



Creating Compelling Multilingual Packaging: A Manufacturer's Challenge

Very often, global and domestic customers want different things from the same products. Marketing to these unique segments is never universal and requires localization strategies that address each customer's cultural values, attitudes, and buying behaviors.

For example, when shopping for something as commonplace as fruit juice or bottled water, it all comes down to a critical five to ten seconds, when it is just your product and your targeted customer face-to-face. The drum roll sounds as your global marketing efforts pay off and the customer buys your product, or they decide on your competitor's product.

There are new markets born every day for both consumer and business products. Population shifts and cultural changes challenge marketing professionals to make intelligent and nimble adjustments to their product's pricing, positioning, and promotion. For example, minority communities in Southern California now demand non-English language support and labeling at local stores. European markets require that anything classified as a medical device must be labeled in every recognized language of the member countries. These are real world examples of how product localization is an immediate reality for global companies.

In the race to meet these needs and maintain market leadership, companies are making timely adjustments to a key element that accounts for 10 percent of every consumer purchase. Indeed, we are talking about the actual container in which the product is offered for sale, and on which information is communicated—the packaging.

Packaging is essential to the manufacturer, retailer, and ultimate consumer—even for something as ordinary as bananas! Addressing the language and labeling needs of multilingual consumers is a challenge that requires a baseline knowledge of localization's best practices. With just a little understanding, it is possible to create compelling multilingual packaging that demonstrates the strength of your global brand.

Multilingual packaging has not received the attention and early incorporation into product life cycles it deserves. Due mostly to the small word counts for translation, there has been limited planning for this frontline element. As a result, marginal packaging efforts with overcrowded designs litter storefronts, negating the billions invested in global marketing.

Multilingual packaging development is a complicated process that includes many contributors and extensive workflows. The packaging must be designed, translated, culturally adapted, approved, printed, and ultimately prepared for packaging with the physical products. Because of the many steps and stakeholders involved, there is enormous potential for errors and issues with time-to-market. Managing multilingual packaging can be very challenging due to production cycles that fail to consider the time and effort required to incorporate new languages and cultures into products. It is impossible to compile a definitive list of do's and don'ts for multilingual packaging in every unique locale and target market in the world, but understanding how localization relates to packaging is a start to controlling costs, quality, and ultimately time-to-market.

Packaging designers must be involved early in the process, creating layouts that are ready for localization. They need to remain sensitive to cultural differences and address any ethnocentric attributes that compromise cultural customization. These early preparations minimize packaging rework and maximize the product's true market potential.

Most products do not have a large surface area to host an army of complicated graphics and marketing copy. There are functional instructions, legal disclaimers, logistical elements, marketing copy, and branding to display. It is helpful to communicate early with your marketing and legal departments, as well as distributors, when planning the layout of your packaging. For example, if the creative writer knows that the copy will be translated into a dozen languages, he/she can use concise language in the source to alleviate text expansion resulting from translation.

Using Style Guides

Stylistic consistency relates to multilingual packaging in the same way as branding does to marketing. A carefully documented style and layout specification reduces localization costs by reducing revisions. Adherence to style guides expedites localization because if any part of the effort is outsourced, a localization team will have the collective history of a product's packaging. Without this background information, the direction of a brand may be compromised by linguists and multilingual desktop publishers. To be effective, these documents must be updated regularly to include all changes made during the creation of additional products and versions.

Glossary Management

Multilingual glossaries are another quality practice that supports the localization process by standardizing terms in your content. Some companies have become so good at standardizing terminology that we use their product names in our day-to-day vocabulary. Think about this next time you are purchasing "Kleenex," "Whiteout," or a "Post-it Note." When we are buying generic facial tissue, correction fluid, or sticky notes, we identify the items by commonly used brand names created by Johnson & Johnson, the Bic Corporation, and 3M.

Terminology management is critical in multilingual packaging where consistency is needed to clearly explain a concept or a product. A classic example of how consistency affects comprehension relates to Hewlett Packard's User Guides. In one version of the User Guide, screen captures used the term "printer preferences" while help content screen captures used the term "printer options," causing confusion for the end-user. Glossaries should be treated as business intelligence with a documented process in place to ensure all vendors and reviewers have the most up-to-date versions.

Translation of Packaging Copy

The language you use in all marketing communications, and especially packaging, should reflect each target locale's unique cultural expressions and values. Translating marketing messages for international campaigns often leads to ineffective copy, as words expressing people's values cannot be easily conveyed. Simple word-for-word conversions are not sufficient. Linguistic subtleties make copy difficult to translate without extensive creative writing and cultural analysis. A branded slogan that has conquered domestic markets rarely transliterates to another language with the same power and precision.

To ensure effective and high quality multilingual packaging, use experienced linguistic experts who understand how to write marketing and packaging copy in each of their languages. In trying to save on linguistic costs, companies commonly make the mistake of using in-house bilingual resources as translators, resulting in a disparate branding message.

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Text Expansion

With a limited amount of real estate, packaging designed without considering text expansion is difficult to localize. For example, Italian or German text typically requires approximately 25 to 35 percent more physical space than the English source. We recommend that products targeted for international markets budget approximately 35 percent more space in initial designs and templates to accommodate expansion.

Products with extensive usage information and legal copy can preserve valuable branding real estate by expanding packaging into inserts. This is common for medical device companies seeking to sell products in the European Union, where they are required to provide labeling and product information into over 20 different languages per the Medical Device Directive.

Multilingual Desktop Publishing

Packaging is a graphical element. Graphics pose additional challenges for the localization process that can be costly and time consuming. For example, if the source files contain problematic graphics, the time and cost needed multiply by the number of targeted locales. The obvious solution is to optimize graphics before localization begins.

To prepare your graphics for success, you should separate graphic localization challenges into two categories: technical and cultural. Each category requires separate expert resources; however, a basic understanding of graphic preparation can help you reduce your localization costs and time-to-market substantially.

Cultural Challenges

Successful packaging localization involves cultural research since pictures, icons, and other non-verbal elements may look different to people from different cultures. What looks familiar to one person may be unrecognizable to someone else. Certain images may evoke unexpected reactions in another culture. They may be thought to bring bad luck, be considered vulgar, or symbolize unrelated ideas. Colors and even the number of objects in a group may have meanings that obscure or contradict the message the packaging is trying to convey.

The best solution is to have graphic designers from the target culture review source packaging. If this is not practical, then it is best to stay with simple layouts and depictions of everyday objects that are used in the same form worldwide.

Potentially risky graphics

When designing your graphics, here are some examples of things to avoid:

- Human body elements and body language
- Humor, puns, and slang
- Ethnic, racial, political, and religious environments
- Images of animals
- Sexual and violent elements
- Regional conventions, such as reading direction, date/time, and monetary elements

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In-Country or Target Market Review

All quality localization projects should incorporate a review step by a representative from the target market. The local subsidiaries and distributors should verify that the localized packaging contains accurate country-specific product terminology and meets all cultural conventions for their country or region. Ideally, the in-country reviewer should be involved early in the project, especially during the glossary development stage, so their preferred terminology and product knowledge can be incorporated.

Outsourcing Packaging Localization

To overcome ever-changing language challenges, select a translation and localization vendor who specializes in labeling and packaging localization. This ensures that translations are accurate, consistent, and technically correct.

When working with vendors, establish a clear understanding of critical objectives and timelines with the localization project manager. This person is the main point of communication between you and the assembled team of linguistic and technology resources. The more you communicate with your translation and localization team, the less likely you are to experience a surprise with your global strategy.

Conclusion

Creating compelling multilingual packaging is an ongoing challenge for manufacturers with long-term global and multi-cultural objectives. Competition makes it too easy for your audience to turn to another source that accommodates their unique wants and needs. Once upon a time, companies were able to produce products in one language, as long as that product was in demand, but language is no longer the problem of the consumer. Language is now an urgent challenge for the manufacturer.

ENLASO's Localization and Translation Solutions

For more information on how ENLASO can assist you with all of your localization needs, please contact us at marketing@enlaso.com, call (720) 259-8488, or go to www.enlaso.com.

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