

Case Study: Is the new brand name offensive somewhere?

The client:

*Inspired ideas that simply sell.* That's the tag line of Yamamoto Moss Mackenzie, a Minneapolis-based ad agency that rebranded as just *Yamamoto* in 2012. They have a reputation for custom-crafted, highly creative work.

Does that word mean anything in Swahili?

Yamamoto came to Tembua for help evaluating a new brand name created for a client. Because the name was a nonsense word with no meaning in English, they were concerned that they may have accidentally stumbled on a foreign word that some people found offensive.

Who's going to see that name?

Tembua approached this interesting assignment by first asking for the geographic regions where the new brand name would be promoted and assigning a language to each. For foreign countries both the primary and secondary languages were used. For regions of the United States, we pulled language usage data from the US Census Bureau and chose the top languages for each.

How do we find out?

Tembua's project manager created a simple questionnaire that asked if the new brand name meant anything in one's language; if the sound of the name had any connotations--negative or positive; if the name was similar to another product in a different category or a geographic designation; if that name sounded like any offensive terms.

The questionnaire was sent to 5 native speakers of each of the languages identified. The names were chosen from Tembua's extensive list of translators, interpreters, writers, editors and subject matter experts around the world. They were asked to report first impressions and then write a sentence or two about the brand name.

Report to the client

Yamamoto received from Tembua a complete report on any meaning, possible offensive connotation and other impression of the brand name in each of the languages surveyed. For example, one person reported it sounded like a calm body of water in his language.

Yamamoto's client was pleased with the results and went ahead to use the brand name and related collateral with confidence.

Not a marketing firm

Marketing is very specific to the culture in which it will be used. Tembua, therefore, does not translate pure marketing texts which should be written by marketers in the usage area. However, packaging, instructions for use, documentation and other similar texts are handled here on a daily basis.

Yamamoto is one example of how Tembua uses its expertise to assist clients all along the linguistic value chain!