



Not Connecting with All Your Audiences? Maybe You're Not Speaking Their Language

It's vital to understand what motivates people from other cultures.

By Stephanie Tramdack Cash

As the nonprofit world becomes more and more multicultural, it's important to reach out to other countries and cultures. To make a connection, you need to communicate in a way that resonates emotionally with people, no matter what their language.

There are three emotional indicators that drive people's behavior:

- 1. First, they need to trust you** and believe what you tell them.
- 2. They need to admire your organization** and hold it in high esteem.
- 3. You need to stir good feelings** in them.

Only if those indicators are present will people be moved to act on your behalf.

If you want to make that coveted emotional connection, you must be perceived as a native of the culture. Only then will

people trust and respect you. To achieve this, you need the skills of a top-notch translation team.

Keep these things in mind when gearing up to speak the right language to all your potential markets:

Always ask people their preferred language of interaction with you. It may be different from what you assume.

Don't be fooled by money-saving machine translation. Your image is too important. An online translation button on your website sends precisely the wrong message, since a computer program has no inkling of the nuance or emotion you want to communicate.

You're trying to evoke an emotional response in a human being. That's something only a human translator can do. With machine translation, you run the risk of severing that emotional connection. Any perceived insult or sloppiness will be an immediate deal-breaker.

Find a translator who understands your target audiences and can convey technical points with precision. You need to be saying what your audiences are used to hearing. What's more, proper, grammatical writing is indispensable in transmitting a sense of your professionalism and your respect for customers and prospects.

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Make sure your translator is expert at grasping and conveying the emotions you want to express.

Look for translators who specialize in marketing and communications. This step is perhaps the most often overlooked, even by conscientious and knowledgeable people.

Brief your translator fully, and be open to the translator's input. Each culture has its own emotional palette. You'll need to strike a different note with a foreign culture than with your own.

For instance, an idea that conveys adventure in your culture may create feelings of satisfaction or safety in someone else's world. You want to be sure you're playing the right strings in this panoply of feelings. Translators, with their knowledge of other people's ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling, can help you arrive at the right mix of emotional messaging.

Don't limit your communications to your website or brochure. Think about developing language-specific newsletters or other content marketing tools to help you build trust with your target markets. Regular, high-quality communications, rendered in your customers' languages, can go a long way toward promoting buy-in.

Be bold in your approach to communicating across cultural frontiers. With a careful plan, you'll make an emotional

connection with people in new markets. When you tap into their culture's emotional palette, your brand will not only receive more attention, it will also be perceived as local and desirable. You might just find your horizons expanding in directions and dimensions you never dreamt of. And you'll never look back at your organization's old, English-only approach to the world. 

Stephanie Tramdack Cash, CFA, translates French documents. She is an active member of the American Translators Association (atanet.org), which represents over 10,000 translators and interpreters across 100 countries.

Connecting across Cultures

For more, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Managers Must Become Multicultural (Vol. 20, No. 6)

Do You Need a Translator? (Vol. 36, No. 1)

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