Lost in Translation: The Role of Creative Design in Marketing Projects

Marketing translation projects involve translations used for marketing purposes, such as advertisements, brochures, catalogs, pamphlets, etc.

From a translator’s perspective, readability is probably the foremost consideration when dealing with a marketing translation project. The translator’s task is to break through linguistic barriers in order to make things easy for the reader. Consistency in terminology, date formats, spacing, product names, punctuation, and measurement conversion are also very important.

Overall appearance is an equally important concern from the standpoint of the end user. How something looks may well determine whether or not someone reads it. Design and layout are vital to make a project visually appealing.

In the translation process, however, design issues are often overlooked. Here are some examples. Take a close look at Graphic 1 before reading further.

When you picked up your program at the 43rd ATA Annual Conference in Atlanta, did you happen to notice two distinct font sizes, three lines, and two colors in the conference program title (Forty-Third Annual Conference)? If not, you are in good company. When I showed this graphic to those attending my ATA conference presentation, the majority had overlooked these design ideas.

Such oversight is common and occurs all too often. You may think this is a trivial matter. Clients, however, may see things quite differently. For their own reasons, they consider such intentional design features to be important. This is where the creative design effort kicks into the translation process.

When the title from the ATA conference program was localized into traditional Chinese, we came up with four different options, illustrated in Graphic 2. Although all are acceptable, which one do you feel would be most appealing to a Chinese audience? Here, the translator can play an important role. He or she can assist in making an aesthetic judgment based on familiarity with and knowledge of Chinese culture.

You may wonder: Is this a design or translation issue? The answer is both. We need translators to help us get messages across and desktop publishing experts to put ideas in motion. Such collaboration is the essence of the creative design process in translation.

Graphic 3 offers another example. Again, examine the following carefully before reading on. Did you notice the use of the unusual font in the program title (44th Annual Conference)—the serrated A and tumbleweed O? Even though they were included to convey a distinctive Southwestern flavor, most of those attending my conference session had not noticed this feature until I pointed it out to them. Some dismiss the importance of these...
design elements, but the client may expect these nuances to be translated. Translating these artistic fonts into Chinese is a challenge. Here again, the translator can play a role, assisting, for example, in font selection.

Graphic 4 shows some Chinese decorative fonts which attempt to convey the Southwestern motif in the original design. Taking things one step further, we can even create certain graphic effects. This opens the door to a world of possibilities limited only by one’s imagination. The first line in Graphic 5 is unelaborated traditional Chinese. The second has been embellished and is bound to attract attention.

The point is simple. Although additional time, expense, and resources are required, it is all well worth the effort because the overall appearance of the text has become more appealing.

Although adding design effects will enhance the quality of marketing projects, it is still necessary to give careful attention to other steps in the translation process. For example, it is important to perform a post-graphics check before submitting the final product to the client. Elements you need to verify include: font type and size, spacing, line breaks, punctuation, and numeration. It is highly recommended that you have the client review translations for unseen problems. Doing a post-delivery color or digital proof is also advisable. Ask the client’s printer to submit a pre-publication copy, which should be reviewed for blown-out characters, double printing (duplication), cut-off text, and incorrectly processed colors.

This article has attempted to demonstrate that effective cooperation among translators, project managers, and desktop publishing specialists is key to the success of marketing translation projects. When each of these parties has a thorough understanding of the creative design process, they are better equipped to assist with the overall production.

A successful marketing project should not only follow routine procedures, it should strive to go beyond them. A “good-enough” approach leads to mediocre results. Client and user satisfaction require careful attention to detail and quality assurance. Design elements can contribute significantly to a project’s appeal.

---

**ATA Members**

Be sure to take advantage of your benefits of membership

**Credit Card Acceptance Program/Professional Services Account**

NOVA Information Systems
Reference Code: HCDA
888.545.2207 • 770.649-5700

---

**University of Arizona**

**National Center for Interpretation**

**Interpretation Seminars**

**TUCSON, ARIZONA**

Covering intensive skill development in all three modes of interpretation and topics that include ethics and protocol, legal procedure, medical interpretation, test-taking strategies, and vocabulary development.

- FCICE Exam Prep Seminars (April-June, 2004)
- Agnese Haury Institute (July 12-30)

For full details, go to the University of Arizona website at nci.arizona.edu.