



## THE GLOBALISATION OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR LIBRARY COLLECTIONS AND TECHNICAL SERVICES (ALCTS)

Never say I don't know buzzwords. Well, I don't know many, but globalisation is a hot one right now in the American Library Association (ALA) and in the association world in general. Not to be left out, I am devoting this article to globalisation, or at least becoming more tuned in to the international market. Plus, I just went to a workshop on global growth, so I have some interesting tidbits to share.

*Text Charles Wilt, ALCTS Executive Director*

The workshop was presented by Terrance Barkan, who has worked both as a CEO of international associations and CEO of his own association management company in Europe. He is now a consultant specialising in globalisation for associations. Globalisation in association management has been getting a lot of press during the past couple of years. The general tone is that associations should be expanding their missions to include an international market.

There are, however, some caveats. It is important for an association to consider a number of questions before moving forward. For me, the two most important questions raised were: *'Should you be international?'* and *'How will you measure success?'* There is a good deal of evidence that the first thing associations think about is promoting membership, which is not the best way to proceed. The issues with 'leading with membership' are myriad: how do you

provide service to those members? Why should someone want to join your association in the first place? Another key to moving into the international market is a realistic understanding of the market. The lucrative market you envision may not be, either because you have nothing or little to offer that market, or else the competition is already stiff. Asking the question *'should you be international?'* should address those issues.

A few more points also stood out. Social media can be used to reach markets that are particularly hard to reach otherwise. LinkedIn, the example used, has nearly 200 million users, about half of which reside outside North America. Developing a globalisation strategy is important. Having a

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group that is devoted to being international is worthwhile because, along with the strategy, this priority helps to provide focus for the association.

Now back to the market question, and how it relates to ALCTS.

According to Barkan's research, the top challenges to reaching any global market are:

- defining appropriate business models,
- accurately estimating the market's potential,
- identifying partners (if that's the way you want to go),
- language, and
- culture.

He also points out that internationally, associations tend toward trade groups and federations rather than professional associations, which is more or less where ALA falls. We already have the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). I also mentioned that the supposedly lucrative market might not be all that lucrative after all. China and India are touted as the next big thing in global association expansion. It's true they have huge populations, but do those populations really line up with the products and services of the association? In our case, maybe, maybe not. The other issue is existing competition in these markets. It's important for us to keep in

mind that countries like Belgium or the Netherlands might be potentially more important markets for us, even though they are smaller in population.

As Barkan notes, *'emerging markets are much more than just Brazil, Russia, India,*

*China, and South Africa (BRICS).'* He breaks down emerging markets into advanced and secondary. Advanced include the likes of Brazil, Czech Republic, Hungary, Malaysia, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, Taiwan, and Turkey. You can see that Eastern Europe is well represented. Malaysia and Turkey may be surprises. Of course, these do not necessarily translate into opportunities for us, but they might. Secondary markets include Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Thailand, and the UAE. In terms of our own reach, we have had continuing education attendees from forty-seven countries, from Australia to Zimbabwe. We do much better in the secondary emerging markets with attendees from Chile, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Thailand, and the UAE. We have had only attendees from South Africa in the advanced group.

We have an enormous opportunity for our own expansion into these areas. ALCTS international members make up only 2.5% of our personal membership, but international organization members make up 25% of our organisational membership. It seems clear that marketing not to individuals, but to organisations will give us our best return. Figuring how to do that is always the trick.

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