

Bridging Culture Worldwide LLC Case Studies

Producing cross-cultural solutions to meet each individual organization's needs has always been a strength of BC CEO and President Don Southerton. Southerton brings over 30 years business experience along with strong critical thinking, analysis, innovation, and creative reasoning. BC case studies highlight our passionate approach to client challenges. These are a representative sample to show range, adaptability, and dedication to our clients.



Case Study: Zeno Group, 2005

Zeno Group is part of the DJE group of communications companies; Zeno is the fifth largest independent PR agency in the US.

The Challenge

Zeno Group is the outside PR agency for Kia Motors America. They were asked to support and oversee the ground breaking of the new KMA headquarters in Irvine, California. They learned that special attention was to be given to the protocols and norms for visiting high ranked Korean government and senior Hyundai Kia Motor Group officials. Moreover, concerns at Zeno surfaced that a failure to address these norms might have a negative impact on the PR firm's ongoing relationship with KMA.

The Solution

BC was asked to assist the Zeno team in better understanding Korean culture and norms. As a first step, BC offered thirty Santa Monica, California-based Zeno team members a daylong workshop on Korean culture and business norms. BC then reviewed Zeno's event action and operations plan. One strong recommendation by BC was that a minute-by-minute and more highly detailed time schedule/agenda be crafted to ensure all contingencies were addressed. Second, BC suggested that Zeno should have its entire staff of 30 on site at the event. Finally, BC would provide discrete support during the event.

The Results

Unlike similar Hyundai-Kia Motor Group North American events, the KMA headquarter groundbreaking was without incident. Zeno senior team members and the KMA team saw the event as a success. In the words of a Zeno vice president Stephanie Goddard, "Don was our secret weapon."



Korea Trip Orientations, 2003-2006

Over the past three years, BC has prepared numerous groups for their 1st visit to Korea. These include top non-Korean executives (CEO, COO), senior management (VP, Directors), employees (managers through specialists), and dealer-related teams (technicians). Three examples have been highlighted and show how workshops are crafted for a specific audience and their needs.

Case Study: Hyundai Motor Finance Company, 2005 and 2006

The Challenge

A Hyundai Motor Finance Company (HMFC) senior management team was invited to meet with Seoul-based Hyundai Capital Services. Although not directly affiliated HMFC and HCS provide similar captive car financing services for HMA/KMA and HMC/KMC respectively. The U.S. invitees had never visited Korea. HMFC wanted to ensure their team was aware of the differences in workplace and business norms and practices.

The Solution

BC met with the HMFC team members and provided an overview of what to expect in Korea. Topics such as currency, language, cuisine, phone and Internet service, transportation, and accommodations were discussed. Special attention was given to meeting and greeting protocols including the exchange of business cards. In addition, a brief summary of HCS and its key officials was offered to the American team. Finally, work-related social events were also discussed. Drinking courtesies were explained in detail.

The Results

The American team felt well prepared for their visit to Korea. Any initial anxiety was reduced. In follow-up polling, the team was happy they were prepared in the meeting and greeting protocols. All HMFC team members commented on the obvious importance of white collar after work social gatherings. Being aware in advance of the significance of the role drinking played in these events led to bonding and trust building among the American and Korea teams. The Americans felt the trip helped build greater understanding and fellowship between HMFC and HCS teams.



Case Study: HMA Technician Korea Trip Orientation, 2003 and 2005

The Challenge

Every two years HMC hosts a global contest for top Hyundai technicians. The event held in Korea tests skills of Hyundai technicians. HMA selects its participants among hundreds that compete in regional competitions. Most often the regional winners have little international travel experience. (Many have never been out of their home state). The HMA Service Department recognized that an orientation to Korea would better prepare their participants for the Korea trip and the global event.

The Solution

BC met with the Hyundai technicians and provided an overview of what to expect in Korea. Topics such as currency, language, cuisine, phone and Internet service, transportation, and accommodations were discussed. Special attention was given to protocols for the competition including showing respect to seniors. Framing this concept was important since the U.S. technicians were blue-collar workers mostly from small towns where issues like hierarchy and protocol are not common. Saying “Thank you” in Korean was also practiced. Finally, event-related social events were also discussed. Drinking courtesies were explained in detail. In addition, the team was given handouts on Korea and Korean culture to study on the air flight.

The Results

Prior to leaving for Korea, HMA management and the technician team felt prepared for their visit and the event. Initial anxiety was reduced and the technicians noted they were better aware of what to expect and Korean norms. In follow-up polling, HMA management saw their team displaying respectful protocols and cross cultural skills in the competition. Moreover, in the competition’s social events the technician interacted well with their Korean hosts and other global participants. An outcome of the experience was a greater respect and loyalty among the U.S. team for Hyundai.



Case Study: KIA Motors Vision 21, 2006

The Challenge

Each year KMC hosts team members from its global affiliates. The program is called Vision 21. In 2006, KMC (and HMC, too) greatly expanded the program. KMC offered to host over 100 KMA employees along with Kia dealers from across the America. Little advance notice was given to KMA; nevertheless, teams of employees were quickly selected. The program and tours extended over 6-8 weeks, with teams departing each week for Korea.

The Solution

To address the scores of questions about travel to Korea, KMA Human Resources Department Vision 21 team recognized several large group orientations for the trip would reduce concerns and provide support. BC quickly crafted a tailored group workshop for the KMA Vision 21 teams. A series of workshops were then offered over 3 weeks with approximate 30 attendees per session. Topics include an overview of modern Korea, language, cuisine, telephone and Internet communications, accommodations, currency, electrical system, tourist attractions, shopping opportunities, and emergency situations. BC concluded the sessions with Q and A to address specific concerns. BC also provided the team with 24/7/365 phone and Internet support.

The Results

2006 Vision 21 was a huge success. Teams of KMA employees found the trip highly rewarding. In polling team members after the trip, participants noted the orientation prepped them well for the trip. Moreover, many team members enthusiastically shared their experiences. Finally, to support Vision 21's mission during ongoing Korea culture training program offered at KMA (and HMA) BC has encouraged team members who visited Korea to share their experiences to other employees. This has been very effective.

Addendum

BC has also confidentially prepares top American executives for their initial visit to Korea. This includes preparing American executives for their first meeting with Chairman Chung Mong Koo and senior Hyundai-Kia management. Protocols are rehearsed prior to the trip to Korea. Background is also given on H-K facilities they will tour, for example, Asan, Ulsan, Hwasung, and Namyang. Following the trip, BC debriefs the executives and reviews the trip.



The Power to Surprise™

Case Study: New KMA Headquarters' Lobby Design, 2007

The Challenge

Kia Motors America Marketing Department is responsible for overseeing design for the new Irvine, California lobby—a 10,000 square foot room with 45 foot ceiling. The design concept must convey a strong visual message to visitors to the corporate headquarters. The Design Steering Committee (the KMA COO, VP-Marketing, and Sponsorship and Productions manager) recognize the need to link Kia's Korean heritage to the American headquarters, while still portraying KMA as a U.S automotive sales and distribution company. Concerns surfaced after the outside design firm (Exhibit Works) original renditions lacked vital elements linking both cultures. (Exhibit Works is one of the America's leading exhibit and event marketing companies.) Moreover, the project must be approved and completed for the new HQ's upcoming Grand Opening Gala (June-July 2007).

The Solution

BC was asked to provide insights into how Hyundai-Kia and their affiliates have recently addressed Korean heritage with global expansion projects. BC first provided the KMA team with an overview of trends in modern Korea with regard to portraying dynamic Korea—a model that blends the rich past with modernity. BC then provided a sampling of recent Hyundai-Kia global high visibility projects (HMMA, HATCI-Irvine and Ann Arbor, Frankfort Design Center, Namyang, etc). Finally BC recommended that the design team focus on three themes:

1. Kia's—"rising out of Asia" heritage.
2. The H-K *sahoon* and core heritage values ("can-do" spirit, innovation, etc).
3. KMA's branding ladder.

The Results

The Design Steering Committee realigned and clarified their vision following BC's recommendations. Subsequently the committee directed Exhibit Works to build upon BC's themes that link heritage with KMA's ever expanding place in the American car market. BC continues to work closely with the KMA and Exhibit Works team. Currently, BC is preparing to review of the Exhibit Works' new renditions.



Case Study: Hyundai Information Systems North America (HISNA), 2005-2006

The Challenge

HISNA was formed in March 2005 and chartered to provide all IT related services to Hyundai Motor America, Kia Motors America, Hyundai Motor Finance Company and their affiliates in North America. Initially former IT teams from HMA and KMA (about 100 people) formed the core of the company along with teams from Korea's HMC IT division. By summer 2005 employee turnover at HISNA was an issue. Much of this was attributed to normal turnover following a business merger, however, some team members felt cultural differences were also an issue. In the past, no Americans had directed reported to Korean managers and few had interacted so closely with Korean team members.

The Solution

In 2004, while HMA's IT head Rich Hoffman felt BC Korean culture training had been extremely helpful. Some of the old HMA IT team had also received Korean cross-cultural. Recognizing that many of his team lacked cross-cultural training, Hoffman now the HISNA CEO and President, contacted BC. To address the turnover issue and build teamwork in the new IT organization, BC suggested HISNA offer workshops to center on building cross cultural understanding. All 20 HISNA managers, Korean and American, then participated in a unique workshop. The training's initial focus was that each culture had very different heritages, which manifests as cultural differences and norms. The HISNA group, including senior American and Korean management, was then divided into small groups to discuss 3 case studies. Each case provided a forum for the Americans and Koreans to voice their perspective on work related issues. The groups then shared their findings in a debriefing. Following the intensive, the HISNA team attended the firm's first group diner and gets together to further build teamwork and bonding.

The Results

Prior to the workshop some HISNA team members felt frustrated because the company was not addressing cultural issues. An immediate outcome was that team members appreciated that senior management had taken action. BC continued to support the HISNA team, Korean and America. Over time turnover reduced and despite HISNA's aggressive rollout, morale improved. Follow-up workshops and training have also been offered to new HISNA team members to build understanding of Korean culture and Hyundai norms. Rich Hoffman noted that the 2005 workshop served as a "turning pointing" at HISNA for its team members and management.

Addendum

Since 2005, BC has offered similar joint Korean and American team building events at HATCI, HMMA, and HMFC.



HISNA

Hyundai Information Service North America

Case Study: KMA Auto Show '06 MY Product Training, August 2005

In cooperation with Gail and Rice, a full service corporate marketing firm with deep roots in the automotive industry reaching back over 70 years.

The Challenge

Auto shows highlight a car manufacturer's new product line. Product education for show presenters (talent) is offered prior to the season. This talent interacts directly with the public at the auto shows and need extensive knowledge of the product. Turnover among the talent for the auto shows tend to be high. Moreover those veterans most often have worked for Big Three carmakers. In turn, they know little of Korea and its car industry. At the events, show talent at times is quizzed on cultural issues not directed to cars, but for example issues involving Korea. Moreover, unlike egalitarian western car firms, Korean firms tend to be hierarchical with norms and protocols for interacting with senior management who visit key high profile shows (Detroit International Car Show). KMA's Show Management team and talent provider Gail and Rice recognized the need to address these potential auto show issues.

The Solution

BC was asked to participate in a two day MY Product Training workshop along with Kia University, Marketing, PR, and Exhibit works (KMA's display firm). On Day One of the workshop, BC offered background information on Korea, its history and culture, Hyundai, and KMC. In addition, a session covered etiquette, protocols, and common Korean greetings. Special attention was given to interacting with high ranked Hyundai-Kia Korean management. BC also prepared the group to handle sensitive Korea-related issues that ranged from *gaegogi* (dog meat), to labor and scandal issues in Korea, and loss of market share by the Big Three to Korean imports Hyundai and Kia. In addition, BC offered support to the talent team throughout the season by email or phone.

The Results

Initial responses among the talent were that they needed the training to better understand how Kia and Korea differed from the Japan and their imports. The talent also enjoyed insights into Korean culture relevant to the car industry. The '06 auto show season was successful for KMA. Gail and Rice along with KMA's Show Management team were pleased with the program and will offer it again.



Gail & Rice