



Brand Naming New Products Or Company Naming for the Global Market

By John Hoepfner

Samuel Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain, had a unique appreciation for the power and influence of language. He said, "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." In today's over-communicated global economy, effective verbal brand communication that is achieved through name research is not just important, it is critical.

Today, all brands are global in the wired and wireless world of Internet communications. Your company's branded products are easily accessible worldwide, even if your company is primarily a domestic marketer. Right now you can go to Amazon.com and order HobNobs, a popular milk chocolate candy from the U.K., or find Japanese Hello Panda biscuits for sale. Consider that an eBay shopper in Venice, Italy (Benvenuto su eBay) sees basically the same screen as someone logging in from Venice, California (Welcome to eBay). The name is the same, only the language is different.

A key component of brand marketing is to define geography. If your marketing area is defined as the U.S., North America, Europe or Asia, foreign language name research and analysis is critical. Misinterpretation or implied negativity can lead to an embarrassing failure and retreat from the marketplace.

Perhaps the most noted naming faux pas is the textbook case of Chevrolet's Nova introduction in South America. Although there is some controversy regarding the name's impact, if any, on Latin American sales, the name "no va," if pronounced as such, can mean - it won't go. The Coca-Cola brand was introduced to China as Ke-ke-ken-la. Imagine the shocker when the printed signs translated to - bite the wax tadpole or female horse stuffed with wax, depending on the dialect. After researching 40,000 Chinese characters that could be a phonetic equivalent, the brand managers settled on, ko-kou-ko-le, which can be loosely translated as happiness in the mouth.

At NameQuest a recent foreign language name research and analysis has resulted in veering away from an array of names. Brand names that may have been suitable for North American markets held the potential for global misfire. A few examples include a name in Hebrew that sounded too similar to a recently poisoned baby food in Israel; a name for Arabic-speaking markets that sounded too Jewish; another that translated in Hindi to devil or demon; one in French that had an association with nudity or naked; and a German name for a service-related product that translated to "complaint."

There are essentially five choices when considering your global linguistic strategy:

1. Enter the market with the country of origin verbal brand name.
2. Phonetically translated brand name.
3. Directly translated brand name.
4. Combination of original name and phonetic translation.
5. Combination of original verbal brand name and direct translation.

From a cultural perspective, consumers by and large prefer home-grown or domestic verbal brand names. In major markets with large GDP's such as the U.S., U.K., Germany and Japan, the appeal of national verbal brands is exceptionally strong. However, global brands are very acceptable within certain categories of products.

Consumer electronics from Asia, including products marketed by Sony, Samsung and Panasonic, are flourishing globally. German performance auto brands Mercedes and BMW, and U.S. motorcycle marketer Harley Davidson are strong global players. At the same time that Japan's Toyota has achieved market share in the U.S., Korean automakers Hyundai and KIA find the U.S. market difficult to penetrate.

The role of verbal brand naming will continue to grow in importance. The competition for your new products may not be your true competition. The biggest challenge for you new product may be competing for the attention of your customer.

John Hoepfner, President and Founder of NameQuest, Inc., is recognized as a leading expert in verbal brand name development and name research for leading Fortune 500 corporations worldwide. NameQuest is the first and most experienced company dedicated solely to international verbal brand name development and research. NameQuest is a five-time recipient of the American Marketing Association's prestigious Edison Award for best new product branding. Est. 1984



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