

Asia inside and out:

How North American companies can extend their reach into Asia's highly lucrative markets

By Cindy Payne

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Did you know that the top four Asian economies of China, India, Japan and Korea represented 28 percent of worldwide gross domestic product in 2006? When compared to the United States at 21 percent and the EU at 20 percent, it is not surprising that many North American companies are wondering how to extend their reach into Asia's highly lucrative markets.

To help your clients with this quandary, you must first ensure they are culturally relevant and understand the value of "going local" in Asia. Appreciating the myriad of cultural differences across the region and engaging appropriately with the media in each market means adopting a country-by-country media relations strategy.

Choosing the right partner in each market

Unless your agency is already multinational with offices across Asia, or you belong to an international network, you should consider partnering with a local agency in each market you wish to enter. Why? Because local agencies already have a keen understanding of the media landscape, know the nuances of their marketplace and have established strategic media relationships that your clients would like to leverage. They know what news is locally relevant, how to tailor it for local consumption, which journalists and editors to approach for each communications message, as well as the protocol for presenting the news to maximize interest.

However, choosing a partner is a strategic process that requires time and patience. Not only do you want to verify the company's reputation, but you also want to ensure you share the same vision and values because your success in their

market will hinge on building a trusting and results-oriented relationship.

Media planning

The media landscape in Asia differs widely from country to country. To effectively plan which media outlets and platforms to select for your clients, you need to understand every client's target audience and the prevailing conditions of the media industry in each market.

In general, all media meetings should be done in person if possible. Practical gifts for the office are appreciated by media attending press conferences or interviews. You should translate documents in media kits into Simplified Chinese (China), British English (India and Singapore), Kanji (Japanese) and Hangul (Korean), and be mindful that journalists across the region enjoy all-expense-paid trips for events outside their city borders.

China

Many companies seeking to enter China's gigantic market will initially focus on the media in one specific city. Beijing is the national media hub and the priority for businesses with government ties. Alternatively, Shanghai serves as the launch pad for companies seeking relationships with the business community while Guangzhou is the gateway to the manufacturing sector in Southern China. For business, consumer and finance-oriented news, top-tier dailies are the preferred vehicle, easily reaching 2 million (mostly urban) readers each.

Companies that are new to China usually hold a press conference to formally introduce the company while interviews work well for companies with already established relationships with journalists. These media meetings should be scheduled during the mid-morning in Beijing and Guangzhou and in the afternoon in Shanghai.

Journalists in China are arguably the worst paid, so to offset the reality of public transportation woes, you are expected

to provide a Media Travel Allowance (MTA) to journalists attending launches and press conferences. Discreetly paid in a white envelope inserted in the media kit, this practice is unique to China and would be considered offensive if attempted elsewhere. In addition, wining and dining is prevalent and an entertainment budget valued up to 15-20 percent of the total retainer is common, as are gifts during key festivals.

India

Since a nationwide launch could include as many as 20 cities, your clients may opt to focus on Delhi or Mumbai for their initial activities. The dailies are mostly targeted for consumer, business and finance news, while India's rural illiterate have no option but to watch the news on television.

The Indian media prefer interviews or small group briefings over press conferences — with most meetings scheduled between noon and 3 p.m. While wining and dining is a dying trend, the key Indian media are agreeable to sharing experiences over food and drinks.

Japan

In Japan, the top dailies will be the main priority outlet for your clients' news, though online news is gaining momentum. Similar to China, press conferences — starting at 11 a.m. — are the preferred platform for company launches, while roundtables or one-on-one interviews are suitable for companies that already have a rapport with the media. It is not critical for your clients to entertain the media since, despite the wide range of media options, there is uniformity in style and content across the media playing field.

Korea

Korea's vibrant and aggressive media market is an eclectic mix of tradition and modernity. All media launches are held in Seoul, with broadcast serving as the favored outlet followed by the dailies.

Koreans are early adopters of technology, embracing online news, Web 2.0 and the new media options.

After an initial launch, you can arrange interviews for your clients to effectively maximize coverage. Most media meetings begin at 11 a.m. Relationship building with the media centers on lunch meetings and special evening gatherings.

Singapore

Though censorship is prevalent, and Singapore's print and broadcast media are controlled by near monopolies, the island nation is a hub for many regional media outlets. When working with Singapore media, your clients should focus on local implications to remain relevant.

The media are spoiled for choice when it comes to attending press conferences and interviews, so you should arrange interviews with late-morning or early-afternoon meetings. Media entertainment is usually limited to lunches, rather than after-hour appointments or networking events.

The bottom line

With all these varying cultural differences and protocol for wooing the media in key Asian markets, you can begin to appreciate the value in choosing a local partner to help you maneuver within the media landscape. Not only can you and your clients not afford to view Asia as a homogeneous region, but it is best to tackle it one market at a time — ensuring you get some wins under your belt and learn some valuable lessons before blazing further forward. By choosing your in-country partners wisely, you will be well on your way to successfully maximizing your entry into Asia. **T**



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Asian media at a glance

China

- More than 2,000 newspapers
- 7,000 magazine titles
- 1,000 television stations
- Media divided into national and provincial outlets
- No privately owned media
- National language is Putonghua or Mandarin

India

- Approx. 35,000 newspapers in 18 languages and 220 million readers
- 560 television stations (primary news vehicle for rural illiterates)
- National language is British English

Japan

- 110 dailies, 72 million readers
- World-leading newspaper circulation
- National language is Japanese (Kanji)
- Uniformity in style and content

Korea

- 116 dailies (mostly Hangul, 2 English)
- 121 television stations (2 national) are priority outlet
- Extensive online media
- Self-censorship
- Vibrant, aggressive media

Singapore

- 14 newspapers (4 languages), read by 83 percent of the population
- Near monopolies for newspapers and television stations
- 90 magazine titles
- Key media language is British English
- Heavy censorship