



Growing Global Requires Company-Wide Commitment

How Small Companies Can Think BIG

By Laurel Delaney

Success in going global is directly related to a company-wide commitment. That company-wide commitment involves you alone if you are a sole proprietor, or in the case of a large corporation, the executive committee, finance, operations, marketing and sales, logistics, research, technology, and culture.

Once you recognize the resources available to you and what it takes to export, import, or outsource your product or service, prepare a list of what is required from each of these functional areas of your company. Then present the list to the person who is willing to be a part of your global team.

Who do you look for? Someone who pays attention to detail and who has great salesmanship qualities, persistence, integrity, an interest in international matters, bi- or multi-lingual language capabilities, cultural empathy, and good writing and speaking abilities. If you find part of most of this in a person, grab him or her!

You might need a person from each department to assist you either regularly or on an as-needed basis. Whatever it takes, the individual must know what will be required from her over time. He/she must also understand the international process and how each member's tasks fit into the overall global process. Don't be afraid to get this person's commitment, preferably in writing, so they will be there for you on when you need him/her.

My recommendation is to have someone from each department set aside one hour each day just to work on an international sales strategy. It doesn't matter if there are no sales pending; it is critical to arrange a structured amount of time that requires discipline, commitment, and exchange of information. It gives everyone the feelings of importance and team spirit that are critical for the growth and prosperity of the company.

As you work with your global team, they will need to be trained. If you are a novice globalist, they will learn as you learn but the point is to get their input as often as possible and insist they execute their portion of the plan. Below is a general idea of how to get company-wide commitment and what to expect from each member of your global team.

8 Clues to Achieve Company-Wide Commitment

1. The Executive Committee: While this committee serves as a sounding board for your updates, it is primarily interested in knowing what is needed to operate successfully in the global marketplace. Always approach meetings with the notion of making huge requests to ensure that you walk out with what you know you need for certain.

Clue: Try your in-house committee for advice. If you are a one-person shop, set up your own independent council that includes noted academics, consultants, and other experts in global trade.

2. The Marketing/Sales Staff: These people are original thinkers and need your advice on how to be creative in marketing your product or service overseas without confusing or offending your customer. They need an international marketing map and can use their domestic one as a model.

Clue: Try GlobeTrade.com (<http://www.globetrade.com>) for a one-stop-global-shop consulting service.

3. Logistics: How will they get your product or service to another country? Your logistics people must understand international documentation as it relates to shipping, insurance, customs, compliance, method of payment, duties, tariffs, and international laws. A freight forwarder might be an option, but is not the only answer.

Clue: Try web-based Descartes (<http://www.descartes.com>), Exel (<http://www.exel.com>) or Intra (<http://www.intra.com>). For smaller cargo, there's always UPS (<http://www.ups.com>), which claims they are the only direct express nonstop service between the United States and China.

4. Operations: This team needs to know how many widgets you are going to sell, for how long, how often, and within what time period. It needs to know about any changes in the production of the widget well in advance of the customer's deadline in order to coordinate procurement of raw materials and schedule a production run in a timely manner. Operations people need no outside help here -- this is where they shine and usually rise to the occasion.

Clue: Try Celarix (<http://www.celarix.com>) for supply-chain visibility and connectivity.

5. Finance: How will your company get paid on overseas sales? The finance people need to know. They must understand international payment methods and terms both offline and online. Your own bank's international department can help here.

Clue: Try SurePay (<http://www.surepay.com>), PayPal (<http://www.paypal>) or WorldPay (<http://www.worldpay.com>) for credit/debit transactions.

6. Research: Who will determine which market is the best market to export your product or service?

Clue: Try the Department of Commerce (<http://www.ita.doc.gov/index.html>), SBA (<http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/OIT/>) or The U.S. Commercial Service (<http://www.usatrade.gov/home/export.html>).

7. Technology: These people need to adopt a new crop of Web-based applications that dramatically transform the international operations of the organization.

Clue: Try Bolero (<http://www.bolero.net>), NextLinx (<http://www.nextlinx.com>), TradePoint (<http://www.tradepointsystems.com>) or Vastera (<http://www.vastera.com>).

8. Cultural: Who will be respectful of local culture and how will that be conveyed on your website? Adapting and translating fast-changing content for multiple countries' markets can be challenging. These people must become familiar with developed software that helps to automate the workflow of language translation.

Clue: Try Uniscape (<http://www.uniscape.com>), Worldlingo (<http://www.worldlingo.com>), ConveySoftware (<http://www.conveysoftware.com>) or Welocalize (<http://www.welocalize.com>).

All other team members, such as the legal or customer service departments, must learn to coordinate their activities to ensure the smooth flow of the overall international operation.

Your global team is just that -- a team -- and should never work in isolation from one another. That's why the set-aside time is important for keeping each person up-to-date with the hope of identifying the broad as well as the detailed issues concerning your international transaction.

You have now developed your crack global team and have clues on how to get global. Whether you have strengthened yourself for this task or have a staff of 20 to utilize, you should be able to implement your first international sale. Good luck!

Copyright ©Laurel J. Delaney. All rights reserved.

About the Author:

Laurel Delaney runs GlobeTrade.com and LaurelDelaney.com, both Chicago-based firms that specialize in international entrepreneurship. She is also the creator of "Borderbuster," (www.globetrade.com/generic21.html) an e-newsletter, and The Global Small Business Blog (<http://borderbuster.blogspot.com>), which are both highly regarded for coverage on global small business. Laurel can be reached at ldelaney@globetrade.com or 773-381-1700.