

NADA REACHES OUT TO DEALERS IN MANY LANDS

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Albert Gallegos:
Global effort

If you look closely, the annual auto dealers' convention that starts Saturday, Feb. 9, is going to look a bit like the United Nations.

According to the National Automobile Dealers Association, delegates from 32 countries have signed up for its convention in San Francisco. NADA expects to beat last year's total, when 1,700 delegates from other countries came to the convention in Las Vegas. "From Botswana to Barbados, we'll have people attending," says Albert Gallegos, NADA's director of international affairs.

About 27,000 dealers, exhibitors and industry officials are expected to attend this year's convention, so the international delegation will remain a relatively small minority. But NADA is catering to those delegates. For example, the association will translate four workshops into Italian for the benefit of more than 100 Italian attendees.

United Nations

The top 5 home countries of international delegates registered to attend this year's NADA convention

1. **Australia:** 335
2. **Canada:** 312
3. **United Kingdom:** 245
4. **Brazil:** 146
5. **Italy:** 105

Source: NADA

Over the past two years, NADA has cultivated ties with dealership groups around the world. Foreign dealers like to attend the NADA convention because they are wrestling with the same issues — Internet marketing, tight profit margins, service and parts — as their American peers.

And it gives NADA an opportunity to monitor events in fast-growing markets such as China and India. For example, the association has scheduled a seminar on Chinese automakers — part of an effort to educate American dealers who might want to sell Chinese brands. "Dealers need to do their due diligence" on Chinese imports, Gallegos says. "They need to ask: 'Does it fit my local market? Does it fit my business plan?' There is so much distorted information." The Chinese are gathering information, too. Gallegos says 10 Chinese dealers and industry officials will come to San Francisco. That's a relatively modest number, but visa problems and the Chinese New Year — a major holiday — limit the number of visitors.

These overseas initiatives aren't going to change NADA's fundamental focus on the United States. But as the auto industry globalizes, Gallegos thinks these efforts will help the association see how the auto industry is changing.

"The challenges that dealers face around the world are the same: competition and the pressure on margins," Gallegos says. NADA's international program "is still in its infancy, but we've laid the groundwork."