



Mollie Pillman, Senior Director,
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Interview

with *Mollie Pillman*

MCI has just completed a go-to-market strategy for the **American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)**'s global expansion, specifically in Brazil, India and the Gulf region. Based on local market intelligence, MCI provided critical insights for AHIMA to further engage in these markets. Mollie Pillman, AHIMA's Senior Director, Strategy & Transformation, shares with us their perspectives on global growth, market opportunity and segmentation, and lessons learned in the process.

AHIMA is the premier association of health information management (HIM) professionals worldwide. Serving 52 affiliated associations and more than 71,000 members, it is recognised as the leading source of "HIM knowledge," and is a respected authority for rigorous professional education and training.

MCI: How did you assess AHIMA's opportunities to expand globally?

Mollie Pillman: While every association is different, the first step to going global is to gain support from the Board of Directors. A good Board will ask tough questions during this process, including what the global business model might look like, whether potential demand and financial projections show return on investment, and how global fits into the overall organisational strategy and expectations from the membership. Based on the level of risk that the Board and staff are willing to accept, many different options and approaches exist but it is important to remember that global is a long-term commitment and to choose markets that give the greatest chance of success, especially when starting out. AHIMA is fortunate to have a forward-thinking Board that recognises that diseases and technology no longer have borders, so elevating the HIM profession globally is critical to improving healthcare both at home and abroad.

MCI: What prompted AHIMA to choose India, Brazil and the Gulf region as priority target markets?

MP: AHIMA's global approach was developed to lead with education, in support of a long-term strategy to elevate and promote the Health Information Management (HIM) profession worldwide (which then creates a market for professional development and many of the products and services that AHIMA provides). Because this aligned well with US governmental initiatives around the export of health technology, we were fortunate to receive a multi-year grant through the US Department of Commerce's Market Development Cooperator Program that has provided funding for our initial investment in globalisation.

The DoC had a list of priority developing markets, and comparing that list with past AHIMA sales data and known areas of interest allowed us to narrow our initial target to the three regions mentioned. That said, we knew that not all of them would likely result in the same opportunities, so we invested in full-scale market research on each of the countries to ensure that all were viable and assessed the relative priorities and timelines for each.

MCI: What were the different steps undertaken in this go-to-market strategy and what were AHIMA's desired outcomes?

MP: Right off the bat, we knew that the Middle East would likely be the greatest short-term opportunity due to its rapid investment in health technology and goals to create new jobs and adopt international standards. We even found that many professionals in the region were already familiar with AHIMA.

Because of this, we approached that market with slightly less focus on high-level analytics and more emphasis on identifying the needs of the customer and potential in-country partners or competitors through phone interviews, SWOT analysis, and product assessment. We knew a lot less about the healthcare environment in India and Brazil, so detailed market profiles on the front end were critical in creating realistic expectations and determining the best strategy for entry. In all cases, however, the best way to learn what works and what doesn't is to actually get in on the ground and talk to people, and our initial visits proved invaluable from that regard.

MCI: What were some of the key findings and what did you learn about AHIMA's brand and opportunities in these key markets?

MP: Through our research we were able to confirm many initial assumptions, such as the great demand for our content and services in the Middle East, and found that in all of the target markets there is general interest in learning from American experiences. Associations have varying levels of recognition, so communicating your reputation and value are important, while acknowledging that the local market also has expertise and seeking help to localise offerings, particularly in Brazil where language is a barrier.

For us it was also important to reiterate that we are making a long-term commitment, as US organisations have a reputation for one-off contributions rather than ongoing support.

MCI: What is the way forward for AHIMA in these markets?

MP: All of these markets have shown positive results but vary in the degree of opportunity. Politics play a major factor and identifying the right stakeholders and influencers has been crucial to creating momentum for our strategy.

While in India and Brazil, much time is spent explaining what HIM is and why it is important; the Middle East discussions have centred around what we can provide and when we can start. As such, we are beginning by creating models and offerings for the Middle East in a way that will allow us to experiment and then take what is successful to the other markets. We'll be on the road a lot in 2015 but have high hopes that the effort will be well worth it – both from a mission standpoint and financially. ■

Insider's view

MCI: As part of AHIMA's global expansion, you recently organised a study mission in Brazil. What was the purpose of this Study Mission?

Adriana Rodrigues: MCI Brazil has been involved in the market analysis project for AHIMA since April 2014, along with India and UAE, having already developed some research and reports on the country profile and potential partners in Brazil.

The society decided to also involve us in the process, despite the Study Mission having been organised by the US Department of Commerce which gave them a grant for a global project related to HIM/HIT education. The main goals of AHIMA's Study Mission in Brazil were to understand the local HIM/HIT market, how developed the market is, which barriers they may face in the future, and to assess collaboration opportunities with potential partners in the country.

MCI: What types of potential partner organisations did you introduce

AHIMA to? Can you share some of the outcomes?

AR: We organised meetings with the government including the Ministry of Health, universities, the National Confederation of Health, the Brazilian Society of Health Informatics and a company in the health sector – a potential sponsor for AHIMA's future activities in Brazil.

Although the HIM profession is not as mature in Brazil as in other countries, we could observe a lot of interest from the different organisations in developing the profession locally and a strong political will to do so. This will represent major public health advancements for Brazil, and AHIMA can play a key role in that process.

MCI: Describe the kind of local intelligence and support you offered to AHIMA during their Study Mission?

AR: We provided guidance to AHIMA's staff, and explained how meetings and negotiations are usually conducted in Brazil. We assisted them during the

meetings, accompanied them to the different cities where the meetings were held and, where necessary, provided translation.

At the end of the Study Mission we sent them a scorecard for them to evaluate each organisation they met with and organised a debriefing session about the key opportunities and next steps forward. ■

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