

Marketing Rule #3: You Said what?

Over the last couple years you've probably encountered a strange phenomenon that has made the rounds on the Internet. It is a series of non-related, yet bizarrely-tied together occurrences hallmarked by mistranslations of slogans and corporate "brand statements". One is a Spanish mistranslation from a T-shirt maker that read "I saw the potato", instead of the well-intended phrase: "I saw the Pope". Another was the Chinese mistranslation of the KFC slogan "Finger Lickin' Good" as "Eat Your Fingers Off". Finally, there was the GM release of the Chevy Nova...which in Spanish means "doesn't go".

The more you read about this seemingly of viral collusion of oddities, the more you think: there must be a hoax going on. And in reality a number of the brand errors and "miscommunications" are indeed fake "PR generators" or otherwise poorly constructed entries soliciting buzz. Some of it is generated in a vain effort to create blogging or twittering chatter. Some of it is honest error on the marketing side. But all of it (even the fake stuff) is noteworthy in that it is a kind of the pulse about is lacking in brand communication these days.

As you consider your own company brand identity, what sort of questions about your communication do you ask on a regular basis? What I mean to say is, *do you think about your brand in any significant way?* And if so, do you think about all of the ramifications of how you communicate that brand to your potential customers?

With the accessibility of information floating around the Internet today there are several important principles you should follow to ensure that you don't send the wrong message to your customers and somehow tell people something you prefer not to.

Some key principles to marketing rule number three: "Say what you mean...and mean what you say"

1. What do you look like online? You may be thinking: "Well, like nothing. Why would there be anything about me online?" The fact of the matter is that if you own a business and any kind of website, you have an "image" online. And, the great part is that if you are lucky, and good, you can contribute to a largely positive image. And, if you have a positive image, you'll communicate your brand better. Just imagine if someone was blogging a rant about you or you popped up on RipOffReport.com? Based on the page rank of these types of online streams, you could face severe penalties for a bad rep. You'd lose business before you had a chance to get it.

And that goes for offline routes too. As the Cheshire cat said, "Say what you mean and mean what you say." Make sure you take care of the things you (and your company) say...because someone, more likely than not, is out there waiting for you to trip up so they can write about you negatively.

If you discover an issue with your credibility, there are good PR firms, marketing consultants and even websites who specialize in rebuilding your presence online. But do something to correct that image.

Another thing to think about? If your consultant or staff isn't keeping an eye on your outward appearance, you need to consider hiring someone who is.

2. How consistent is your collateral? There are many great ideas. But it doesn't mean you need to do them all. Additionally, whatever ideas you do come up with and execute, make sure that they are even and consistent in their presentation. The pieces need to be integrated; look and feel like they carry the same messaging. If your print, online and other messaging doesn't carry the same "look", "feel", "sound" and even "taste" you'll be less likely to be trusted and there will be more room for miscommunication...and greater indecision on your customer's part.

3. Mean what you say and stick by it. Don't promise something only to shirk your accountability to it later. I've seen many times where inconsistency rules only to have the company complain that revenues are down, or they can't seem to figure out why their marketing programs aren't working as well as they'd like. If you promise to deliver some certain item, then deliver it...always...every time. No questions.

It's kind of humorous to see large companies or smaller organizations miscommunicate what they mean via translation goofs or plain, straight forward mistakes. But upon a closer look it turns out things are never funny when poor results come from that miscalculation. How closely you watch you're messaging and interpretations of your messages are critical to your marketing success.