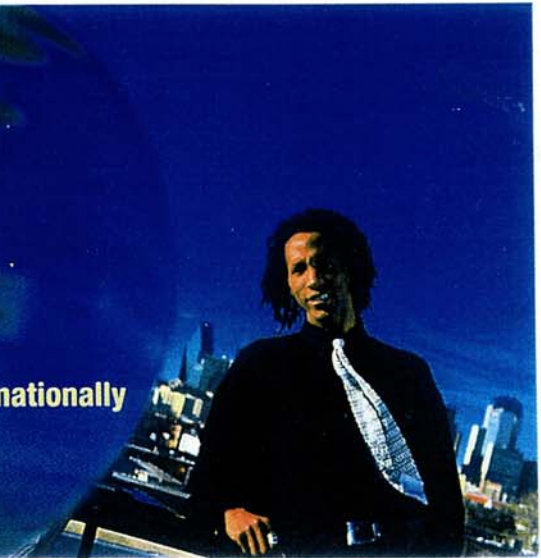


GOING GLOBAL

Forming Strategic Alliances Internationally

By Michelle Ray



The technological revolution has indeed made the world a smaller place. As an Australian immigrating to Canada 10 years ago, I never would have imagined that a computer and a telephone could create the kind of lifestyle I lead today. "Globetrotting," however, does not necessarily have anything to do with airports. We can travel the world at the touch of a button...in our office or living room. These days, the whole world is our business oyster.

After leaving full-time employment in 1995 to become a self-employed professional speaker, I wrote a dream list of goals that I wanted to reach within a year. One of those objectives included travelling internationally, all expenses paid, doing the work I love to do and being able to visit my family and friends back home.

In June 1998, I had an idea. I thought it would be wonderful if I could promote my speaking services in Australia even though I now reside in Canada. So I got busy with my newly acquired computer skills and started researching satellite office information, marketing companies and communication systems.

The Internet has transformed our access to information in ways that were inconceivable only 20 years ago. When I came upon the idea of publicizing my seminars and workshops overseas, I already had exposure to a wealth of marketing knowledge acquired by contracting with speaking and training companies that were already successfully conducting their business internationally...without an office or staff outside their corporate headquarters.

Whether you are a speaker, agent, bureau, meeting planner or the owner of

a small or medium-sized business, here are some insights and lessons learned from doing business across the globe.

DO'S AND TABOOS OF GOING GLOBAL

KNOW YOUR BUSINESS AND YOUR MARKET

Invest time and energy learning about the countries where you want to invest. Realize that there could be tax implications and talk to your accountant about what this might mean for your business, whether you are a corporation or a sole business owner. Become familiar with local business practices, time zones, geography, climate, customs and culture. This knowledge will often enhance the relationship with your prospects.

USE YOUR BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

Your professional relationships and networks can work for you even when you are not physically present. For example, I recently received a telephone call from a consultant in Vancouver who asked me if I knew anyone in Australia who would be interested in purchasing the franchise rights to an internationally-renowned training company. I immediately passed on the name of a contact in Australia who I thought would be a perfect fit. Moral of the story: one connection leads to another, and in this case

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my alliance with all respective independent business owners has been strengthened.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

With the aid of technology, learn as much as you can about the viability of your business plans. For example, when I was preparing to conduct a series of presentations in Australia while based in Canada, I used the Internet extensively to negotiate with a number of list rental companies, mailing houses, printers, call centres and the like.

Although this was to be a short-term project, it was an important project nonetheless. Using e-mail cost me virtually nothing to request price quotations and proposals from these companies. By hiring the services of a call centre over a 10-week period, for example, I did not need to employ staff to manage the incoming calls and take registrations for my seminars.

DECIDE WHERE YOU WANT TO FOCUS YOUR BUSINESS, LOCALLY OR GLOBALLY

What are your priorities? How much time do you wish to allocate to travelling or working on your international business? What kind of expenditure do you wish to invest in staffing, contractors or business operations overseas? While it is admirable to think big, it is important to remember that once you have begun to expend energy in one area, it will require you to continue to do so. Will it ultimately be an energy gain or an energy drain for you?

HIRE INTERNATIONAL CONTRACTORS OR AGENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH YOUR BUSINESS

As a speaker, my antennae are always up when it comes to recognizing the type of person who is as enthusiastic about my business as I am. In other words, if someone is keen to represent me and act in my best interests, then I will pursue the relationship. Ask yourself if you are comfortable entrusting someone to manage your business

from a distance. Don't bite off more than you can chew. You need to be clear about how much you are willing to pay and whether or not a person or a business entity will fit your image and reflect that image appropriately.

LEARN FROM YOUR COMPETITORS

Study their methods and find what works for you. Look at their achievements in the "virtual" realm. Assess their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Use your networking skills to gather information. Consider aspects of their business that appeal to you. Take what you want and leave the rest.

MANAGE CLIENT OBJECTIONS

Perhaps your clients or prospects will tell you that it is too expensive to conduct business with you from a distance due to freight costs, time zone differences, currency exchange and after-sales service. They might also be concerned about language barriers, local regulatory bodies and government red tape. Streamlining and providing a full-service package from start to finish will be appreciated by your prospects.

MAINTAIN YOUR PRESENCE

It is easy to fall behind the eight ball in terms of client contact when you are running a business from a distance. Managing your presence internationally requires you to be able to respond quickly by keeping up to date with technology and maintaining up-to-the-minute knowledge of your market. Exceeding expectations by sustaining a

"high touch" approach is one of the unique challenges you might face.

In summary, research the possibilities and wherever possible get references regarding the viability of businesses alliances you wish to make. Minimize overhead dramatically by taking advantage of virtual office call-centre services that are equipped to handle inquiries, marketing and promotions, and general secretarial functions on your behalf without the cost of hiring. Many such offices can transfer calls directly to you without clients knowing that you are thousands of miles away.

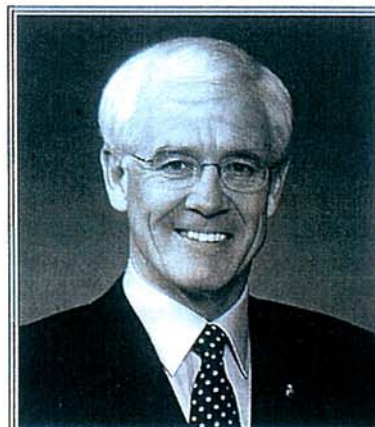
In addition, virtual offices often have international affiliates that operate in numerous countries. By using their services, you might be entitled to global benefits, such as conducting a business meeting in one of their office locations anywhere in the world whether you travel or use video conferencing from your own office at home.

For a small business, the world can indeed be at your doorstep. Going global has never been easier for those who want to stay close to home. The choice is yours.

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