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Lenox Powell: Hi, I'm Lenox Powell, a host and producer of the Outperform Podcast. I talk to and spotlight Acceleration Partners team members, industry partners, and clients about topics ranging from affiliate marketing, publisher development, and global performance marketing, to work/life integration, remote work, and company culture.

Welcome to the Outperform Podcast. Today we're kicking off a three part series around taking your affiliate program global. Because there's a lot to know about this topic, we thought it would be helpful to break it down into three parts. Part one, important things to consider and do before you go global. Part two, what to know and do after you determine there's a viable opportunity to take your affiliate program global, and three, what you should be looking at and evaluating in the months following the global expansion of your affiliate program.

On today's episode, we're focusing on what to know and do before you go global. Our experts on this subject matter are Tyla Cobb and Tess Waresmith. Tyla is an account director, and Tess is a senior account manager here at Acceleration Partners. Both have extensive experience launching and managing clients' global affiliate programs, and Tess even moved to Singapore for a year to oversee the Asia-Pacific launch of a client's affiliate program.

Welcome Tess and Tyla.

Tess Waresmith: Hi Lenox.

Tyla Cobb: Hey Lenox.

Lenox Powell: Before we dive in, I think it would be helpful for you guys to share a bit about your experiences managing and overseeing clients' global affiliate programs. Tess, let's start with you. You started at AP a few years ago, and have truly had on the ground experience managing a client's affiliate program from a different country. Talk a bit about that journey.

Tess Waresmith: Sure. It was a bit unexpected. I went to Singapore in 2017 with the intention to stay for six weeks, to get a feel of the landscape, and eventually ended up staying for over a year. It
was a pretty unexpected opportunity, but ending up being amazing. I had the opportunity to launch several different programs for one client. It was definitely a steep learning curve.

There are huge differences that I'm sure we'll get into later, about how the affiliate industry operates in the US, versus other mega regions around the world. But truly an amazing opportunity professionally and personally. It definitely forced me out of my comfort zone. It was imperative that I embraced a problem solving mindset, and constantly be thinking outside the box, but definitely an amazing opportunity to travel on a personal level as well.

Lenox Powell: Tyla, you're the AP veteran on this call and have overseen many AP client programs on both a domestic and a global scale. Share a bit about your background and what your first experience was taking a client's program global.

Tyla Cobb: Sure. First, I'm not sure how I can follow Tess and her globetrotting, but I'll try. I will say my first introduction to global program management was actually four years ago. I was at another digital agency, so why I was there, I had a bunch of different programs. One of which though, was in Japan, and I remember thinking right off the bat, "Whoa, this is going to be totally different" and it just stood out, and even the creative strategy.

What I was accustomed to in the US market was using a lot of text links, and in Japan, for this client, it was a larger banner strategy with a very vibrant banner, too, so visually I could just see it was going to be totally different.

Fast forward though to today at AP, in my account director role, I oversee a really large global team with people on the ground in all major regions. We have people in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the US. For one client, actually, we have 15 dedicated people spread across seven different timezones, so with that comes a lot of interesting challenges. Just the sheer spread of people across the globe is a constant challenge. It's something that is top of my mind for us every day.

Lenox Powell: Yeah, absolutely. As we discussed in the intro, this is going to be a part three series, because there is so much to going global, and so for this particular call, we're talking about what to do, what to know before a company takes their affiliate program global and then part two and part three will be the next stage, the after stage, the assessment stage.
There are a lot of different angles to this, and Tess, you had mentioned when we've prepped for this particular call that there are some considerations, some key considerations, and research and data that a company should be doing and knowing and looking for well before they actually take their affiliate program global. What are some of those considerations? What kind of research and data should they be looking at?

Tess Waresmith: There are endless pieces of data that you want to look at before you go into a new market, and I think the most important thing to start with is getting some local context. What is the market like? What are your priorities? In the US, we talk about North America as a market, and Canada and the US have more similarities, similar language.

For going into a region like Asia, every market, every country is so different. The same strategy in one market isn't necessarily going to work in another, and there are literally countless variables to consider. But I think the very first one is language and culture differences. Depending on which region you're going into, you're going to need to build promotional material, which can include creative images, instructions, and all of that is going to have to incorporate the local language and culture.

A perfect example is Singapore. It's predominately English, but you'll definitely want to make sure that you're creative in your imagery and whatever you're going to use to promote in that region. First of all, make sure that you have the resources to create what you need to enter with enough information, but also to reflect a specific culture that exists there.

Lenox Powell: And Tyla touched on a little bit about that in her intro about Japan, and brighter and more in your face type of creative or banners. What's an example of that from your experience in Singapore?

Tess Waresmith: Sure. A very simple example would just be imagery. Singapore is predominately English speaking, but you won't want to use imagery that shows a countryside, or that shows people that aren't of Singaporean descent. That's just not going to resonate with the local culture there.

Another key difference is around internet and mobile device usage. We obviously work in the digital space. If you're a company whose product works better on iOS devices, you're going to have to consider the market that you're going into and what their usage is like. For example, Indonesia has way less use of personal computers, way less people have iPhones, and even less have smartphones. You really have to consider what that looks like in any country or region that you're moving into.
Lenox Powell: Why is that? Why is there less personal computers and more on mobile?

Tess Waresmith: Sure. In Indonesia, that's just a matter of the fact that it's in a different socioeconomic place than Singapore. Singapore is a very wealthy country. Everyone has access to personal computers, and the income to do so. Indonesia's definitely not as wealthy of a country, so you're just dealing with a totally different demographic and not just income wise, but also what devices do they have and what kind of access do they have to computers?

Another thing, another variable that you'll want to think about is your expectations of ramping a program up. The length of time it takes to get things off the ground will vary depending on what market you're in. If your goal is to ramp up really quickly, some markets are going to move faster than others.

Australia's a great example of that. Australia is a market that thrives on building relationships, trust is super important, and building those relationships is going to add time to a launch. Face time is absolutely crucial for some markets in order to get any type of affiliate partnership off the ground.

Lenox Powell: You had written a really insightful blog post for the AP blog about this specific thing. It was around business cards and your "Ah-huh" moment around business cards and that face time. From your experience, why is face time so crucial in some of these areas?

Tess Waresmith: Thanks, yeah. I enjoyed writing that blog post and the business card piece, I'm glad you brought that up. That is something that was super interesting. The first meeting that I sat down in Singapore, everyone at the table took out their business cards and very politely passed them, using both hands, to each person at the table.

I definitely did not have business cards on me at that meeting, so moving forward after that, I always had them on me, but that was a huge difference, and something that I didn't even think about before I went. As far as the face time is concerned, first of all, face time in general just leads to better conversations and obviously that's global.

But a client or a publisher in a region like Asia, and Australia, they're more likely to be upfront in a face time meeting versus a virtual discussion, and it's going to add trust. Trust is such an important part of building relationships, and in person meetings foster that. Additionally, a lot of times your partners will need to
see the person behind the project and if they have a close relationship with someone, they're more likely to prioritize that project as well.

All of the partners that you're working with are having regular face time meetings with other clients or other publishers, if you want to make sure that your project is being prioritized, you need face time with those people.

Lenox Powell: When we say face time, we're not talking about the iOS app on the phone, FaceTime, we're talking about in person, physically.

Tess Waresmith: Yes, we're talking about in person, physically. Make sure you have a travel budget. It is amazing how much you get out of in person meetings, in regions, and how important it is to move projects along. I can't stress that enough. I talk about it all the time. It's probably the number one thing I took away from working in Singapore and in that region.

Lenox Powell: Yeah. What's interesting about that, too, is that AP is a 100% remote company, so we are used to doing video calls. That's the way we communicate as a company. We tend to communicate with our clients that way, our partners that way. I'm sure that was a real transition for you, thinking, "Oh, no problem. I've done this. I work with a remote company. Everything's video calls, we can totally do that, that should be enough."

Tess Waresmith: Yeah, so true. I did spend a lot more time in clients' offices, having regular publisher meetings. It became very common, and in that region it's the expectation. Publishers in Kuala Lumpur will fly to Singapore regularly. They all are traveling constantly. I didn't work in Europe, I don't have the same experience, but I imagine it's similar there. I know there's just a lot of travel and it's super important to set up that time to actually meet with someone in person.

Lenox Powell: What's another consideration?

Tess Waresmith: The last one I haven't touched on yet would be awareness of affiliate in the market you're moving into. In the US and Canada, most big clients and companies understand the value of affiliate marketing, or at least they've heard of it. That's not the case in a lot of other regions in the world, and especially in the Asia-Pacific region where I worked.

In Southeast Asia, there's just less publishers in general. You'll be dealing with mostly some affiliate networks, or if you are trying to onboard publishers, they might not be aware of the opportunity. Affiliate marketing is a newer concept in general, so
there's less content publishers, there's less mass media publishers that are willing to work on a revenue share basis, or on a cost per action model, because they just aren't willing to take on the risk. It's something they haven't done before, so they haven't seen the benefits of it.

Lenox Powell: We actually just had a conversation recently with our new managing director in Singapore, and it was really interesting. I said, "What does affiliate mean in that region?" She said, "For a lot of people, it's like multilevel marketing" which completely blew my mind. I'm like, "Oh, interesting." Gets back to that cultural perspective.

Tess Waresmith: Yeah, it's totally different. The affiliate piece there, it's not necessarily a positive. It's not something people are familiar with. Especially in Australia. There's a lot of potential partners that could make huge impact in programs, but they're not as used to taking on the risk to work on affiliate model, even though it could be very beneficial for them. A key part of getting over that barrier will be figuring out how you're going to educate the market on the opportunity that you're bringing, and that could be with decks about affiliate marketing and how valuable it can be to accompany webinars. You'll have to get creative once you're in the region, and figure out how to make your opportunity valuable to the people there.

Lenox Powell: For people who are listening, I mean, they don't even resonate with the term being called an affiliate, much less the concept of affiliate marketing. You have a great publisher who their doppelganger here in the United States would go with that's an affiliate. We'd call them an affiliate, but there, they'd never resonate with that term.

Tess Waresmith: Yeah, that's a super good point and it's actually a term we ditched very early on when we first got there. A lot of the emails we sent to talk to potential partners, we used partnership. We didn't use affiliate. That didn't resonate, and didn't lead to a lot of responses. Whenever we were approaching someone new that we hadn't worked with yet, we were very careful with the language we chose, just to make sure they understand that this is a real partnership and there is opportunity, mutually beneficial opportunity here for you and for our clients.

Lenox Powell: Yeah, those are really, really good insights. Tyla, let's talk about a centralized global strategy. Why that's important for companies to think about in advance, well in advance actually, of taking their affiliate program global. First, what do you mean, what's your definition of a centralized global strategy?
Tyla Cobb: Totally. From our experience, it's just really important that you lay the foundation out in advance of the type of global program you want to have. This is important so all stakeholders across markets, on both the client side and on AP side, are completely aligned on the vision, and if there are any non-negotiables that you want to have in your program.

For example, for one of our largest global accounts, a priority for them is to use the affiliate channel to drive truly incremental traffic. For this client, that means actions driven by affiliates wouldn’t have happened if they didn’t do some type of activity. With this being a focus at the global level, it's really critical that everyone both on the client side and our side are using the same KPIs to really define success.

Whether you're looking at ROI, or cost per action, or some other metric, it's just really important that we have consistency so we can all have the same comparison across the globe, and that we're really comparing apples to apples.

Lenox Powell: How did that differ, though? I mean, a US client would want that too, right? What is that unique element for a global company?

Tyla Cobb: Yeah, great question. Honestly, I think markets are so different and a lot of times you have stakeholders in that market at the local level, and they might have other priorities. Making sure that we're all singing the same song at a global level, so we're comparing performance consistently across markets is really important.

Lenox Powell: Define a stakeholder in this context.

Tyla Cobb: Yeah. A stakeholder could be obviously someone on our side, so usually we have a program manager in each of the major regions. That's really working very closely with the client contact for that region, so the client contact typically would manage that region. We would have a contact on the client side that would manage all of the Asia-Pacific region, and we would work closely with the regional contact on the client side to make sure we have a really solid understanding of what countries are a priority.

We would have a stakeholder on the client side, a stakeholder on AP, and obviously then we have publishers which also are major factors in the relationship.

Lenox Powell: You were saying it's also important for those stakeholders to follow a really clearly defined global process. What's an example for that?
Tyla Cobb: For the example that I talked about earlier, we have 15 people all working on the same account, it's really critical that everyone's following the same processes for execution, and any best practices are all trickled out to everyone across the board that we're learning from each other's mistakes or tests, whatever you have.

For one client who has the focus on incremental value, for that client it's really critical that all of our team is completely aligned on how we're going to monitor for fraud, and that we're catching publishers proactively that aren't providing value, and removing them from the program. Even doing that for your market, you need to think about every other market, so making sure that we're sharing out those violators, and what happens, so we can learn from those circumstances and make sure that all other markets are really safeguarded.

Lenox Powell: A lot of logistics need to go in to before ... I mean, I'm envisioning a client being so gung ho, "We're going global, we're going into Singapore, we're going into Latin America" or whatever. How do you slow that client down to say, "Okay, this is not going to happen in two weeks. A foundation has to be laid, if you really want to be successful long term?" How do you get them on the same page with this?

Tyla Cobb: Yeah, completely. I think just really talking about all of our experience expanding into new markets, and all of the different tactical pieces that go along with it. A lot of times clients, they're really responsible for thinking about their strategy and working with their internal stakeholders. They don't have sometimes a lot of perspective on how much it takes behind the scenes just to get the program off the ground and keep the lights on, and just from a logistical standpoint. That's on us to really communicate that and provide recommendations to the client.

Lenox Powell: Tess had talked about, okay, if you're in Singapore, you're in many areas of Asia, that the concept of being an affiliate to being a publisher, they resonate really more with partner. What about from a publisher perspective and aligning them with this entire global strategy?

Tyla Cobb: That's also really important to have a centralized vision for your program. We're seeing more and more that publishers have the ability to work across markets, or target traffic in other markets. Sometimes one publisher might be talking to one of our program managers in Latin America, but also talking to one in Europe. We want to make sure that obviously we're sending a consistent message that the program manager in LatAm isn't saying, "We need volume, volume, volume" and meanwhile the program manager that they're working with over in Europe is really
focused on incremental value and focused on quality. We just want to make sure that the message is really consistent across the board.

Lenox Powell: Right. Hindsight's 20/20. It all makes a lot of sense now, and it's so fantastic that you guys, we've had people like Tess and still do, many, it's grown exponentially, who are now on the ground, who can provide that feedback to our US team members who are managing those global programs for clients. Some learnings. Tess touched on a little bit of this. She went to a meeting, everyone was very politely and respectfully handing out their business card. She's like, "I don't have a business card."

This is all the before you go into a new country, or new market. What are some learnings from your guys' perspective that you've had, that you didn't know? You don't know what you don't know, so what are some of those things that you didn't know?

Tyla Cobb: Yeah, totally. Tess will probably kill me for telling this story, but a funny one that I always think of is just because they speak English in the country that you're going to, don't assume that it's English. We were working on a client and we had to localize some creative, and we thought it was in Australia, so Tess was just going to throw on a couple mates and G'Days and we'll call it good, and it obviously, we shared it with a client and they were like, "No. This is not [crosstalk 00:21:25]." Just don't make any assumption.

Tess Waresmith: I was trying to own the problem and we didn't have the resources, so did what I could.

Lenox Powell: Yeah, that's a good learning. Tess, what about you? I mean, you must have a ton.

Tess Waresmith: Yeah. I could go on for days. I think the biggest piece before you enter a market is really understanding how long it's going to take to launch and giving yourself time to plan, to ask the questions. What kind of support do we have? Do we have people that can translate this blog article from US English to Australian English? Do you have a strong cultural understanding of the local market? Those are the kind of questions.

I mean, all those things take time, and going back to the US versus Asia example that we were talking about before, I mean, in Asia you have 12 different countries. If you want to launch in Asia-Pacific region, even smaller, the Southeast Asian region, there's many, many different countries and many different languages. If you ever launched in that region, you're going to have to prepare a lot of material or have a plan to do so.
Otherwise it's going to be very hard to launch in all those markets.

I think just really understanding what it's going to take, and also laying the groundwork for the expectation that it will take longer in some regions for so many different variables. Whether it's affiliate communication, whether it's translating creative, could go on and on on the differences there. But really setting those expectations and giving yourself time to plan before you go into the market.

Lenox Powell: So what's one of your favorite learning stories from when you were in Singapore?

Tess Waresmith: Probably one of my favorite learnings was what's included in APAC. So APAC, A-P-A-C, that stands for Asian Pacific Region. Depending on who you talk to, that will include different countries. Some people will refer to APAC as Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia. Other people will include more Northern countries, like Taiwan and Japan. A lot of times when I'm talking to someone and they might be talking about launching in APAC, it makes me chuckle a little bit, because that's like saying you're launching in 35 countries that all have different languages.

I think really respecting the mega region is probably the best learning I had, and it's not something you really get a grasp of until you're there, and you realize, "Oh, my gosh. Every single one of these countries is so different top to bottom. You can't just have one strategy."

Lenox Powell: I mean, this is really insightful information, because there is limited expertise on both the client side, the network side, the agency side, in terms of taking an affiliate program global and doing it successfully. Any other closing thoughts about what a company should do before taking their affiliate program global?

Tyla Cobb: Honestly, just be open minded and it's super exciting. I know, it's my honestly favorite part of my day today is just learning constantly about new strategies and tactics. They're all very different, but at the same time, there's a lot of similarities across markets which is pretty cool.

Tess Waresmith: Yeah, I would add that there is so much opportunity and so many challenges in equal parts. It sometimes can be hard to stay positive because it's so challenging to go global and figure out how to do that with all the variables you have to consider, but there's also endless amounts of opportunities. Keeping both of those things in mind.
Lenox Powell: That's great. Well, your firsthand on the ground experiences is truly invaluable, so thank you both so much for taking the time to talk about what companies should know and do before taking their affiliate program into a new market. On our next Going Global episode, we're going to discuss what we've learned as an agency after taking a client's program global.

This is the foundation, this is the before, we're going to talking about the after, and for this episode, we'll include some helpful Going Global resources in our show notes for this episode, and we really look forward to bringing you part two of this series. Again, Tess and Tyla, thank you so much.

Tyla Cobb: Thank you.

Tess Waresmith: Thanks Lenox.

Lenox Powell: For listeners out there, thank you so much for listening, and until next time, keep outperforming.