



# TRANSCREATION: THE NEXT STEP BEYOND TRANSLATION

A VIALANGUAGE WHITEPAPER

## Transcreation: The Next Step Beyond Traditional Translation

You are probably familiar with the successful “Got Milk?” advertising campaign. Introduced in 1993, the popular slogan has been a familiar presence ever since. Yet few likely know about the blunder made by one unsuspecting U.S. healthcare department when they tried launching the campaign within the U.S. Hispanic market. By translating the phrase “Got Milk?” into the Spanish “¿Tienes Leche?” they soon learned that they were actually asking consumers “Are you lactating?”

In addition to being embarrassing, communication gaffes of this kind can have a real impact on your company’s reputation. You must truly be exacting when marketing translated materials to a multilingual market. Anything less can be costly.

The first question to ask is whether you need to simply translate the materials, or if transcreation is more appropriate. While everyone is surely familiar with how translation works, transcreation might be a new term for some. Here’s a quick primer:

### What Is Transcreation?

Transcreation is the process of taking content that has already been translated and adapting it to be culturally relevant for your audience. This entails recognizing not only the audience’s country of origin, but their region as well. For example, the cultures of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong and Southeastern China differ from the Hui people of Northwestern China due to the Hui’s practice of Islam. Or take the Hispanic population in the U.S. Those living in the west are likely to be of Mexican or South American descent, whereas those in the east typically have more Cuban and Puerto Rican influences.

By adapting the message to the specific culture to which you are communicating, transcreation allows you to reach the audience at an emotional and intellectual level, making the communication both more meaningful and more effective.

### Transcreation in Practice

To ensure that the content being worked with achieves a linguistic and cultural appropriateness, transcreation usually means translators are granted greater creative license with the copy than is common with translation. They are encouraged to go beyond the words to ensure that the copy not only captures the intended message but also reflects a deep understanding of the culture of the audience. Here’s an example:

- **Original English Sentence:**  
Our organization is here to help today’s seniors live healthfully and with independence.
- **Translated Spanish Sentence**  
Nuestra organización está presente para ayudar a los adultos mayores que están en nuestras vidas para que puedan vivir la vida con la salud y con independencia felicidad.
- **Transcreated Spanish Sentence:**  
Nuestra organización está presente para ayudar a los adultos mayores que están en nuestras vidas para que puedan vivir la vida con la salud y felicidad.
- **English Translation of Transcreated Spanish Sentence:**  
Our organization is here to help the seniors in our families live healthfully and happily.

As you can see, the linguist took greater creative license to adapt the copy to connect with the audience on a cultural level. Sometimes this might be as simple as using regional vocabulary, taking a more formal/informal tone, or stressing some cultural touchstone.

In the example, the translator understands the importance of the role played by family and intergenerational ties in the Hispanic community. Having incorporated these elements, the copy diverges from the focus of the original but becomes in the process more culturally resonant, and ultimately more meaningful for the audience.

Working with Dakine, an industry leader in action board sports accessories, viaLanguage transcreated their glove product line and company story to fit each of the cultures of their French, Italian, German Spanish and Japanese markets. For example, product features such as “nose-wipe thumb panel” can mean very different things to different cultures. Through the process of transcreation, viaLanguage was able to convey Dakine’s messages accurately and in culturally meaningful ways to each of the markets.

### Transcreation vs. Translation

Both translation and transcreation play an important role in your multilingual communications. So how do you determine which is the preferred approach with a given project? This important judgment starts with an assessment of the needs of your communications.

In general, translation is the recommended strategy when the materials to be addressed must adhere to specific product or service requirements, such as with forms, guides, or other documents with little creative content. It is also typically the most cost-effective solution as it allows you to maximize your translation memory savings.

In addition to being more expensive than translation, transcreation is not always possible for all markets. For example, rarely does one’s Spanish content budget stretch to account for the various cultural differences found in, for example, the Hispanic communities in Florida, California, and New Mexico.

Transcreation is also more influenced by the style and skill of the copywriter and is typically charged by the hour, not per word. Not all transcreationists are created equal, so it is important that you select one whose experience and abilities are well suited to your needs.

| Translation   | Transcreation   |
|---|---|
| Renders words and phrases in the target language. Effort is made to retain the exact meaning, tone and literacy level of the source material unless specified otherwise. Takes a faithful approach. | Re-writes or edits content with a creative license that may result in re-phrased wording and changes in a tone to render intended meaning. Takes into account factors like the target audiences’ environment, lifestyle, family values, cultural beliefs and other practices that affect their connection to the campaign. Less effort is made to adhere to original word and sentence structure. |
| Best for - legal documents, terms and conditions, official notices, reports, statistical information, etc.  | Best for marketing materials and branding   |
| Pricing: Most often charged on a per word basis and possible to achieve 10-30% translation memory savings   | Pricing: Most often charged on a per hour basis with a yield of zero to very low translation memory savings   |
| Talent: Professional translator with 3-5 years experience   | Talent: Professional copy writer who may also translate   |
| Revision Cycles: Not included or rounds are in addition to per word pricing   | Revision Cycles: Often 1-2 rounds are included  |

## The Importance of Healthcare Transcreation

Culture can strongly influence how people perceive and respond to the messages your brand sends out. It will affect from whom they buy and with whom they build loyalty. To help ensure effective communication with your multicultural audiences, it is often necessary to go beyond mere translation to incorporate key cultural concepts, language nuances, literacy levels, and jargon or slang.

Consider the example of an organization's global HR and wellness program. If a nutritional information sheet was created as part of this program, such a resource would commonly reference a selection of foods eaten by the target audience. But while the menu of a person of Japanese descent may use fish and tofu as a staple protein source, your Latino employees may eat more beef or pork. Your communications are most successful when they account for these important cultural distinctions.

### Top 6 Transcreation Tips

If you decide to transcreate, the following tips will greatly assist the process and ensure the clearest communications:

- 1. Update your style guide for each language and culture.**  
Determine in advance key phrases, tone, demographic, brand message, and goals of the copy.
- 2. Budget appropriately and by the hour.**  
Translation and localization tends to be done by the word. Anticipate the number of rounds of edits as you and your transcreationist establish the desired style and tone.
- 3. Seek references and past samples of work from the transcreationist.**  
This is an important step in ensuring that the person has the necessary skill set.
- 4. Weigh the importance of audience literacy level vs. style and message.**  
A low literacy level requirement (grade 4 to 6) may limit the transcreationist's ability to incorporate style and nuance into the copy.
- 5. Address photo/image family and graphics.**  
Ensure that these elements are also properly selected and localized. For example, if it is a brochure on flu prevention targeted at a primarily Vietnamese community and written in Vietnamese, incorporate photo/art work that speaks directly to this community versus using random Asian-themed photos.
- 6. Test materials within your community and give feedback to writers.**  
It is important to test all materials with diverse audiences to confirm that they are understandable and appropriate for the targeted literacy and language level and culture.

### Getting it right — every time

In an ever-growing global market, a one-size-fits-all approach is not likely to prove effective given the wide range of cultures, languages and demographics. To communicate effectively, written materials must be both culturally and linguistically appropriate for the audience. They must be adapted to meet the needs of the audience.

In situations like the "Got Milk?" campaign, transcreation is an effective way to do just that, ensuring that your message is culturally relevant and appropriate for your target audience. It also shows that you care about your diverse audience and are truly making an effort to bridge any language or cultural gaps.

### About viaLanguage

To learn more about translation, transcreation, or how viaLanguage can help ensure you always say what you mean when communicating with your audience, contact us at 1-800-737-8481 or visit us online at [www.viaLanguage.com](http://www.viaLanguage.com).