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## Overseas Outsourcing Can Create a World of Problems

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By Deborah Daily, Co-Owner, Buckaroo Marketing/New Media,

The internet broke down geographic barriers for businesses, making it possible to find lower-cost suppliers around the world. But if companies lack the knowledge and skills to manage those suppliers properly, they may end up spending far more than expected.

We've worked with companies all over the globe to help our clients meet their advertising and marketing objectives while protecting their budgets. While most of those working relationships have been positive, we've had to manage unexpected complexities.

An excellent example was a trade show video for an industrial client. The video concept involved 3-D animation of their products to demonstrate how they would be installed and operate in a typical customer's facility. The concept was fairly straightforward, and the end result was beautiful and effective, but completing the project took more effort and money than anyone anticipated.

The biggest factor behind the added complexity came down to cultural differences. The company our client chose to develop the 3-D animation had a New York office, but was based in France, and had all the actual work performed in Latin America, where wages were more economical. The company's bid was far lower than domestic options, and they were friendly and eager to work with us.

Cultural differences entered the picture when it came to specifying exactly what our client was after. Our client contacts were engineers who know their product very well, and who gave us what they believed to be clear directions. We relayed those directions to our contact in New York, who subsequently relayed them to the team in Latin America. I'm sure you can see where this is going. Descriptions didn't always translate well, especially when language differences were involved, so we began creating drawings and using Photoshop on screenshots to indicate changes that were needed. The extra steps added time and cost, but they were required if we were to get the animation where the client wanted it to be.

Translation is another area in which companies will often turn to overseas outsourcing as a way to trim costs, but that can be very tricky. We worked with a client that had extensive sales operations throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean, so everything

from their website to sales sheets to videos also had to be produced in Spanish. But which Spanish? There are so many different dialects and colloquialisms that Spanish from two separate countries might as well be separate languages.

Fortunately, this company had sales professionals in each of those regions, and after consulting with all of them, they came to agreement that the most universal dialects were those spoken in South America. We didn't stop there. We prepared a sample piece of copy for translation, sent it to several translators who were South American natives, and asked them to turn it into Spanish. Then we ran the sample translations past the sales staff, who agreed that a Colombian translator captured what they saw as the ideal version of Spanish.

Most companies probably won't go to that much trouble, but language is so important. If your company wants to be accepted as a true partner in many countries, it needs to sound local. That builds trust and confidence among customers. It's something you won't get by using a translation app.

When considering whether to work with an overseas vendor, don't make your decision based solely on a website's claims or a sales rep's promises, either. Be sure to request a portfolio of projects the vendor has handled and ask to speak to some of their other clients. If a project goes south (figuratively, not literally), your recourse may be limited unless you want to pursue a legal challenge halfway around the world. Doing your due diligence can limit the potential for trouble.

Another strategy we've used successfully is giving the vendor a small project and seeing how that goes before handing them something large or important. If you encounter problems with a small job, you'll want to think twice before continuing the relationship. But if you're pleased with the process, you'll be less nervous to move forward.

One effective way to reduce the risks associated with overseas outsourcing is to work with an intercessor such as a marketing agency that has experience at coordinating projects like these, so they can guide you through the steps and safeguard your interests at every step. That way, you'll be more likely to reap the benefits that led you to consider outsourcing in the first place!

*Deborah Daily is co-owner of Buckaroo Marketing | New Media, a Fishers-based advertising agency.*

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