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Notes



Engaging a Global Community: an IMTS Case Study

By Michelle Bruno

The Association for Manufacturing Technology (AMT) has addressed its fair share of challenges—the movement of manufacturing jobs overseas (a trend that has begun to reverse itself) in the early part of the decade and an economic recession that deeply affected its member organizations over the last three years. During the same time; however, it strengthened its international standing in emerging markets including China, India and Latin America, and developed a global communications strategy to grow its flagship event, the International Manufacturing Technology Show (IMTS).

AMT developed its own virtual marketing and communications “dream team” with hand-picked experts in copywriting, advertising, design, public relations and media. They are in an unusual position according to Peter Eelman, vice president, exhibitions and communications at AMT, because his experienced staff can coordinate the communications efforts—the role usually filled by an ad agency. “I don’t like being

locked in ever. If you find really good freelancers, you can get some great work done without the attachment. We can pick and choose who is the best at the various disciplines, and it’s up to us to blend it together,” he says.

The primary mission of IMTS’ virtual marcom team, comprised of Clearly Write, ThinkingCap and Pumphrey Marketing, is to make IMTS the gathering place for the industry, spotlight attendee and exhibitor successes and attract new prospects from emerging vertical market segments. “So, as they are making the decision to exhibit or attend, we need to arm them with compelling reasons why IMTS is a must-attend event. We spend the full two-year cycle [IMTS is produced every other year] building a comprehensive case to make IMTS ‘the event’ for manufacturing professionals,” says Mary Uhrina of Clearly Write.

The marketing and communications strategy at IMTS takes the global marketplace into consideration. It includes keeping the show’s brand strong and recognizable using taglines that change with market conditions. In 2008 and 2010 the

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tagline was “Connecting Global Technology.” In 2012, it has changed to “Dominate the Competition.” Both are easily understandable across geographies and cultures. The theme of dominating the competition appears in advertising alongside powerful copy that reads like a buyer manifesto for the post-recession era:

- **I will succeed every time I compete against you.**
- **I've directed my team to see and compare the world's newest manufacturing technology solutions in person.**
- **They have the budget and the power to buy. They'll meet with the best minds in the business. Educational sessions will enhance their knowledge.**
- **Decisions will be made. Orders will be placed. We will begin taking deliveries. You will be hard-pressed to keep up.**
- **Some call this continuous improvement. We call it survival of the fittest.**

Delivering the message is as important and developing it. Because the IMTS audience has indicated that it prefers electronic communication to any other type, most of the messaging is distributed online or via e-newsletters, digital ads and social media channels. Although research indicates that English is the preferred language on the Web, show registration is available in nine languages, and advertising is executed in five languages.

There is still an important role for print advertising—the machine shop audience that is estimated at 250,000 readers. In emerging nations such as China, Mexico, Brazil, Russia and India, print is extremely important. IMTS relies on its overseas offices and partners to vet the messaging and execution. “We use our office staff in those countries to help us identify the right media and make certain the message is appropriate,” Eelman explains.

Mary Uhrina, whose experience includes the Chinese and European markets, underscores the importance of

local input. “We rely on them to be the eyes and ears and the reality check for the virtual team,” she says.

IMTS’ outreach doesn’t end when the show begins. They produce IMTS TV highlighting news and technology from the show floor. In recent years they have even broadcast from a sister show in Germany. The Emerging Technology Center (ETC) is a little more than a new product showcase. “We feature four technologies at each show and leverage them through serious promotion side by side with our ETC partners,” Mary Uhrina explains. In 2012, ETC will feature a Local Motors car built right on the show floor using a collaborative manufacturing process.

AMT’s Peter Eelman has earned a few things about communicating with a global audience. First, he says, “Messages are different in different markets. It’s important to make sure that the messages are well received in multiple markets. Something what is aggressive and works in some markets will be ridiculed in others. The challenge is in testing the message in all of your markets and seeing whether it’s possible to have harmonized messaging. Slight alterations [to fit the culture] are important.”

“Find someone on the ground in the market to approve the advertising before it goes out,” Eelman advises. “Even translation companies can be fooled,” he adds. If the market is a new one, Eelman suggests going through the local embassy or consulate or contacting a sister trade association to recommend someone locally to help tailor the message to the local population. The brand doesn’t suffer and the organization benefits from more impactful messaging.

The global marketing and communications initiative (and an improving economy) is working. Mary Uhrina explains that in 2010, IMTS results exceeded both show management and exhibitor expectations. The exhibition welcomed over 82,000 visitors from 106 countries (organizers expected only 74,000). An estimated total of \$655 million in orders were received. Future sales resulting from the show are estimated to reach \$2.4 billion, and 55% of the sales leads at IMTS were new prospects for the exhibitor. Visits to the IMTS website have more than doubled.

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