Great global branding: Building brands without borders

Category: Branding
written by Stewart Hodgson | 21 February 2019

A few decades ago, in the 1980s, there were only a handful of brands big enough to deliver their products and solutions to customers all around the globe. Worldwide sales required a vast sales and marketing team, not to mention endless funding for brick-and-mortar stores. Subsequently, the average business was restricted to sales specifically in their local area.

Now, the times are changing.

The arrival of the internet, eCommerce and social media means that the barriers to entering new markets are lower than ever. Even the smallest start-up brand can connect with consumers all around the world if they have a way of delivering results to their customers.

In this age of limitless expansion, ambitious business owners know that conquering a local market is just the beginning. The real goal for many aspiring companies is to achieve worldwide domination through a comprehensive global branding strategy.

So, how do you go global?

Like any significant brand-building campaign, a global strategy requires care, focus and careful planning. Here's your guide to creating the ultimate expansion strategy.



What is global branding: How to define global branding

While your specific definition of global branding may change according to your long-term goals, the easiest way to explain this term is as the strategy companies use to translate their values and identity into a limitless landscape. Global brands take their USP and look for environments that they can thrive in outside of their local country.

The most important thing to understand is that there's more to global branding than creating a .com website and making sure you ship products to different parts of the world. Every location comes with its own unique cultures, expectations and consumer demands. This is why it's so important to have global branding strategies in place, to guide your choices about which parts of your identity need to stay the same worldwide, and which elements you need to adapt.

A global branding strategy helps to:

- **Maintain consistency:** Though brand campaigns may need to change in some places to suit the needs of a new target audience, consistency is still crucial in a global campaign. Though the types of products and service you offer may vary, your brand promise needs to stay strong, wherever you go. A consistent commitment to your values shows integrity that makes your brand valuable anywhere in the world.
- **Foster positive relationships:** As you add new segments to your target audience, you'll need to make sure that the connections you build are robust, intimate and focused. A positive reputation across geographical boundaries helps your brand to grow not just as a provider of a specific solution, but as a global thought-leader for your industry. Think about the kind of identity you want to create, and how you can use that presence to power your relationship-building strategies.
- **Deliver value:** No matter where your business goes in the world, it needs to constantly deliver value to your audience. That means that you need to know your USP, and how it translates to address the pain points of target customers in different parts of the world. Often, the companies that have the best global branding experiences are the ones that use their product or service to solve a universal problem like hunger (food companies), communication, or boredom (entertainment businesses).



The advantages and disadvantages of global branding

The more you define global branding for your company, the more you'll realise just how ambitious a worldwide strategy can be. Stretching your business over geographical borders isn't easy – even as things like the internet make the world smaller.

To accomplish genuinely incredible things, you'll need to understand what you're getting into. While the benefits of global branding are significant, there are challenges too.

The benefits of global branding:

The most obvious advantage of a global branding strategy is that it will allow you to reach people almost anywhere in the world. The more you expand your brand reach, the more potential customers you bring into your community. Even the smallest company can achieve additional sales through the right global campaign. You can:

- Outshine your competitors by demonstrating your willingness to serve a variety of customers.
- Address under-served markets and give your USP a chance to shine.
- Build global relationships with both customers and potential partners that may help your business grow.
- Develop your reputation in multiple spaces as a thought-leader and industry expert.
- Give yourself opportunities to grow with new products and services.

Global branding issues

As great as global branding strategies can be for the right company (in the correct environments), they also have several challenges to consider. Some products don't necessarily translate well to a global economy. For instance, mosquito repellent will only appeal to customers who are plagued by mosquitos in their local area. Some of the most common global branding issues include:

- **No market for what you sell:** Economic, cultural and government boundaries might stop certain products from thriving in other countries.
- **Higher risk:** A mistake in other countries could harm your reputation in your local target area. You'll have to be even more cautious with your campaigns.
- **Different rules:** Strategies that are permitted for growing your brand in the UK or the US might not be allowed in other areas. A mistake could be costly to your bank account and your future.

Simple starting points for your

global branding strategy

At this point, it should be pretty clear that global branding strategies require more than just a worldwide social media presence. To avoid getting into potentially brand-demolishing trouble with your campaigns, you'll need a comprehensive plan.

The easiest way to improve your chances of success is with the help of a global marketing agency. Professional branding and marketing teams understand how to position and optimise your brand for international expansion. However, you can begin building the foundations for your growth by:

1. Choosing the right market

It's easy to assume that the best markets to slide into with your global campaigns will be the ones with the highest number of potential customers. When the creator of the popular Candy Crush Saga "King" took their Pet Rescue title into South Korea, they assumed they'd be able to reach a vast audience. Unfortunately, negative cultural connotations around keeping pets in the region made it difficult for people to connect with the game.



Focus on finding an expansion market that isn’t just the “biggest” but the most relevant to your company and what you offer. Find other locations where you’ll be well-positioned to address your customer’s pain points.

2. Maintain consistency

As we mentioned above, consistency has always been a critical part of branding, and it’s essential to your global branding definition too. Although it’s worth looking at ways to change your language and marketing materials where necessary to suit your audience, the core parts of your organisation must remain the same.

Before you expand into any new markets, look at your company’s purpose and think about whether you’ll be contradicting it with any changes you make to your offering. If you can’t maintain your mission and promise from one country to the next, your company’s reputation will begin to suffer because your audience won’t know what you truly stand for.

3. Research everything

Look at some of the leading global brands in the world today, and you'll notice that they all invest huge amounts of time and money into research. Everyone from Google to McDonalds and Lego knows that if they want the best global branding strategies, they need to do their homework. For instance, when Danone decided to move into new countries, it used social listening to identify gaps in the Spanish market for lactose-free products.

Credit: Activia
Through focus groups, surveys and questionnaires, it's possible to learn a great deal about your audience and your potential market. More importantly, you can also find out how your brand would translate into other environments. The last thing you want to do is join the list of global branding blunders out there like Clairol's "Mist Stick" which translated to "Manure" in Germany.

How to embrace the advantages of global marketing: Quick tips

Worried that a global branding strategy seems like too much hard work?

Taking a small brand "international" is an exciting concept, but it can also be a serious challenge. There are a lot of hurdles to face on the road to success, and the slightest mistake can lead to costly issues with your company's future.

The good news?

There are ways that you can limit your risks with global branding issues. As you define global branding for your business and create a strategy that's custom-made for your target audience, you'll discover new ways to defend your identity and your goals. While the best plans are built

dynamically as you learn more about your new audiences, the following starting tips will help to drive you in the right direction.

1. Create customisable campaigns

Whether you're exploring viral marketing, influencer campaigns, or building your presence on social, the vital thing to remember with a global branding strategy, is that you're working in a whole new world. Developing your business in a new country means adapting to a different set of rules, regulations and even languages. Add to that the fact that we're living in the era of customisation, where customers expect more than ever from brands, and it's easy to see where people can struggle.



Credit: kennejima

To start with, learn as much as you can about the country and market you'll be working with, then ensure that your campaigns can be optimised to the region. Flexible strategies will mean that you can maintain the same general focus with your brand, so you don't have to start from scratch when building a

presence in each new country. For instance, Disney opened Splash Mountain in Tokyo with an extended number of seats on each flume, so that people could sit side-by-side, adhering to cultural norms.

2. Prioritise proper positioning

If you want the benefits of global branding to transform your company into a worldwide force, then you need to be prepared to handle the competitors in your new spaces. This means not only conducting in-depth competitor analyses but also understanding how you can position yourself in a different country to make sure that you stand out.

Understanding both your competitors and the broader industry dynamics that you'll be dealing with should help you to adjust your USP and make your competitive advantage shine as you expand. Remember, when looking for ways to position yourself in different areas, don't just try to force yourself into markets where you don't fit. Look for expansion opportunities that are a natural fit for your brand promise.

3. Focus on your customers

For most companies, the biggest challenge of any global branding strategy is finding the right balance between consistency, and ensuring they communicate their brand in a way that appeals to a new user persona. The chances are that the people in your new sector will have specific challenges they need to face. Determining what you can adjust to reach your new customers, and what you need to maintain for consistency is crucial.



Credit: kennejima

KFC is an excellent example of a company that walked this tightrope well. Back in the 70s, the chicken company launched a Kentucky for Christmas campaign that encouraged Japanese locals to visit their brand on the holidays. This idea went down well in the area because there weren't many Christmas traditions in Japan at that time. One of the few traditions the Japanese had, enjoying a special cake on the day, was included within a customer-focused meal bundle.

4. Find the right partners

Business might be a dog-eat-dog environment, but that doesn't mean that you can't benefit from a little extra help from time-to-time. Sometimes, the right collaborative strategy can be all it takes to transform your organisation and improve your global branding strategies. This is particularly true if you can partner with people who understand the rules of your new location, and help you get used to them.

Whatever you do, make sure that the people you connect with share the same values as your core brand. Your new influencers

and partners should make your business more appealing to your target audience, without compromising on the essential promises that make your organisation special.

Amazing examples of global branding strategies

We're entering an age where businesses are becoming increasingly global. Even if you don't build a strategy to deliberately sell and market your products online, you won't be able to stop your brand from earning attention around the world in an age of social media and viral campaigns.

The good news is that while global branding strategies can be difficult to master at first, they also present your company with incredible opportunities. If you can pinpoint lucrative locations in other markets that you're already primed to serve, then you can instantly multiply your profit margin. Here are a few global branding examples to introduce you to the power of worldwide campaigns.

1. Red Bull

Where do you think the brand "Red Bull" comes from? America, the UK? One of the biggest reasons why Red Bull is so great at global branding is that it focuses on being as diverse as possible with its product and marketing strategies. Many Americans assume that it's a local brand, yet the Red Bull team is great at making its drinks look like they're from a global economy. There's no 12-ounce can for the US market, or plastic bottle. Red Bull looks like it could belong to any country.



Combine the careful design strategy of the Red Bull drink with the fact that the company hosts sports events all over the world, and the brand becomes even more universal. This is a business that fits in well – anywhere.

2. Airbnb

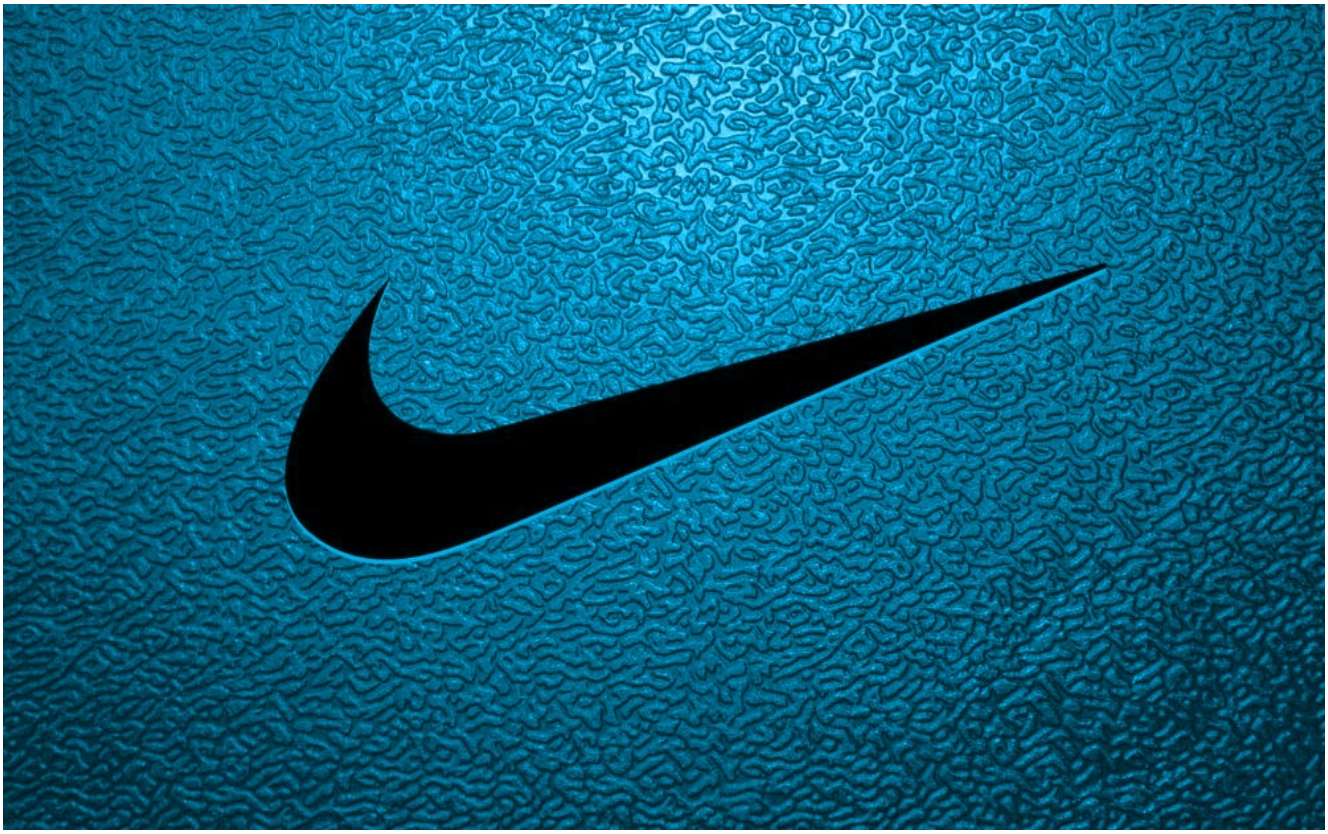
Today, Airbnb is one of the biggest travel companies in the world. However, when the brand first launched, it had a complex challenge to face. Airbnb needed to convince people around the world that it was “normal” to stay in someone else’s home instead of a hotel.



With a comprehensive global branding strategy in place, Airbnb managed to impress and amaze every country it expanded to. One of the key components of the company's strategy is localisation. Every country has its own local team responsible for developing stories that would appeal to hosts and travellers alike. The brand also has the universal "Belo" symbol as their logo, which symbolises global belonging.

3. Nike

Nike is easily one of the most well-known global branding experts in the world, known for its amazing product design, branding, and marketing campaigns. One of the things that makes Nike so accessible around the world is the way that it connects to its customers. A focus on emotional engagement means that Nike can build relationships by addressing deep-seated concerns in people who live all around the world.



No matter where you live, you want to be the hero of your own story, and Nike uses everything from its name (the Greek goddess of Victory) to its marketing campaigns to champion its customers. Few companies could make a product like footwear so inspirational.

4. McDonald's

McDonald's is another company that most people know for its successful global branding strategy. Although its image and tone of voice remain the same in every country, McDonald's has no problems with changing its menu to suit the tastes of its audience. For instance, in 2003, the company introduced the "McArabia" to Middle East restaurants. We've also seen:

- Biscuits and gravy for Southern America.
- McLobster for New England and Maine.
- McBratwurst for Wisconsin and Illinois.
- Mango and Peaches Pie for Hawaii.
- McSpaghetti for the Philippines.
- Macaroons for France.



Credit: Paul Asman and Jill Lenoble

5. Stella Artois

Finally, Stella Artois might be a Belgian beer, but it's made efforts to build its reputation in countries all around the world. Dating back to the 1300s, this is one of the best-known beers in the world today. Not only does the Stella Artois global branding campaign focus on delivering the same great and renowned taste to customers worldwide, but it also focuses on keeping the identity of the company the same.

Stella Artois is sold under a luxurious image, to counteract the previous connotations the brand had with football hooligans in England. You'll often see adverts of people speaking in French, and Stella's attractive packaging conveys sophistication with shades of white and gold. The company appeals to a global desire for indulgence.



Ready to expand? Reach out to a global branding agency

Global branding is a challenging experience for any company.

It takes time to develop a sustainable reputation in just one country, so expanding into multiple locations is bound to come with a greater number of challenges. However, it's safe to say that a global branding strategy is worth the work. If you read through Forbes' list of the 10 most valuable brands, you'll see that most of the big players have to have a global presence.

The key to successfully moving into new spaces is understanding how diverse your target market can truly be. Different locations bring with them new cultures, expectations, and rules that you need to know before you grow. Just ask the team behind the Perdue Chicken marketing team, who learned too late that its slogan translated poorly in Spanish. A strapline about tough men making tender chicken

suddenly became about “sexually stimulated” men creating “affectionate chicken.”

With a little planning and the help of a global branding agency like Fabrik, you can overcome these common expansion issues, and discover the true potential of your business.

Is it time to break down the borders around your brand?

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