

Think Local, Act Global: Marketing Strategies for Expanding Your Startup Around the World

Author : Amrit Richmond

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Launching your company in new cities, or want to increase brand awareness in new markets? This post shares the building blocks of a global strategy for your startup, brand, or project.

Marketing. It can be expensive, complicated to measure ROI, and sometimes hard to just get a budget approved by your boss. But creating and executing a solid **marketing** strategy is *crucial* to build an enduring, global company.

But not all **marketing** programs have to cost your company money. You can pay in time and shared resources through strategic partnerships, product integrations, and promotions with like-minded companies. After all, the best partnerships align values to help both sides of the table achieve their goals.

So, if you want people to enjoy your product, why not have a little fun and get creative with your **marketing** strategy? This post outlines the basics for local **marketing**, **brand** partnerships, and growth tactics to help your company attract new users, customers, and ambassadors around the world.

For transparency: I've worked with or have developed partnerships with multiple companies and investors mentioned in this post, including [Meetup](#), [CreativeMornings](#), [Collaborative Fund](#), and [RRE Ventures](#).

After creating community and platform programs for four venture funds and collaborating with 100+ companies, I now consult with startups and investors on research, strategy, and ecosystem development via my agency [CMYK Ventures](#). CMYK's network of consultants, agencies, and experts can help your company plan and prepare for many of the challenges in this post.

Do you have feedback, ideas, or want to share notes on smart cities, ecosystems, and network effects? My email is amrit@cmyk.vc

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National & International Network Effects

Before diving into tactics, let's look at 11 national and international companies and how you can get involved in their communities.

From technology platforms and corporations to on-demand services to community-driven organizations, the following companies should be top of mind for every startup or **brand** looking to expand around the world.

Use their consumer apps, create content on their platforms, study their strategies, partner and integrate with them, attend their events, and befriend their teams.

Uber

As of April 3rd, 2016, you can order an [Uber](#) ride in 402 [cities](#) around the world. **Uber's** defensibility can be seen in its global ecosystem of drivers, users, API partners, developers, and local teams.

*"The barrier to growth is speed to launch. You have to become part of the fabric of a city." — Emil Michael, SVP of Business at **Uber** ([source](#))*

[UberPOOL](#) for ride sharing, [UberEATS](#) for food delivery, and [UberRUSH](#) for delivery of goods from retailers and e-commerce sites, are among the company's recent product extensions. Before I tried **Uber** for the first time in 2011, they caught my attention with cute [kittens](#) and [ice cream](#) on-demand. Read up on **Uber's** product integrations and partnerships [here](#).

For number nerds, **Uber's** city breakdown by geography: USA (196), Europe (71), East Asia (30), South Asia (29), Central + South America (27), Southeast Asia (14), Australia + NZ (13), Middle East (11), Africa (11)

Lyft

As of April 3rd, 2016, you can catch a Lyft in [208 cities](#) across 33 states in the U.S. Lyft's initial service was an on-demand ride, with a fun culture baked into the passenger UX that felt like you were being driven by a friend.

While maintaining their friendly **brand**, Lyft has since launched new products and initiatives such as Lyft Line, [Lyft for Work](#), [Lyft for Good](#), an Ambassador program, and tools for [Developers](#). You can [partner with Lyft](#) on a national level, like MasterCard's [Priceless Surprises](#) campaign, or on a local level and earn a commission for signing up new Lyft users and drivers.

In March 2016, [Lyft and General Motors announced Express Drive](#), a rental service for Lyft drivers that paves the way for autonomous cars.

Airbnb

As of April 5th, 2016, [Airbnb](#)'s ecosystem of hosts and guests are creating a sense of belonging in [50 countries](#) around the world. Staying in an **Airbnb** gives people the feeling of actually living in that city, making **Airbnb** a perfect partnership platform for travel, transportation, home decor, connected hardware, cleaning, and food startups that can enhance the experience for their community.

To expand on its consumer facing product, **Airbnb** now offers [Airbnb for Business](#) and tools for [Travel Managers](#).

Facebook

As of January 2016, **Facebook** is connecting [1.591 billion monthly active users](#), with about 83.6% of DAUs outside of the U.S. and Canada. People use **Facebook** to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them. ([source](#))

[Facebook Messenger](#) is an emerging platform opportunity for on-demand apps and travel services to increase revenue, chat directly with users, and deliver more personalized customer service experiences.

Twitter

Twitter is the ideal platform for talking to your current and potential customers. Share your company updates, create accounts for each of your cities, help your customers in real-time, follow your partner and competitor companies, promote your launches and apps through ads, and more! More on how to use **Twitter** for **marketing** and market research later in this post.

As of December 31, 2015, **Twitter** shared their user stats of 320M monthly active users, with 79% of those users outside of the United States. As your expanding to new cities, consider connecting with **Twitter**'s 3,000+ employees across 35+ global offices. ([source](#))

Postmates

First restaurants, and now retailers, can have their goods quickly delivered to consumers by a [Postmates](#) courier. Postmates works with merchants on giveaways and low delivery

promotions to drive revenue and awareness.

At the end of March 2016, Postmates announced their [milestone of 1M deliveries per month](#), and launched a [\\$9.99/month delivery subscription](#).

Meetup

There is a [Meetup](#) everywhere about most everything. Community groups around the world use Meetup to power their events and connect with like-minded humans in their city. Love dogs, photography, LARP, or Objective-C? There's a Meetup for you! **Brands** can sponsor Meetups in a city and specific to interests related to their products for hyper targeted, offline engagement.

Foursquare

[Foursquare](#) was one of the first location-based mobile platforms. Exploring your city, checking-in with friends, and unlocking specials was just the beginning. [Foursquare's ad platform](#) helps local businesses acquire new customers. **Brands** can also offer post-check-in promotions to users.

Breather

[Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.](#) provides on-demand, private workspaces that you can book by the hour via your smart phone. Think ZipCar but for private offices. With Breather you can unlock beautifully **designed** private offices that feature high-speed wifi, comfortable seating, Apple TV and white boards.

If you need a space to take a call on the go, impress a client, or just need a quiet space to get work done without distraction, Breather is a great choice. Teams leverage Breather for offsites and brainstorming sessions, while individuals use them to teach classes and meet with clients.

Breather is available in 9 cities in the U.S. and Canada, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, New York City, and Montreal.

WeWork

[WeWork](#) provides workspace for startups, remote teams, and independent workers in 23 cities. WeWork's community infrastructure connects their members through an online network and offline events. **Brands** and startups can offer [benefits](#) to WeWork's network of entrepreneurs and freelancers.

CreativeMornings

[CreativeMornings](#) connects 15,000+ creatives across 138 cities in 55 countries offline every month for an inspiring lecture and breakfast. Each city's events are organized by a chapter host and team of volunteers.

Brands that want to support the creative class — *photographers, designers, entrepreneurs, artists, musicians, agency strategists* — can partner with CreativeMornings on their global

newsletter, podcast, and themed month takeovers, or you can collaborate directly with hosts of their local chapters.

Lean In

[Lean In](#), Sheryl Sandberg's book and now community platform, connects women through online groups and small offline gatherings. Corporations and **brands** that want to empower women and help close the wage gap can [partner](#) with Lean In on local events (aka [Circles](#)), content, and campaigns.

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Additional notable examples of city-based businesses and organizations: [Instacart](#) / [Shyp](#) / [MakeSpace](#) / [Managed by Q](#) / [Zeel](#) / [TaskRabbit](#) / [Wag](#) / [ClassPass](#) / [Hotel Tonight](#) / [Getaround](#) / [Munchery](#) / [One Medical Group](#) / [Levo](#) / [Awesome Foundation](#) / [NewCo](#) / [TEDx](#) / [LittleBits](#) / [AIGA](#) / [Jukely](#) / [Spoon University](#) / [Google Fiber](#) / [Move Loot](#)

Marketing Challenges Across the Map

There are many moving parts with operating in one city, now multiply that by 10x. What should your **marketing** and operations team keep in mind?

Engaging Local Teams

- Recruiting, training, engaging, and retaining employees in multiple cities.
- Managing and engaging remote freelancers or ambassadors.

Market Research

- Analyzing your competition before you launch in a city or country, which is especially challenging if your team hasn't lived in or visited that city.
- Conducting effective market research to test demand in a new city.
- Customer development to decide if you should grow or sunset a city.

Marketing, Advertising & User Acquisition

- Acquiring new users for your product in a city you don't live in.
- Calculating your Customer Acquisition Cost, and reducing it over time.
- Engaging multiple micro-communities and retaining users.
- **Marketing** automation and workflow across multiple timezones.

Brand Partnerships & Awareness

- Finding local companies for partnerships and business development.
- Building **brand** trust with companies and consumers in a new city.

- Finding events to sponsor or co-host in a new city.

Quality Control & Customer Service

- Creating a world-class user experience in your first city.
- Scaling the high-touch experience you had in your first few cities.
- Earning user trust, and ensuring their safety when using your product.
- Responding to customer service questions, comments, and concerns.

Data Analysis & Growth

- Defining the right launch and growth goals for each new city.
- Organizing and analyzing your global data to improve your products.
- Holding your team accountable for meeting and exceeding growth goals.

International Payments, Infrastructure & Travel Costs

- Accepting and sending **digital** payments around the world. This could be for sending payroll to your new team in Europe, or sending a \$1,000 sponsorship to one of your Ambassadors to host an event in India.
- Expanding to unbanked cities or where credit card ownership is low.
- Expanding to cities where wi-fi is not available or affordable to everyone.
- Cost of team travel (plane tickets, transportation, lodging, food)
- Payment resources: [Stripe](#)(and [Stripe Global](#)), [Abra](#), [TransferWise](#)

Localization, Logistics & Culture Barriers

- Localization of your product (translating to new languages, cost, time)
- Working across time zones means early morning or late evening calls.
- Shipping physical stuff to satellite offices or ambassadors. In some countries, the receiver has to pay a local fee to accept the package.
- Resources: [Smartling](#), [Skype](#), [Shyp](#), [World Clock Chrome extension](#)

Team, Ambassadors & Community

Your company's success is dependent on how many people care enough about your product, vision and mission to join your team, evangelize your **brand**, and engage with your product.

Team

City Launchers, GMs, Growth Hackers — the collaborative economy has generated demand for new skill-sets and careers for analytical marketers and operators. To manage a city rollout, you have to be super sharp *and* excited about spreadsheets, logistics, leading a local team and ambassadors, business development, sales, **marketing**, budgets, and revenue forecasting. These roles are great opportunities for former management consultants, iBankers, and MBAs to transition into working with startups.

If you read a few dozen job descriptions, you'll see that many companies in this post structure their satellite teams in the following ways:

- Hire full-time GMs to build, manage, and mentor your local teams.
- Then hire part or full-time city/community managers to create awareness, engagement, and relationships with local small businesses.
- Engage a network of mission-driven volunteers who love your **brand**.
- Work with student interns / freelance **brand** ambassadors / street teams.

In addition to local teams in each city, your company may also need to hire contractors such as drivers, cleaners, chefs, dog walkers, and couriers.

Lyft sets a great example for how to create a community of independent contractors through their local [Driver Advisory Council](#). Managed by Q [goes a step further in treating workers with respect](#) by hiring their cleaners and handymen as employees, and offering them health insurance and equity.

Resources: [AngelList](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Jobbatical](#), [Workpop](#), [1099.is](#)

Ambassadors

You don't always need to send your team to a city — at least not right away. Find people who live in that city passionate about your company's mission.

Consider starting an ambassador program on college campuses. You can even hire ambassadors to help you test demand and prepare for a city launch. Give your ambassadors online resources to host events, connect them with each other, and equip them with swag to show off your **brand**.

Personal development and networking are two big reasons why students participate in ambassador programs. Go out of your way to share career opportunities and perks with them, such as resume feedback, interviews at your company or friends companies for internships and full-time jobs, and resources to learn new skills, such as a [Skillshare](#) or Kindle allowance.

[WayUp](#)'s targeted job platform can connect your company with student interns and ambassadors studying specific majors at any U.S. college.

Examples of ambassador programs: [Maven](#), [Foursquare](#), [Spoon University](#)

Community

The only people who spend more time than your team with your product are your community of users. As you grow to new cities and countries, don't forget to engage your community for ideas, feedback, and support. Make a point to meet your super users when you travel, and find authentic ways to connect users to each other, even if your team isn't in the room with them.

Where to Next? Launching in a New City

Key indicators and reasons to help you prioritize your next city rollout.

Data, Data, Data

- Because we have significant amount of website visitors in that city.
- We have a lot of existing users or newsletter subscribers in that city.
- We have a lot of **Twitter/Facebook/Instagram** followers in that city.
- When you're developing new products and **brand** extensions, identify your strongest cities that are likely to experiment and share feedback.

Inbound Interest

- Repeat requests from potential users for you to operate in their city, or inbound interest from existing customers in a nearby city.
- Ambassadors submit applications to launch a city / license your **brand**.

Market Research

- Do market research of potential need for your product in that city.
- Identify an obvious opportunity or demand in the local market.
- Do customer development and find user stories from your competitors.
- Because your competitor operates in that city; they proved demand!
- Throw darts at a map at your next team happy hour... *(just kidding!)*

Local Government & Economic Indicators

- Because the dollar is strong(er) or the taxes are lower in that city.
- Because our target demographic has disposable income in that city.
- Keep in mind that not every industry and city will make it easy for you to expand.
Transportation, hospitality, and healthcare upstarts often face unique challenges with local governments when expanding to new cities.

Marketing, Advertising & User Acquisition

You can't expect people to download your app, invite friends, or buy your product unless they know it exists.

User Acquisition

- Buy **social** ads targeting your ideal customer or user in specific cities. Promote your app, a special offer, or drive conversions to your site or retail stores.
Platforms: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Yelp](#), [Foursquare](#).
- Offer discount codes for new users to try your app that can be distributed on **social**

media, through content partnerships, by word of mouth, between friends in SMS or email, and shared offline at events.

- Search for people on **Twitter** talking about your product, your competitors, or lifestyle keywords around your company. You can learn a lot about what people want/need with a few searches. ex: Search for “My car broke down. I’m stranded in San Francisco. Help!” Say hi to that person, then send her/him a free ride in your transportation app.
- Local search engine optimization — Make sure your company, service, and the cities you operate in are listed on the first page of search results.
- Resources: [Moz](#), [SocialFlow](#)

Strategic Partnerships

- Forge partnerships with companies who operate in that city, such as other startups, local **brands**, restaurants, and community event spaces.
- Do deep link and cross promotional partnerships with mobile companies to drive awareness, downloads, and revenue for each other’s apps.
- Collaborate on events with companies and community spaces in the city.
- Sponsor local events and Meetups around your target demographics.
- Resources: [Button](#), [Angellist](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Meetup](#), [Lanyrd](#)

Community Engagement

- Host local events and conferences for your existing and potential users.
- Remember when you made that email list of people who are waiting for you to launch in their city? Take those people to breakfast or host a meetup so they can meet your team, and each other.
- Run a contest on **social** media and through your newsletter to see who can sign up the most users in a pre-set amount of time. Offer a free ticket to a local conference, or a year’s worth of credits to use your app.
- **Design** swag like stickers, shirts, notebooks, and temporary tattoos to help your team, ambassadors, and community evangelize your **brand**.
- Resources: [Splash](#), [Extol](#), [Sticker Mule](#), [Poppin](#), [Tattly](#), [Makr](#)

Social Media Management

- Setup new **Twitter**, **Facebook** and **Instagram** accounts for each of your new cities. Even before you launch there, register your company name + city, then make the accounts private to protect your **brand**.
- Setup email addresses for each city (such as boston@mystartup.com) to use for customer service, email newsletters, and inbound questions.
- Setup an email newsletter list for each city to generate demand and keep in touch with your users. Here’s a [sign up form example from Breathe](#).
- When you launch, offer a discount to the people who were on the waitlist. Here’s [an example from Postmates](#) offering a free sandwich.
- Resources: [Buffer](#), [Intercom](#), [ZenDesk](#), [Meldium](#), [Dashlane](#), [MailChimp](#)

Give Back to the City

- Support local non-profit organizations with deep roots in the city by sponsoring their events or donating your time and resources to help.
- Gift the city something it wants or needs, such as disaster support, bike sharing, wi-fi, or job training. See [Airbnb's disaster response work](#).
- Resources: [GuideStar](#), [Google Fiber](#), [Citi Bike](#), [Flatiron School](#)

Public Relations

- Share your company's story, and highlight how citizens are using your product in local blogs, television, media, print magazines, newspapers.

Sponsor Local & Global Content

- Don't forget about newsletters, podcasts, radio, newspapers, and movie theater ads. Local media can be very effective for user acquisition, especially if you're aiming for users beyond the early adopter crowd.
- Newsletters: [theSkimm](#), [Quartz Daily Brief](#), [CreativeMornings](#), [The Fetch](#)
- Resources: How to buy [podcast](#), [radio](#), [newspaper](#)+ [movie theater ads](#).

Out of Home Advertising

Consider buying billboards in the cities and neighborhoods you want a bigger footprint in. They're a great conversation starter and give people something to share on **social** with friends. Lyft, **Uber**, Munchery, MakeSpace, Handy + more have purchased billboards on streets, subways, and buses.

Resources: [ADstruc](#) for purchasing billboards and [Wrapify](#) for car wrap ads.

Brand Consistency

Doesn't it feel great when your font is the same style, everywhere? Create a style guide with your logo, fonts and messaging for your team, ambassadors and community to use when representing your **brand**, online and offline.

Noun Project recently launched [Lingo](#), a desktop app to help you share all of your **brand** assets in one place with multiple collaborators.

Financial Planning & Growth Capital

Costs for real estate and your team's expenses will vary by city, but after a few cities you'll be able to figure out a repeatable formula.

- Create templates for *everything* to save your team time and money.
- Create a budget with operations costs for any new city so you can plan for how much runway you need to execute your expansion goals. Ask your friends or investors for anonymous financial models to help you continuously optimize spend on upstart costs and user acquisition.
- When traveling to your cities, use [Breather](#) and [WeWork](#) for your meetings and workspace before committing to a multi-year office lease.
- Keep in touch with angels and VCs who understand the on-demand economy, network effects, and city-based business. The best investors can connect you to talent and partners to accelerate your city expansion.

Venture Capital

Funds and accelerators that invested in companies in this post include:

[Andreessen Horowitz](#), [Collaborative Fund](#), [RRE Ventures](#), [General Catalyst Partners](#), [Spark Capital](#), [Union Square Ventures](#), [Sequoia Capital](#), [Accel Partners](#), [Homebrew](#), [Baseline Ventures](#), [Forerunner Ventures](#), [Haystack Fund](#), [Lowercase Capital](#), [Index Ventures](#), [Menlo Ventures](#), [GV](#), [Founders Fund](#), [Tiger Global Management](#), [General Atlantic](#), [Greylock Partners](#), [FirstMark Capital](#), [Matrix Partners](#), [Omidyar Network](#), [Draper Fisher Jurvetson](#), [Y Combinator](#), [Techstars](#), and more.

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