

the finalists

The Lloyds Bank Mid-Market Business of the Year Award

Mind Gym
VHR (Virtual Human Resources Group Limited)
Wright's Pies (Shelton) Limited
Adaptivist
Verastar Group (Etihad Topco) XLN
La Fosse Associates
Aspire Pharma
Express Vending Ltd
A1 Pharmaceuticals Plc

The Innovation Award

Lawson Conner
CluedUp Games
Laundryheap
gunnercooke
DPD UK
TRAILAR
OrderWise
Switchee
SciChart
SCX Ltd

The Lloyds Bank New Business of the Year Award

Qynn Limited
Urban Jungle
Services LTD
Capitalise Business Solutions Ltd
Nectar Sleep
MJF Osteopathy Ltd
The Mayfair Clinic
Lifesaver Power
SoPro
PRO-FOOTBALL ACADEMY LTD
Alconex
Infrastructure & Solutions Limited
Pickr

The Lloyds Bank Exporter of the Year Award

Keen Attachments Limited
CDEnviro
Stiltz Ltd
Sewtec
VHR
Merci Maman
naughtone
Shree Sai
Trading Limited
M Squared
MNB Precision Engineering

Making the most of your overseas opportunities

National Business Awards judge **Allyson Stewart-Allen**, chief executive of International Marketing Partners, shares her thoughts on trading across the globe

You might think that expanding your company's reach overseas is a complex, dangerous and risky exercise not worth undertaking, given the expensive mistakes you read about in the trade and national press. However, this couldn't be further from the truth.

The executives and organisations that make a great deal of money abroad are those that have a plan and clear focus for aligning their products and services to the right countries.

While the EU has traditionally been where UK companies aim to stake their claims, in fact Japan, China and the USA offer great rewards for those that get it right.

Winning in these locations is a direct result of being intentional.

First, international expansion to these consumers and clients must be part of your business strategy. All too often, companies are pulled into these large economies accidentally, where a large order is placed by a Japanese, Chinese or American customer. While being opportunistic can be profitable, it's not a strategy.

Better to know why and how you'll grow in these markets and the size of the opportunities in them for your products and services. If the US is your target, it's worth knowing that California has an economy the size of France's, while Texas's is the size of Brazil. San Francisco, Oakland and Hayward in California are collectively about the size of the Belgian economy.

If Japan is where you are thinking of expanding, then its status as the third-largest world economy by nominal GDP, fourth-largest by purchasing power parity and second largest developed economy in the world makes it one full of opportunity.

China is also worth consideration. If you believe Walmart is the world's biggest retailer or Amazon the largest online retailer, then you've not studied

Alibaba. This Chinese giant sells nearly three times more merchandise than Amazon and has surpassed Walmart as the biggest retailer. In fact, Alibaba's US online retail growth makes it the sixth-biggest online-shopping site in the US.

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Ensuring you know how the cultures of these new markets will impact on the appetite for your products and services is vital. Whether using UK Department for International Trade experts on the ground in your target markets or conducting your own market research, we know that, in the words of management guru Dr Peter Drucker, "culture eats strategy for breakfast". For example, UK baby food brand Ella's Kitchen learned early on through research that American children do not like the taste of fish. Similarly, cake mix brand Betty Crocker quickly discovered in Japan that their products could not be used in a rice cooker.

DIFFERENTIATION

Knowing how and why your products and services will be better than and/or different to what's on offer in your overseas markets is a key

starting point. Only then are you able to earn a premium from these international customers since your points of difference are clear and defensible. Luxury brands do this very successfully, promoting their countries of origin, product scarcity and unique manufacturing methods making them unique in their chosen international markets.

LOCALISATION

While McDonald's is often criticised for its similar menu template around the world, it is in fact a very good at offering local items such as macarons in France, apple strudel in Germany, a MacKorma meal in India and MacArabia in the Middle East. Other brands have been less successful

abroad, witness Tesco's US foray with Fresh & Easy. While it did much market research, it ignored many of the findings, insisting on using its UK approach such as pre-packed produce and self-service tills.

So while you may be a new or potential exporter, you too can enjoy great commercial success overseas with forethought and good planning.

Focus on America

Having written the book *Working with Americans*, I know that breaking America requires knowing the rules for negotiating, communicating, influencing and building profitable relationships. It can be expensive business unless you do your homework, so I thought I'd share a few tips to get you started on your journey:

The clock is King

Be on time for meetings. Americans love a schedule, deadlines are serious.

'You look wonderful, darling'

Neatness and attention to detail are important for you and your packaged product. If the appropriate business attire is unclear, do as the Americans - ask before you go - what's the dress code today? And make sure your shoes are polished.

'Hi there, glad to meet you, what's the bottom line?'

Be prepared to quickly provide specific information about your products. Arrange your material, your story, pricing and facts in simple formats.

Business before pleasure

Be willing to do business first, build the relationship second. Americans develop relationships through doing business. If they don't take time to get to know you, remember no insult is intended, they just are keeping to a schedule.

Hip, hip, hooray for our team

Treat everyone as if they will be the person to sign your contract. Everyone, no matter of rank or age, should be treated as equals. Think: we are family, equal and ethical.

Make it my way

Americans want to have their opinions recognised. Provide choices in your product and be sure to involve them in decisions to show that you recognise their varying needs.

'Let's do lunch'

Don't be insulted when your American colleague suggests getting together but doesn't follow up with a specific invitation. They are sincere in the wish to get together but often too rushed to follow up.

Guides are good

Americans use outside advisers as a regular part of their business lives. If lawyers or consultants are included in meetings do not be offended or anxious. They routinely act as advisors to be sure that issues are addressed to avoid future problems.

Plan, plan, plan

Don't be surprised when you're asked to describe your market entry plan, your training plan, or your plan to increase revenue or where you plan to go on vacation. The assumption is always that you will have a plan because without one you might not reach your goals.

Do it now!

Even with the emphasis on planning described above, Americans still may make decisions seemingly on impulse. In their rush to "get things done" they try to decide quickly and worry about consequences later.

Did somebody say disrupt?

Let's hear it for the companies that are shaking things up. By **Cherry Martin**

"Disrupt" has become one of the key buzzwords in business in recent years - so much so that it now has its own award. Hashtag friendly, slimline character versions of established brands covering all industries strive to streamline services and deliver a better experience that benefits customer and client and end-user. These people need a shout out.

DISSOLVING DEBT

Capitalise Business Solutions Ltd (CBSL) is the law firm behind "Escalate" - the multi award-winning commercial dispute resolution that is transforming how SMEs resolve business disputes and recover bad debts. Escalate is a fast-growing and sustainable £5m turnover business that is already helping to unlock £50m of cash for clients caught in a variety of commercial disputes.

PROSPECTING RICHES

Secretly a Tech Firm, dressed up as a B2B marketing agency, SoPro is one of the fastest growing B2B marketing technology businesses in the world. In three years and with zero capital investment, it has created the most advanced social prospecting technology available and generated connections that have converted into new business



NectarSleep may be a disrupter but its 'bed in a box' concept has removed the stress of shopping for a mattress and given customers a restful night's sleep

worth more than £50m for its clients. Want your funnel flooded with important leads?

UNLOCKING VALUE AND EFFICIENCY

For many house builders, securing the infrastructure required to deliver essential utilities can cause costly delays to construction projects. Alconex offers housing developers an efficient, cost-effective and speedy "full turnkey" utility solution for electric, gas, water, telecoms, green energy, directional drilling and design. Accelerating installation while

driving down costs has brought a solution-focused alternative to the marketplace, which construction companies are embracing.

STRESS FREE SLEEP SHOPPING

NectarSleep has done its research and taken each of the essential elements of sleep into account to create its Nectar mattress - and it's paid off. The cool covered, three layered memory foam beast has received rave reviews from customers. But here's the even cooler thing, if you don't feel as though you've had the best sleep of your life within 365 days of

receiving the mattress simply let them know and they'll come and collect it free of charge. Their "bed in a box" concept has relieved the stress and pressures of sourcing a mattress, bed and essentials online.

NO TIME TO WAIT

Need to manage real-time data to make instant decisions? SciChart's uniquely composed technology combines the fastest-moving, highest-performing and most visually appealing features of gaming technology with the analytical aspects of enterprise software required

to produce fast, realtime charts with a groundbreaking level of data compression on all platforms. This means graphs and charts across the globe can accurately process and display millions of data-points rather than just a few thousand, and all in just a fraction of a second. It has led to game-changing improvements in performance for many businesses including easyJet and Lloyds, while motor racing legends McLaren now use SciChart's 2D&3D charts to analyse lap and open road data to provide powerful, race-winning insights.

The 10 best tips for making your 2020 application

Keen to get involved in next year's awards? Ready to showcase your company's talent and be rewarded for your efforts to boost the economy? Competition is always strong for the National Business Awards, with more than 2,000 organisations applying, so if you believe 2020 is your time to be acknowledged, read these tips. All of them have been gleaned from feedback from our judges...

1. If you want to be shortlisted make sure your application truly reflects your passion.

2. Ensure your financials are on point and correct. Be prepared to discuss them frankly and to answer questions about them.

3. Don't be shy to tell us of what you've achieved - this is your time to shine. But you've got to be succinct.

Make a bullet point list of your most important 'wins', put them in order with most impressive first, and be ready to talk about them.

4. We do read each submission and check out the websites and social behind each one. So if you've been planning on updating your website design, user interface or social channels, try to do so before the deadline for submissions.

5. If you are fortunate enough to be shortlisted, turn up on time, at least 10 minutes early, and be ready to present to the judges.

6. If you're shortlisted then it will be time to think about your presentation. Try where possible to bring your firm's founder with you. The reality is that many companies apply via their marketing departments and the judges are aware of this - but remember



Passion and preparation can lead to success at the National Business Awards

that these are highly sought-after awards and the company that cares enough to bring its chief executive or founder is already ahead of the competition.

7. Make sure you understand the

criteria that you're being judged on. For example, if ethics counts for 20 per cent of your total score, tell us what decisions you've made for the everyday good of your staff and culture, and the greater good for the population and planet.

8. Don't just read from your PowerPoint presentation. Instead, use it to engage and inspire the judges. For example, if you're proud to tell us that you've installed environmentally friendly solar paneling on your new warehouse, show us with a decent, well-shot image. Think of the presentation screen as a way of bringing your story to life. Everything on display should add to what you're saying, it should not be the sum of it.

9. Come to your presentation prepared. You wouldn't believe the number of candidates that were late, didn't show up or didn't have the correct equipment.

10. You only have 30 minutes to impress the judges, so make sure that you raise eyebrows for all the right reasons - not the wrong ones.