

Alexei Orlov Explains Why Global Brands Cannot Treat Every Market the Same

Former Volkswagen Group CMO and MTM Choice founder Alexei Orlov says successful international growth requires brands to understand local consumers rather than simply export a strategy that worked somewhere else.



New York City, New York Sep 15, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](http://www.Issuewire.com)) - A strong brand may travel around the world, but its strategy cannot always travel unchanged.

That is a lesson Alexei Orlov learned over nearly three decades of working with businesses and consumer brands across the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, China, and Southeast Asia. From leading international marketing organizations to building MTM Choice, Orlov has seen how quickly assumptions about consumers can become unreliable when a company enters a new market.

“Understanding your market does not mean believing you know everything about it,” Orlov said. “You have to arrive prepared to listen. The brand may be global, but the people experiencing it are local.”

That distinction became particularly important during Orlov’s time as Group CMO for Volkswagen across China and ASEAN. He oversaw eight consumer brand portfolios while the business achieved five consecutive years of record sales and Volkswagen Passenger Cars became China’s most admired automotive brand.

For Orlov, the experience reinforced a simple principle: consistency and sameness are not the same thing.

Global Brands Still Serve Local People

International companies often spend years developing a recognizable identity. Logos, products, values, positioning, and customer expectations become part of what makes a brand valuable.

The challenge begins when protecting that identity turns into an assumption that every market should receive exactly the same strategy.

Consumer priorities can differ from one country to another. So can attitudes toward price, service, status, convenience, technology, family, and trust. Even the way people respond to humor, aspiration, or authority can vary considerably.

Orlov believes global organizations need to understand those differences without losing the qualities that make the brand recognizable.

“The question is not whether you abandon who you are every time you cross a border,” Orlov said. “The question is which parts of the brand must remain constant and which parts need to respond to the people and culture in front of you.”

That requires more than translating an advertising campaign into another language.

Localization can affect how a product is presented, which benefits receive the most attention, where customers encounter the brand, and how companies build relationships with local communities.

It also requires listening to people who understand the market firsthand.

Local Teams Should Be Part of the Strategy

One risk facing a large international company is assuming that headquarters naturally has the clearest view of every market.

Orlov argues that local teams should not simply execute decisions made elsewhere. Their knowledge should help shape those decisions.

During his international career, working across markets with very different cultures reinforced the importance of asking questions before applying familiar solutions.

His preferred approach is something he describes as “adopt, adapt, apply.”

A company can adopt useful knowledge from elsewhere, adapt it to its circumstances, and then apply it in a way that makes sense for that particular market.

“You should bring experience with you, but experience should be a starting point rather than a set of instructions,” Orlov said. “Something that succeeded in London, New York, or another part of Asia may contain a valuable lesson. That does not mean you can simply reproduce it and expect the same response.”

Local employees, customers, business partners, and market specialists can expose assumptions that may be difficult to recognize from thousands of miles away.

For senior leaders, Orlov believes listening to those perspectives is a practical business discipline.

Data Cannot Explain Everything About a Culture

Companies today have access to enormous amounts of customer and market information. Orlov sees that information as valuable, but he cautions against believing numbers alone provide a complete understanding of human behavior.

Two markets can produce similar data, but the reasons behind that data can be very different.

That is where context becomes important.

Orlov's broader philosophy around technology emphasizes what he calls “human acuity,” or the judgment, curiosity, empathy, and understanding people bring to information. The same principle applies to international marketing.

Market research can reveal what is happening. Experienced local people can often help explain why.

That difference can influence everything from advertising and customer experience to product positioning and long-term brand strategy.

Localization Should Not Mean Losing the Brand

Orlov also cautions against moving too far in the opposite direction.

A global company that changes completely from one market to another risks weakening the identity that helped make it successful in the first place.

Effective international marketing therefore requires balance.

Companies need to identify the elements that define the brand and protect them. At the same time, they need enough flexibility to make those elements meaningful within different cultural and commercial environments.

That balance is particularly important as businesses expand into several markets at once.

Orlov has experienced international growth from multiple perspectives. In addition to his work with Volkswagen, he spent eight years at Wunderman/WPP, ultimately becoming Vice Chairman and helping lead a client portfolio worth approximately \$300 million. He later served as a Divisional CEO within Omnicom before founding MTM Choice, which itself expanded internationally.

Across those experiences, one lesson remained consistent: global scale does not eliminate local differences.

It makes understanding them more important.

Curiosity Is an International Business Skill

For Orlov, international experience has ultimately made him less interested in universal formulas.

Markets change. Consumer expectations evolve. New competitors emerge. A strategy that worked five years ago may need to be reconsidered even within the same country.

That makes curiosity an important part of international leadership.

Companies entering new markets can begin by asking relatively simple questions. What matters to customers here? How do they make purchasing decisions? What creates trust? Which assumptions is the company bringing from its home market? What do local employees see that senior leadership may be missing?

The answers may require changes to the strategy.

Orlov believes that should be viewed as intelligent adaptation rather than inconsistency.

“The objective is not to make a global brand smaller by adapting it,” Orlov said. “It is to make the brand relevant enough that people in different parts of the world can understand what it means to them.”

For companies pursuing international growth, that may require accepting a basic reality: a brand can have one global identity without speaking to every market in exactly the same way.

About Alexei Orlov

Alexei Orlov is a global CEO, CMO, entrepreneur, and strategic adviser with nearly 30 years of experience building, transforming, and scaling businesses and consumer brands across the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, and Asia.

His career includes senior leadership roles with Volkswagen, Omnicom, and Wunderman/WPP. He is also the founder and former CEO of MTM Choice, which grew into an approximately 200-person multidisciplinary creative and advisory group with an international presence. Orlov secured \$35 million in growth funding and helped build the company to approximately \$55 million in annual revenue before transitioning it to new leadership. He remains an adviser to the chairman.

Today, Orlov works with founders, boards, investors, and leadership teams on business transformation, brand strategy, growth, and organizational change.

Media Contact

Alexei Orlov

*****@alexeiorlovmtm.com

<https://www.alexeiorlovmtm.com/>

Source : Alexei Orlov

[See on IssueWire](#)