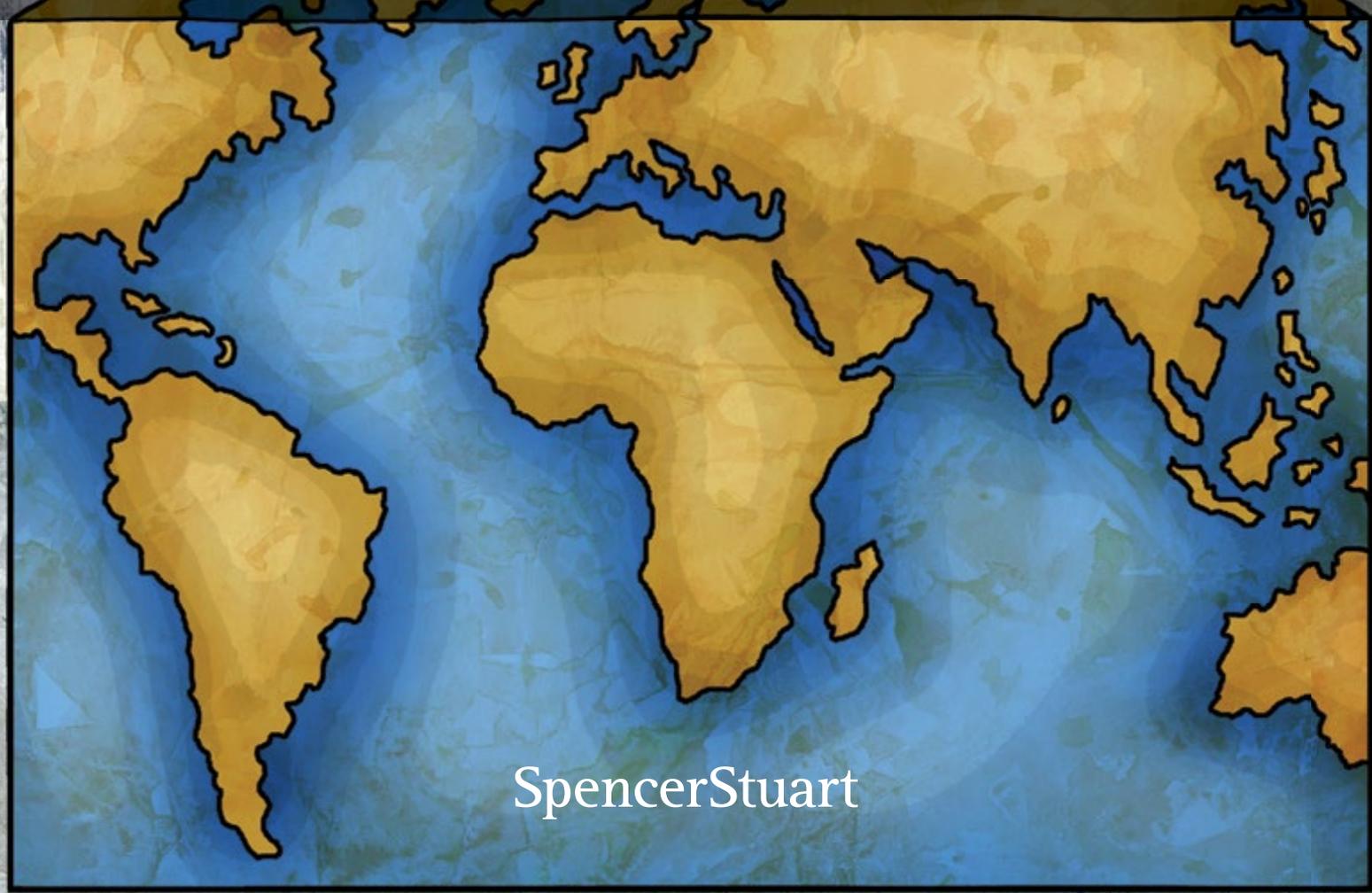




# Crossing Borders

Internationalizing brands



SpencerStuart



# Crossing Borders — Internationalizing Brands

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## Introduction

As companies seek to develop their global footprint and exploit opportunities for their brands in growth markets, they are increasingly reliant on outstanding marketing leaders who can develop teams with the right balance of skills and experience, both at the centre and within the local markets.

This report explores the challenges facing CMOs from around the world who have taken on the task of 'going global'. Members of our firm-wide Marketing Officer Practice interviewed 45 CMOs and senior marketing executives responsible for many of the world's leading brands. We invited them to reflect on the issues they have faced leading brand internationalization projects and to explain how their experience of operating in foreign markets has shaped their thinking about how brands can cross borders.

We were particularly interested to learn how CMOs are organizing their teams into effective global marketing operations and how they approach the vital task of hiring and developing people who can drive brand growth in key strategic markets. We hope that marketing leaders will draw some inspiration from our findings and pick up some new tools with which to evaluate the qualities and attributes that make for first-rate international marketers.

## Setting the scene

Prepare for the boundary-less marketing organization where the frontiers between marketers, key opinion formers and consumers will disappear.

Marc Mathieu, Unilever

Consumer behaviours are evolving rapidly and often in unpredictable ways. On the one hand, globalization has resulted in converging consumer interests and expectations. More than ever, consumers accept global brands with global positioning and communication, perhaps because they are looking for experiences that transcend the limitations of their own lives. On the other hand, consumers the world over are becoming ever more sophisticated, while retaining a strong sense of pride in their local culture. They are more demanding and idiosyncratic than ever, thanks to the impact of social media and other forms of global communication.

These forces are turning brand internationalization into an increasingly complex discipline. As brands reach across new frontiers, marketers have to address different cultural nuances and deliver campaigns that reflect how local consumers like to interact with their brands. CMOs have to make clear, informed decisions about the degree of control that can and should be exerted from the centre without jeopardizing the potential opportunity in any given market. They need to ensure that everyone shares a common understanding and respect for the brand's core values, while translating high-quality consumer insight into agile and effective execution on the ground.

Companies have experimented with a variety of organizational models to facilitate global brand management. At one end of the spectrum are companies with centrally controlled brands that dominate their category (these are rare). At the other end are companies that give almost total freedom to their local operations. Among these are businesses that tried to push their brands out from the centre in the belief that a uniform approach would be effective, but then withdrew power entirely from the central team when the strategy failed to work. The middle of the spectrum is occupied by companies that have learned, often through trial and error, that the concept of a global market is illusory and that internationalizing the brand requires a clear understanding between those in the centre and those in the regions as to which elements of the brand are fixed and which can be adapted to local circumstances. These companies recognize that some degree of metamorphosis will be necessary for their brands to thrive in new markets. They pay close attention to country-specific circumstances — anything from consumer behaviour and expectations to retail environments and climate — while being careful not to sacrifice the brand's essence or jeopardize its competitive advantage.

## How organizations are changing

Deciding where to position their organization within the standardization vs. adaption spectrum is a challenge for any global CMO. The ground is continually shifting, and the solution is rarely obvious, as Serge Jureidini, former president of Lancôme and now CEO of Arcade Marketing, points out: “Adaptation often allows you to go faster, but it might also take you away from your equity. You might have to twist your brand a little to be successful and go faster as you adapt to consumers as opposed to consumers adapting to your brand. Some other times, especially when it pertains to luxury brands, you just need to be patient and allow time for consumers to discover your brand.”

Part of the complexity that marketers face comes from contradictory consumer expectations in a globalizing world. Some products will appeal to consumers in one part of the world precisely because they convey a particular cultural aesthetic or authenticity, so attempts to adapt these products would be self-defeating. Other products may appeal to consumers regardless of geography because they are attracted to the sheer power of the global brand. Other product categories might require a high degree of customization to appeal at a local level.

To Carlos Ricardo, Global Marketing, Advertising and Sponsorships at BBVA (Madrid), this is a fascinating debate.

“My personal opinion, having worked on a number of different brands and organizational models, is that consumers are increasingly becoming part of a global community, thanks in part to the impact of social media; there is a growing appreciation for big brands with global reach. Companies should therefore strive for a ‘glocal’ approach — global reach with local connection. That doesn’t mean that all brands should have global aspiration — some are local iconics that can continue to grow on the basis of their heritage and emotional connection to a specific geography or culture. The challenge for successful local brands in Brazil will be to define clear marketing strategies and business models that will enable them to expand internationally. Havaianas is an inspiration for other Brazilian brands with the potential to break into global markets.”

CMOs seeking to meet consumer demand on a global scale need to adopt new organizational structures that will allow for the creation of global brand teams as well as centres of excellence that incorporate the right mix of functional skills, whether it be brand building, brand development or social marketing.

## Establishing the optimal framework

Global protocols never deliver great work. They can prevent poor work, but great innovation is never delivered by a textbook. Businesses need to be brave enough to give markets freedom to innovate in their space and if the business results are poor change the people, don't introduce protocols.

Nikki Lawson, Yum! Restaurants

Establishing and communicating a clear framework that everyone involved in the marketing of brands understands and buys into is absolutely critical. Some companies have extremely strict, standardized processes governing brand management and brand development thinking to eliminate harmful variations in the execution of brand strategy. However, overly rigid frameworks can stifle creativity at a local level, undermining the potential of the brand and driving good people away.

Today, most CMOs recognize that achieving a unified brand expression usually involves a flexible approach in which some elements and processes remain fixed while others are stretched and adapted to local conditions.

Chris Burggraeve, former CMO AB InBev, is not in favour of a menu-driven, laissez faire attitude towards international brand management: "There's one ABI way of marketing: whether you work on the global, multi-country or local brand, the approach, the software is the same for everybody. The language is spoken by everybody. If

you don't like it, you're not in the team. It's very simple." However, he makes a clear distinction between global brands and local brands. "We made it very clear from the beginning where responsibility lies for global brands. Those people are sitting in New York and run the brands — like Apple or Disney or all the best global brands — with a high degree of control of the framework and limited degrees of freedom for the key markets in which the brand operates, but of course in smart partnership with the key countries to secure relevance. Now the flip side is true for the local brands, because even today in a company like AB Inbev the local brands are the power houses that define the company's revenue stream the most. Anything that is local is really managed locally."

Jacopo D'Alessandris, Vice President and Head, Marketing North America, Philips Consumer Lifestyle, is clear about where the boundaries lie: "Global brand, local execution. The brand has to identify clearly its characteristics, values, guidelines. Once this is done and those boundaries are

clearly set, countries should be allowed to execute campaigns locally that connect with people in each country. Local entrepreneurship and understanding of local usages and behaviours are key to making the brand relevant to people.”

Hanneke Willenborg, Vice President Global Brand Development Dishwash, Unilever, believes that close teamwork is critical in addressing the ‘not invented here’ syndrome: “What works well is having effective, open collaboration between a central marketer and a local marketer who is closer to the consumer; developing the right brand model depends on segmentation, which is based on consumer insight.”

D’Alessandris agrees that this team dynamic is vital. In his experience, implementing a global concept involves a joint development process with key countries. “The concept either has to be adapted locally (glocal) or completely redesigned (local for local). It is vital to have local marketers who are as good as the global ones, because the best ideas are born out of the discussions and challenges between the two parties. You also have to have a very good global agency that can support the global matrix and facilitate these discussions.” According to Fabio Di Giammarco, Managing Director, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bacardi (Brazil), the main difficulty with formulating a coherent, consistent international branding strategy lies in finding a true insight that is

applicable across all countries. “Research budgets are limited and concepts and value propositions are not always validated in relevant markets. When it comes to execution, global teams must engage local teams in a timely manner and take account of local nuances. When local teams lose faith in the product or campaign, the battle is all but lost.”

Rich Gerstein, CEO of Zignail, who has worked at HP, Sears and P&G during his career, says that wherever the pendulum settles between centralization and decentralization, marketing teams are continually thinking about how much to drive a unified mandate around the globe. “If you’re in the global group your tendency is to want to keep things clean and simple and unified. If you’re on the localized side, your instinct typically is to say ‘my market is different and it won’t work here because of cultural differences or competitive pressures or because of the trade structure’.”

Some companies seek to alleviate this tension by providing a high degree of local autonomy and thus accountability, putting all the resources into the regions and forcing them to sink or swim. Gerstein believes this approach is less effective than what he refers to as the “co-dependency model”, in which responsibilities for different brands are spread across different regions. “If I’m heading North America I’m responsible (hypothetically) for the diaper business

Trust is vital in the relationship between HQ and local offices.  
Angelo Giardini, Ferrero Trading (Shanghai)



I believe that a brand can only have one image. Adaptations can occur in local cultures and in the choice of product assortments, but on communication the approach has to be the same everywhere.

globally. If I'm running Europe, I'm responsible for the detergent business globally. I come to you with special requests, you come to me with special requests. This breeds a kind of co-dependency which I think is better and more efficient."

Perhaps the key game changer in global brand management is the emergence of brands from developing markets with significant potential for global exploitation. Marc Mathieu, Senior Vice President, Marketing, Unilever plc, acknowledges this shift and sees it as a positive development, rather than simply a threat. "We no longer live in a world where global brands are Western brands. Global brands and global executions can be born anywhere in the world. Today, the American dream is as much Chinese as it is American. Also, the reality is that social has enabled things to travel globally very fast across the organization in ways that do not follow the practice management process. So the likelihood of new and exciting things coming out of developing economies and feeding the global brand platform is huge."

As the macro environment becomes more complex and the role of the international brand marketer more nuanced, the guardians of established brands and brand entrepreneurs are increasingly dependent on finding, developing and retaining outstanding talent — people at the centre of the organization and out in the markets who share a common goal and who combine intellectual agility, cultural sensitivity and international experience with sharp commercial instinct.

## Building the ultimate global marketing machine

Marc de Swaan Arons, Founder of EffectiveBrands and author of The Global Brand CEO.

Today almost every marketer works for or competes against a global marketing organization. Although global brands have been around for ever, organizationally this represents a major shift; over the last decade almost every significant marketing organization has evolved towards a more global way of working.

Our work and the results of the Leading Global Brands™ study have helped us identify some key effectiveness drivers for building an effective global marketing organization:

### INTERDEPENDENCE

In any organization which needs to lead the marketing and brand vision centrally and coordinate across countries, there will inevitably be central marketers who need to work with local teams to develop and translate global strategy into winning local tactics. The nature of this central-local relationship is critical to success and can often be characterized as either overly dependent or fiercely independent. Neither is healthy. We find that the most effective global marketing leaders have carefully built an interdependent culture where central marketers have a 'Servant Leadership' mindset and local marketers approach the strategy process in a spirit of looking for similarities. The recently publicized 'One

Sony' initiative is a good example of how a major leadership push may be required to bring colleagues back around the same table with a shared sense of interdependence.

### INSPIRATION

Behind the façade of every effective global marketing organization there are highly inspired local, regional and global marketers who have made a personal connection with the brand's purpose and the organization's global marketing objectives. Although this sounds like a given, we find that very few global marketing leaders invest the necessary time or resources to make this happen. Too many marketing leaders delegate the task of building internal cohesion to a junior team member, even though we have found

that behind every major global marketing success there are stories of leaders adopting a highly personal, ambassadorial approach to inspiring their teams. CEO Paul Polman's Unilever Sustainable Living Plan is an excellent example of how corporate purpose can drive brand vision, employee retention and, importantly, market success.

#### FOCUS

In global marketing organizations it's all about creating absolute clarity on objectives across geographies and ensuring total alignment between strategies, KPIs and personal rewards. Everyone, no matter where they sit in the organization, needs to have clarity on how their objectives contribute to a simple global strategy. We have found that there is a huge opportunity to simplify the strategy process for global organizations by clustering markets according to their stage of brand development. Diageo has had tremendous success in requiring markets in the same cluster to collaborate on strategy and tactics, regardless of geography.

#### ORGANIZE

There are very few global marketers who get out of bed in the morning with the ambition of developing an operating model, yet our work often reveals an important and demotivating lack of clarity around precisely who does what. This lack of clarity often results in wasted or negative energy among management and even leads to people leaving the company in protest because discussions about responsibilities can get personal very quickly. We have also found that breadth of responsibility is far less

important than clarity about where responsibility lies. Taking the time to get this right up front pays back handsomely. When Starbucks created its first global marketing team, global and regional marketers took only a day to agree their respective roles on the following year's must-win projects. This quickly turned out to have been a very worthwhile investment. Global teams no longer automatically sit in corporate HQ either: both Unilever and P&G have recently moved global brand teams out into the Asia region where some of the most interesting consumer activity is taking place.

#### DEFINING A COMMON WAY OF DOING MARKETING

When two companies merge the first thing they do is align their financial systems to ensure the numbers add up at the end of the quarter. Whereas finance teams in the same company work with common definitions, there is no such consistency in marketing. Senior and mid-level marketing leaders are often recruited from Unilever, P&G, Mars and Kraft and bring in their own language and ways of doing marketing. All the effective global marketing organizations we have worked with have found it well worthwhile to step back and define their company's way of doing marketing. Creating a Marketing Academy and a common language allows quick transfer of best practice and better collaboration across teams. When Hershey decided to focus more on global growth, the creation of the Hershey Way of Marketing became a leading force in bringing colleagues closer together and increasing overall skill levels.

## Identifying, hiring and developing talent

Working overseas helps you cultivate better business instincts. You are exposed to a different and bigger playing field, you get used to making bolder decisions. This tends to increase your impact on the business.

Günther Trieb, Delsey S.A

In order to exploit brands to best effect internationally, CMOs need to develop three things: well tuned cultural antennae; a keen awareness of the subtle differences between markets; and a first-rate network of trustworthy marketing professionals in distant geographies capable of reconciling the demands of a global brand — the “non-negotiables” — with the distinct commercial realities and cultural nuances of each local market.

The CMO needs to devote a lot of time to thinking through the personal qualities,

skills and experiences needed among the dispersed members of the team who will execute the marketing strategy.

There is a growing preference for developing and deploying local talent with the skills and market knowledge to manage and grow businesses in local markets. While the principle of putting local nationals in charge of regional or country teams is a good one, in reality this is often impractical and sometimes entirely inappropriate. In some developing markets there is still a serious shortage of talent which combines brand

### Why take an international assignment?

- > Develop a fresh perspective that challenges your company's and your own preconceptions.
- > Differentiate yourself from your peers.
- > It is a healthy way to break habits and set patterns of behaviour.
- > Appreciate the difficulty faced by local teams.
- > Develop an “outside-in” mindset.
- > Learn to bring the voice of the consumer alive inside the organization.
- > Learn to get into the depths of execution with limited resources.
- > Become better equipped to design relevant programmes when you're back at HQ.
- > Test your adaptability, agility and ability to survive outside your comfort zone.
- > Become fit for purpose in an increasingly globalized world.

management skills, commercial savvy and local market knowledge (including consumer insight) with the international mindset and accountability that comes from working with global brands.

CMOs need to devote a significant amount of their time to identifying which members of their team are most likely to succeed in foreign environments and minimising the risk of failure by putting high potentials through a proper assessment programme. Mistakes can be costly, both financially and in terms of damage to the brand.

A significant percentage of expatriate assignments fail, and a common contributor to those failures is spousal or family unhappiness. Moving someone to a new country is a major upheaval for them and for their family; the new appointee has to deal with added pressure from all sides. CMOs must take care over such appointments, then provide practical support to ensure a smooth transition. They need to ensure that once hiring decisions are made, appointees are fully prepared for their international assignments, that they undergo a thorough onboarding process and that they continue to be supported in the early days of their

## Advice for marketers thinking of going overseas

- > Assert yourself. Make it known that an overseas experience is what you want. Have a good explanation for why, and why now.
- > Think of what you can learn. You are on the most exciting journey of your life.
- > Develop an ability to collaborate across professional boundaries (i.e. finance, sales, production, etc.).
- > Get on the road early in your career. You will experience an incomparable growth curve overseas.
- > Family issues will add complexity to your new role. Be ready to have your family become part of your journey.
- > Do not worry too much about the job or the package. At times it can be better to accept a job slightly below what you are doing today. This reduces the risk and maximises your prospects abroad. The value to your CV will outweigh any perceived lack of upward progression.
- > Think in terms of becoming an expert in an area that may be of tremendous importance to your organization.
- > Be prepared to work harder than you ever have. In emerging markets the pace can be very fast.
- > Try to get a balance between local and central assignments, and between emerging and developed markets. The best people have both. This is how you develop both your operational and strategic acumen.
- > Experience both developed and developing markets (sophistication vs. entrepreneurship and innovation).
- > Expatriation should be a life choice as much as a career one; it helps but doesn't automatically solve career issues.

new roles. They also need to prevent people from staying in roles long after they have ceased being useful.

Mads Nipper, Chief Marketing Officer of LEGO, places a strong emphasis on building diverse brand and marketing teams, especially in the lead regions (US, UK, Denmark and Asia). One of the ways he achieves this is by rotating LEGO's marketers. "Ours is a global offering, centrally managed, with global brand and product development. A requirement for

promotion is that you have to have worked internationally."

One HR director observed that in order for an executive to be considered for an international assignment, he or she must either bring something to the table, such as a deep set of skills or a particular expertise, or be someone of high potential, for which this will be an accelerating development opportunity. "You must have a solid track record of performance in your established role, because once you become an expatriate the expectations of you are so much higher."

#### THE VALUE OF HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE IN FOREIGN MARKETS

CMOs making decisions about who to hire into international roles can learn from the background and experiences of their peers. Many of the senior marketing executives who participated in this study decided early on in their careers to gain exposure outside their home markets. Their willingness to

place themselves in unfamiliar and often uncomfortable situations and to learn about different social, cultural and economic systems played a significant part in their career development and the formation of their marketing leadership skills.

#### Things to consider once you are in situ

- > Understand the language if you can. A great deal is lost in translation.
- > Never underestimate the differences between countries, and that includes the internal organization.
- > Remember why you are there. Your role is to develop the foundation for success.
- > Teaching is a tough job.
- > Be more of an Excel marketer than a PowerPoint one. Develop your numeracy and analytical powers; stay commercially minded.
- > Don't stay in the office. Spend time on the ground. Be present.
- > Success will be measured by how well the business does after you leave. There are personal benefits, but everything you're doing is in service to help the local team.
- > You've got to get that right in order to accomplish the personal and profession goals you set for yourself — one of which should be to groom your successor.
- > Maintain your bonds and your connection with your home country. This is essential if you want to ensure a smooth return passage from an overseas assignment.

“Some people are genuinely motivated and passionate about working internationally,” says Mathieu. “They are curious about the different cultures, about exploring and adapting. Some people just do it because it is the natural, logical career path. I am not saying that you have to be passionate about it, but that was certainly the case for me. “

Chris Burggraeve has spent 18 years of his 23-year career outside his home market and says it was an advantage being a Belgian national. “In Belgium, we have a very large ‘abroad’. Someone born in the US or India or China may not have that same desire to leave because those countries are so large. My international career was by design and by desire. I studied international economics. Every traineeship I did abroad or had to do with foreign trade. It was a deliberate choice.”

Nikki Lawson of Yum! Restaurants, also elected to leave her home environment in favour of testing her skills abroad. “I was keen to see how adaptable my skills were,” says Lawson. “I knew what worked in South Africa; we’d achieved a lot, becoming

marketing organization of the year. The question was, if I was suddenly presented with a whole set of different circumstances would I be able to adapt what I’d learned to those circumstances? So coming to Australia where KFC wasn’t number one, I had to deal with far more sophisticated consumers who saw the brand as down-market rather than aspirational. I couldn’t rely on tactics I’d used previously; I needed to adapt the knowledge I had to a new set of variables.”

Helen Souness, General Manager, Envato, previously Marketing Director of Seek Ltd, believes that international experience was instrumental in developing her leadership skills. “Working in different places, regularly being out of your comfort zone, not being known and having to prove yourself without family or business connections — these are all valuable experiences, and particularly help develop your communication skills.”

## Adapting to an international assignment

### Personal

- > Practical support is critical (help with local bureaucracy, etc.).
- > Family happiness is a major factor and can derail a great opportunity. Be aware that you will experience added pressure from both sides: your work and your family.
- > Language issues (no substitute for learning the language).

### Professional

- > Onboarding: don’t leave it to others.
- > Figure out who to trust, who to listen to.
- > Be wary of entrenched local interests.
- > Work with a great consumer insights agency or research partner.

## Focus on China

There's something about China. It's the scale, the complexity, the speed at which things move ...

Alan Jope, Unilever

The prevailing view among our interviewees was that in contrast to other growth markets, marketers in China generally do not yet have the skills or training to provide local marketing leadership for non-Chinese multinationals. "There is still a need for these marketers to develop further experience and maturity before we start seeing significantly more Chinese talent running local operations," says Udai Kunzru, President Asia, Dyson Ltd.

That does not mean it is easy for non-Chinese marketers to be effective in leadership roles in China. According to Erica Kerner, VP Marketing & Communications, Asia Pacific, Tiffany & Co, there are challenges on both sides: "We need to respect each other. I have to rely on research, data and instinct to figure out strategy, but I also need local knowledge and experience and the local talent who can help me get it right. In this role I am part strategist, part diplomat and part teacher."

Alan Jope, President, North Asia for Unilever, says it takes about a year to realize just how different China is: "As an expat [coming to China] you realise after 12 months how little you know. After five years

you cautiously offer the odd opinion. You should have been here for double-digits of years, speak the language fluently and usually have a Chinese partner before you can humbly offer opinions about the country.

"It's true of any country that you should be respectful of what you don't know for quite a long time, but there's something about China. It's the scale, the complexity, the speed at which things move, the magnitude of difference compared with the culture where most of our international assignees come from."

Unilever has done a lot of work on what it calls "transference", in an attempt to identify those countries that can transfer work and ideas successfully between each other. "We find that it's not always geographical or linguistic groupings," says Jope. "It might be about the state of socioeconomic development in the country, the extent to which a market has developed. What we find is that China is particularly difficult, so China has got zero transference with anywhere else. In fact, whereas we might test in Spain and assume that that's relevant for parts of southern Europe and Portugal

and maybe bits of Latin America, in China we can't even test within one place. Getting transference even within China is hard, so increasingly we are running differentiated communication in different parts of China."

"There are some things about brands you just can't tinker with, where you have to be very prescriptive," says Jope. "Take Omo laundry liquid or Dove shampoo. We don't fiddle with the core proposition or the packaging or the pricing strategy. However, the way people wash their clothes in China is fundamentally different from almost every other country so we have adapted the formulations. Chinese hair is four times stiffer than Caucasian hair and so you need heavier conditioning systems in the shampoo. And then the way you talk about children's development or women's self-esteem is very different in China from almost anywhere else. So you need freedom and the quality of people who can change what needs to be changed and leave what doesn't."

Annie Young-Scrivner's career has taken her from Frito-Lay to Pepsico (where she was CMO and VP, Sales for Quaker Foods & Snacks Division and President, PepsiCo Foods Greater China) and then to Starbucks, where she was Global Chief Marketing Officer and President, Tazo Tea. She believes that brands are most successful when they have their own identities in each country. "Brands need local relevance, then they become a ritual."

Young-Scrivner has spent much of her career in China and points out that Quaker had to make a substantial adaptation of the brand in China, where oats are considered primarily to be horse feed, even though they have more nutritional value than rice. "After researching vitamin deficiencies in the country, we developed a product incorporating oats, rice, calcium and other ingredients used in traditional Chinese medicine, adapting the thicker texture found in oatmeal in the US and UK. Likewise at Starbucks we created a black sesame green tea frappuccino."

Angelo Giardini, General Manager China, Ferrero Trading (Shanghai), is adamant that people have to commit themselves to the Chinese market in order to fully understand it and be effective. There is so much to learn, about society, culture and commerce. "I don't understand companies that send people to China for three years and then move them out. It's a disaster! When I say commit, we are not talking three years, but rather eight, ten years. In three years, what do you do? In the first year you don't know your name. By the second year you start to understand how to say your name in Chinese. In the third year, you learn how to walk. What is the additional value? Zero." The same is true in reverse, says Giardini. It can take five years for a Chinese national to become fully effective in an international context, and only usually after spending time in HQ and in one or two other markets — a substantial investment.

## Evaluating the potential international marketer

Today's first-class marketers are business people. They are passionate about financial performance, consumer insights and brand equity. In that order.

Ola Arvidsson, Arla Foods

Despite increasing mobility among marketing executives, there is a clear shortage of high-quality, internationally focused marketing talent around the world. Being able to assess which members of a team have the right skill-sets and personal qualities to handle international assignments is critically important. Here we look at the characteristics most prevalent in marketers who perform well in their foreign assignments.

At the broadest level, a successful international marketer needs to combine local knowledge and cultural sensitivity with a broad-based category management mindset, while being fully aligned with the goals of the corporate centre.

Deep functional competence is vital, since it gives an individual the confidence to add value across a range of geographies. An intelligent use of metrics and the ability to focus on key data are also important. However, assuming that all potential candidates for international roles meet the baseline requirement of proven core marketing skills, the deciding factor in overseas appointments will usually come down to a combination of motivation, personality, soft skills and global mindset.

The prime motivator propelling most executives to take on an assignment overseas is the desire for career progression, but this is not enough on its own. To survive — let alone thrive — in an unfamiliar environment surrounded by very little support and infrastructure requires a combination of flexibility, sensitivity and robustness.

One of the signs of a person's motivation and flexibility is whether they have previously made a successful transition between two different divisions or types of role, whether they have moved successfully between staff and line jobs, have led high- and low-performance teams or have moved extensively within their own country. Each of these provides some evidence that the individual is able to adapt to a new cultural context outside their home market.

As some of the earlier accounts from CMOs illustrate, executives who have had international exposure from an early age tend to have an advantage over their peers when it comes to developing a global mindset, which is perhaps the most critical quality of all.



## What constitutes a global mindset?

Marketing executives with a global mindset possess a level of cultural fluency which sets them apart from their peers. They have often acquired this as children, encouraged by their parents to be tolerant, flexible and to have “eyes wide open to the world”. Far from being fazed by situations that

take them out of their comfort zone, they embrace new experiences and new markets, have a willingness to learn, and actively seek out opportunities to enhance their understanding of different cultures and markets. This cultural aptitude comprises several qualities which are outlined below.

### 1 HUMILITY

What I went with was real humility to learn the local market and to understand cultural differences. I think I was very accepted by that team, probably for that attitude as much as anything. Helen Souness, Envato

The natural desire to exert influence in a new role needs to be tempered by a willingness to learn. Management pride is dangerous and the global marketing executive needs to be smart and confident enough to admit to what they don't know. It forces them to be open to new learning and to consider the opinions of others in the team. In a situation of power, it's easy to be seduced into thinking that you know everything or that you are supposed to.

One of the main reasons international executives do not work out is that they try to impose their own cultural or world view, trying to make everything operate the way it does in their own market (often company headquarters). Natural relationship-builders who don't make snap judgments tend to have humility.

## 2 SENSITIVITY

There are a lot of ways to do business. You need to have the sensitivity, the willingness and the fascination to get under the skin of the local culture and to scan the differences and similarities. Hanneke Willenborg, Unilever

Sensitivity to cultural nuance is a critical quality for any executive operating on the international stage. It cannot easily be taught, but is most likely to be developed through cultural immersion.

Effective global executives demonstrate low ego. They are prepared to listen and immerse themselves in the local culture to sharpen their understanding and insight.

## 3 INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

The true marketer is constantly wired in to what's happening — from technology to pop culture to shifts in shopper behaviour. The people who are naturally interested and opinionated about the dynamics of the changing world around them are normally the ones who will excel in a marketing career. Carlos Ricardo, BBVA (Madrid)

Intellectual curiosity is useful at two levels. It deepens a person's understanding of what drives the local business and what motivates its employees; it also helps develop an appreciation of the broader cultural context. Global marketing executives with a willingness and propensity to learn become increasingly valuable to their organizations over time.

“As an international marketer you cannot rely on past experience,” says Günther Trieb, Group Chief Executive Officer, Delsey S.A. “Much of an expat's success and enjoyment comes from having a genuine interest in how people and cultures operate. You want the executive who will be energized by the differences, not frustrated by them or seeking to change them.”

## 4 AGILITY

Marketers are having to deal with much shorter cycles, so they have to be more flexible and learn on the fly. You need people who can step back and understand things in the abstract and yet get into the detail when it comes to local implementation.

John Kennedy, IBM

Agility is a quality that every global marketing executive must possess. It has multiple dimensions: intellectual, cultural, social and emotional. The most effective executives can adapt their style and approach to what they see in front of them. Culturally agile people will use their guile and influence to locate the resources they need without trying to learn or do everything by themselves. They are prepared to work with what's available and are interested in finding the best solution, regardless of whose idea it might be. In high-growth markets, agility is essential because you don't have the benefit of time — things move so quickly. You have to be able to learn on the fly, to develop

your fast-twitch muscles, as one person put it. Even the job scope can change. In a state of flux, the global marketing executive has to be comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.

Another aspect of agility is the ability to apply learning to different situations, to sort through a myriad of data and make the right connections. Carlos Ricardo looks for people “with a passion for innovation that drives them to constantly question the different components of a business model and help find ways to offer more value to consumers delivering profitable growth.”

## 5 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The most important thing for a top-class international marketer is the ability to find new ways to adapt the communication to a changing environment.

Matthias Becker, formerly McDonald's Germany

Excellent communication skills mean not only being able to articulate your vision in a different cultural setting and inspire others to executive that vision, but also the ability

to win people's confidence and trust and to develop insight through a wide range of different conversations.

## Conclusion

Global marketing is not a new phenomenon. In the postwar years, as international and cultural barriers came down and the flows of global commerce increased, brands (in particular Western brands) fanned out across the world. With them went a vanguard of global marketing executives carrying suitcases filled with ready-mixed campaigns and guidelines. Some were true pioneers, others were simply messengers or career-enders.

That was then and this is now. Global marketing is an altogether richer cocktail driven in large part by the increasing sophistication and buying power of those markets once tagged “third world” or “developing”. Simply imposing a ready-made solution on these markets is to seriously underestimate them. However, the economic logic of the global brand has to be maintained.

Enter the new breed of international marketer. Our study has confirmed that this new dynamic needs a different kind of executive — one who is passionate about genuine multi-culturalism, who is committed to live and breathe a wide range of international experiences and who sees this as a career-enhancing stage on the journey, rather than a cul-de-sac.

Whether you are a marketer who is thinking of your next step, or shaping the future talent strategy for an international company, we hope this study will give you ideas and inspiration in equal measure.

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