

**An International Communication by
Design, Inc. (ICD) Case Study**



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ICD Case Study: Label and Marketing Collateral Translation for the Japanese Market

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Introduction

This case study describes specific challenges of translating and localizing marketing literature and labels for products exported to Japan. Conclusions that ICD drew from this experience and recommendations are also provided.

Project background

ABC Company needed to create labels for its line of health care products in order to market its products to consumers and businesses in Japan.

The overall marketing campaign for the product also involved development of marketing literature.

For ABC Company, the challenge was to translate all labeling and marketing materials so that they would satisfy the needs of Japanese customers and conform to all in-country regulatory requirements.

Implementation

Often, a translation project from English into another project involves creating a mirror image of the English information products in the target language.

But for the ABC Company labeling and marketing collateral projects, the client wanted to take special steps to ensure that Japanese consumers could identify with the product, that cultural differences were addressed, and that all Japanese regulatory requirements were met.

In translating and localizing the materials, ABC Company learned that product labels were subject to specific regulatory requirements different from requirements in the United States.

The translation phase

Prior to translation, ABC Company conducted an extensive internal review of their content and ensured that the English text was fully approved.

Because ABC Company needed to ensure that its labels met all of the health safety and warning needs of consumers in Japan, they chose to have their Japanese office conduct the translation.

For this project, both the labels and the marketing materials were translated, taking into account best practices for writing for translation. (See the article [“Creating Translation Ready Marketing Documents”](#) on the [ICD web site](#) for more information.) Some localization of the content was also performed for the market in Japan.

Desktop publishing and review

After translation, ABC Company determined that the layout of the Japanese materials did not match the English layout. So they provided ICD with both the Japanese source document and the original English source file to perform the desktop publishing of the materials.

At ICD, desktop publishing was done to align the Japanese copy and to map the content and all elements to the English layouts.

Once ICD completed the desktop publishing, ABC delivered the materials to their representative in the Japan office for review and also conducted a thorough copy review in the United States. During this review, English-speaking reviewers compared the English content against the Japanese content to ensure that ABC’s branding standards had been met.

As part of the review, English reviewers were looking for trademark registration, signature lines of office locations, and proper branding elements to ensure that the Japanese labels retained the “look and feel” of the ABC Company image.

At the same time, the ABC international department’s native Japanese speakers reviewed the translated and desktop published materials, looking for any issues with layout, such as whether characters had dropped off during the desktop publishing phase. Japanese speakers also looked at the content of the messages to ensure that the meaning had not been changed and that key elements were present.

After the copy review process was complete, ICD was given final changes and incorporated them into the materials. The final step in the process was then for ICD to provide source files back to the ABC Company’s Marketing Services Department, who sent the materials to print.

Tailoring the labels

During the translation phase, representatives in Japan determined that some of the legal statements on the English labels did not meet Japanese regulatory requirements.

To address this issue, they worked with in-country legal representatives to ensure that all required new text was added and that some existing English text was replaced. In fact, those portions of the labels that dealt with regulatory requirements were written by native Japanese speaking attorneys in country.

Tailoring the marketing materials

While the English marketing collateral used U.S. models, ABC Company decided to hold a separate photo shoot

using Japanese models to better focus on their target market. Once the text had been translated into Japanese, these new photos were dropped into the marketing materials to be distributed in Japan. A special color palette was also used for the Japanese versions of the marketing collateral.

Because the product labels were being prepared concurrently, ABC was able to schedule the photo shoot even before the labels were translated by posing models with empty product containers. It was then possible to use photo editing software to replace images of the empty products with product images that bore the new Japanese labels.

For the photo shoot, ABC also performed research into the types of uniforms worn in the medical field in Japan. Although the photo shoot took place in the U.S., ABC chose specific industrial uniforms, and nursing and doctor attire for its models to wear in order to ensure authenticity.

Lessons learned

Check in-country regulations first

- Check your English content first with in-country attorneys or regulators for any in-country regulations that might affect the text when it is translated.
- Consider whether it is more cost effective to write portions of the content in the native language, rather than to translate the English text into the target language.

Consider time zone differences

- Keep in mind your timelines in both locations. Your contacts in the target market location can work different activities in the same project plan, but timelines for each area may differ.

- Use good project planning and management techniques.
- Consider the effect that time zone differences and different holidays will have on your project and expect normal communication delays.
- Factor differences into your scheduling.

Understand local preferences

- Know that when you localize, your target audience may have specific preferences for colors and images of people and objects.
- Determine the preferred color palette for your target location and choose appropriate graphic images, being culturally aware of local customs.
- Work with knowledgeable representatives in country who know their market best and are familiar with local customs will help you to think globally, but act locally.

Want to know more?

For more information on translating and localizing marketing material and ways you can improve your translation and source quality, contact International Communication by Design, Inc. at info@icdtranslation.com.

When you need complete globalization services, trust ICD for on-time and accurate language translation services.