

Brand Succe\$\$ in the US

The USA is the most rewarding and competitive fashion market in the world. Thierry Bayle of Global Fashion Management has spent more than 20 years helping European Fashion Brands to sell successfully there. Here, he shares some top tips for taking your Brand to the States.

Before we go any further, I need to get something off my chest. Let's call it the Gold Rush Syndrome. Have you any idea how many British and European Brands have decided, very often at the last minute, to attend U.S. trade shows and then recruit local agents with little or no preparation? Does it sound like a brilliant strategy? Really? In so many cases it cost them considerable time and money. But it really doesn't have to be this way. If you're planning to take your brand to the USA, my top tip can be summed up in one word and a lot of hard work: **PREPARATION!**



The USA offers our brands endless opportunities and you can certainly strike gold, however, unless you take the time to do the research, preparation and legwork required, it could end up costing you more than you make. Easy when you say it quickly, but what does this mean for your brand and what will your To Do list look like?

Obviously, every market is different, but there are some key considerations for the USA which will make all the difference to your success there. These include:

- Coverage: it's a huge country, but many brands go no further than NYC, LV or LA. Why miss out? Shouldn't you be showing in Las Vegas too, where you'll find the only national show? What about regional shows?
- Duty optimisation (there are a number of options here, so get advice on what is best for you).
- US Market Segments: you need to know and understand these and be able to describe which price point your brand fits into so that you can position yourself appropriately with buyers. You must also use the American words to describe your line.
- Brand positioning: understanding where your brand fits into the market (who are your competitors? Which brands would sit well alongside yours?).
- Get some training on talking to American Buyers: if you use the phrases they want to hear and offer the deliveries they expect, your brand will have greater credibility and they will be more likely to consider it.
- Sales routes: are you better off recruiting an agent or setting up your own show room and sales office? Should you consider a distributor (despite my sharp intake of breath and vigorous head shaking, it can work for some brands)?

As you can see, there's plenty to think about, which is why I always advise my clients to delay their US market entry until they feel ready. It can easily take a year or two to prepare for this type of venture. However, after 4-5 months you should be able to understand and connect with buyers and set up the marketing machine to convert them.

It's not just a question of feeling mentally ready and having the right information at your fingertips. In addition, you need to look at your products and decide whether your product is right for the US market or whether it needs tweaking:

- Are the sizes right? Will they fit Americans?
 - Are you offering the right colours and fabrics?
 - Is it too daring for some regions or too conservative for others?
 - Should you be aiming to sell darker colours on the East Coast and brighter ones in the South?
- Do you need a more trendy version for the West Coast?

Don't forget that your US business will impact on your whole company, not just the design, sales and marketing staff. Don't forget to make sure that the accounts team are not only fully briefed but also thoroughly trained to handle US business. If you want to be paid, it's incredibly important that they understand the protocol for issuing and chasing a US invoice!

I've mentioned some specific issues to think about when entering the US market, however, it will be even more important to ensure that your vision and strategy are rock solid, in order to ensure that the new venture has firm foundations.

It has to be your strategy, decided by you!

With this in mind, I'd like to pass on the following tips:

Tip 1: Execution

Ideas are only great if they are well executed. Make sure you have competent staff or experts joining you. These people must be happy to be challenged, ready to look at new ideas and new ways of doing things. Avoid people who are always too busy to listen and who claim to know it all.

Tip 2: Cover those bases!

Having a holistic approach is critical. You can have one expert or several experts but you must remember that you cannot succeed unless you have covered all of these points:

Product Management / Merchandising/ Sales/ Marketing/ Logistics/ Duty and Optimisation/ Credit Management/ Public Relations/ Celebrity Placement.



Tip 3: Have a truly nationwide approach

This means you must move outside New York and New York's trade shows.

Tip 4: Act on a local or regional level

You need to look at a minimum of 5 regions. There is more than just the West Coast and the East Coast. When you have identified 5 different regions, ask yourself how your brand is represented in these areas. You will see that you are missing a lot of opportunities.

Tip 5: Have the X Factor

Have a little “je ne sais quoi”, something to differentiate you from your competitors. You need to be creative.

Tip 6: Train, Train and Train again

The market changes, consumers are more knowledgeable and new sales techniques appear. You must keep learning new tricks - yes, it's exhausting, but practice makes perfect (and \$s!).

Tip 7: Control your Risk

At every turn, we are faced with more and more risks: risk to produce the goods; risk to take an agent; risk to give credit to buyers... You have to understand, control and, above all, manage these risks.

Tip 8: Products

You need to adapt your products to the US Market. It does not mean that you have to change your identity but you have to identify which pieces are relevant for the US Market.

Tip 9: Preparation

Preparation is the key to success. You cannot build up export and leave preparation to the last minute. That applies, of course, to the trade shows you will attend. You must be prepared and understand what the market requires and what will trigger agents and buyers to take on your brand. You must know how to invoice (FOB or landed / £ or \$), ship and collect money. So many questions for which you need answers!

Tip 10: Network and talk to as many people as possible.

Talk and compare experiences. Ask people how they succeeded or why they failed. Make sure you understand the brand and product proposition before you jump to the conclusion that FOB terms are good or that the Coterie is THE show you must attend.

As well as my other tips, make sure you adopt the following rules:

Sell the goods in dollars and landed duty paid. Give credit solely to good buyers. Attend more than one trade show or have 4/5 regional sales reps. Always remember the 3 words that govern many individuals in the US: Money, Money and Money!

To know more, attend our live event in London and Paris in 2016.

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PARIS – [Short link](http://ow.ly/YP2B5) (<http://ow.ly/YP2B5>) to access the workshop – Delivered in French.

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