



Interview

with Greta Kotler

Greta Kotler, CAE
Chief Global Development Officer
ASAE – The Center for Association
Leadership

ASAE - The Center for Association Leadership represents more than 21,000 association executives and industry partners from 10,000 organisations. Members manage leading trade associations, individual membership societies and voluntary organisations across the United States and in nearly 50 countries around the world.

In 2011, MCI conducted global market research for ASAE to identify the needs of the global association community and assess the potential for ASAE's growth in Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and Latin America. Following this ASAE engaged MCI to help it actively build new markets in Korea and China.

Greta Kotler, Chief Global Development Officer, talks to us about global growth and advancing the international association management profession through ASAE's education and training, and more specifically in Korea.

MCI: How did you assess ASAE's opportunities to grow globally?

Greta Kotler: Over the last six years, we have had increasing opportunities to meet and engage with association executives from around the world through both attendance at international meetings and their engagement with ASAE. In 2010, we developed a request for proposal for a third party to assist us in identifying key opportunities and interest in our body of knowledge covering association management.

We selected MCI because of their work around the globe including offices in over 47 countries, and the extensive methodology which they proposed. We felt that it was very important to have a third party on the ground to assist with our work.

MCI did a thorough analysis of the different opportunities based on the overall country economy as well as the maturity and needs of the association market. MCI started with a group of 16 individual country markets which were then narrowed down to seven for further product analysis. They also conducted local interviews and identified potential partners. In the final analysis, we accepted their recommendation to begin our more detailed work in both Korea and China.

MCI: How would you define the maturity of the global association community today?

GK: Through our experience we are finding different levels of maturity of the association community. In Europe, there is a strong group of associations and association executives, with the largest

number of international federations located in Brussels and sophisticated association communities in Germany, the Netherlands, UK, Switzerland, France, Spain, and other countries.

In the Asia Pacific region, we have found varying interest in growing the association community depending on the specific area. Some examples include Australia with a vibrant community of association executives who participate with ASAE and through their own umbrella organisations.

In Korea, there is a committed group of professionals with interest in expanding the sector as well as becoming more effective executives.

In China, there are over 200,000 associations and over 2.3 million staff according to the MCI research. They are organised under

Insider's view

MCI: You have been operating ASAE's local presence in Korea for 18 months. Why did you consider there was good market potential for ASAE in Korea?

GC: Even though Korea is a very big market, there are no organisations representing association professionals in the country. Also, Korea strongly needs association management programmes, services and tools for improving their management styles. ASAE's proven experience and knowledge is perfectly adapted to the Korean association market needs and requirements.

MCI: In your view, what are the critical success factors for ASAE in Korea?

GC: There are three main success factors:

1. A local presence to promote and serve

- Korean association professionals
2. Develop strong local partnerships for jointly promoting ASAE's products and services to the Korean market
3. A joint investment in time, money and resources for promotional activities at an early stage with partners.

MCI: What are your tactics for building ASAE brand awareness in your market?

GC: We have launched a bi-monthly electronic newsletter, a website and started the CPAM education programme, and will soon introduce ASAE's publications in Korean.

MCI: How are you delivering local value and relevance? How have you helped ASAE to customise its educational programmes?

GC: We have introduced and are operating ASAE's CPAM educational programmes for association professionals in partnership with the Hallym University of Graduate Studies in English. Because of the limited English skills of Korean association professionals, localisation and translation of the study materials is key. For this reason, most of the educational materials have been translated into Korean. We are also currently working on licensing and translating ASAE books and publications too. ■

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several umbrella government groups such as the Chinese Association for Science and Technology (CAST) and the Chinese Medical Association.

ASAE has also led Study Missions to China, India, Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai, Brazil, Argentina and Europe where we have found and met with association staff and leaders. We are increasingly impressed with the calibre of the association executives, as well as their desire for knowledge exchange and learning about successful practices in association management.

MCI: What are you able to provide to the global association market today in terms of education and training?

GK: One of our strategic goals is knowledge exchange with association executives around the world. We see the potential of a global community of association experts and executives who will be able to learn from each other, share valuable resources and run their associations with increased efficiency.

ASAE has a strong body of knowledge on association management which can be found on our website, www.asaecenter.org, as well as publications, face-to-face and online learning programmes, and a strong network of association executives from trade and professional to philanthropic organisations.

Last year, based on needs expressed by international association executives, we introduced the Certificate Program in Association Management. This is a five day Certificate programme that covers the essentials of association management, membership development, working with volunteer committees and task forces, communication and public relations, and leadership.

ASAE is also working on developing other courses based on the specific needs raised by the international community.

MCI: What are ASAE's top priorities for adapting certification and training products to the global association market?

GK: The Certificate Program in Association Management (CPAM) is currently ASAE's top priority for adapting training products to the global association market. The operating model is that organisations license the programme from ASAE with ASAE training the local instructors who are asked to localise the materials with specific examples from the given area.

In Korea, to date 22 association managers have completed the CPAM through Hallym University. There are also four trained ASAE facilitators for the programme. In China,

CAST has licensed ASAE's CPAM. To date, the Certificate Program has also been licensed to Logic Management Consulting, with offices in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and to MCI to train their staff worldwide.

In the future, ASAE will look for additional needs or opportunities to develop other relevant educational programmes in collaboration with local advisers and users. The goal is to have a well-prepared group of association executives who are able to work effectively in their organisations and countries, as well as add knowledge to the growing international association community.

MCI: What prompted ASAE to choose Korea and China as your first target markets?

GK: Both Korea and China were selected as a result of the MCI research. The key advantages of Korea were a strong need for ASAE's body of knowledge and a desire to professionalise association management. There was also a group who identified themselves as association professionals as well as good potential partners. One of these potential partners was Hallym University of Graduate Studies.

To date, they have licensed and offered the Certificate Program and have also licensed the translation and publication of 7 Measures of Success.

China was selected as a longer-term market because of the opportunity to be part of their growth, professionalism, and knowledge exchange as China grows. The body of knowledge with modifications would be relevant to association development in China. There are also expecting government policies that will enable associations to be more independent and "market driven".

MCI: How would you describe your main opportunities and/or challenges in developing these markets?

GK: Although there are many differences in both of these markets based on their economies, cultures and business operations, there are also similarities in both opportunities and challenges.

Regarding opportunities, in both markets, there is an interest in the body of knowledge and building the professionalism of association management. There is also an awareness that effective associations can be important to their country's competitiveness.

Regarding challenges, there are a few that can be generalised to both markets. First and foremost, language is an issue. To be effective with any education programme or with the body of knowledge in either

country, materials need to be translated into the local language. Regarding education programmes, the content must be tailored to the challenges of the local landscape.

MCI: If you were to advise other US associations on critical success factors, what would they be?

GK: As so many industries and professions are becoming more global, there is a growing necessity to be able to operate globally.

When deciding to expand worldwide, it is important to have enough research to develop a strategy and realistic goals for the outreach. It is certainly important to have support from your board on this journey which is usually more complicated and less measurable initially than what associations have expected when working exclusively in the US.

It is also important to have buy-in from the staff. For all staff departments, serving the global market – even if only in a few countries – adds complexity and an increased workload. We have found it effective to have a cross-functional team that addresses their specific areas, but this is new territory and it is critical to track and actively learn from our experience.

Within the given country or area, it is essential to spend time understanding the culture, their needs and expectations, and developing relationships with appropriate partners. A good and well-structured partnership can multiply your efforts and provide credibility in the local community.

We have also found that it is important to be flexible, to enter the global arena with a desire to learn, to try things that are new, and deliberately debrief and learn from the experience – whether it met your initial expectations or not. It is also important to review your plans and goals and be willing to make changes as you learn with your partners what is working and what is not in a given culture.

We have found wonderful and exciting new associations and association executives.

We will continue to look for ways to adapt our content with a future goal of co-creation of relevant products and services. We will also continue to explore ways to facilitate knowledge exchange among many committed association executives with the goal of learning from each other and improving the practice and results. ■