

Global Markets in Your Own Backyard



BY ELISABETE MIRANDA
TRANSLATION PLUS, INC.

WE HEAR IT ALL THE TIME. “THE world is getting smaller every day. Boundaries are disappearing. Sell your products overseas.” But are there global opportunities closer to home? Of course there are—right here in your own backyard.

Multicultural opportunities abound in America’s tight-knit immigrant communities, especially with first generation immigrants. Cape Verdeans. Hispanics. Asians. Haitians. Brazilians. It doesn’t matter if you are an English-speaking business or a Spanish business. With the right marketing tools, you can increase your target markets. Ask yourself the following questions. Who lives near your place of business? Who are your potential customers?

Stop and listen to the buzz of everyday living in a local immigrant community. You’ll hear Portuguese, Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese, or any one of a multitude of global languages. Each dialect represents a group of people adapting to life in America—never an easy task. And there’s a lot of pressure to fit in. Economic rewards. Consumer goods. Peer pressure. There are a number of reasons why people want to fit in. But one of the most basic is this: It’s awkward to be different. One of the times people feel most different is when they communicate: when they speak, or when they read and write.

The Language of Success

Watch what happens when you speak and write in someone’s native language. You put people at ease, break the ice, and establish instant rapport. Apply this to a business setting, and you’ll open up many new opportunities. Addressing customers in their native language is a great way to build up a loyal customer base. It makes people feel comfortable and secure. It’s also a clear sign of respect, and respect is the foundation for a long, healthy relationship. In a business context, the competitive advantage becomes tremendous. You set yourself apart by making your business transactions personal and friendly.

There are many ways to make a product or service appealing to different cultures. One way to reach out to the Spanish-speaking or any other minority community is to customize your marketing materials and instructions by translating them into different languages. You can also make your advertising resonate by incorporating elements that are easily identified by other cultures.

If you are a Hispanic business offering non-ethnic products or services, keep in mind that having only signs in Spanish or targeting your advertising to Spanish media only will limit your audience and therefore your market size. Want to know more about your local minority communities? Do your homework; nothing fancy, just some simple demographic research. One of the best resources is the U.S. Census Web site. There you can find very interesting information. Here’s a teaser: do you know that more than one-quarter of the population in seven states speaks a language other than English at home? In New Jersey alone,

the percentage is 25.5 percent and in New York it’s 28 percent.

Which languages do they speak? In the Northeast region 4.5 million speak Spanish, 3.8 million speak other Indo-European languages, 6.9 million speak Asian and Pacific Island languages and 1.9 million speak other languages. So, what do you do now? Identify the components of your marketplace. Then follow some basic rules of multicultural marketing, such as: offering culturally relevant products, addressing customers in their native language, or publishing marketing collateral that reflects their culture.

Here’s a true story about a Korean owner of a small produce store. With a large Hispanic population in the neighborhood, it’s quite interesting seeing several signs in Spanish. Now, the big surprise is when you walk in his door and hear the Korean proprietor speaking Spanish. Ask him why he does it and he’ll tell you it’s good for business. A majority of his customers speak limited English, and they love doing business with the Korean fellow who speaks Spanish. He makes them feel good. And you don’t have to be multi-lingual to gain this competitive edge.

You may not speak the language, but that doesn’t stop you from learning new cultural traditions so as to develop immigrant friendly product lines, store displays, or marketing promotions. Be creative. Making money this way can be very rewarding ... just ask our Spanish speaking Korean friend the next time you’re in his produce store. ■

Elisabete Miranda is president of Translation Plus (www.translationplus.com), a full service language company offering multicultural consulting services.