

## **Global Language Solutions Offers Tips for Communicating Across Cultures**

All communication is cultural – it draws on ways we have learned to speak and give nonverbal messages. Analysts and scholars attach technical terms to these characteristics and beliefs that can be confusing, such as whether or not a culture is high or low context and individualist or collectivist. These specialized topics are best addressed by intercultural communications experts. However, for those looking for a basic overview, Global Language Solutions offers a few tips for communicating with a linguistically and culturally diverse audience:

- 1. Cultural appreciation.** Cultural differences need to be taken seriously. Be mindful of how different cultures behave in business with greetings, business card exchange, and personal space. In some countries, business people expect to do business on the same level, i.e. CEO to CEO. In addition, read up on the cultural norms of the host country you are working in, or, if you have a high number of multicultural patients, clients, or customers, take the time to understand what their communication expectations may be. For example, to many Hispanics and Asians, respect, especially for elders, is extremely important. Therefore, avoid using first names, but rather Mr., Mrs., Sir, or Ma'am unless invited to use familiar names. Appealing to the entire family and recognizing the importance given to elders will go far with these audiences.
- 2. Intercultural research is an overall approach to understanding cultures; not an absolute.** Just because a specific culture is labeled by intercultural communications theorists as “collective” or “low context,” does not mean that every person from that culture will demonstrate those tendencies. Therefore, although these norms are a guideline, they should not be regarded as absolutes.
- 4. Translating your branded marketing messages is not always possible.** When translating your marketing materials, understand that some words are so culturally significant that they cannot be translated. A slogan or phrase that works in English may not have the same meaning, impact, or relevance in another language. To ensure the effectiveness of your messages, it is crucial that translations are completed not only by translation experts in your target language, but also someone who understands your industry AND the target culture. **Tip:** Avoid using colloquial expressions that may be untranslatable. For example, a seemingly common American English expression, “what’s up,” could elicit a response, “up where?” if translated literally from English into other languages.
- 5. Develop materials that are appropriate for the education, literacy level, and potential language barriers of the audience at hand.** For instance, many Hispanics in the U.S. today are first-generation immigrants with language barriers and a general lack of higher education. According to 2004 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 58 percent of Hispanics have finished high school, while just 12 percent hold a bachelor’s degree.

6. **Creating materials in multiple languages.** You know your market. If your customers prefer their information in their native language, then give them what they are looking for. If nothing else, having materials on-hand that are translated into at least one language, such as Spanish, can show your cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and event depth of ability. Also, in many industries there are certain laws mandating the translation of materials or packaging. For example, in the European Union (EU) countries, several directives, including the Clinical Trials Directive, Medical Device Directive (MDD) and In-vitro Diagnostics Directive (IVDD), have specific provisions that make translation of medical and pharmaceutical labels mandatory into the language or languages of the country in which the products are being tested, distributed, or sold.
7. **Use cross-cultural marketing teams.** Most organizations form cross-functional teams. GLS recommends creating internal cross-cultural teams to include people with diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and multicultural perspectives. Or, if you outsource your marketing and advertising communications, confirm that your agency or contractor has representation from the culture your organization is trying to reach.

For additional tips on incorporating messages that are linguistically and culturally appropriate into your business initiatives and promotions, please call +1-949-798-1400 or visit <http://www.globallanguages.com>.



#### **About Global Language Solutions**

Global Language Solutions (GLS) is a full-service translation company delivering solutions in over 100 languages to increase its clients' multicultural and international market share. GLS has several industry tip sheets available including: *How to Select a Translation Provider*; *Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Translations*; *Using Interpreters in the Legal Setting*; and more. For additional information, visit [www.globallanguages.com](http://www.globallanguages.com) or call +1-949-798-1400.