Chapter XIV

A Rhetorical-Prototype Mechanism for Creating International E-Marketing Materials

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Abstract

The global diffusion of the Internet has resulted in a new degree of access to international markets. Creating successful online materials for international consumers, however, requires an understanding of cultural expectations related to visual design. For this reason, a mechanism that examines such expectations can facilitate international e-marketing success. This chapter proposes a methodology marketers and design firms can use to address cultural expectations in relation to Web site design. By using this method, individuals can increase the chances that e-marketing materials will meet with success in the global marketplace.

Introduction

The Internet has forever changed how marketers present materials to prospective clients. Now, information can be delivered directly to consumers on an unprecedented scale, and
online data gathering mechanisms permit a degree of customized marketing not possible in print media (De Kare-Silver, 2001; Brondomo, 2000). This new degree of international access, in combination with market forces of globalization, raises the stakes for businesses, and corporations have begun to grab shares of overseas markets in order to increase overall profits. This situation means marketers may need to develop materials designed for overseas consumers. E-marketing practices, therefore, need to adopt an international focus.

Cultural groups, however, can have different opinions of what constitutes a “credible” presentation—one that is worthy of consideration and acceptance. These differences mean that a marketing piece considered “acceptable” by one culture might be considered “offensive” by another. In terms of online—or Web-based—materials, the most problematic differences can involve visual design, for Web sites are primarily a visual medium. Unfortunately, such cultural expectations are often deep-seated and remain unknown until miscommunication occurs. For this reason, marketers can benefit from methods that address cultural expectations related to marketing visuals.

This chapter presents a methodology, based on concepts from rhetorical theory and prototype theory, individuals can use to create more effective e-marketing materials for consumers in other cultures. The chapter begins with an examination of the global spread of Internet access and examines how cultural expectations of visual design can affect interpretations of marketing images. The chapter next overviews rhetorical theory and prototype theory and explains how each can contribute to the design of international e-marketing materials. The chapter then explains how a merger of aspects from rhetorical theory and prototype theory can create an analytical method marketers can use when designing online visuals for international audiences. This organization helps readers understand why it is important to address cultural expectations in e-marketing materials and how to address such expectations more effectively.

International Spread of Online Access

Until recently, access to online media remained relatively restricted to western cultures. The degree of international Internet access has, however, increased with amazing speed in recent years (How Many Online, 1999). In fact, some sources indicate that the number of global Internet users grew from 563 million to 580 million in the last half of 2002 alone, with much of this growth occurring outside of North America (“Nielsen Net Ratings,” 2003).

In industrialized nations, Internet access is expanding at an impressive pace. Western Europe has experienced rapid growth in online business transactions. As a report in The Economist notes, nearly 466 Swedes, 685 Brits, and 1,800 Germans open a new online brokerage account every day (“Going for Brokers,” 2000). Moreover, the “UK Market Overview” for the Internet Marketing Hotlist (2000) claims that one in three households in Europe will have Internet access by 2005. In Japan, over 50% of the adult population is online, and the total number of Japanese Internet users increased by some 13.5 million in 2002 (“AsiaBizTech,” 2003). As a result of these trends, e-commerce in Western
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