

the soho club

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Think globally but work locally

I'm often being asked, as a Brit who has worked in America and now lives in Canada, "Are there any cultural challenges or difficulties that need to be addressed by the entrepreneur with International dreams of expansion?". My answer, as always is, "Yes! Forget who YOU are and learn about who THEY are." The streets of Britain, Canada and America, as with all other countries around the world, are littered with the broken and forgotten dreams of the intrepid SOHO entrepreneur who dared to travel and who dared to broaden their horizons as they set out to conquer the world.

These aspiring International SOHO entrepreneurs can be compared very much to the aspiring actors and actresses who set their sights on Hollywood and stardom. Each believing in their own ability, skill, talent and looks trusting that that would be enough to get them to the top. But that is just not the case as the many thousands of Hollywood's waiters and waitresses can attest to, and thank goodness they can for without them there would be no-one to wait table in the multitude of eateries that swamp that great city.

Now I'm not saying that aspiring International SOHO entrepreneurs will end up waiting tables in the capitals of Europe and North America, but I am saying that you can perhaps avoid seeing your dream lying shattered and broken in the gutters, or worse still, facing bankruptcy in some far flung courtroom.

If I am asked to compare the Brits, Canadians and Americans, my answer would be that if a Brit was asked to design an American, you would end up with a Canadian. The British generally resent success, the Americans go after success with unabashed aggression and the Canadians are midway. They go after success but enjoy the success of others along the way. I highlight these three major differences as a simple means for showing that, although we all speak the same language, we respond to that language in different ways.

These three markets have massive potential for all of us but it is still only potential for, without understanding of the culture, that potential becomes just another 'pipe dream'. The same applies to the ever expanding Asian markets, the emerging 'old third world countries' and also what used to be called Eastern Europe. Having traveled and worked in all these countries, rest assured that they

are different and that you have to approach each one differently with a different speaking style, a different story and a different attitude. A friend of mine recently opened a cosmetics company in Los Angeles marketing his product through a direct sales force. For a reason that he could not explain, 95% of his statewide sales force were Korean. He has to run HIS conferences in HIS country with a Korean translator.

Were you aware that almost 1 in 4 of the population of Canada is Chinese speaking and that the Chinese language could soon take over as the second language of Canada knocking French into third place? Were you also aware that every country in the world is represented in Britain and North America? Knowledge of these facts makes International expansion so much easier for the SOHO entrepreneur but it means that our thinking has to change if we are to take advantage of this potential.

So, where do you start your International expansion? At home! In your own country! They say that charity begins at home – well so does business. Australia and New Zealand combined have a population of approximately 24 million, of which almost 3 million come from other cultures. It's these other cultures that become your passport to the International scene.

Canada, UK and the USA have a combined non indigenous population of 83 million people, predominantly of Asian origin. It is therefore safe to say that within your own backyard, you have 3 million opportunities to take your business around the world.

However, there are some relatively simple steps that should be taken immediately that will not only start you on the path to International expansion but could also lead to a growth in your home based expansion.

You will notice that, although these are all English speaking countries, they are populated by cultures from around the world. Each of these individuals will have contacts back in their home countries and invariably could be a great source for new and exciting opportunities. The question is, are you communicating to any of these cultures that live in Australia, and if so, how? What percentage of these cultures make up your customer base? If the answer is 'none' then perhaps this is something that you could be looking at resolving today.

For example, what languages is your current literature in? You don't need to translate

each and every piece of literature into each and every language, but one or two pieces could go a long way to bridging the gap. Do you employ bilingual staff? The 'shop keeper mentality' says, "if they don't speak English, I cant do business with them", whereas the entrepreneur asks, before hiring his staff, "which languages do you speak?"

So the first stage to International Expansion is identifying which International markets exist in your own backyard. Identify your second and third most prominent cultures within Australia, for these people are your stepping stones into the International marketplace. Just through networking alone, not only can you establish International contacts, you will also be identifying new markets on your home turf which, up until now, may have been largely ignored.

Once you have identified your prominent cultures, decide upon how you are going to approach them. My suggestions would be:

1. Have at least one of two pieces of current literature translated.

2. Make sure that your web site accommodates at least one if not two different languages. You don't need to translate your whole website however, you can purchase software that will 'sit' on your site, allowing the user to translate to another language should he or she wish to do so. (If you have difficulty locating this software – contact me at www.dogash.com)

These suggestions are just two of many such thoughts and ideas which may not bring you immediate business, but in the long term they will show that you care for other cultures. The one single element that all International customers are looking for is that you care and that you understand their needs.

Also advertising in their community magazines and papers, using their language, is a must. You will be surprised at how much cheaper it is to advertise in these papers. Join their local community and business associations. You will be amazed as to how warm your welcome will be, and as to how few indigenous Australians actually join these groups. Seek out what their community needs from you, and then provide it. Learn their culture, understand their ways and provide the services that they are looking for.

Nurture these new contacts and markets well for they are the windows and doors to your International wealth and fortunes.

Next month we shall be looking at how to establish footholds in International markets. ●