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Maintaining the ‘special relationship’

Written by [Ronnie Dungan](#) on Wednesday, 03 March 2021. Posted in [Global](#), [Interviews](#)

CEO of International Marketing Partners and author of the best-selling *Working with Americans*, Allyson Stewart-Allen has worked closely with SMEs and multinationals for more than 30 years, imparting valuable knowledge and experience to businesses

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Maintaining the ‘special relationship’

CEO of International Marketing Partners and author of the best-selling *Working with Americans*, Allyson Stewart-Allen has worked closely with SMEs and multinationals for more than 30 years, imparting valuable knowledge and experience to business on both sides of the pond. You can catch her at Elite Business Live on 12 March, but we caught up with her first to find out what to expect...

Among the many highlights at this year’s Elite Business Live Conference is a keynote from someone who has been at the forefront of both the UK and US business coalface for more than 30 years.

In that time she has worked with a cavalcade of well-known brands and companies (some 200 businesses in 26 countries) including HSBC, Aegis, Burberry, Cadbury, Coach, Lufthansa, NBC Universal, SAB Miller and Shell to name just a few.

She has been a regular talking head in the media and has even appeared on the BBC's *The Apprentice: You're Fired*. Oh and in between all that she has authored a best-selling book called *Working with Americans*.

Allyson Stewart-Allen has fronted International Marketing Partners since 1991, in response to a demand from clients to grow the quality and number of their customer base both domestically and in international markets by, in part, helping to ensure their products were locally relevant and viable.



It's a role she has clearly relished over the years.

"Getting to advise some of the most influential companies in the world – some that are bigger than the GDP of many countries – is a thrill, as often their complexity makes their international growth trickier," she says.

"Setting up the business in 1991 after working with three of the most well-known strategy consulting firms means the chance to do work in a broad range of sectors and transfer that knowledge across them which lets me be creative and is very intellectually stretching."

A virtual *Who's Who?* of blue chip brands and Government organisations on both sides of the Atlantic, makes for quite a catalogue of success but being able to communicate her business vision in her book *Working with Americans* is high, (if not actually top) of her list of personal achievements.

"There have been a few – getting to write two editions of a best-selling book (*Working with Americans*), being able to join *The Apprentice* for several seasons, being offered the chance to share my knowledge to help companies avoid pitfalls and pain... winning two awards for the leadership education programmes I've created for London Business School and said Business School, being named in 2014 in the annual FTSE *100 Women to Watch* list are some of the many things I'm especially proud of."

And...presenting at Elite Business Live. She forgot to mention presenting at Elite Business Live 2021 on 12th March. It's a minor oversight. She's a busy lady.

As a native of California, who came to Europe more than 25 years ago, she has been able to distil her experience of the unique elements of both business cultures into her book, which first appeared in 2002 but is now out in a new second edition.

It seems that the cliché about two countries being separated by a common language holds some truth.

"People very often find the US business culture unexpected, and especially so for UK companies. The version of "English" we speak is entirely different, stripped of hidden meanings and layers of context which often derails British business leaders. If we spoke Chinese, it'd be a lot easier as then their approaches to expanding in the country would be created from the ground up on the assumption that it's an entirely different market – which the US certainly is compared to those in Europe.

"To successfully influence, communicate and negotiate with Americans, you need to be aware of the business culture versus your own. And seeing your own is very hard to do as fish don't know they're in water..."

And they don't have a lot of use for bicycles either. The size of the US market is one of the key differences, she explains.

"It's a vast market that has 10 times the number of competitors than in your UK home so unless you're clear how you're better and different to the incumbents, it'll be hard to win. You also need to know Americans aren't shy when it comes to marketing and sales where we're unapologetically commercial."

But of course, it's a double-edged sword and our American cousins are guilty of making presumptions about the UK and European markets that can be detrimental to their progress.

You might call it 'American exceptionalism', but applying US business practice to Europe and assuming it will work the same, can be just as ineffective a strategy.

The lesson for all is to do the research and know your market first and foremost. Which is where consultancies like International Marketing Partners come in.

"Typically, they [Americans] assume it's the same as the US and that the American template will work everywhere around the world. Given the country's business history built on standardisation thanks in part to Henry Ford and those of his era, it's easy to fall into the trap that US markets are no different to any others."

US companies heading to Europe have traditionally looked to the UK first, because of that common language and its ease of access to the continent. Brexit, however, may have changed that. Whatever your view on leaving the EU, it's hard to imagine it hasn't altered the approach in a lot of ways.

"Brexit has made international expansion a more intentional pursuit," Stewart-Allen says, "which may in fact mean a lot more care and attention to defining your points of difference now that there's more friction between EU/UK trade – so a little more convincing and reminding is needed to retain your EU clients/customers which may not be such a bad thing."

But will US companies now think twice before basing their European HQs in the UK when it used to be the obvious choice?

"In short, yes. Given the size of the prize for international companies to be based in a market of roughly 450 million people in the EU27 versus 66 million in the UK, access to a bigger market where scaling is key might make sense. Then again, it depends on the sector. The UK is a global leader in certain areas including fintech, AI, pharmaceuticals, genomics amongst others so it still has a place in the global marketplace – and that story needs to be told more loudly and consistently (of course I would say that as an American marketer!)."

There's good news though. Apparently an optimist, Stewart-Allen believes the UK can recover its reputation from the twin buffeting of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic which has seen the highest death rate in Europe

"I'm a firm believer that country brands can be turned around – just look at how Biden's win has helped the world's view of Brand USA!"

But the real question, is what can we expect from her presentation at Elite Business Live

"I'm really looking forward to shedding light on how you crack Asian markets in terms of localisation to ensure you've accounted for the cultural factors that will impact your approach. If you get the culture, you get everything else."

And if that sounds like something that can help your business....you know what to do.

You can catch her keynote speech in our overseas expansion session which is taking place on Day 2 of Elite Business Live at 15:30. Click here to get free access <https://elitebusinessevent.co.uk/register/>

Allyson Stewart-Allen is a renowned advisor, author, speaker and educator whose expertise in brand internationalisation is sought by leading businesses globally through her consultancy, publications, appearances, mentoring and corporate education.

A Californian based in Europe for over 25 years, Allyson has advised more than 200 businesses in 26 countries. She is also a Mentor for the Mayor of London's International Business Programme.

Her insights have appeared in broadcast, print and digital media across the globe, including BBC News, ITV News, CNN, The Financial Times, Bloomberg, USA Today, Business Week, The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek and Fortune magazines.

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About the Author



Ronnie Dungan

Ronnie is a business journalist and comms specialist of some 30-plus years' experience, although thanks to a rigorous moisturising regime, and the right lighting, you wouldn't necessarily know it. He has edited and published so many titles that he has properly lost count. It's well over a dozen, but he shows no signs of calling it day just yet.
