

**When in Rome…. a sales and marketing trip (with tips!) around the APSMA chapters of Asia!**

*Did you know that in Mainland China, doing business is as much about the friendship and personal relationship you establish as it is about the business relationship? The Chinese coin the term for this “Guanxi”, and it is a fundamental dynamic in what is described as “personalized networks of influence”. Guanxi is founded on “implicit mutual obligations, reciprocity and trust”, requiring salespeople to be personal, patient, tenacious and connected.*

In our increasingly globally connected world it is critical we understand what drives buying decisions in markets outside our own. As an Asia-Pacific marketing and business development organisation, APSMA is in a unique to position to work with organisations from a multitude of different cultures. In my first thought leadership article as President, I wanted to take this opportunity to share insights with you from our members across the Region and connect you to the markets in which your clients operate.

**China**

Many of the largest Chinese companies are State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and as public servants, buyers’ decision making processes are not only based on the business benefits your company will provide but also take into account many complex political factors. Marketing in this context can be challenging…Chinese clients are known for being strong negotiators and driving a hard bargain. Price, however, is not the sole element of the marketing mix that determines success, with brand, service quality, experience and credentials all integral to setting you apart from the competition.

Whilst a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, doing business in Hong Kong is not the same as in Mainland China. Hong Kong is a patchwork quilt of long standing, highly esteemed local business communities and high pace, high turnover expatriate business communities. The fusion of guanxi, analytical and research-oriented mindsets, with frequently extroverted, expressive, vocally assertive attributes has created a very versatile and dynamic environment.

You should expect very detailed, well thought through planning processes with a strong focus on risk management/mitigation, but be ready when buyers get comfortable as they move fast, buy quickly and will expect short term ROI turnaround times. Sales and marketers should be on the front foot of industry developments, taking insights to clients, helping them to work through scenarios, avoid pitfalls and be seen to be the forerunner of new business opportunities.

**South-East Asia**

The markets of South East Asia (also known as ASEAN or “Association of Southeast Asian Nations”) are unquestionably the most culturally and linguistically diverse of any reqion in the world and unsurprisingly this environment renders any generalisations completely meaningless (arguably like all aforementioned and ensuing generalisations!).

Singapore reflects this diversity with 74% of residents of Chinese descent, 13% of Malay descent, 9% of Indian descent and the balance representing Eurasians and other nationalities. This blend of nationalities can give a little of everything doing business in Asia has to offer: the tough negotiation skills of the Chinese; the importance of relationships (especially as a way of giving the client ‘face’); respect for seniority and hierarchies; a preference for polite, respectful discussion over an open and direct style; and bleeding edge use of technology.

For the marketers amongst us, helping client serving teams clearly articulate quantifiable benefits through your firm’s relevant experience and credentials, will go a long way to differentiating your firm’s proposition.

**Australia**

Next up…. and down under… and the birthplace of APSMA. Straylia, mate! As ‘poms’ like myself have learned (poms, by the way, are Brits prone to sunburn famed for turning the colour of pomegranates), Aussies like to be open and direct. Have the conversation but be efficient. Aussies like to know which school you went to. Don’t waste time wondering why, answer the question and move on!

In Australia, clients are business outcome and value focused. Many an EY client win/loss debrief bears testimony to the need for professional services firms to more clearly articulate and demonstrate compelling value propositions. And so long as you’re pricing to market, price will not be a factor, particularly if you get the opportunity to provide some form of “skin in the game” through risk/reward and success fee based options.

Sales and marketers can seize this opportunity by co-developing your value proposition with your client. They will tell you what they think of it and with your “skin in the game” will work with you to refine it.

**New Zealand**

And last but not least, New Zealand. New Zealand has built a reputation as a straightforward and uncomplex place to do business – the environment is more informal than elsewhere and Kiwis don’t like red tape. Similar to the Aussies, Kiwis prefer you to be direct and cut to the chase. But you need to demonstrate ingenuity – New Zealand is a nation of DIYers – and they like people who come up with creative ways of resolving problems – then expect you to roll up your sleeves and get things done quickly because execution times are much shorter than in larger markets.

With commercial creativity has come an increasing popularity with risk sharing particularly in the engineering industry where collaboration and working on spec to win jobs is fast becoming the norm.

Finally, remember that New Zealand is a small market. There is often only one degree of separation with everyone knowing someone in common so your reputation will make or break you. And be prepared to talk about sport – so long as they haven’t been recently beaten by the Aussies, most Kiwis will be happy to oblige!

So when in Rome, do as the Romans do!

Alex Grell

APSMA President 2016