

Foreigners' views on American marketing overseas

Some American marine manufacturers can be ignorant about the rest of the world, according to overseas observers. At last year's IMTEC show in Chicago, for example, one Dutch distributor mentioned that an American supplier actually asked him, "Do you have faxes over there?" His products have been shipped to Dusseldorf, Germany, instead of Amsterdam, Holland.

The German-speaking country of Austria, located in Europe, is regularly confused with English-speaking Australia, on the opposite side of the globe.

John Frankel of Navicom, a marine electronics distributor in Conflans, France, says he sees the language problems that exist with U.S. exports to the rest of the world. American manufacturers and distributors are not very good at translating and providing brochures and literature about products in foreign languages, leaving most international distributors to translate and print materials themselves. Only the engine manufac-

turers provide much of anything in other tongues. Americans do not put a priority on becoming proficient at other languages and sometimes have difficulty providing even blank forms for non-English speaking customers.

One distributor of boats, motors and trailers in Germany remarked that his perception of American guarantees is that they are not really guarantees. Guarantee statements can contain so many exception clauses watering them down that there are few circumstances under which the guarantees apply, he says.

The same distributor complains that American manufacturers are inflexible regarding European needs. U.S. boatbuilders often won't change, adapt or alter their products enough to fit the different European markets. Small details can be improved to make a big difference in sales, as Sarasota, Fla.-based Donzi demonstrated when it changed the curvature of its windshields to accommodate European customers.

Another German distributor of marine accessories and electronic hardware also holds the opinion that American firms are not international enough. American suppliers, for example, did not prepare to meet the qualifications of the CE mark that is required to sell in the 15 countries of the European Union since January 1996. As usual, Americans have had to play catch-up.

Further, his buying prices are the same prices that American distributors get, so a U.S. firm that buys in larger quantities can undercut German distributors. Also, because of improvements in technology, prices are down, so he needs to sell more products in order to make the same profit.

These observers recognize that American firms could be more successful in the international marketplace by learning more about other countries and their languages and by adapting products to better meet foreign needs and standards.