

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN **BAD** TRANSLATION HAPPENS TO **GOOD** COMPANIES?

Translation errors can quickly become bad news for global companies. They can damage brand image, alienate customers and even require costly rebranding campaigns. Here's proof that even major global brands aren't above the occasional translation mishap.



TRANSLATION MISSTEPS

SOFT DRINK MANUFACTURER

This multinational company entered the Chinese market trumpeting that their product **"brings you back to life!"** Unfortunately, the slogan was translated as their product **"brings your ancestors back from the dead."**

AN AIRLINE

The ads for this now-defunct business evoked luxury by encouraging travelers to **"fly in leather."** But this was translated as **"en cuero"** in Spanish, which sounds like **"en cueros,"** meaning **"naked."** It seemed like the airline was inviting customers to fly in the buff.

A MULTINATIONAL BANK

A UK-based bank expanded internationally with the slogan, **"Assume Nothing."** In many markets, this was translated as **"Do Nothing."** The bank had to spend \$10 million on a rebranding campaign.

A MAJOR BREWING COMPANY

This company's **"Turn it loose"** slogan may have evoked wild parties for American audiences, but the Spanish mistranslation of **"Get loose bowels"** was less appealing.

A CAR MANUFACTURER

In English-speaking markets, this company's **"MR2"** was a fine name for a sports car. But its translation into French, **"M-R-deux,"** sounded like a French expletive for many EU consumers.



ARTISTIC MISSTEPS

ANOTHER CAR MANUFACTURER

In China, a European car manufacturer transliterated its brand name to **"benshi,"** evoking the second half of its brand name. This means **"rush to die"** in Chinese. It later rebranded to **"benchi,"** which means **"to run quickly as if flying."**

A MULTINATIONAL APPAREL BRAND

This company's stylized fire design on the back of its athletic shoes prompted a costly recall because it resembled the word **"Allah"** in Arabic script.

AN INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE

This company created a **visually striking map** of its Asian destinations that resembled a Chinese calligraphic character. But since the character had no meaning, Chinese customers were baffled.



CULTURAL MISSTEPS

A TOOTHPASTE COMPANY

A toothpaste brand offended Asian consumers with the slogan, **"You'll wonder where the yellow went."** In some Asian regions, chewing certain nuts—which stains teeth—is considered a status symbol. To many consumers, the slogan seemed racist.

A MULTINATIONAL DELIVERY SERVICE

One reason an international courier service rebranded its name was to better appeal to Latin American customers. Its original name **conjured negative associations with Federales** local law enforcement or military forces.

A UK-BASED MOBILE COMPANY

A British mobile company drew criticism with a slogan that seemed to **align with an Irish Protestant organization.** This reference to **"orange"** was made during a time of tension between Irish Protestants and Catholics.

SURVIVAL TIP

Avoid costly localization mistakes by using only experienced translation vendors. Professional linguists fluent in your industry and target markets can craft accurate, relevant translations that delight global customers.



Sources: Forbes, Financial Times, Associated Press, CNN, Week in China, The Independent, Alex Simonson, Bernd H. Schmitt, *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity, and Image*, Michael White, *A Short Course in International Marketing Blunders*, Susan Westcott Alessandri, *Visual Identity: Promoting and Protecting the Public Face of an Organization*