

Translating Your Brand Successfully

It's important to be consistent in the presentation of your company's brand – this reaches further than just your logo and brand marketing. It can stretch to your communication to your clients and even the way you phrase things' your tone and the style of writing.

As we are well and truly in the age of globalization, a vital and almost inevitable part of growth is that you may end up communicating with people overseas. It's incumbent on you to communicate to your clients in a way that they understand – which will inevitably mean having your marketing material translated into another language. It also needs to suit you; it has to retain the “feel” of your brand – which goes beyond having the same logo design.

Obviously there will be stylistic changes between languages. For example, French is a more 'romantic' language than English, while Japanese is undoubtedly more formal. Differences like this may be lost in translation, but a good translator will be able to take care of them.

Cultural differences aside, it's best for your business to have the style that is as similar as possible to the original document. If your company has an informal, jokey tone with its communication material, this should be retained wherever possible in the translation.

If you have standard phrases in documentation, these should also be consistent. So if you translate a phrase one way, to avoid confusing customers it should be translated the same way every time.

How do you achieve this, given that you have a number of translators that work on your material? One way is to make a list of terminology or jargon that's shared with each translator. This should also include combinations of the source and target language to keep things consistent: English to Japanese; Spanish to English; English to Spanish. Maintaining a terminology database for translating 'both ways' will be helpful; it will reduce errors as things are sent back and forth.

It may also be worth having lists that focus on different areas of your company – human resources, marketing, products and services might all have different lists. It's especially important that any information going outside the company – such as marketing – has its own translation guidelines as this is the face of your company. Update the list and make sure it's sent between different departments of the company to keep things consistent.

With all translation, it's important that you hire people who are adapt at the target language are best, as they are most up to date with subtleties of the language. Some phrases may be 'correctly' translated but sound odd to a native speaker, so it's worth keeping that in mind when hiring a translator.

It's also worth keeping in mind that choosing branding names for your marketing material can have unintentional double meanings for your brand. If your target market is Japan and you have named something that has a double meaning in English and Japanese, check that the meaning is positive and not offensive or embarrassing for your company. This can also apply to the look or style of the brand. For example, in Japanese, red writing is bad luck. Translating your brand means translating everything – from the written to the unspoken.