

Five Tips for TRULY Taking Your Association Global

As the need continues to grow for international and intercultural business skills, many associations find themselves ideally positioned to support their members and expand their services in an increasingly global market. This presents leaders with both opportunities and challenges as they grapple with the question of how best to take their association truly global, beyond North America.

Here are five tips to help inform your discussion about the best way to expand your association's presence internationally or globally:

1. Focus and take actionable steps to build a sustainable model

Association leaders should identify one or more specific markets where they want to establish and build their presence, then focus their efforts acutely in those markets. This begins with identifying a local contact who can champion the cause and coalesce interest locally to support a base-level of activity. Over time this may yield success that grows into an informal network, which is commonly referred to in the association community as a "City Circle." Based on the success of a City Circle, and the energy of those involved in local-level leadership, the next natural step would be formation of larger initiatives on behalf of the association or even establishing a Chapter.

2. Connect with a local partner

Collaboration is a key part of expanding into a new market. Whether it is with a local university, for-profit entity, or an association that offers clear mission alignment with yours, finding a way to collaborate with a local partner to establish a presence can dramatically improve your chances of gaining a foothold in the marketplace.

3. Leverage technology

Online tools for communication, collaboration, and learning have evolved dramatically in recent years both in terms of functionality and affordability. These tools offer resources that associations can leverage to offer virtual engagement opportunities year-round without the challenges that come with international travel. Examples include online credentialing and certification programs, virtual meetings, online subscription to access to publications, and remote participation in volunteer positions.

4. Gain exposure through a partner-hosted initiative

If there is a local association similar to yours serving a market you want to enter, partnering with that organization can accelerate brand awareness for you and build your credibility by affiliating your association with an already-trusted resource. Whether it is partnering on a virtual learning series or getting your association recognized as a co-hosting sponsor of the local organization's annual convention, symposium, tapping into a partner-hosted initiative allows your organization to project a global presence without the need for major financial investment or risk.

5. Invest in your strategy

Many associations say they want to go global but don't designate staff or financial resources to make it happen. They also underestimate the time that it takes to build the infrastructure and the rigor it takes to sustain the effort. Make sure your global expansion plan incorporates realistic funding needs and opportunities that are included in the association's overall budget. This will create accountability and show those in target market that you are genuinely interested in investing in their success and truly taking your association global.