

EXCERPT FROM MAKE IT IN AMERICA by MATTHEW LEE SAWYER

Entering the U.S. Stage

Chess masters know the opening is the most important part of the game. After studying their opponents and researching potential strategies, they make their first decisive moves. The opening is the time to test strategies and identify the best approach: bold and aggressive? Or safe and measured? Similarly, in business your opening moves are critical, particularly when entering a new country, marketplace, or community.

If you're part of an international company, you'll need to get the attention of buyers, suppliers, and collaborators. If you're an entrepreneur, you will need to make positive in-roads with potential investors and partners. Simply said, unless you get noticed, no one will consider doing business with you. However, getting noticed in the crowded U.S. market isn't simple. The abundance of digital media doesn't help matters. Every day the average American scans through the equivalent of 300 feet of videos, tweets, images, books, articles, eCommerce and social media sites, which is approximately the height of the Statue of Liberty!ⁱ

To capture attention at the start, you'll need a strong entrance with clear goals. Theater actors and screen stars know how to enter a scene with the clear goal of introducing their character. They want to be noticed and be recognized as the character they are playing. Acting coaches describe this as arriving with intention and establishing presence. Body language, movement, and dress communicate just as much as spoken words. Sometimes an actor's arrival in the story is announced even before the actor steps on the stage, as other characters talk and share stories about the character. Similarly, Americans will probably learn about you — and create a first impression — before they meet you.

First impressions set the stage for productive relationships and business opportunities. Within seconds people will decide if they are interested or not interested in considering your company and its product. Is it relevant to their needs? Do they trust your organization will deliver on its brand promises? Researchers at Princeton University found that it takes only a tenth of a second to form an impression of a stranger from seeing their face—and even after spending more time with the person, that first impression doesn't change significantly.ⁱⁱ

Decisions made by first impressions, both good and bad, are difficult to overcome later. Psychologists describe this “first impression bias” as the tendency to base final judgments on information gathered at the beginning. First impressions influence, or anchor, all other information they subsequently receive.

Impressing with Your Brand

Your first impression in the U.S. market will be your brand. What's a brand? The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any feature that indicates a seller's goods or services as distinct from other sellers.”ⁱⁱⁱ That definition is too narrow, however; it doesn't capture all of the ways that brands resonate with people. Think of your experience going to a restaurant in a new city. Certainly, the name and signage made a strong first impression. Were you impressed with the décor and atmosphere? Were the aromas pleasant and the noise level acceptable? Did you feel welcomed and valued by the staff? If not, you might leave and try another restaurant.

So, your brand needs to be clear and compelling—not to everyone, just the people who are important for your business: potential customers, business partners, suppliers, employees,

investors, and other influential people. American consumers are cautious about buying products from unknown companies, particularly since they generally have many options to choose from.

Spotlight: MediaMint (India)

Aditya Vuchi came to the U.S. from India to study engineering at West Virginia University. After graduating, he joined the Tribal Fusion agency in Silicon Valley to build technologies that create, distribute, and track the performance of digital advertising. Four years later Aditya was promoted to Director of Global Operations, and he built a highly-efficient “back office” operation in India to deliver complex digital advertising campaigns for Tribal Fusion’s clients.

Entrepreneurs at heart, Aditya and his wife, software engineer Neelima Marupuru, saw the skyrocketing growth in digital advertising. U.S. digital advertising revenues were \$26 billion at that time in 2010, and in ten years it grew to \$140 billion.^{iv} The couple founded MediaMint in Hyderabad, India with a U.S. subsidiary based in San Francisco. Their goal was to be a valued and trusted business partner to the world’s biggest advertisers and media companies.

The couple hired Jason Riback, an operations expert from McKinsey & Co., as MediaMint’s president to build a world-class organization focused on client service and execution. Jason knew that business executives in the U.S. would need convincing to trust their critical operations to an unknown, foreign company. MediaMint started by asking for small projects, and then over-delivering with flawless execution and extensive performance reporting. Clients loved this, since it meant they could show their bosses how their operation was running efficiently and effectively. MediaMint’s mantra to its clients? “It’s our job to earn your business every day.”^v

MediaMint grew by focusing on building strong client relationships and exceeding their expectations for flexibility, scalability, and efficiency. In 2022 the company was purchased by

Brightcom Group for a reported \$75 million in cash and stock. At the time, the company employed over 1,300 people and was servicing clients including Expedia, Pinterest, The New York Times, and Netflix.^{vi}

ⁱ Kai D. Wright, *Follow the Feeling; Brand building in a noisy world* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2019) p. 27

ⁱⁱ Eric Wargo, “How Many Seconds to a First Impression?” *APS Observer* 19, July 2006, <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/how-many-seconds-to-a-first-impression>.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Branding,” *American Marketing Association* (blog), Accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/>.

^{iv} iab Report, “IAB Full Year 2010 0413 Final”. https://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IAB_Full_year_2010_0413_Final.pdf.

^v Conversation with Jason Riback, President of MediaMint, on April 19, 2021

^{vi} Telanganatoday. 2021. “Hyderabad-based Brightcom acquires MediaMint for Rs 566 crore”. Telangana Today. December 7, 2021.