

Word Choice in Marketing

Word choice in marketing and advertising is absolutely critical. When advertisers spend millions of dollars each year, you can bet they have tested every word they are going to use. They want their word choices to psychologically lead you to believe their product is the best, that it will change your life. Skilled advertisers can get us to absorb their message unconsciously. They might even package an identical product with different words and phrases to reach a wider segment of the public.

Dary Benn conducted a study on how advertisers use word choice and catchphrases to sell different, but identical in effectiveness, brands of aspirin. Consider the following: The word choices in these advertisements work because the positive connotations make us assume that each advertised brand is the best. There are other words advertisers employ, which are known as weasel words. These words confuse their audience and don't allow you to put an exact number on the advertiser's claim. They let you justify and believe what you want. They are weasel words because weasels are notorious for breaking into the chicken coop and sucking out the inside of the eggs without breaking the shell. The eggs look fine but in reality are hollow and empty, just like these words. Watch out for these words:

- **Helps**
- **Possibly**
- **Up to**
- **About**
- **May**
- **Improved**
- **Almost**
- **Approximately**

Brand A: proclaims 100% pure, claims nothing is stronger. Benn also notes that governmental tests showed no brand was weaker or less effective than any of the others.

Brand B: advertised "unsurpassed in speed—no other brand works faster." Same governmental tests showed "B" works no faster than any of the others

Brand C: declares it used an ingredient "that doctors recommend." Governmental tests revealed that "special ingredient" is nothing more than regular aspirin.⁴

Advertisers know that changing just one word in their ad can dramatically increase the response rate. One advertiser changed the word "repair" to "fix" and saw a 20% increase in response. The challenge with word choice comes when these billion dollar corporations want to translate just the right English word into the perfect equivalent in another language. The most famous marketing fiasco based on translation was the Chevy Nova. Translated into Spanish, Nova meant "Doesn't Go."

"Come Alive, You're the Pepsi Generation" translated into Chinese means, "Pepsi, Bring Your Ancestors back from the Grave." When American Airlines wanted to advertise its new, leather, first-class seats in the Mexican market, it translated its "Fly In Leather" campaign literally, which meant "Fly Naked" (*vuela en cuero*) in Spanish! Coors put its slogan, "Turn It Loose," into Spanish, where it was read as "Suffer From Diarrhea." The Dairy Association's huge success with the "Got Milk?" campaign prompted them to

expand advertising into Mexico. It was soon brought to their attention that the Spanish translation read, “Are you lactating?”

An American T-shirt maker in Miami printed shirts for the Spanish market promoting the Pope’s visit. Instead of “I saw the Pope” (el Papa), the shirts read “I Saw the Potato” (la papa). Frank Perdue’s chicken slogan, “It takes a strong man to make a tender chicken” was translated into Spanish as “It takes an aroused man to make a chicken affectionate.” The Coca-Cola name in China was first read as “Kekoukela,” meaning “bite the wax tadpole” or “female horse stuffed with wax,” depending on the dialect. Scandinavian vacuum manufacturer, Electrolux, used the following in an American campaign: “Nothing sucks like an Electrolux.”

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