

# Managing a global brand locally



Whether you're working within the boundaries of a global brand developed elsewhere in the world, or you're responsible for a brand that needs to work globally, it can be tricky. Reflecting cultural differences, bridging the divide with head office, managing different skill levels and bending the rules so the brand can work for you. They're all big challenges, so how do you tackle them? We would love to say that there is a magic bullet or a perfect answer. But, sadly there isn't - it's more of an art than a science. However, we do have a view. Sit back and enjoy our thoughts and, who knows, your team may become the *Magic Stars* within your global brand and communications network...

**We think the following six points are key to successfully managing a global brand locally:**

1. *Put things in context*
2. *Knowing international means knowing what you don't know*
3. *Earn permission to stray*
4. *One size doesn't fit all*
5. *Choose your battles*
6. *It's all talk, talk, talk*

# 1

## Put things in context

The global brand is owned and managed centrally but you are responsible for it in the UK and/or EMEA. From experience you know that some aspects of the global brand need to change to ensure it resonates in your region. You recognise the importance of brand consistency, but you also know it's critical you achieve your business and marketing objectives. Of course, the global brand team will understand that global requirements and those of each region or country will differ. But, they are unlikely to understand the implications of these regional variations for the local brand. This is where you come in. You need to educate them. You need to help them understand the context for the global brand in your region. Why? The better they understand the context informing your specific brand and marketing challenges, the more likely they are to support you. Below we recommend some tools to capture and communicate this context in a useful way.

### **PESTLE**

Using the 'PESTLE' analysis tool you can review your market through six 'lenses': **P**olitical, **E**conomic, **S**ocial, **T**echnological, **L**egal and **E**nvironmental. For example, the political and economic uncertainty being caused by Brexit in the EMEA region would be relevant to both the P and E of PESTLE. Regional players disrupting the local market with new technologies would be relevant to the T. Once you have completed the PESTLE analysis, the next step is to capture the implications for brand and marketing in your region. Then share with the global team.

### **Strategic marketing plan**

Your strategic marketing plan presents another opportunity to demonstrate how your regional context has implications for the global brand. Include your PESTLE analysis in the document and show how it informs your marketing plans.

### **Immersion session**

How about setting up a half-day workshop to immerse the global brand team in your world? Share your PESTLE analysis and your strategic plan face-to-face. Give them a chance to really get under the skin of your regional challenges and how the global brand is impacted.

### **FAQs**

You and your team will not be the only ones speaking with the global team. Ensure that your senior management team or regional board are also on message. Arm them with the regional context, rationale and facts using FAQs.

# 2

## Knowing international means knowing what you don't know

Whether you're the owner of the global brand, the manager of a region such as EMEA, or a local outpost of a global business, never make assumptions on how to nuance your communications to ensure they resonate locally. Nuancing is about reflecting crucial subtleties of language and style. It's about understanding genuine regional differences that mean different markets work in different ways. The only way you can do this is through testing or sense-checking of some kind. This almost always uncovers unexpected insights. Insights that can transform the effectiveness of your communication.

Depending on the nature of the project, this might be through formal market research. However, it doesn't have to, and there'll be plenty of situations where there's not the time, budget, nor appetite for something formal. Instead consider the following:



Reach out to colleagues in your offices in those regions and sense-check the work with them. Select people who know that market and culture well and, preferably, are fairly communications-savvy.



For something more formal, consider putting together a small team of internal people from different regions to create a consultation panel that sense-check the work at intervals throughout its development to ensure it'll work in those regions.



Finally, if it's just about sense-checking a headline or copy in different languages (and it's not appropriate to ask people internally) reach out to your communications agency who will be able to organise it with their international linguist contacts.

# 3

## Earn permission to stray

So, you know that you need to do something (slightly) different in your market or markets. Something that may not be 100% aligned with the global brand or 'template'. So, how do you get permission to stray? To carefully tread a different but aligned path? Without this permission your efforts could be quashed or significantly stifled. It could lead to a breakdown of trust and you being seen as someone who's 'going rogue'. So, what tactics should you employ? Here are some ideas:



### Show you get it

Look for opportunities to consistently demonstrate that you get it. By 'it' we mean the global business and brand strategies. Look for opportunities to playback this understanding (e.g. in your strategic marketing plan). Reassure global by inviting them to share the brand thinking directly with your team. Make it visible that you and your team are participating in any brand training or events.



### Strike a balance between global and local

Make it clear that you are not only willing to work with the global brand but that you want to. Put in place – and share with the global team – explicit objectives related to underpinning the global brand strategy and positioning. Recognise that you need to wear two hats and make both hats fit. The global hat and the local hat.



### Prove that it works

To do that you need evidence, and this comes from measurement. This is about tracking and measuring everything from brand awareness and understanding, to campaign effectiveness. Start by baselining and then show the trajectory on key measures has positively changed. Share evidence of how your strategies are working and winning on both a local level as well as on a global level i.e. underpinning and building the global brand.

# 4

## One size doesn't fit all

Different markets will be at different levels of maturity and sophistication, and as a result will have different needs and challenges from a brand building and implementation perspective. If the brand is to succeed, these differences need to be considered and acknowledged. To do this the brand and communication content, tools and templates need to be flexible enough to ensure that they can be adapted to work in the different markets. This is the case whether you're developing a brand strategy, visual identity, messaging platform or advertising campaign. One size doesn't fit all.



### It's about:

Providing freedom within a framework.



Creating principles, not overly prescriptive guidelines.



Developing a user-friendly toolkit that's informed by a good knowledge of the challenges and needs of the teams in those different markets.

# 5

## Choose your battles

Once 'global' has understood your local context and you've earned their trust, you need to decide what aspects of the global brand, marketing, content or messaging needs to flex and why. The clearer you are about what flexibility you need, and why from a brand, identity, marketing, campaign or messaging perspective, the better the chance you have of getting that flexibility from global. You need to choose your battles and plan the timing. What do you really need now? You can always ask for more next year. What tactics should you employ? Here are some ideas:



### **Empathise**

Global can sometimes be seen as the brand police. So, the starting point is to empathise. Recognise and acknowledge that the global team will not have had an easy ride either. They may have spent two years on a project to drive a new brand and identity through the boardroom. Therefore, as soon as they hear that you want to 'meddle' with the brand their hackles will go up. Be a supporter not an aggravator.



### **Explain the 'why'**

Explain what needs to be different and why. Provide evidence, proof points. Explain clearly what level of freedom - or the tolerances - you need and ensure they know you're going to operate within the global brand framework or template.



### **Be specific**

Don't just say "the brand doesn't work for us in the UK" or the "messaging doesn't work" or "the values don't resonate". Rather, say (if possible) that the identity is 95% right but that you would like to discuss some small concerns in relation to tone of voice. Or that the messaging framework is great but there are one or two messages that are a cause for concern from a regulatory perspective in your markets.



### **Sell not tell**

Remember that to secure the changes, you need to be prepared to negotiate. You need to be able to build and sell your case effectively. Make it easy for them to buy what you're selling. But, you also need to know what you're willing to settle for as a minimum at this stage.

# 6

## It's all talk, talk, talk

The previous five points have been practical and hopefully useful. Indeed, striking the global/local balance is a very practical thing. However, getting it right is as emotional as it is practical. One of the issues is that all too often, the only time you talk to your colleagues in other regions or in HQ, is when you need something – their approval, their help and so on. You need to move your relationship from virtual to reality and here are our top tips for doing this:



Engage people early and often.



Speak when you don't have to as well as when you do, build relationships.



Be collaborative. Co-create. Share best practice, test and learn, reach out to find out whether anyone shares your needs and challenges.



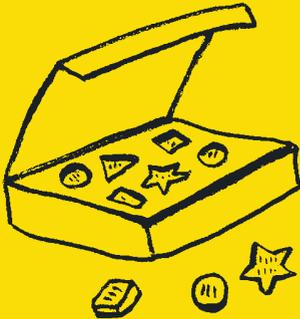
Whenever you can, get together face-to-face and see the whites of one another's eyes.



Keep talking and build a community. (This will also help to build more effective hubs of expertise, which are particularly crucial when trying to get things like messaging right. And will provide a stronger network for when you want to test whether something resonates in a different region.)

## Bringing it all together...

So, there's no one *Magic Stars* formula to successfully managing and implementing a brand globally while ensuring regional and local differences are considered. It's a combination of things. It's about making the context you're operating in clear. It's about acknowledging that one size doesn't fit all and being flexible as a result. It's about being prepared to collaborate as well as to negotiate to get what you need. It's about building mutually beneficial relationships involving and engaging people. Ultimately, it's about give and take. About empathy.



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