

## Brand Parents – Launching your Baby!

Good news, you finally received the first container order from a far flung, highly populated, Asian country. With product registration nearing completion, your brand should be on the shelf in 90 days. But what is your plan? My experience is that many companies devote significant energy to finding a good distributor, completing paperwork requirements, and getting the first order. Then, local execution and “launch” are primarily left in the hands of the distributor to manage.

In my export workshops and speeches, I’ll frequently compare the new country launch process to the birth of a child. Export managers serve as the “Brand Parents,” charged with developing a healthy new brand. The nine months leading up to the product launch are filled with planning and getting ready. Your launch needs extra attention during the first year, just as a new baby needs constant care and many visits to the doctor during its infant stages. As the baby grows older and healthier, less oversight is required. Listed below are ideas to get your new brand baby off to a positive start in an expansion country.

### Timeline

What is your timeline of key activities for the first year?  
What are the benchmarks? List marketing plans, by month, whether it’s a \$100,000 budget or guerilla marketing.  
What are your visit plans for the first year?

### Sales Launch Meeting

Every distributor conducts regular sales meetings. This represents an ideal opportunity to launch your brand to each member of the team, not just the company executives. Challenge yourself to make your launch fun, not just an hour long sequence of PowerPoint slides. Create a game show atmosphere to test product facts. Bring in a local chef to prepare recipes with your product. Give away shirts or other items with your company’s logo. Rehearse answers to likely objections. Set clear objectives for in-store placement. Have fun!

### Key Account Call Schedule

Request a firm calendar of key account calls. If possible, schedule them in one week so that you can attend. Visit a small account or two first to get learning prior to trying to sell the largest, toughest customer. Get the buyer out of his office for a leisurely lunch presentation versus a squeezed meeting in a small office.

### Trade/Public Relations Launch

The birth of your brand is a “special event.” Why not organize a party to celebrate your company’s “baptism” into the market? Invite food magazines and bloggers as well as buyers. Local embassy personnel are usually available to attend and make a speech of support. Invite influential, “thought leaders” from your country’s local expatriate community to attend. Take plenty of photos to publish online or in industry publications. Create “buzz.”

### Digital Media Plan

In most countries, everyone who can afford your product has access to the internet. Digital media plans range from high spend, multi-tiered activities including pay-for-click to simple plans using your existing web tools. At a minimum, create a local Facebook page, put an announcement on your distributor’s web site, and engage local bloggers. A digital media plan reflects a year long campaign, not just a “one time” event.



### Sample Everyone!

I remember a boss who loved to share samples with every single person at his personal account. Another tactic is to send a classy gift basket to the buyer’s home featuring your product. If the spouse likes it, your chances for acceptance sky rocket. Other brands sample schools and youth sports teams. Give your retail team samples and ask them to share with friends. Require written feedback so they don’t just keep them all at their home.

### Retail Ready Date – Visit Plan

Distributors are masters of juggling the priorities of up to 20 different companies (or more!). A smart move is to establish a sensible “Retail Ready” date when your brand should be available at leading supermarkets. Schedule a visit, and bring other company representatives from marketing, supply chain, and your executive team.

Arrange a market visit date with multiple store audit teams. Pair one person from your company with a person from the distributor. Three teams can visit 30-40 stores in a day, covering different regions. Lessons learned: a proud distributor will work feverishly, particularly the week before your arrival to insure that his market “looks good.”

### Sales Contest

Every sales person likes to compete. A sales contest is a motivational method to generate visibility and commitment for your launch. Create a theme with a catchy name like “Mission Possible.” Structure the contest for entire team participation and multiple winners, not just one grand prize. Contest should be 30-45 days in length, with weekly updates.

### “What’s Measured is Treasured”

Container shipments and retailer warehouses capture inventory, not consumption. Create metrics around in store presence and activation: Number of items in distribution per store, pricing, shelf facings, secondary locations, and displays are more accurate reflections on launch progress.

### Healthy Baby

A significant gap exists between marketplace success and another small flag on your export map. Your brand is already a winner in other countries. Incorporate your Lessons Learned into a well defined, year one plan. This is possible, even without a big budget. Two essential ingredients: Heavy sampling, plus your commitment to visits during year 1. This strategy will result in a “healthy baby” with good prospects for a long shelf life in a new country.