



Global Perspective

We live and work in a global marketplace. Doing business internationally is no longer the sole purview of large corporations. With the advent of the Internet, even small companies have the opportunity to reach audiences across the country and around the world. To succeed in this ever-expanding world market, we need to think globally as we name our companies, products, and services. Verbal branding practices that demonstrate awareness and sensitivity regarding linguistic and cultural differences are essential to attracting and keeping new customers.

Think Ahead

The best time to think about the international effectiveness of a name is before it is created. How and where a name needs to function should have a profound influence on which name is ultimately selected for use.

Imagine you're getting ready to launch a new product that will be the centerpiece of your corporate offering for years to come. You expect that sales for the first two or three years will be in the U.S. only. After that, you'll expand to Japan, Europe, South America and the rest of the world. Is it worthwhile to conduct an international check of name candidates now? The answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

If you expect that your product will eventually be marketed internationally, you can save yourself a lot of time, heartache, and money by determining up-front that the name you select is available in and appropriate for your international markets. Although international screening can seem like an expensive and unnecessary investment during the critical period of a product's launch, the time and cost associated with checking the international viability of name candidates prior to name selection is minor compared to the cost (in financial and public relations terms) of changing the name of an established product, or, even worse, trying to promote different names for the same product in different markets.

Determining the international viability of name candidates involves two areas of concern: international trademark searches and linguistic/cultural analyses.

International Trademark Searches

In conjunction with your trademark counsel, you should carefully plan out how you will conduct international trademark searches. Since the strategy you select for international trademark searching will determine its cost and schedule, it is important to have this conversation with your trademark counsel early in the name development and selection process.

There is no single "right" way to conduct international trademark searches, as every company has its own unique set of marketing and legal issues to consider. However, you can get a realistic idea of your own time and cost considerations through discussion with your trademark counsel.



Working with your trademark attorney, you can develop a search strategy that takes into consideration:

- your required level of confidence regarding trademark availability (will a limited search suffice for now, or should you conduct comprehensive searches in all key markets?)
- your spending priorities (does it make more sense to spend the money to search names in every potential market now, or to limit the search parameters and reserve funds for business development and marketing efforts?)
- your projected market presence (if you never expect Country X to be a significant market for your product, is it worthwhile to conduct a trademark search in that country?)

Linguistic/Cultural Analyses

Equally important to determining the international viability of name candidates is gauging the name's appropriateness – linguistically and culturally. Placing names into a marketplace without checking whether or not they might be offensive or ridiculous to the local populace not only betrays a parochial attitude on the part of the name's owner, but signals to potential customers, employees and business partners that their way of life is of little consequence to the company that wishes to benefit economically from them. In other words, companies that commit linguistic and cultural gaffes with their product and service names run the risk of presenting themselves as ignorant, careless, or, at the very least, insensitive.

Bad literal translations aren't the only danger in naming for the global market. How familiar are you with the culture of the countries in which you propose to market your product or service? Imagine launching your new online banking product only to discover the name is shared with a popular penniless, or miserly, character. It would be like opening Crachitt Bank or Scrooge Financial without any knowledge of the characters from Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, a reference from classic English literature which is likely to be well-known among English-speaking audiences.

Even tougher to keep up with are popular culture references, often arising from television, movies, popular music, or even political scandals. Consider the differences in cultural association that have arisen over the last 40 years for American English words such as "groovy," "gay," and "crack," as well as entirely new vocabulary such as "ecology," "skyjacking," and even "Internet."

These are hard lessons to learn, but happily such situations are relatively easy to avoid by taking the names that you seriously consider to a linguistic and cultural analysis in each of your international markets. That is, you need to check with the Spaniards in Spain and the Colombians in Colombia if both Spain and Colombia are markets for your product, as the Spanish spoken in Spain is distinct enough from the Spanish spoken in Colombia to affect the pronunciation and perception of your product name. Inhabitants of the two nations will also have different cultural takes on any given name.

Planning your linguistic and cultural screening strategy is, like trademark searching, also a question of key international markets. The starting place is still the list of your current and future international markets, but you must also take into consideration that many countries have two or more official or unofficial languages or dialects, and plan your testing accordingly. For instance, you could in theory plan to market your product only in German-speaking Switzerland, excluding the French-speaking areas, but you may still wish to consider screening in the Swiss French dialect so as to avoid insulting those French speakers who will see your product displayed. Another case in point is the U.S., where screening for English alone overlooks the many dialects of Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, and other languages which are spoken as first languages by significant numbers of American consumers.



Working with your naming consultant, you can develop a linguistic/cultural analysis that takes the following into consideration for each name, in each market:

- is the name easy or difficult to pronounce? (if your product name is a tongue-twister, chances are people will hesitate to ask for it)
- does the name have any literal meaning in the language under consideration? (if the literal meaning of the name conflicts with the product's positioning or desired brand attributes, it would probably be a poor choice)
- does the name have any positive or negative connotations in the language under consideration? (if the name suggests death and destruction, you want to know about it)
- is the name appropriate for the endeavor? (if you are naming a bank, but all the names you are considering suggest dog food, you know you have a problem)

Given limited resources, international trademark searches and linguistic/cultural analyses may seem like a huge hurdle to get past as you struggle to release a product, but they are part of the price of doing business internationally. In the long run, this investment pays off.

Other International Considerations

The discussion up to this point has been of company, product, and service names, but what about the other verbal aspects of your brand? "Localizing" your verbal branding efforts can apply to anything from your printed marketing materials to your website.

- Taglines are almost always translated into the language of the target market. For example, Coca-Cola utilizes both direct translations (English "Life tastes good" = Spanish "La vida sabe bien") and equivalent phrases (French "Sourire la vie" means "Life makes you smile" or "Smile through life") to promote its brand internationally
- Descriptive names are usually translated into an equally descriptive name in the target language
- Some countries require that your website be presented in the local language, while in others it is a question of the image you want to project. Enlisting the aid of an experienced translation firm can be critical, as for many clients, their visit to your website will be their first and only experience with your company

The care with which you approach localizing your verbal branding efforts reflects the care with which you conduct your business. Interacting with your customers in their language is not only good marketing, it's polite behavior.

We live and work in a global marketplace. The opportunities open to us are enormous. But let's be careful out there.

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articulating brand promise™

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