



Seven Questions to Ask Before Taking Your Trade Show Overseas

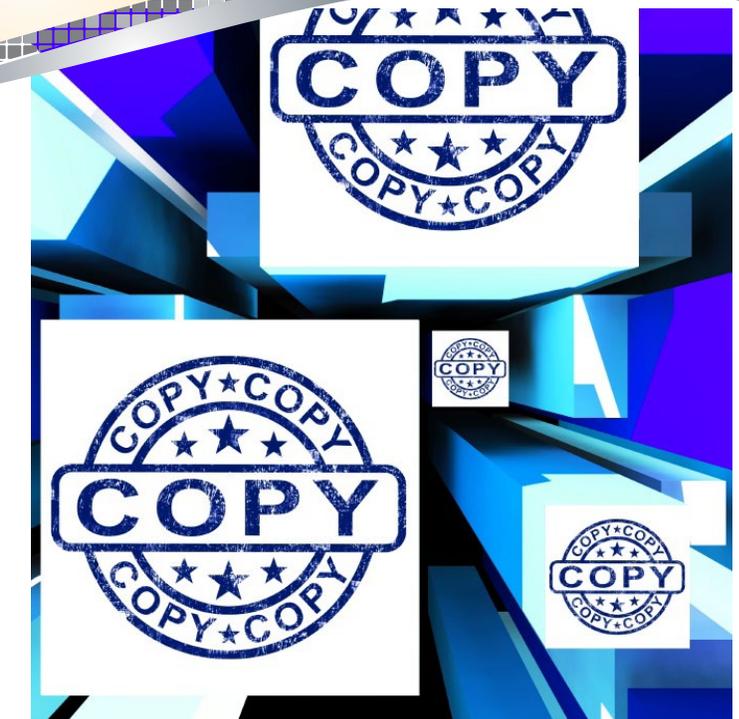
by Michelle Bruno

The decision to clone a successful show overseas is never taken lightly. It is a labor-intensive, expensive and potentially risky endeavor that many organizations prefer to avoid. Nevertheless, there are associations and independent show organizers keenly interested in taking their existing brand and customer base to other countries. They all have one thing in common. They have to ask some critical questions before making the decision to go for it.

1. Why are we considering taking the show outside the U.S.?

Before examining the “how” of cloning a show, organizers should consider the “why.” Without a compelling reason to clone, most organizations will eventually scrap the idea. Here’s why some organizations consider going overseas in the first place:

Internal demand—In many cases, the existing exhibitor base gets behind the clone idea. They prefer going overseas with a trusted partner to taking their chances on a competitive event.



The lack of competition—In some cases (emerging markets or new technologies), competitive shows have yet to surface opening the doors for a successful U.S. brand to move in.

Existing customer base—Many shows have a large enough following of international exhibitors and buyers from a particular region to sustain a clone. Although organizers have to make sure that the clone doesn’t cannibalize their existing shows, there are scenarios of exhibitor support worth considering.

Strong brand—Sometimes, there is an exhibition in the target market, but the show is weak. Having a well-known exhibition brand can be enough to lure attendees and exhibitors away from a poorly organized competitor.

Cross-pollination—some organizations clone their events to create synergies between shows and grow a global customer base that will support all of the events they organize around the world.

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2. Is there a market for the products?

There are a number of ways that show organizers can determine whether an international market or potential market exists for a category of products and services:

Research—the U.S. Department of Commerce compiles reports on potential markets for U.S. exports that can be very useful for show organizers.

Business intelligence compiled by U.S. exhibitors—some of the best information can come from existing customers who are already selling overseas.

Existing competitors—if shows in a specific segment already exist in a region, it's a good sign that the market has potential. It's even better if the existing shows are vulnerable to strong competition from a known brand.

Government plans for infrastructure improvements—Most countries announce their plans to buy goods, services or technologies in advance.

3. Who will the core stakeholders be?

No exhibition can make it—especially a launch—without a solid infrastructure of sponsors, anchor exhibitors and key buyers. Before firm planning begins, organizers should list the likely candidates for those positions.

4. Who should we partner with?

Partnership is a critical necessity for most trade show organizers entering a new market. The question about who to partner with typically leads to yet more questions:

What will the partner do (on-site logistics, public relations, audience promotion, exhibit sales, some or all of the above)? Determining what tasks the partner will be responsible for informs the kind of partner to pursue.

Should the partner be an equity holder or a contractor? Some would-be cloners prefer that the partner have a stake in ownership to help guarantee that they are fully invested in the success of the event. Others prefer to hold contractors accountable at least in the beginning.

How can the reputation and experience of the partner help us succeed? What a good partner brings to the table should complement what the U.S. organizer has to offer.

5. How much money can we afford to invest?

International clones rarely make money the first few years primarily due to the up-front investment required to build the customer base and promote the show. Thus, the pre-planning process must include not only budget figures, but pay-back estimates as well.

6. What internal resources do we have to manage the process from the U.S.?

Even with a partner willing to do most of the heavy lifting in the local market, U.S. organizers have to dedicate staff and resources stateside to keep the momentum going and it's too big of a job (and risk) to add it to the plates of staffers with existing responsibilities and accountabilities elsewhere. In addition, international show management often requires a different skill set than domestic show management.

7. What are the barriers to entry for exhibitors?

All of the logistical building blocks—good exhibition infrastructure, growing market demand, experienced partners to choose from, a loyal customer base—can be in place and the trade show still be destined for failure if the barriers to exhibiting are too great for exhibitors to manage. Some potential roadblocks could include the costs to exhibit (floor space, shipping, customs clearance) or the degree of difficulty in exhibiting (import regulations, poor in-country transportation, limited storage, security issues, lack of skilled labor and equipment).

Cloning an exhibition overseas can be as exhilarating as it can be challenging. Collaborating with experienced consultants, contractors and colleagues to place all of the risks and requirements of the opportunity on the table can help organizers make the best decisions for their organizations and their clients.

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