business support and it should not be used as a substitute for serious planning.

Provide a Marketing Support Guide

You can produce a guide to support programs which enables the local outlet to select programs that allow it to develop its own promotional strategies. The guides should:

- explain the scope and benefits of individual programs;
- describe the support material available to operate the program;
- explain how to order support material;
- provide guidelines on running the programs.

Localize Marketing Programs

Because there are so many possible variables in different markets, you should develop localization kits that will enable you to customize your creative work to incorporate the most relevant messaging, images, offers, and creative treatment while retaining the value and strength of your brand. This approach gives you real creative and commercial flexibility.

The localization process can be applied to:

- e-mail;
- newsletters;
- advertisements;
- direct mail;
- online activities;
- publications;
- customer magazines.

The key stages in localization are:

- analyze and refine messages to reflect levels of market maturity and awareness;
- analyze and refine messages to reflect local issues;
- select images/graphics appropriate for the culture.

Support Direct Marketing

The essence of an effective local support program is that local outlets understand their customers' needs and communicate with messages tailored to that market. The most powerful medium to achieve that is direct marketing—a powerful weapon in the hands of local outlets because it enables them to talk to their customers on their own terms.

Use Database Management to Support Local Programs

The key to the success of local direct marketing programs is detailed knowledge of the local customer base so that the offers and information can be tailored to local marketing programs. The most efficient way to handle this is to maintain a central database of all local customers and use database management techniques to manage the mailing list. Local outlets are unlikely to have the sophisticated equipment needed to carry out database management operations and the exercise can be carried out more efficiently on a central database.

Information for the database can be gathered from a number of sources, including:

- local customer sales records;
- replies to advertisements;
- responses to special offers or invitations;
- market research.

You can give your local outlets guidelines on the way to build and maintain their own records so that they provide suitable input to the database. By managing the process centrally and working in close conjunction with local outlets, you can ensure that your local outlets enjoy a professional quality direct marketing service that is precisely tailored to their local market.

Run a Customized Advertising Service

Local or regional advertising campaigns can be customized to suit the needs of the local market. Support can be delivered in a number of forms:

- funds to enable local outlets to produce and run their own advertisements
- contributions to the cost of joint supplier/local outlet advertisements
- contributions to the cost of advertisements run by regional groups of outlets
- production of national support advertisements that incorporate local information and that are run on a regional basis

Allocate Advertising Funds

The level of financial support depends on the funds available for local support and your local outlets' own budgets. For example, many independent outlets have substantial advertising budgets of their own and utilize the suppliers' budgets to supplement their own or to run specific campaigns. Other smaller outlets or franchised outlets without their own budgets rely entirely on the supplier's contribution to run local campaigns. Because of this, the question of financial support is usually subject to negotiation.

Supply Advertising Material

You can also supply support in the form of complete advertisements, logos, artwork, or photographs for inclusion in the outlet's own local campaigns. As you are more likely to be concerned about the consistency of local advertisements than the local outlet, you should issue clear guidelines on the use of different elements of corporate identity. Many suppliers provide advertising standard manuals which give examples of layouts for different sizes of advertisements, explain the position and size of the company name and logo, list the typefaces to use, and include sample advertisements for guidance.

Offer Centralized Advertising Services

Alternatively, you can offer local outlets a central advertising service. This support policy enables you to offer local outlets consistent professional advertisement standards, with local information such as name and address, map, priced offers, product variations, and special offers incorporated. The local outlet benefits from national advertising and strong branding, but has advertisements that suit the local market.

Set Up a Local Markets Team

You should set up a team to work with your local marketing contacts to help them develop their strategy and plan their program of activities. The team would arrange regional meetings to help local contacts identify the right strategic mix and messaging. To help them implement the program, the team can recommend local approved marketing agencies who work within the framework of your overall marketing strategy and can ensure that local marketeers are up to date with the latest campaigns and creative strategies.

Share Experience for Success

Local markets share many common characteristics, as well as clear local differences. Sharing experience and best practice can help all local markets, so consider setting up a local markets forum. The more mature markets may have case studies and proven campaigns to share, while younger territories can share their experiences.

What to Avoid

Your Impose Standard Campaigns on Local Outlets

The role of local marketing management is to refine the main brand by adjusting its execution to communicate meaningfully with each local market. Local brand building depends on an understanding of local trends, using knowledge that a central marketing department has no access to.

Where to Learn More

Book:

Van Gelder, Sicco, *Global Brand Strategy: Unlocking Branding Potential Across Countries, Cultures & Markets*. Kogan Page, 2005.