

# Transcreation: make an impact with copy that resonates

A five-step marketing guide



Transcreation is a major buzzword in the translation industry. But it's more than just a trend. Marketers around the world are turning to this intentional, creative form of translation for their campaigns. In doing so, they are not only taking the language of their new market into account, but also the cultural and emotional context of their target audience. Over the last five years, transcreation has emerged as the ideal approach for creating authentic content in an international business environment.

We explain what transcreation is, offer a few successful examples by prominent brands, and show you how to put transcreation into practice for your business.

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# Transcreation vs. translation: definitions and differences

Transcreation is translation with a difference. So what do they both mean and what will you get when you order one? Read on to find out what makes these two services different and what they aim to achieve.

### Translation

What is it?

The no-frills standard. Translators use their linguistic knowledge to transform a text from one language into another. Quick, simple and close to the original. When it comes to straight-up translation, maximum accuracy is the aim. Translating specialized texts in areas such as medicine or law requires relevant industry knowledge and little to no room for interpretation. Specific terms need to be translated consistently.

#### Objective:

To enable the target audience to understand the content of the text.



#### Transcreation

#### What is it?

The name says it all: transcreation is 40% translation and 60% creation. It's a creative form of translation in which a language expert intentionally chooses words and formulations to create copy that works in the target language. In doing so, they take the local context, customs and conventions into account. Transcreation is a key component of localization: it adapts the content to the local market.

#### Objective:

To communicate the message and make the copy resonate with the target audience – even if the audience different context. The aim is to create an authentic, local brand experience. In addition to cultural insight, the process requires linguistic finesse and creativity.



"Transcreation is about understanding people within the cultural context of the regional environment. It's not just about understanding language, but also about understanding the cultural nuance of the customer's expected behavior, their perspective, what they truly care about, and what triggers their actions."

**Talia Baruch, Co-founder of GlobalSaké,** a global community of of tech leaders driving new markets' expansion, and an independent International Product Growth Consultant (ex Googler and Head of International Product Growth at Linkedin and SurveyMonkey)

An effective transcreation combines language, culture and emotion. It tailors itself to each market and target audience individually. Sometimes the transcreator wants the new text to have the same effect on its audience as the original; sometimes they want a very different one – whatever best achieves the defined marketing goals. Alternatively, depending on the case, an entirely new text may need to be written, in which case it becomes a copywriting job.



So what exactly is the difference between these approaches? Here's an overview:

Translation	Copywriting	Transcreation
Works with a foreign (source) language	Works in their native language	Balances the source and target languages
Begins with the original source text	Begins with a blank page	Begins with the original as a guide and deviates from it as much as necessary
Creates understanding	Convinces the audience	Creates an authentic experience
Helps to understand something	Helps to sell something	Helps to create an emotional connection
Understands the language and culture	Understands marketing	Understands the relevant mar- kets, cultures, marketing and two languages

You can find out more about the skills a good transcreator needs in section 4.

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# Creative, concise and invisible – four transcreations that get everything right

Good transcreations are invisible – which makes them hard to find. And yet they are more in demand than ever. Below are four examples from across the globe that show in detail how transcreation works.



Image: haribo.com

"Kids and grown-ups love it so – the happy world of HARIBO" (English)

"HARIBO macht Kinder froh und Erwachsene ebenso" (German original; literally, "HARIBO makes kids happy, and grown-ups too")

"HARIBO c'est beau la vie, pour les grands et les petits" (French; literally, "HARIBO makes life good, for young and old")

#### 1. HARIBO

The candy manufacturer from Germany has delighted the world – and the translation industry – with its slogan. The translators pinpointed exactly what makes the original so successful: tone, language and emotional impact – and deftly transferred these aspects into the target languages, even though the words themselves differ.



## 2. McDonald's

Many consider McDonald's to be the epitome of culturally insensitive globalization. But we'd like to challenge this. The corporate giant has demonstrated a flair for cultural subtleties in the transcreation of its world-famous slogan. For example, the Spanish version is much closer to "I really like it" than "I'm lovin' it".

Why? "Amar", the Spanish word for "to love", is closely associated with romance and passion. While in the US you can say you love cars or even a burger, this sounds more than a little odd in Spanish. The same goes for the Chinese translation. Directly translated, it means "I like it". The slogan refrains from using the word for "love"  $(\mathfrak{F})$ , which is rarely spoken aloud in China.



"Me encanta" (Spanish)

"我就喜歡" (Chinese)

## 3. Silver Linings Playbook

When it comes to cultural adaptation, the makers of the dark comedy *Silver Linings Playbook* show us how it's done. The English expression on which the title is based ("Every cloud has a silver lining") has no direct equivalent in most other languages, and made no sense to foreign audiences. So for the international release, the team looked for alternatives – with creative results:

Happiness Therapy (Belgian title)

Le bon côté des choses (French/Canadian title; literally, "the upside of things")

Los juegos del destino (Mexican/Columbian title; literally, "games of fate")

Il lato positivo (Italian title; literally, "the positive side")

**Мой парень – псих** (Russian title; literally, "my boyfriend is crazy")





Images: IMDb

世界にひとつのプレイブック (Japanese title; literally, "the only playbook in the world")

Sometimes adjustments are needed even between regions that share the same language. This was the case for the UK, where the title of the film was shortened to just *Silver Linings*, as "playbook" is an American football term that audiences would not have been familiar with.

### 4. Swiffer

With this example from 1999, <u>Marco Leali</u> achieves the seemingly impossible: an improvement on the original. In English, the Italian slogan means something like "Dust doesn't stay around, since it's caught by Swiffer." The tone and emotional message (Swiffer makes life easier) remain the same, and the slogan simultaneously touches on the product's benefits – its ability to clear dust.

A huge amount of work goes into a transcreation. Reconciling different languages, cultures and marketing considerations – within a single sentence, no less – can often verge on the impossible. For it to work, you have to get creative, and have the courage to deviate from the original where necessary. <u>We look at the skills good</u> transcreators need here.



Image: swiffer.com

"When Swiffer's the one, consider it done" (English original)

"La polvere non dura, perché Swiffer la cattura" (Italian)



# From slogans to product names: seven clear cases that call for a transcreation

What types of copy require a creative approach? Why does translating a short slogan or a simple app take longer than translating a content-heavy press release? Here are some specific examples of when a transcreation is the best approach.

## Taglines and slogans

Your brand and your products need a strong message, often encapsulated in the form of a slogan. A slogan should communicate what your company or product is all about in a short, snappy format. Unfortunately, most slogans cannot simply be transferred over to another market, however well written they may be. Sometimes there are linguistic reasons for this – slogans often contain cultural references, wordplay, alliteration or rhymes. On the other hand, sometimes the brand simply has a different image in the target market, or addresses a different target audience.

#### BMW and its driving machines

BMW's traditional German slogan "Freude am Fahren" (literally: "the joy of driving") has been translated pretty much word for word in some languages:

*Piacere di guidare* (Italian) *Pelo prazer de conduzir* (Portuguese)

For the US, however, they developed a whole new slogan:

#### The Ultimate Driving Machine

This transcreation aimed to set BMWs apart from the standard hefty American cars and appeal to people – particularly young men – seeking a more extravagant driving experience.

#### Websites

Localizing a website well requires more than just translating the content and changing the payment methods. Your website is at the very heart of your corporate communications; it's your digital business card, and it presents your products or services and your marketing message on the global stage.

Many brands adapt their online communications for a US audience. Take Président Camembert, for example: the soft French cheese is marketed differently in North America than in France to make the product feel more accessible to customers in the US.

> "Saveurs finement typées" "Camembert préféré des Français" (delicate, distinctive flavor; France's favorite Camembert)



Image: presidentcheese.com

"Unique – yet approachable"

## Newsletters and mailings

Whether it's an email or a letter through the post, successful newsletters create a connection with customers. Evoking an emotional reaction is key. A lot of time, energy and creativity will have gone into the original – and this should be felt by customers in other markets, too. This makes transcreation an obvious choice for newsletters and (e)mail marketing campaigns. It's worth bearing in mind, for example, that customers in different target markets may have different interests and celebrate different holidays and events.

# Public holidays: always a question of culture.

Fourth of July sales are only a thing in the US, for example, and new year's sales in China don't start on December 31: the date of Chinese New Year changes every year, and can fall anywhere between January 21 and February 21 depending on the new moon.





Image: heavenhill.com

#### Product names

It's worth having a native speaker check your product name before starting a global marketing campaign. What does your name mean in other languages? Is it easy to read, write and pronounce? And is it correctly understood abroad? If a product name already exists in another market, or means something different in the target language, you mayhave to go back to the drawing board. Doing so can help you to avoid mistakes like Chevrolet's Nova, a car whose name means "doesn't go" to Spanish speakers. Or Irish Mist, a whiskey liqueur that Germans interpret as "Irish crap" ("Mist" literally means "manure" in German).

You can find more tips on how to ensure you get your international product naming right from the outset in our <u>blog</u> <u>article</u>.

#### Dubbing and subtitles

Translating subtitles is always a challenge – for two obvious reasons: there are limits on the amount of time and space you have to display them. On average, people can read around 21 characters per second. This means that, as a rule of thumb, a line of subtitles shouldn't have more than 42 characters. As a result, subtitles often need to be reworded and shortened – all without losing the core meaning. Dubbing, on the other hand, requires a script adapted for speaking and syncing to video. Translation for film and video is now such a highly developed field that subtitling is regarded as a specialized discipline of its own.

## Ads and commercials

Marketing and advertising copy often have time and space constraints. In addition, they often contain cultural references that need to be adapted to new markets or target groups. A clear case for transcreation.

## Apps and digital tools

Apps are normally designed with the simplest possible user interface. This puts a limit on space, and calls for wording that is both precise and concise. Depending on the context, buttons, instructions and menus may also need to be translated differently.

In order for the app to be easily found in the app store, the keywords need to reflect user behavior in the target market. Again, a direct translation won't cut it here: keywords need to be researched afresh for each new market.

Transcreation has a clear mission: for a text to have the same impact in your target market as it does in your existing one. This means taking account of all the considerations that went into creating the original text. Think about all the

time, effort and research that went into every campaign, every web page and every product. It's only logical that the same amount of care should be taken when localizing your product for a new market.

As a general rule, any content that aims at marketing a product or building a connection with the target audience requires a transcreation. Simply put, transcreations don't just translate words; they translate emotions.

## Did you know?

To ensure that a user interface makes as much sense in translation as it does in the original, certain calls to action need to be made more specific for particular markets. For example:

English: "Click here" Japanese: "料金についてはこちらから" (literally, "See the prices here")





# What to look out for when choosing a language service provider

According to <u>Slator's 2021 LSP Index</u>, one in three language service providers offers transcreation. But not every translation agency is equipped to deliver high-quality transcreations. Transcreation requires specialized expertise. Read on to find out more about the specific skills required.

"Good transcreators are the unicorns of the language industry: they're really hard to find."

Kristy Sakai, Chief Executive Officer at Supertext USA



#### An extra dose of marketing knowledge

Why is it so hard to find talented transcreators? Because they need to be translators who are also copywriters. They need to combine a gift for writing with in-depth knowledge of the culture and market of the target country. Good transcreators need to unite skills in several different areas:



- Fluency in more than one language
- An understanding of cultures and marketing
- A talent for writing in their native language

Translators who combine all of these things are rare. So where can you find the right people for the job?

# How to recognize a good transcreator

A transcreator needs to think outside the box (without using tired idioms like "think outside the box"), and get inside the target audience's heads. Transcreation is a process; an exchange of ideas; a collaboration between the customer and the linguist(s). And it's also a bit like a pitch: once they're finished, the transcreator needs to be able to sell their text to the client or stakeholder. Can they explain why they chose these exact words? Or why a direct translation (or no translation at all) might actually be the better option in certain cases?

The best transcreators are native speakers of the target language who grew up in the relevant

culture or market. They keep up to date with local preferences and intercultural differences. Like translators, they need language expertise – but they also need to be able to think creatively and write well.

You're looking for people who know as much about copywriting and marketing as they do about translation. Whether you prefer to work with a local marketing agency, an international language service provider or an agency that offers both copywriting and translation is up to you. What's essential is the right mindset: you need linguists with transcreation experience and effective project managers who are familiar with the transcreation process, and who therefore know how to choose the right people for the job and put together a brief. The right agency can offer both of these things.

In short, you need a team that combines linguistic and cultural expertise, and that will know straight away by looking at your campaign what needs to be done to ensure your message lands in your target market.



"The skill set of an ideal transcreator combines language skills, copywriting skills, cultural sensitivity, and subject-matter expertise, along with the necessary technology skill set."

Florian Faes, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Slator, a market research company and news platform for language services and technology



# Ordering a transcreation: six top tips for writing a good brief

Transcreations are the product of talent, time and experience. Whether a transcreation truly shines will depend on who's done the job – but also in large part on good planning and the instructions received by the team. A well-written brief is half the battle. We'll show you everything that belongs in briefings for transcreations and which questions you need to ask yourself. Before you get started: what do you want to get out of the transcreation?

Transcreations let you precisely tailor your copy to different markets. Copy won't be translated word-for-word – instead, there's more room for creativity and linguistic freedom. The result should be a new text that takes the target audience's culture and expectations into account to achieve the emotional impact you desire. Understanding the process and the goal of transcreating copy helps you assess the results better and decide how well a transcreation fulfills your personal intentions.

Thinking through a few key points will help set the boundaries for your transcreation. Imagine the briefing as a map that will guide your transcreation team to its destination. Which information is needed to step into your new readers' shoes and direct the text accordingly? A good rule of thumb: the more comprehensive the briefing, the better the result. By answering at least the following questions, you're already well on your way.

# 1. Where will the copy or the marketing campaign appear?

From headings on a web page to image captions for social media, every text is intended for a specific format and context. Alongside guidelines on tone of voice, you need to bear in mind character limits or other technical requirements that differ depending on where it will be published.

Just as important as the context are any accompanying visuals, such as images, graphics or video clips. The text usually refers to these directly, and should work together with them in the final product. You might therefore need to adapt the visuals themselves in a second step, because imagery lands differently in other target markets – where different colors or patterns are in demand, for instance.

#### 2. Who is your target audience?

First, think about the target audience's geographic location. Although they share a language, readers in Mexico and Spain couldn't be more different culturally. Other socio-demographic information such as age, employment or educational level also plays a role – though it's not the whole picture! Where it gets really interesting is when you consider the audience's psychographics; in other words, what makes them tick? Are they digital natives or do they prefer analog media? What are their needs and preferences? All these factors have an influence on customer behavior, and therefore on how a text must be adapted.

There is no better proof that psychographic factors make all the difference than the example of Prince Charles and Ozzy Osbourne. In socio-demographic terms, their profiles aren't too dissimilar:



Images: twitter.com/biblioaccess

- Male
- Born in 1948
- Raised in the UK
- Married twice
- Lives in a castle
- Rich and famous

#### 3. What do you aim to achieve with your content?

Next, put down on paper what your text's aims are. Are you looking to:

- sell something?
- Iaunch a new product?
- generally increase your brand's visibility?
- increase your site traffic or the number of newsletter subscribers?
- simply provide information?

You need to adjust your key message to the specific market depending on the goals you define. Selling something doesn't work the same way everywhere. See the next point.



# 4. Which sales strategy is right for this aim?

Every market has its own special preferences that affect sales and outreach, from social media to TV channels to search engines. Knowing these preferences can be decisive for your marketing campaigns. While Google is the most widely used search engine by far in the US and Europe, Yahoo!, Baidu and Naver have the edge in Asia. And while you might see billboards or TV spots advertising burgers here, mukbangs – food vlogs – on Weibo are used to the same effect in China.

Identifying which channels work in your target market and what the important factors are therefore requires some research. You can take this on in advance by yourself or with a partner in the target market – or through your language service provider.



Mukbang host (image: Weibo)

# 5. What should the transcreator know about your brand voice?

There are several questions to ask yourself here:

- How do you speak to your target audience?
- Is there room for some humor and a lighthearted note, or are you aiming for a more succinct style?
- Which set terms or phrases do you use?

The goal is that the brand voice is consistent across different languages and the brand values are efficiently communicated. So everything that you have defined for your original communications should be included in the briefing. We'll show you what this looks like in a <u>sample client</u> <u>project</u>.

#### 6. What is the budget, and what is the deadline?

When estimating the budget and timelinefor a transcreation project, you will want to consider the time investment required to get results. Long copy transcreation may be calculatable by the word, but short copy transcreation is typically charged by the hour, and at the end of the day, you're paying for how much work the team puts in. If you come up with a good briefing at the beginning, the cost will be lower at the end. And when it comes to the briefing, these six little steps can pay off in a big way.



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# Sample client projects

Supertext has made a name for itself as a transcreation and localization partner in the world of international marketing. The examples below show why – from local startups to global corporations, from gaming providers to cooking apps.

# BVG: posters for the *"BerlKönig"* ridesharing service

Berlin's public transport provider BVG (Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe) takes an unconventional approach to its marketing – and its new ridesharing service, BerlKönig, was no exception. Supertext provided creative English adaptations of its poster campaigns, generating slogans that truly stick in your head.



WEIL WIR DICH LIEBEN.





WEIL WIR DICH LIEBEN.

The English slogan – which is shown next to an image of the German parliament building – plays on the same political statement as the original. All while retaining BVG's characteristic sense of humor.



WEIL WIR DICH LIEBEN.



WEIL WIR DICH LIEBEN.

Same backdrop, same typical Berlin bluntness – only somewhat more explicit than the original German (literally: "In Berlin, we love to share"). The risqué play on words – shown with a picture of the van driving past a swingers' club called "Easy III" – gets the message across.

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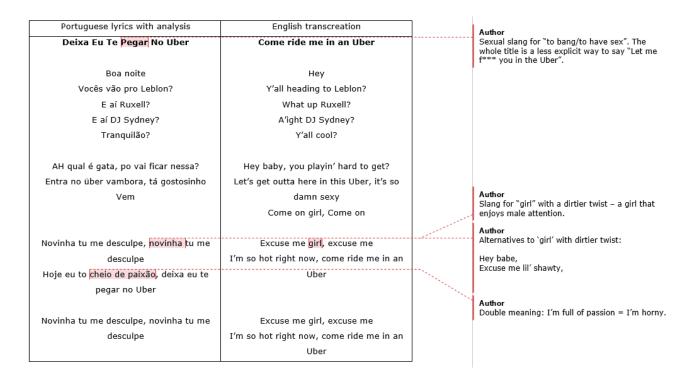
How does it work?
When do you need it?
What's the best approach?
Client examples

1. What is transcreation?

## Electronic Arts: song lyrics for FIFA 20

Translating music requires an ear for rhyme, rhythm and linguistic nuance. As one of the largest providers of computer and video games in the world, Electronic Arts (EA) knows the challenges of making its lyrics appeal to a very diverse audience. Slang and emotional impact are key factors when choosing its songs – which need to work across all languages.

Thanks to transcreations by Supertext, the Portuguese soundtrack to FIFA 20 hit all the right notes in English.



The aim here was to replicate the slang and, above all, the deliberate double entendres and sexual innuendo of the Portuguese original in English.



# FREITAG: "No Black Friday" campaign

Every company has its own corporate language – and FREITAG's is creative, unique and well defined. When translating its texts, the distinctive tone of voice and wordplay of the world-famous bag brand need to be brought home in the target language and culture. Supertext's transcreations for its "No Black Friday" campaign into English, French and Italian were truly one of a kind.

#### BLACK FREITAG: NEINSAGEN IST EIN NO-BRAINER

Seit es uns gibt, setzen wir auf langlebige Produkte, nachhaltigen Konsum und sagen Nein zum Shoppingwahn und zu Rabattschlachten. Deshalb schliessen wir auch dieses Jahr wieder am Black Friday, 26. November, 08.00h bis 27. November, 08.00h MEZ, unseren Online-Store und laden alle Besucher\*innen zum frohen Taschentauschen ein.

Und weil wir ausserdem Community besser finden als Konsum, haben wir uns dieses Jahr mit gleichgesinnten Brands zusammengeschlossen, um unsere positiven Anti-Schnäppchenjagd-Aktionen gegenseitig zu unterstützen.

WER SAGT WIE JA?

#### BLACK FRIDAY: SAYING NO'S A NO-BRAINER

For as long as we've been around, we've been committed to durable products, sustainable consumption and saying "no" to shopping hysteria and discount battles. So, this year once again, we'll be closing our online store from 8 am on Black Friday, 26 November, till 8 am CET on 27 November, and inviting all our visitors here for some happy bag swapping.

And because we also believe community's better than consumption, we've teamed up with some like-minded brands this year to offer each other some positive support for anti-bargain campaigns.

#### WHO SAYS YES?

While the original plays on the fact that "FREITAG" means "Friday" in German, many English speakers aren't aware of this translation. Instead, the English version opts to replace the wordplay with a straightforward reference to Black Friday.



#### **BLACK FREITAG : DIRE NON N'EST PAS SORCIER**

Depuis sa création, la marque FREITAG s'est toujours engagée en faveur de produits résistants et d'une consommation durable, tout en disant « non » au shopping frénétique et à la folie des promos. Il est donc tout à fait logique qu'à l'occasion du Black Friday 2021, nous fermions une fois de plus les portes de notre boutique en ligne (du 26 novembre à 8h00 au 27 novembre à 8h00 – heure d'Europe centrale). A la place, nous vous encourageons à faire un tour sur notre plateforme d'échange pour un troc de folie.

Et comme nous préférons nous consacrer à nos communautés qu'à la consommation effrénée, cette année, nous avons décidé, avec nos amis à la tête de marques sur la même longueur d'ondes, de mener ensemble une action anti-course aux bonnes affaires sur tous les fronts.

À QUI DIT-ON OUI ?

#### **BLACK FREITAG: CERTO CHE NO!**

Da sempre puntiamo sui prodotti durevoli e sul consumo sostenibile, dicendo no alla mania dello shopping e alla guerra spietata a colpi di ribassi. Ecco perché anche quest'anno chiudiamo il nostro Online Store in occasione del Black Friday, dalle 8:00 (CET) del 26 novembre alle 8:00 (CET) del 27 novembre, invitando visitatrici e visitatori a un'allegra esperienza di scambio di borse.

In più, dato che preferiamo il concetto di community a quello di consumo, quest'anno abbiamo unito le forze con alcuni brand che la pensano come noi, per sostenerci a vicenda nelle nostre iniziative di contrasto alla caccia spietata all'ultima offerta.

CHI SI UNISCE A NOI?

In French and Italian, however, the slogan kept the brand name, as it was safe to assume that French- and Italian-speaking customers in multi-lingual Switzerland would know enough German to know that "FREITAG" also refers to the day of the week.

The French and Italian adaptations move away from the idea of a "no-brainer", there being no equivalent phrase in either language. Instead, the French version states that saying no "isn't rocket science". The Italian slogan adds even more weight to the anti-consumerist sentiment with the wording "Black Friday: of course not!", and a button that reads "Who's with us?".



### Vorwerk

In 2021, the inventor of Thermomix set out an international brand strategy. This included localizing its entire website into 33 languages. Supertext provided content creation, translation and transcreation services. This involved, among other things, tailoring product names to the target market and finding appropriate idioms for marketing texts.

Website text English	Italian	French	Chinese
Get a Thermomix	Come avere Bimby	Recevez un Thermomix	獲取 Thermomix
	(Where to find a Bimby)	(Get yourself a Therm- omix)	(Get a Thermomix)
You won't believe until you see, smell, taste it	Non ci crederai finché Il faut le non lo vedrai in azi- croire one!	Il faut le voir pour le croire	眼見為實,親自聞一聞,嚐一嚐 (Seeing is believing, smell
(You won't believe it until you see it in action)	(You won't believe it until you see it in action)	(You have to see it to believe it)	and taste it for yourself)
Book a demo (Book your demo)	Prenota la tua di- mostrazione (Book your demo)	Réservez une démon- stration (Reserve a demonstra- tion)	預定演示 (Predefined demonstra- tions)
Let us show you what we are all about	Scopri tutto quello che Bimby sa fare. (Discover what Bim- by can do)	Laissez-nous vous faire découvrir comment Thermomix fonctionne. (Let us show you how Thermomix works)	我們將向您展示所有功能。 (We'll show you all the features)

More personal, direct and familiar: in Italian, Thermomix isn't marketed as a kitchen gadget, but as a friend and assistant called "Bimby" that's there to help you like a member of the family. In doing so, it aims to appeal to the more family-oriented Italian audience.

French customers, by contrast, are used to being addressed in a more formal, distanced way. This is reflected not only in the polite form "vous", but also in the more general, less emotional wording. Chinese advertising demands emotion, but rarely addresses the individual directly – instead, there is more focus on the collective. As a result, the calls to action are almost entirely indirect.

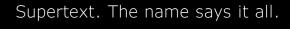


Ready to have a chat about your transcreation project? We'd love to.

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supertext.com Contact us





Founded in 2005 as a copywriting and translation agency, Supertext has grown into one of the most innovative and creative language service providers in the world. With locations in Los Angeles, Berlin and Zurich and more than 3,000 companies – from startups to international conglomerates – partner with Supertext to reach global markets. Supertext leverages its own online portal and a hand-elected network of more than 2,000 language experts covering 100+ languages. The LSP has forged a strong reputation as a creative partner for transcreation and global expansion thanks to projects for brands including Electronic Arts, Kitchen Stories and Vorwerk.