

~~Just Translate It?~~ ~~¿Apenas Tradúzcalo?~~

Just say ¿Tradúzcalo?

A White Paper for Marketing Professionals

Your new marketing campaign is so successful, you've decided to communicate to your Hispanic customers.

Great idea.

After all, Hispanic purchasing power in the U.S. has surged to nearly \$700 billion. That growth is nearly three times the overall national rate for the past decade, and will propel the aggregate disposable income of the nation's largest minority group to as much as \$1 trillion by 2010, according to a HispanTelligence® analysis of data recently released by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

So ... you contact your advertising agency and ask them to "translate" your campaign into Hispanic versions.

~~¡Error Grande!~~

¡Gran Error!

If you are using the wrong agency, chances are they'll turn to a Spanish speaker (or, worse, some software-based language robot) to "translate" the copy for your campaign. Presto, your Hispanic marketing campaign is ready to go. Oops! You broke Rule #1:

Messages intended for Hispanic consumers should be written in Spanish, not translated to Spanish from English

If you call a child fat, it is endearing. To be embarrassed and to be pregnant share the same root word. Depending on whether you are speaking to a Mexican or a Puerto Rican, *ahorita* means "immediately" or "a little later."

Translating your English message to Spanish is just plain *patas pa' arriba* (paws pointing upward) — bass backwards.

Clearly, there's more to understanding a culture than the Google Language Translator has to offer.

It's so tempting to just translate the English words to Spanish words. So easy. The roadside is littered with the bleached bones of many such translation disasters.

We often see "cultural cognates" that have no relevance in the Hispanic world. References to old songs, movies, American football. *I Love Lucy*. *Gangbusters*. *The Fonz*.

Another landmine frequently stepped on is the incorrect dialect for the audience. Many advertisers use words from one Hispanic culture when the target is another. Since *Cinco de Mayo* is a Mexican holiday, why use Puerto Rican or Cuban vocabulary?

Word choices matter, and accents matter every bit as much. Why choose voiceover talent with one Spanish accent (from, say, Chile) when the target audience uses another?



These are assaults on the Hispanic ear and send a clear message to your target audience: you just don't understand them. This may seem oh-so-subtle to some of us, but it's sledgehammer obvious to Hispanics.

Let's put it in an Anglo frame of reference: people from Boise wouldn't readily warm up to a Biloxi or Brooklyn accent selling them healthcare or banks or candidates for Congress. Those accents might be fine for listeners from Birmingham or Bensonhurst, but not from Billings or Bakersfield.

A side note on audience feedback: Mexicans are, by culture and tradition, very polite and accommodating. They will never tell you of your language mistakes, so as not to embarrass you. Even when directly asked, they will try to intuit the answer you want to hear. Net result? Your messages will fizzle; you'll never know why.

Another side note about media choices and planning. (It's probably worth a second White Paper, but here's a highlight.) Many of us Anglos do not, or cannot, listen to the radio at work, but we do read the newspaper. If you are a restaurant cook or a roofer, on the other hand, radio is a great companion. After a long day's labor, you're less likely to read the paper, especially if you're time-pressed and family-centered by culture. These aren't just different planning criteria – it can be topsy-turvy from our "typical" media mix. Moral: Don't bring Anglo assumptions to the media planning and buying process, either.

You need an Hispanic agency to communicate your brand and message to the Hispanic audience. Starting in Spanish gives your messaging the best chance to resonate with your target. (They're the ones with \$700 billion to spend, remember.)

Don't use a translator to rehab your message. Instead, get a team of account, creative and marketing people to create your marketing and brand messages. Communicate in a way that your target audience will not just understand, but connect with on an emotional level.

Your copywriters' first language should be Spanish. They must understand branding and write creative, culturally relevant copy in the most appropriate Spanish dialect.



Your account team, however, should include English speakers who read, write and speak fluent Spanish, who understand the Hispanic culture. It's your "bridge" to connect the dots: is our message what we intend? Is it consistent? Is it powerful?

In a world where a blonde is a güera in Mexico, a rubia in Cuba, a catira in Venezuela and a mona in Colombia, it pays to make the extra effort so your audience will be responding to your ad, not wincing at your errors.

These consumers are intensely brand-loyal, once you've won them over. Competitors will find you hard to dislodge – so it's vital you get off on the right foot.

Are you getting your share of that \$700 billion?