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trends and other interesting things from around the world



It's estimated that there are around 6500 languages spoken on our little planet. Of these, the top three, Mandarin, Spanish and English account for over 60%. With such diversity it is hardly surprising that to 'simply' communicate is no simple matter.

Most of us have at sometime or other played Chinese whispers, although sometimes inadvertently. As a game the results can be incredibly funny, a bit off the wall or just complete nonsense. The initial meaning is typically lost and as we attempt to make sense of the deteriorating



Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The Tower of Babel. 1563.

message we re-order, re-phrase and alter the emphasis. Miscommunication is entertaining in a kids game but put in the context of human relations it can cause marital stress, one of my own personal issues is the inability to say 'couple of beers' instead of just 'going for a beer', a simple lapse but with disproportionate consequences. In the realm of International negotiations it has brought about the profession of diplomats. The skill of diplomacy which has often been cruelly defined as "the art of letting someone else have your way" - *Daniele Vare*. →

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Here's some I made earlier



The strength of most forms of communications is bizarrely, in their ability to play with nuance and the ambiguity that lies in all but the most legalese of meanings. This is then personalised to the individual based on their own points of reference and acts like a instantaneous translation system. A system which we cobble together from past experience or knowledge, personal bias and belief structures. Structure being a bit a strong for something with all the rigidity of soup.



Traditional recipe is reassuring

Towering example

The United Nations could potentially be regarded as a modern day tower of Babel, an organisation comprised of 192 nations with different and disparate cultures, a multitude of languages and a panoply of social and political systems. Yet, this is a tower of Babel that works.

UNO, although no relation to the UN is still a fairly diverse little union. This diversity can be a real strength when we're brainstorming on a design brief or in the creation of a new name for a product or brand as we are able to frame the context within our variety of cultures. The challenges of naming are generally contextual but that context can change when we drop it into a different cultural frame. We have to consider the meaning this will give to the consumer; how will they pronounce it; will it inform understanding of the product; will there be above-the-line communication to re-inforce the meaning and it's associations? With our IDP partners we are able to broaden this understanding by having our partners 'evaluate' a name or a product within their own cultural framework that also includes carrying out specific category trend analysis where we feel that the market may benefit from the application of these cross cultural insights.



What I meant to say was...

When we were discussing this article in the studio, there were numerous references to brands where the name had missed the mark, veering off to eventually sink into a horse's ass. One famous example was when Toyota launched their lovable little sportscar the MR2 into the French market without considering the phonetics. Or, rather they hadn't heard

"M R Deux" from the richly accented lips of an urbane Parisian when it sounds a lot like 'Merde'. With a quick turnabout and a few red faces it became simply the 'MR'. "They call it the MR because MR2 doesn't sound very nice in French," admits Toyota spokeswoman Allison Takahashi.

Although these translation bloopers are not the

sole property of car manufacturer's I thought I should highlight another more blatant example in the form of the Mitsubishi 'Pajero', a rugged four wheel drive that is marketed as the 'Montero' in Spanish speaking regions and the 'Shogun' in the UK. It was Mitsubishi's intention to reference the car to the South American Pampas cat called the 'gato pajero', unfortunately the first meaning to most

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Spanish speakers across the world has little to do with cats and even less to do with driving. The term is 'slang' for an activity that at best can only suggest that the car's power steering is so good that it leaves you one hand free, at worst adds weight to any insults you might get from other road users.

These examples highlight how difficult it can be for an International company to create a name



that has little or no alternate meaning that will erode or spontaneously implode when it lands on a foreign shore. The flipside of this is when a National or Regional product uses a foreign language to give some additional depth and flavour to a product. This may seem safe as the product is not designed to sell outside that country or culture, a criteria that at one time could have been applied to Heinz or even

to Coca Cola. These are now, however globe spanning companies and they have each tackled this challenge in different ways, with both routes having their merits. Coca Cola went for the phonetic translation of the name Coca Cola and attempted to create a word mark that was at least stylistically similar to the famous handwritten original. All the other brand elements were maintained to support

the revised wordmark and also to deliver consistency to the global brand. The phonetics of coke was defined as being more critical than the wordmark, it was also important that the phonetics didn't equate to anything derogatory or ridiculous. The current translation is either 'permit mouth to rejoice' or 'something palatable from which one derives pleasure'. Apparently it's incredibly rare to translate phonetically into Mandarin and have something that both relates to the product and gives it a positive spin. Prior to Coke doing the translation back in 1928, local shopkeepers in Shanghai were adopting their own translation, this is where the 'the bite the wax tadpole' and 'female horse fastened with wax' meanings came from.

Our UK partner (Jones Knowle Ritchie) worked with Heinz on their International branding strategy and delivered a completely different solution. JKR's proposal is a retail centred approach. They take the view that it is at the point of purchase that you need your brand to stand out from the crowd and that to compromise your identity for each market essentially weakens your brand, your point of difference and makes the competitors and the 'me too' products an easy 'why not' alternative. It is

obviously vital when considering foreign markets that you gather as much information as possible to prevent falling down any pitfalls, especially when they would be glaringly illuminated with a little local knowledge. The coke example also highlights the different options that are exclusively available to the big players, these options namely being tied to huge advertising and promotion budgets and the willingness to keep funding in the face of adversity. They also are able to fund vast amounts of local research to sidestep most of the local pitfalls. The ability to have people on the ground across the world that can perform market, product and cultural evaluation was one of the reasons we became a member of the IDP. This service is not new but typically it has been the preserve of all but the biggest players. The service we provide was tailored to meet the requirements of all businesses that have a need to roadtest their product before making a decision, essentially turning a leap of faith based on blind optimism into a positive step built on real insight.

Going global

Creating a beneficial service to our clients is obviously very important for us, revenue stream aside it also sets our 'brand' apart. For a number of our clients it also

allows them to consider becoming an International player without a great deal of the painful baggage that normally goes with it. The benefits to accessing a larger market are there for all to see and the fact that most Australian businesses have had to adapt to succeed in a huge country with a low but distinctly value conscious population means that a great many of our products are already leaner and better than their European or US counterparts. So if you have been pondering over whether the world is really your oyster but concerned that it may be a slightly dodgy one; or have a deep and non-military desire for global domination; or even feel the need to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony, without feeling like a bit of 'pajero', then perhaps it's time for you to give us a shout or maybe even a whisper.

This is our channel for airing opinions; a few of ours, our International Design Partnership friends and if you've got some, yours. Our aim is to start a few fires, kick a few tired ideas into shape and stir up a healthy debate on what we see around us.

If you want to join in the debate or introduce a friend to the channel then you can mail us at the newsdesk@uno.net.au



IDP SMART CHECK™ and IDP SMART AUDIT™:

UNO provides as a founding member of the IDP (International Design Partnership) a global or specific regional market/product check and the more in-depth audit. Should you be considering taking the leap to International stardom then please give Barry a call and he'll gladly give you more details on both of these services.



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