



# Reaching New Markets through Transcreation

*When Translation Just  
Isn't Enough*

By Rebecca Ray and Nataly Kelly  
March 2010

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# Topic

How do you reach customers who buy your products and services for completely different reasons than those in your home market? At some point, you will probably have to recreate or adapt your messaging and content through *transcreation*, a process whereby new content is developed or adapted for a given target audience, rather than translated directly from the original version.

We decided to write about transcreation because of the increased number of requests for information on the topic. We also felt it necessary to address the prevailing confusion in the industry about what the service actually entails, how it is defined, and how it differs from translation. This report covers the why, when, what, and how for transcreation to enable you to shorten your organization's learning curve.

## Taking a Closer Look at What Transcreation Means

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Images speak louder than words when it comes to defining transcreation. The examples that follow show how a pharmaceutical manufacturer markets its birth control product differently to different groups – U.S. English speakers and U.S. Latinas. The tagline in English relates to convenience, while in Spanish it relates to freedom of choice (see Figures [1](#) and [2](#)). Content is displayed differently – safety information plays a more important role in the Spanish sub-menu to alleviate fears about infertility that are more prominent in this demographic.

Confusion surrounds the term and the concept of transcreation across all groups that we interviewed and surveyed. As such, the definitions vary widely. Most people agree that the term “transcreation” is the amalgamation of the words “translation” and “creation,” or perhaps “creative translation.” Here are some other basics related to the definition of transcreation:

- **The history of the term.** Some trace the term's roots to the computer and video game industry, as companies struggled together to take games from one market to several. People discovered that translating only the words was insufficient to convey an enjoyable and comparable user experience. They started changing images and even modifying story lines in an attempt to transform the content in very creative ways. The process was different than the more straightforward localization process being applied to business application software at that time.



Figure 1: Pharmaceutical Transcreation in Practice: U.S. English Website  
Source: Pfizer, Inc.



Figure 2: Pharmaceutical Transcreation in Practice: U.S. Hispanic Website  
Source: Pfizer, Inc.

- **The current definition.** The term “transcreation” is now more commonly applied to marketing and advertising content that must resonate in local markets in order to deliver the same impact as the original. The term may be applied when either a direct translation is adapted, or when content is completely rewritten in the local language to reflect the original message.

Most often, transcreation includes a hybrid of new content, adapted content and imagery, and straightforward translation.

- **Synonyms.** Other terms often used to convey the same concept include “marketization,” “cultural adaptation,” “multilingual copywriting,” “copy adaptation,” “marketing translation,” “international copy,” “adaptation of marketing materials,” “creative international marketing,” and “transliteration” (incorrectly applied).

Typical projects that require transcreation include web campaigns that don’t attract customers in other markets, ads that are based on wordplay, humor that is directly related to just one language or culture, or products and services that need to be marketed to diverse demographics within the same market.

Transcreation provides the freedom to address the cultural gaps. It allows the intent of the message to be communicated so that it is positively received by the intended audience, without requiring the local version to remain fully faithful to the words or images used in the original version.

## More Research Related to This Topic

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Common Sense Advisory has published various pieces of research on the areas covered in this report:

- **Vendor selection.** Our past reports provide insight into when to apply transcreation rather than translation and tips for selecting vendors for both types of services (see “[Best Practices for Purchasing Transcreation Services](#),” Nov09, and “[Localization Vendor Management](#),” Feb08).
- **Quality assurance.** Buyers and providers do not always view quality from the same perspective (see “[Buyer-Defined Translation Quality](#),” Aug08; “[The Buyer-Supplier Quality Gap](#),” Sep08; [Buyers Step Up Their Quality Measurement Efforts](#),” Nov09; “[Best Practices for Client Review Processes](#),” Oct09; and “[Buyer Views of Translation Quality](#),” Nov08).
- **Entering new markets.** Targeting a new demographic requires branding and messaging to resonate with all groups of potential customers (see “[The Top 40 Global Online Brands](#),” Nov09; “[Localization Matters](#),” Nov08; “[Website Globalization: The Availability Quotient](#),” Jan08; “[Reaching America’s e-Latinos](#),” May07; and “[Developing Products for Global Markets](#),” Jun06).