

Fighting the Global Monster

Nothing stresses out a marketer more than being told what to do and how to do it - especially when the person doing the telling comes from a global or a U.S. central marketing function. The usual response of the locals to having their local flair and entrepreneurial drive restricted is to launch a "We're Different!" campaign, hoping to convince the faceless bureaucrats that their crap won't work here and we can do it better ourselves. Alas, such campaigns almost invariably fail for a few very simple reasons.

An ex-boss of mine, who found himself given the global role, remarked that the most amusing aspect of listening to these pleas was the fact that just about everyone used exactly the same approach to demonstrate how different they were to everyone else – thus providing proof that they were in fact very similar. They also fail because the approach is so completely self-centered. It's all about me. What about the global guy? There's nothing in it for them: if the local approach works, their global work is exposed as being useless; if the local stuff fails, they get carpeted for having allowed it. Why would they sign up for that?

But the main reason for failure is that most embittered locals completely mis-diagnose the issue they are trying to solve. The global approach is not a Head Office conspiracy to reduce company profits by replacing great local marketing with crap global marketing; it is to improve profits by replacing crap local marketing with OK global marketing. If one or two exceptional markets lose out in the process, then that is a small price to pay for the benefits that flow from disempowering the cretins in 50 other markets. Far too much marketing doesn't deliver results, and it is that which drives CEO's nuts and makes them create global roles to try and stem the wastage.

The other reason I don't like the "We're different" approach is that it is not credible.

We're different to whom? America? Yes, in some regards we are, but in the big scheme of things, most people from outside North America visiting here would struggle to know which country they were in or whether they were being presented to by a Yank or a Canuck. On the other hand, I have just returned from a trip to Singapore, which is very different indeed: hardly anyone seemed older than 22, no-one had an ounce of fat on them, and they all dressed like they were off to a wedding. And that's Singapore; go to Vietnam or the interior of China if you want to see what different looks like.

No, the trick in dealing with these Global types is to do the opposite to what they expect. They expect to be shunned, so embrace them – it's a friendless job, so show a bit of interest and they are like drowning men grabbing at a lifebelt. They expect to meet resistance to the global agenda, so be a cheerleader for the global approach – it's inevitable anyway, so pick a more winnable fight. And lastly, they expect you to claim to be different, so claim to be the same. In fact, claim to be so typical that Canada would make the perfect market to trial new global strategies. We're small enough that failure wouldn't sink the ship, but have a highly developed marketing infrastructure which would more provide a more than adequate road-test.

And if you have done the befriending and global advocacy bits right, you should be able not only to have a strategy right for Canada, but one that becomes the global model.