

# Understanding Regulations and Cultural Differences in a Global World

A global presence has become an increasingly significant reality for many PCOs while organising conferences but doing business worldwide presents far greater challenges than just working locally.

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There are many complex problems to be solved and choices to be made and of those, many are not straightforward. Numerous strategic aspects must be considered before a commitment can be made: starting with understanding the difference between “global” and “international.” These words seem interchangeable but there are significant differences. “Global” means worldwide or universal, applying to the whole world while the word “international” applies to two or more countries.

So if we take for granted these definitions we can say that an International conference means a conference with delegates coming from at least 5 countries while a global conference is a conference with participants coming from all over the world.

How do these definitions impact the conferences we organise? Does our approach need to change? Will our distinctive resources and capabilities already developed at home translate to a global market? Expansion can be widely profitable, as long as marketing, promotion and the different strategies for boosting attendance are considered with the aim of making it really “global”.

While geography no longer stands in the way of globalization there are still many barriers. Language comes to mind but, realistically, it is the least of our worries. Due diligence must be done as innumerable issues of administrative and compliance issues impact setting up a global conference. So start by asking a few basic questions.

Do we understand all the applicable laws and regulations of the targeted location? If we don't know what we are up against we can't develop a strategy that realistically weighs risks and rewards. Every country has a different set of rules for doing business so we cannot assume that what we did in Country A will work in Country B. What travel compliances are required? Attendees from which countries need visas? Are there other travel restrictions? We can't dazzle participants if we are unable to get them to the conference! And remember, it's not only about moving people. Shipping material overseas is another challenge. Give our attendees, as well as sponsors and exhibitors, information that includes warnings about the obstacles they may face throughout the event.

What are the current events and developments taking place in our targeted part of the world? Attracting attendees to our event today may be very different from what was done a year ago for the very same conference. Know what is happening and do not over simplify the challenges for attendees. We need to keep up with current affairs if we want to be global.

Be sensitive to cultural differences. Of course, it is impossible to know every aspect of every culture but it is important to understand that cultural differences play a fundamental role. Make a note in the marketing materials about food options. Offering attendees culinary choices,

like vegetarian, kosher or others, shows that we are aware of special requirements. Will prayer rooms be needed for events that overlap with the weekend? Should we be promoting alcoholic beverages for attendees coming from more restrictive regions of the world? What about timing? Different regions celebrate different holidays. The peak vacation season in the United States is not the same as in Europe so offer deals that accommodate American attendees who might want to stay longer to turn the trip into a vacation. What about attendees coming from Asia? Delegates, especially from China, are a key focus for many associations. It is a huge potential market but how do we break into these newer markets? An internal marketing team that knows the region and deeply understand the complexities will be able to create a more effective approach.

Do we know how to using the Internet and social media to our advantage? More than two billion people use them to connect. But the tactics we use in some countries may not be as effective as in other countries. Relying on the right platforms for our business is important in a global market. We must make sure we have accurate translations of our pages and are watching out for cultural pitfalls. What may be funny in our country may be offensive to other nations. The best we can do is to keep up with the cultures of our target audiences.

And finally, can we deliver what we promise? Don't make promises that cannot be delivered. We need to develop and execute a well thought-out strategy. Through making a conscious effort to gain a better understanding of the laws and culture of the markets we are trying to break into, we will learn what are our needs and how they are fulfilled. This will make the conference planning process easier. And most importantly, it will help our attendees to feel at home in any culture and in any part of the globe while learning. And isn't that our ultimate goal?

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