

MANUELA TOTEVA: BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GAP

The marketing and communication specialist on how to excel in the Bulgarian and German market

DR MANUELA TOTEVA is a marketing and communications specialist with over two decades of experience in the field. She has managed communication projects for companies in the software industry, metallurgy, the financial sector, trade, and higher education, including SAP, Aurubis, METRO Cash & Carry and others, and is the author of the publication *Effective Tools of Digital Marketing in B2B Organisations*. Dr Toteva teaches strategic communications, digital marketing and intercultural management at the Sofia University, the Technical University in Ilmenau and Hochschule Fresenius in Wiesbaden, both in Germany.

Currently, she is the President of the Heidelberg International Professional Women's Forum – an NGO dedicated to encouraging the growth of professional women.

What motivated you to move to Germany and how did your career evolve afterwards?

Moving to Germany came naturally, led by a combination of personal and professional motivators. After long years in international companies, I was intrigued by the opportunity to immerse myself in a new cultural environment and to gain international experience. Germany, with its stable economy and blossoming business ecosystem, presented the ideal opportunity for growth. After I moved, my career developed in the desired direction. Initially I encountered challenges in adaptation to a different market and work culture, but these obstacles were key for my training. I started working with local marketing agencies that helped me get a grasp of the nuances of the German market. With time, I moved to more responsible roles and in the end I was managing intercultural projects



spanning several countries. This journey not only widened my professional experience, but also deepened my understanding of cultural diversity in business.

In your experience, what are the main differences between the Bulgarian and German market in regard to marketing and communications?

The Bulgarian and the German markets differ significantly in several aspects. In Germany, marketing strategies are often data-driven, with a strong accent on precision, planning and following the regulations. The Germans value this type of information and expect transparency from brands. This is reflected in their in-depth approach in both B2B and B2C communications. The Bulgarian market is more flexible and adaptable. Here, marketing efforts are often defined by creativity and a more personal approach. The Bulgarian consumers value highly emotional appeals and storytelling, which can build brand loyalty. Another significant difference is the media landscape. In Germany, there is a well established, strictly regulated media environment. The environment in Bulgaria is more dynamic. This affects how campaigns are designed and executed – in Germany the preference is often towards traditional media, while in Bulgaria digital strategies are preferred.

How cultural nuances affect the way in which you design and execute communication projects in Bulgaria and Germany?

Cultural nuances are crucial for shaping communication and marketing strategies. In Germany, the approach is usually more formal and structured. Germans value direct approach and being clear, so mes-



sages should be short and factual. This cultural specificity affects everything – from the voice of the advertisements to the websites' design; it guarantees that the communication is direct and reliable. In Bulgaria, communication is often more informal and engaging. Here the accent is on building a personal relationship and trust. Marketing campaigns often include local traditions, humour and telling stories that resonate with the audience. Understanding these cultural preferences is instrumental for designing effective campaigns that appeal to local tastes. Adaptation to these cultural nuances means personalisation of the content, the visual elements and the strategies to meet the expectations and values of the target audiences in each country. This cultural sensitivity not only increases the effectiveness of the marketing efforts, but also encourages deeper connections with the audience.

What were the biggest challenges that you experienced while working between Bulgaria and Germany?

Working between Bulgaria and Germany posed several challenges. Navigating through different cultural expectations and business practices required constant adaptation and sensitivity. Complying with the different regulations, especially in data protection and standards for communicating specific topics, was very complicated and required time. The language differences sometimes caused misunderstanding and asked for additional efforts to establish clear and effective communication. The different levels of maturity of the market and the consumers' behaviour in each of the countries required different approaches and strategies that were sometimes hard to synchro-

nise. Besides, balancing the resources and efforts of both markets, each with its unique requirements and opportunities, asked for careful planning and prioritisation.

Which emerging trends in marketing and communications businesses in Bulgaria and Germany should be aware of?

A couple of emerging trends are shaping the future of marketing and communications in Bulgaria and Germany. The increasing role of digital channels, pushed by the technological progress and the changes in consumers' behaviour, is a major trend that forces companies, in their aim to remain competitive and relevant, to invest in digital marketing, e-commerce and social media strategies. For some years now consumers have begun to expect personalised experiences that fit their preferences, which put more weight on the use of data and AI for providing personalised content and offers. At the same time, there is a growing accent on sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Brands that demonstrate engagement in environmental and social issues build stronger connections with the consumers. The cooperation with influencers remains a powerful strategy, especially to reach younger audiences; authenticity and relevance remain key for successful partnerships in this aspect. Last, but not least, high-quality, engaging content is still crucial, requiring businesses to focus on creating valuable content that educates, entertains and builds trust in their audience.

