

# Culturally Competent Translations

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# When it absolutely needs to be right in any language



## Multicultural and Multilingual Communications



When the target audience is from a different culture than the marketer communications can get tricky. Successful marketers catering to multicultural ethnic markets domestically or around the world need to address their customers in their local language and understand the differences that make each culture unique. The key is a multicultural marketing approach that includes language and cultural expertise.

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## It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It.

**Elisabete Miranda**  
*President, Translation Plus, Inc.*

**Y**ou have probably heard it before. While this popular saying is usually addressing the tone of voice and body language, it is a truism which can apply in multicultural marketing as well. What we say is of course important, but how we relay information to those who do not share our culture and language is critical. As our communities grow to include larger percentages of non-native English speakers, how we speak to each market segment has to evolve. American consumers are a far from homogenous group, acknowledging and respecting differences in culture and language isn't simply a tool of political correctness, it's a forward-thinking, smart business decision.

Language and culture are inextricably symbiotic. Even within the same language, there are many nuances and differences rooted in culture. For example, Spanish is spoken in dozens of countries across nearly every continent, with each country or region having unique usage, idiom, dialect and grammar. The same is true of many, if not all, languages. Even English spoken in the US is subtly different from English spoken in other English speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand or the UK. Acknowledging, understanding and respect-

ing these differences in language are critical to successfully marketing to those diverse consumers.

Marketers strive to understand how consumers behave and what motivates them in order to create messages which appeal to them. They have a unique understanding of the power of language, so it's a natural jump to apply the skills and talents already invested and leverage this to address a multicultural consumer base.

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Though the most common path is to translate the message into other languages, traditional translation will not do. The in-language communication must be culturally competent.

In a perfect world, marketing campaigns are created "in-language" from scratch. However, in a difficult economic climate, we are often faced with budget constraints. The good news is that there are viable options. Some material such as ads should be created in-language while other materials such as brochures may be a good candidate for cultural adaptation or better yet suited for "transcreation". A quality language serv-

ice provider will advise you on the best approach to present your message to your audience while respecting language and cultural differences and staying within your budget.

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Marketing, at its core, is about sending a targeted, specific and controlled message to consumers in the hopes of influencing their behavior. Disregarding cultural differences and lacking cultural sensitivity works against this goal at every turn. Careless use of language may result in inadvertently offending the consumers with whom a marketer is attempting to build trust. Reaching consumers is more than knowing what they buy; it is knowing how they live, what they hold most dear and how they communicate. Businesses who take the extra steps to effective-

ly communicate with multicultural markets as the new “mass market” will have a clear competitive advantage over those who do not in gaining brand loyalty.

American consumers now are more diverse than any other time in history. Companies, and by extension marketers, who acknowledge and embrace the cultural changes by cultivating and maintaining a respectful, sophisticated and mutually beneficial relationship with multicultural audiences will be rewarded with a growing consumer base with steadily increasing buying power. Multicultural marketing is a complex and nuanced topic, but the first and most important step is recognizing how language and culture are two sides of the same coin. Whatever approach a marketer may choose, one thing is sure: language shapes the way we think and act.

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