

How to increase the visibility of Polish companies in the U.S?

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In the eyes of Poles, the United States is a traditional export market characterized by a high level of development, as well as political and legal stability. Despite the large geographical distance, the U.S. market is highly regarded among Polish exporters, and American companies are at the forefront of the trading partners highly desired by Polish entrepreneurs.

The success of Polish companies in the U.S. largely depends, however, on Americans' perception of Poland and Polish companies in the context of joint business endeavors.

So how is Poland and Polish companies perceived by Americans? The answer to this question will not only help to better understand the perception of Poland in the U.S. and the related consequences, but it will also permit building a more effective strategy for promoting Poland, thus increasing Polish companies' chances of success in the U.S. market.

In general, the awareness and knowledge about Poland in the United States is low. This is mainly because Americans pay greater attention to domestic politics and the economic situation resulting from it.

Average Americans are not very well informed in terms of international relations. If asked about Poland, they would most likely associate it with history (World War II, the period of communism, the Solidarity movement - Lech Walesa), Polish Pope John Paul II, the Polish food (such as Polska kielbasa or vodka), Polish amber, sometimes Polish cosmetics and – from the latest political instability – with the country bordering on Russia and threatened by Russia's geopolitical invasion. A significant portion of Americans probably could not even correctly identify Poland on the map of Europe.

Americans who have visited Poland or have had the opportunity of doing business in Poland have greater knowledge and understanding about it. Americans' knowledge about Poland also comes from the media, the internet and often from stereotypes about Poland.

Americans do not see Poland as an important international player, which directly translates to a rather neutral opinion about Polish companies.

However, U.S. companies who have done business in Poland have a positive opinion of Poles and appreciate their ingenuity, integrity, diligent work and good command of the English language (this especially applies the younger generation of Poles).

The lack of information about Poland in the U.S. is the most significant factor that limits, and even hinders Americans from gaining a potentially higher knowledge and interest in Poland and

Polish companies. Americans would definitely be open to doing business with Polish companies, but often they simply do not have sufficient information to do so.

According to a study conducted by the Polish *Ministry of Economy* in the United States among American companies "every third respondent was open to establishing trade cooperation with Poland, but only 2% of respondents had specific plans to do so."

Insufficient information about Poland makes the available information either incomplete, or based on stereotypes, which directly translates into the perception of Polish companies in the United States. Undoubtedly, it would be worthwhile to expand this insufficient information. The question arises, what would be the most effective way to do it.

The author proposes five concrete steps, which the Polish Government, together with the private sector, could undertake in order to improve the image of Poland in the United States. These steps would also directly assist Polish companies in expanding to the U.S. market and they would increase the influx of American investments to Poland. These proposed steps are:

1. Organization by the Polish Government of economic and business events promoting Poland in strategic U.S. states.

Several times a year, in coordination with local authorities of the selected American states strategically and economically important for Poland, the Polish Government should organize more frequent and more targeted events promoting Poland in such states. The Polish Government and business representatives should be present at such events. On the American side, in addition to local authorities, local businesses potentially interested in establishing trade cooperation with Polish companies should also be present.

The proposed events would not only promote Poland as a country, but they would also increase awareness of Americans encouraging them to visit Poland, invest in Poland and to establish direct cooperation with Polish companies.

Poland does not have a proper image in the United States. The proposed more frequent economic/business events gradually could help change that.

2. Opening of a private Polish economic representational office in the U.S.

Polish companies do not have sufficient business support in the United States. This fact strongly limits their entry and expansion in the U.S. market. The Polish Government support offered to Polish companies interested in entering the U.S. market is not very focused and is definitely insufficient.

Polish companies openly complain that the representatives of Polish diplomatic missions in the U.S. are "unprepared to give them necessary business support in specific areas and, in many cases, do not even reply to inquires from the Polish companies interested in the U.S. market."

Opening a privatively owned Polish representational office in the U.S. would possibly create a better and more targeted effort.

On a fee basis, such office would support Polish companies in entering and establishing a presence on the U.S. market and it would serve as a tool to ensure their growth in the U.S. In addition, the Polish representational office in the U.S. (regardless of other Polish Government promotion programs) would promote Poland in the United States, while encouraging an increase in the inflow of investments into the Polish market.

The author predicts that the model of a Polish representational office in the U.S. would prove to be extremely effective in promoting Poland and increasing its recognition in the U.S.

3. Appointment in the United States of a few travelling Polish economic ambassadors.

The Polish Government should appoint in the U.S. several "travelling Polish business ambassadors". Such ambassadors could be representatives of Polish businesses already present in the United States who know the realities of the U.S. market. They would be responsible for the direct promotion of Poland in selected American states strategically important to Poland and Polish companies.

The travelling ambassadors would be kind of a showcase of Poland in the U.S. and they gradually increase the visibility and recognizability of Poland in the U.S. market. In fact, Poland is often associated in the United States through the prism of Poles themselves. Based on this, it would be beneficial if Poles themselves directly worked on promoting a positive image of Poland in the United States.

4. Organization of Polish show case pavilions in the strategic trade shows in the U.S.

Poland as a country is generally not sufficiently visible in the United States. It would be beneficial for Poland to use America's larger trade shows to promote Poland and Polish strategic export sectors. At such events, "Polish exhibition pavilions" could be created to promote under the Polish flag several Polish representatives of a selected Polish industry.

The ongoing European Union funded project implemented by the Polish Chamber of Commerce to internationally promote the Polish meat sector is a good example of this kind of promotion activities. The premise of this project is to promote Polish meat and cold cuts during specific trade shows in selected markets, including the U.S. market.

Similar projects could also be implemented in the industries such as furniture, chemical, cosmetics, or even in the field of eco-environmental technologies and social gaming industry. Poland has something to be proud of and definitely does not show case it often enough. A greater participation in U.S. trade shows could change that.

5. Organization of economic promotional events in Poland in cooperation with local authorities of selected American states.

Apart from the earlier described steps and activities to promote and enhance Poland's image within the United States, an important promotion aspect is to also organize promotional events including American guests in Poland.

Very often, when American business representatives visit Poland they automatically change their opinion about Poland or increase their knowledge about Poland. Besides, directly and more frequently inviting American companies to Poland could immediately result in their desire to cooperate with Polish companies or to invest in Poland.

Economic promotional events could be organized by the Polish Government (or Polish organizations such as the *Polish Chamber of Commerce* or the *Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency*) in consultation and coordination with local authorities of selected American states and their commercial departments. Chosen American states would most definitely be interested to support and increase export opportunities for their resident companies. For Poland, on the other hand, it would be an excellent opportunity to directly present Poland and Polish entrepreneurs.

Nevada is an example of the U.S. state, which seeks to establish closer trade relations with Poland. At the beginning of August 2015 the Governor of Nevada, Brian Sandoval, and his U.S. delegation visited Poland. At the same time, in consultation with Poland's diplomatic post in Washington D.C., the Governor approved the opening of the Polish trade office in Nevada.

Similar models of cooperation could be duplicated to create permanent trade agreements between Poland and selected U.S. states. While choosing partnering U.S. states it would be necessary to pay close attention to specific interests of Polish exporters (worth while noting are American industry clusters), and the U.S. states with not immediately seen and not yet discovered potential.

The states of West Virginia could be an example of such state. It brings together interesting industry clusters and offers interesting, yet undiscovered business opportunities. The Governor of West Virginia, Earl Tomblin, is interested in supporting exports of local businesses and the promotion of the state. Both Governor Tomblin and West Virginia Senator, Joe Manchin, would probably gladly accept the invitation of the Polish Government to an economic event promoting Poland and Polish businesses in context of cooperation with the United States.

Poland's recognition in the United States is low, which undoubtedly should be changed. This change will be particularly important in the face of the currently negotiated *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)*, which aims to increase trade between the European Union and the United States. Polish companies will fully benefit from this agreement only if their visibility on the U.S. market increases. Now is the perfect time to highlight Poland's strategic role in Europe and, while doing that, more dynamically build the desired image of Poland in the United States.
