

## We Speak One Language

### Market Research Faux Pas: Examples of Being Lost Translations

In the fields of marketing and advertising, ignorance is not bliss — it's expensive. There's nothing worse than spending massive amounts of advertising dollars on a campaign or product launch only to cancel the campaign or pull the product — not to mention the PR nightmares that ensue afterward.

Recently, our team engaged in a discussion about some of the craziest market research "oopsies" — specifically ones that involve language barriers and meanings that are lost in translation — that resulted in major advertising FAILS.

1: In the mid-1990s, Reebok creative executives came up with the *perfect* name for their newest line of women's running shoe: INCUBUS. Unfortunately, the word "Incubus" is used to describe a mythical demon that fornicates with women in their sleep. Whoops!

2: In the late-1980s, Kentucky Fried Chicken moved its "finger lickin' good" brand to Beijing, China. There were no traditional American fast-food restaurants on the mainland so it seemed like a great gig for them ... except their ad slogan, when translated into Chinese characters, read "Eat Your Fingers Off." Ouch!

3: In 1991, Locum, a Swedish medical company, sent Christmas cards to all of their customers. Their logo treatment included lowercase lettering and a heart in place of the "o." When the cards were sent to Americans, the appearance of their logo appeared to represent a much different message than intended. Fail!

Some people debate that these blunders were semi-purposeful in



### Confusion Spoken Here

Marketing language needs to be current, positive and direct to compete and sell. It often employs buzzwords, puns and slang that, when translated into other languages, can become confusing, ridiculous or just plain disgusting.

When Coke first tackled the Chinese market, the company simply used Chinese characters that represented the sound of the words "Coca-Cola." However, the actual words those characters created were "bite the wax tadpole." Coke quickly changed the characters to ones meaning "tasty" and "evoking happiness."

Coor's tried to use its "Turn it Loose" slogan in Spanish-speaking countries, where instead of implying a relaxing good time, the words implied suffering from diarrhea.

When Ford marketed its car, the

Comet, in Mexico it used the name "Caliente," meaning "hot." What the marketers didn't realize was that "caliente" was also Mexican slang for "prostitute."

Proctor and Gamble's squeaky-clean image suffered a similar fate in Germany when it tried to market Puffs tissues there. The word is a colloquial term for brothel.

Pepsi's slogan "Come Alive With Pepsi" worked well in the States, but it had a completely different effect in Germany, where it was translated as "Come Out of the Grave with Pepsi."

Perdue didn't sell much chicken south of the border when the phrase "it takes a tough man to make a tender chicken" became "it

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### Future Trans News

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an effort to create buzz and draw attention to the brands. While that theory is unlikely for everyone except Braniff/American Airlines, these are several reasons why market research should be conducted before launching international advertising campaigns.

As Americans, we constantly develop strange slang terms or experience the effects of innuendo-filled terminology — but, as marketers and advertisers, it's better to be safe than sorry ... and without a job!

<http://www.leapfroginteractive.com/blog/2011/03/16/Market-Research-Faux-Pas-5-Examples-of-Being-Lost-in-Translations>

takes a sexually stimulated man to make a chicken affectionate."

### Culture Shock

Language isn't the only thing that separates us. A host of cultural beliefs, expectations, mores and attitudes stand between marketing a product at home and marketing it abroad. A cultural faux pas can do serious damage to an international image - or a domestic one.

### Mix-ups in the Melting Pot

Just because a company markets inside the United States doesn't leave it free from linguistic worries. The sizable U.S. Spanish-speaking contingency often has had an impact on the success - or failure - of a product launch.

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