

SUSAN POPPER

An *internationalist* interview How SAP addresses the global-local challenge

In just over three years, the German technology company SAP has not only achieved its goal of establishing itself as a strong global brand but has expanded its image well beyond the enterprise resource planning space it is best known for.

Evidence of that success is the brand's steady rise on the *BusinessWeek*/Interbrand Corp. ranking of the most valuable global brands. Most recently, SAP was ranked 35, increasing 14% in brand value in the most recent year measured. Says Susan Popper, SAP senior VP of integrated marketing communications, of the company prior to 2000, "We didn't have a single global look. We didn't have a single global campaign."

With over-all responsibility for global branding, advertising, collateral, Web, events, and relationship marketing, Popper has been instrumental in changing that.

Today, SAP has a different challenge. "At this point, we are in a position of leadership in the category, and now it's a matter of reaffirming the leadership position of the brand and being relevant for a changed environment," she says.

That calls for taking the planning closer to the market while still maintaining the brand consistency. "We see the pendulum swinging more back into the regions," Popper says. "We will continue to do advertising creative from the center but probably will have more local adaptations."

Decisions about the global campaigns are made in Frankfurt and New York, where Popper is based, working with Ogilvy & Mather and Mindshare, but they incorporate to a great degree the needs of the regions as a result of working closely with management in the markets.

And while there has always been room for adaptation, as a result of greater focus on small and medium businesses, which are more local, and a more collaborative way of working, the tight central control will loosen now that SAP has established a set of "rules and tools."

Another important factor was the consolidation of advertising at one global agency. It's important

to have "a single agency working with you around the world that understands the concept and SAP as a brand and helps us execute that in a relevant way from market to market. ...With media, we supervise and manage it from here but the budgets get planned locally," Popper says.

In some regions, there is a regional overlay, particularly in Latin America and Asia Pacific. "This complements what's being done in-country and gives coverage to countries that don't have individual budgets," she explains.

The company's current portfolio includes several different types of campaigns. It starts with a basic branding campaign. An outgrowth of the branding effort (and termed internally as the customer momentum campaign) is a series of some 25 ads, each featuring a different SAP customer providing concrete evidence that "the best run-businesses run SAP." The newest addition is a campaign aimed at small and medium-size businesses that is creating awareness in a new target area for the company.

In addition to running in global and regional publications, such as *Business Week*, *CFO*, *CIO*, *Economist*, *Financial Times*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, the advertising also runs in leading national publications such as *Les Echos* in France and *Il Sole 24 Ore* in Italy.

Local markets can choose from different ads created globally. From there, they can adapt the ad in a variety of ways from simply modifying the visual or copy to adapting the concept. Popper's area signs off on everything, but the regions can take the lead.

She acknowledges that finding the right balance between global and local is a major challenge for

Susan Popper

*takes the SAP brand
to the next level.*





BRAND CAMPAIGN

SAP's basic branding campaign is designed to reinforce the company's leadership and help change perceptions about the company and its offerings. It appears in global, regional, and local media in many languages.

CUSTOMER REFERENCE CAMPAIGN

Global and local clients —more than 25—are featured in striking testimonial-style ads using black-and-white photography and bright yellow type. The ads run in print and at airports.

many advertisers these days. And, she adds that there is no magic formula. “We [find the right balance by working] with the countries very much on an ongoing basis to get a sense of their needs and their business issues. We make sure what we're doing is relevant.”

She has found the way to do that is to have “rules and tools” so that everyone uses the same language regardless of whether it's a global or local campaign. Countries do what they need to do; her area insures it's in keeping with the brand and up to a certain level of standards and quality.

And what about the added cost to do this?

“To me, there is a cost to *not* doing this,” she says, adding there is a cost to a lack of consistency and what that means to a global brand like SAP.

One thing that has made a big impression on her as she has built relationships with marketing directors and managers around the world is how interconnected they all are.

“In a global world you can't think when something happens 'over there,' it has nothing to do with me. We're all connected. We rely on each other for mutual success. And it gets more relevant every day.”



SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESS CAMPAIGN

A focus on small and medium business means that SAP must find ways to make sure its message is relevant to local markets yet consistent with its global strategy.

