

International Trade

Communicating Locally when Marketing Globally

The Very Real Local Differences in Marketing Pharma Products around the World

Gary Muddyman, CEO and Managing Director of Conversis and member of the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA), discusses the importance of cultural customisation for foreign language communication and marketing materials in the global pharmaceutical industry.

The global pharmaceutical industry is currently worth in excess of \$550 billion. As the population grows, ages and is faced with more disease, there will be a substantial increase in the demand for pharmaceutical products. By 2020, PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that the global pharmaceutical market will be worth \$1.3 trillion. In order to successfully take advantage of future growth opportunities in foreign markets, pharmaceutical companies must ensure that all communication materials are culturally customised. Failure to do so could result in unsuccessful product launches.

Challenges Faced in Global Marketing

When marketing globally, pharmaceutical companies face both language and cultural differences. These are issues which must not be ignored. To comply with international rules and regulations, all product-related collateral must be accurately translated and culturally customised across a range of languages and cultures. Pressure to increase turnover means that the manner in which a pharmaceutical company communicates to its target audience is the key to its success.

A major challenge that pharmaceutical companies face when marketing globally is reaching and capturing the attention of an ever-expanding and sophisticated audience. Marketing collateral is designed to attract a customer, raise their interest, convince them that they would like your product and steer them towards taking an action, such as purchase or prescribe. This in itself is a challenge, but one which is significantly increased when creating documentation in multiple languages.

For pharmaceutical companies it is perhaps even more challenging than for most other industries, since the target audience may change in every country – even countries that speak the same language. For example, a prescription-only medicine cannot be marketed to the general public in the UK, so the target market there may be general practitioners, and perhaps practice nurses, depending on the drug. In Australia, it is also illegal to market prescription-only medicine to the public, so the target market is doctors, but unlike the UK, registered nurses are not able to prescribe the drug. The same drug can be marketed directly to the consumer in the United States, as well as to doctors. So, we have three English-speaking countries but three very different audiences that, by their very nature, require distinct messaging.

All pharmaceutical marketing materials must be presented to the target audience in a way that demonstrates a clear understanding of the market in which the product is to be sold. All legal and regulatory requirements specific to the target country must be adhered to – and they vary widely from country to country - as any mistakes can prove very costly and damaging to the brand.

Localisation of marketing materials goes beyond translation. Localisation includes cultural customisation which not only requires an excellent understanding of the target country's culture, from language to religion, but also their customs, local laws and regulations, and in pharma, an understanding of how the healthcare system operates.

Cultural Complexities

Cultural differences in foreign markets span from the use of colour and images, to religion and social behaviour such as how you should greet and address someone, conduct business and even on what side of a car the steering wheel should be. When planning marketing activities in foreign markets, it is vital that companies have a full understanding of each target market's culture.

The way healthcare and drug pricing systems operate in different countries must be factored into every global pharmaceutical product launch. A country's national healthcare system directly affects the way medicines are prescribed, bought and paid for. How 'self-medicating' is the market in which you are launching? How easy is it for your target to access a doctor or GP? What kind of relationship does the end-user have with the medical profession? Who pays for the prescription?

In the UK, the NHS sets a basic prescription fee of £7.10. That means, for the average consumer, regardless of what medicine is prescribed to them, it will cost the same amount. Marketing materials targeting doctors therefore are unlikely to include messages about pricing or value. In Australia however, the national Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme does subsidise certain medicines, but the cost of filling a prescription varies widely, depending on the drug. For doctors prescribing to less well-off patients, the end cost to the patient is often a consideration. Marketing messages to doctors in Australia therefore may include some price and value messaging.

And these are not the only considerations. Words, phrases, colours and symbols can have very different meanings in different countries. To gain the trust of your audience, it is imperative to understand these before developing marketing collateral.

It can be difficult to identify cultural differences in foreign markets. What is acceptable in one country may not be in another. For example, in China, the colour red symbolizes good luck but white, blue and black represent death; as do clocks, storks and cranes. Pharmaceutical companies should therefore avoid any use of these colours and images on any marketing communications designed for the Chinese market.

In India, the head is regarded as being the seat of the soul and to pat a child's head may be frowned upon. Any promotional materials aimed at the Indian market should avoid such an image. In Western society, however, this is not an issue.

In the Czech Republic, it is not acceptable to use someone's first name without being invited to do so as this

is considered insulting. Czechs are rarely on a first-name basis with people outside their extended family or very close friends. In Germany, titles and surnames are still most commonly used and in India, professional titles should always be used. Companies should bear this in mind when implementing direct marketing initiatives.

A Selection of Localisation Tips

Seventeen official languages are spoken in India. English and Hindi are the main languages and English is widely used in business communications. When targeting an Indian audience, care should be taken to ensure that the correct language is used for the target region.

In Libya, as in all Islamic countries, avoid sending any marketing communications during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. There is very little business conducted during this time and many companies are closed for the religious observance.

When communicating in Brazil, pharmaceutical companies must be fully aware of the differences between European and Brazilian Portuguese. Differences include spelling and the use of verb tenses and terminology. Brazilian Portuguese must be used in all marketing communications aimed at a Brazilian audience; otherwise the consumer will know that the communication is not specifically targeted at them. The use of Brazilian Portuguese on communications aimed at a Portuguese audience would also be unacceptable and could insult the target audience.

The same can be said for Spanish, a language spoken by approximately 400 million people worldwide. Spanish has many regional variations, some of which differ significantly. If a pharmaceutical company translates a marketing brochure aimed at the Madrid market into Mexican Spanish, it will not go down well. Using the wrong Spanish and Portuguese in the wrong market will certainly affect the success of any marketing campaign.

Nowhere in the world are high-quality translations more appreciated than in France. Pharmaceutical companies must take great care when marketing to the French as mistakes that may be shrugged off in other cultures will certainly not be ignored in France. An unprofessional translation can literally translate to international business failure.

Care should be taken in selecting the relevant communication channels. For example, the Chinese will not build relationships via email and tend not to react to direct mail. The best way of promoting a pharmaceutical product is by attending industry related events. In Mexico, face-to-face meetings are preferred over telephone, letters or email. Negotiations and decisions take a long time and deadlines are seen as flexible and fluid so do not expect immediate results.

In terms of design and layout guidelines, some languages such as French, Italian, German and Spanish require either more or longer words than English to convey the same message. An excess space requirement is to be expected for English to French, Italian, German and Spanish translations and pharmaceutical companies should plan for the discrepancy in the early stages. By planning early on, the need to create an entirely new design for each market will not be necessary thus avoiding any additional creative costs.

Global Marketing Opportunities

Developing countries provide opportunities for pharma companies but are not without their challenges. It is becoming increasingly common, for example, for pharmaceutical companies to outsource clinical research to developing countries such as India as costs are considerably reduced. Conducting clinical trials in India can cost half as much as conducting a trial in the US. There are also many potential patients with varied diseases who will gladly participate in clinical trials in order to gain access to free medical treatment.

This provides pharmaceutical companies with the opportunity of a cost effective option in patient recruitment. The initial marketing of clinical trials must be customised to meet the needs of the target country. All cultural nuances and local sensitivities must be taken into account when producing such material.

China is also becoming an attractive market to enter particularly in light of its growing consumerism. With a population of 1.3 billion comprising 23 percent of the global population, China's buying power is second only to that of the US. There are, however, many challenges faced in penetrating the Chinese market including the complex translation into Chinese. Chinese uses double byte characters rather than the more common single byte. Its many languages further complicate the creation and cultural customisation of marketing materials.

Conclusion

As competition intensifies and pharmaceutical companies compete for a share in a global market, communicating across cultures will continue to be extremely challenging. There will always be different rules and regulations to comply with as well as cultural and linguistic barriers to overcome. The audience will also vary wildly from nation to nation, at times requiring companies to develop different messaging and marketing material for each market. Sales and distribution channels will also differ across different countries. Information and the manner in which it is distributed must be accurate at all times.

In order to combat these challenges, pharmaceutical companies must thoroughly research all locale-specific requirements of the countries in which their communication materials are to be distributed. It may be wise to consult with language services and localisation experts when first embarking on a global marketing campaign. A full directory of providers can be found at the non-profit, international Globalization and Localization Association's website (<http://www.gala-global.org>), where you also can find a knowledge centre with articles, case studies and white papers.