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If we're lucky our cross cultural marketing blunders will only cause great hilarity. When we're not they can cause offence and cost us money. Here are a few of the blunders that some "big boys" made. With all their marketing budgets they can still get things wrong. Cross cultural communication runs deep so it is important to research carefully the Cultural Codes for specific products or brands and do some well-undertaken market research.

Below you will find a selection of marketing blunders:

1. United Airlines unknowingly got off on the wrong foot during its initial flights from Hong Kong. To commemorate the occasion, they handed out white carnations to the passengers. When they learned that to many Asians white flowers represent bad luck and even death, they changed to red carnations.

2. A company advertised eyeglasses in Thailand by featuring a variety of cute animals wearing glasses. The ad was a poor choice since animals are considered to be a form of low life and no self respecting Thai would wear anything worn by animals

3. Pepsodent tried to sell its toothpaste in Southeast Asia by emphasizing that it "whitens your teeth." They found out that the local natives chew betel nuts to blacken their teeth which they find attractive

4. Locum is a Swedish company. As most companies do at Christmas they sent out Christmas cards to customers. In 1991 they decided to become ecologically friendly and produce just one ad. The body copy in the ad goes on about Locum saving trees by printing only one ad as a holiday good wishes rather than sending out lots of cards. They decided to give their logo a little holiday spirit by replacing the "o" in Locum with a heart. You can see the result!

5. The Swedish furniture giant IKEA somehow agreed upon the name "FARTFULL" for one of its new desks

6. There are several examples of companies getting unsuccessfully entering the German market bad translations of products due to the word "mist". We had "Irish Mist" (an alcoholic drink), "Clairol Mist" (curling iron from Clairol) and "Silver Mist" (Rolls Royce car) all flopping as "mist" in German manure/dung/manure. Fancy a glass of Irish dung?

7. The Japanese company Matsushita Electric was promoting a new Japanese PC for internet users. Panasonic created the new web browser and had received license to use the cartoon character Woody Woodpecker as an interactive internet guide. The day before the huge marketing campaign, Panasonic realised its error and pulled the plug. Why? The ads for the new product featured the following slogan:

"Touch Woody" "The Internet Pecker" "The company only realised its cross cultural blunder when embarrassed American explain what "touch Woody's pecker" could be interpreted as!

8. A US telephone company tried to market its products and services to Latinos by showing a commercial in which a Latino wife tells her husband to call a friend, telling her they would be late for dinner. The commercial bombed since Latino women do not order their husbands around and their use of time would not require a call about lateness.

9. Proctor & Gamble used a television commercial in Japan that was popular in Europe. The ad showed a woman bathing, her husband entering the bathroom and sponging her back. The Japanese considered this ad an invasion of privacy, inappropriate behaviour, and in very poor taste.

10. And what about this one? A recent client of mine, a well-known pharmaceutical company, who has to remain nameless, had launched a medicine to settle a bad stomach in Japan.

In Japan their advert ran along the following lines, showing someone feeling ill, taking medicine and feeling better

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Hello, I'm Deborah Swallow and, for the last fifteen years, I've worked in over thirty countries addressing the complexities of people working internationally across multiple cultures or cross cultural a [marketing blunders](#) so individuals and organisations alike can gain an authentic competitive edge and win in international markets.

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