

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.****Mac and PC's Overseas Adventures; Globalizing Apple's Ads Meant Tweaking Characters, Clothing and Body Language**

Geoffrey A. Fowler in Hong Kong, Brian Steinberg in New York and Aaron O. Patrick in London. **Wall Street Journal.** (Eastern edition). New York, N.Y.: Mar 1, 2007. pg. B.1

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

PC's body language is a big source of the humor in Japan: Mac looks embarrassed when the PC touches his shoulder, or hides behind Mac's legs to avoid viruses. "PC constantly makes friendship-level approaches that Mac rejects in a friendly-irritated way," says Oliver Reichenstein, the founder of Tokyo-based interactive brand consultancy Information Architects Ltd. "The western Mac ads would backfire in Japan, because the Mac would appear to lack class."

Mr. [Justin Long], who recently starred in the movie, "Accepted," says his goal is "to not come off like, 'Sorry, man, I'm just better than you,' like I'm gloating and I'm kind of celebrating the fact that I'm better. [That] comes off as smug, and that's the danger." Mr. Long, 28 years old, says his agents told him he was selected for the ads because Apple CEO Steve Jobs saw him in something and liked the performance. "Most of the time, I have to audition," he says.

Another issue: In the process of localization, Apple may have lost some of the meaning in the actors' clothing, meant to personify the Mac and PC brands. In the U.S. ads, Mac's office-casual clothing implies that he could be an Internet entrepreneur or a hip rocket scientist. But that's not what the clothing means to some Japanese viewers, who haven't adopted America's "office casual" movement.

**Full Text** (1399 words)

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When Apple Inc. wanted to bring its series of "Mac vs. PC" ads to international markets, it faced a difficult issue: What's funny in one culture can seem ill-mannered in another.

In the American ads, made by Omnicom Group Inc.'s TBWA\Chiat\Day, a nerdy PC guy keeps getting trumped by his hip Mac counterpart, who uses pointed banter that demonstrates how Macs are better. In one recent spot, PC is proudly having a camera taped to his head so he can do video chatting -- only to discover that Mac already has a built-in camera. In another, PC is flanked by a gruff security guard who insists on getting his permission each time Mac tries to say something to him, meant to represent security in Microsoft's new Vista operating system for PCs.

But in Japanese culture, where direct-comparison ads have long been frowned upon, it's rude to brag about one's strengths. So for Japanese versions of the ads that rolled out last fall, two local comedians from a troupe called the Rahmens made subtle changes to emphasize that Macs and PCs are not that different. Instead of clothes that cast PC clearly as a nerd and Mac as a hipster, PC wears plain office attire and Mac weekend fashion, highlighting the work/home

divide between the devices more than personality differences. In the first ad of the series, Mac even gives PC a nickname: waaku -- a playful Japanese version of the word "work."

PC's body language is a big source of the humor in Japan: Mac looks embarrassed when the PC touches his shoulder, or hides behind Mac's legs to avoid viruses. "PC constantly makes friendship-level approaches that Mac rejects in a friendly-irritated way," says Oliver Reichenstein, the founder of Tokyo-based interactive brand consultancy Information Architects Ltd. "The western Mac ads would backfire in Japan, because the Mac would appear to lack class."

The international campaigns reflect a growing move by U.S. companies to refine their ad campaigns for overseas markets. With more businesses looking to tap into consumer bases in international markets, navigating cultural differences can require a subtle touch. Starting with a basic concept then tailoring it to individual areas works better than "just buying one ad or one picture and repeating it slavishly in every country around the world," says Toby Hoare, chief executive of WPP Group PLC's JWT Europe, who oversees a global ad account for HSBC Holdings. "What we don't say is, 'One size fits all.'"

Over the years, Coca-Cola Co. and McDonald's Corp. have gone back and forth over whether to consolidate costs and messaging with a single global campaign, and the companies have ended up trying universal ads, dubbed ads, as well as completely local fare.

Figuring out when to reshoot and when to dub is complicated. It was culture -- not cost -- that drove Procter & Gamble to intentionally use dubbed Western actors in ads for Herbal Essences shampoo in Japan. The ads featured women shouting in ecstasy while washing their hair. "In that naughty-but-nice character you get from Herbal Essences, the fact that it comes from a foreign person makes it OK in Japan," says Linda Kovarik, executive planning director of P&G's ad agency Beacon Communications, a joint venture between Publicis Groupe's Leo Burnett and Japan's Dentsu Inc.

Some advertising messages translate more easily than others. Apple's long-running iPod campaign that showcases silhouettes dancing to music, also created by the Los Angeles-area office TBWA\Chiat\Day, ran globally as well. Since they have no dialogue, those ads were tweaked only slightly.

In the "Mac vs. PC" series, the U.S. ads were dubbed in the local language for Spain, France, Germany and Italy. But Apple chose to reshoot and rescript the ads for the U.K. and Japan, both important markets and home to unique advertising and comedy cultures.

Casting was particularly important. The U.S. ads, which began airing nine months ago, are very popular primarily because they use actors with cachet among young viewers: droll "Daily Show" commentator John Hodgman plays a bumbling PC always shown up by comic actor Justin Long playing a Mac.

Mr. Long, who recently starred in the movie, "Accepted," says his goal is "to not come off like, 'Sorry, man, I'm just better than you,' like I'm gloating and I'm kind of celebrating the fact that I'm better. [That] comes off as smug, and that's the danger." Mr. Long, 28 years old, says his agents told him he was selected for the ads because Apple CEO Steve Jobs saw him in something and liked the performance. "Most of the time, I have to audition," he says.

To recreate the delicate dynamic in the U.K., Apple hired two moderately well-known actors, David Mitchell and Robert Webb, who have their own TV sitcom in Britain called "Peep Show." The actors play characters similar to their roles in the show, which follows the lives of two friends sharing a London flat. Mr. Mitchell's character, a bank loan officer, is sensible and stuffy. Mr. Webb plays a musician who is sociable and uninterested in getting a regular job.

The U.K. versions hew closely to the original, though some dialogue is made more relevant to local audiences. In one U.S. ad that shows the PC suffering from a terrible cold, meant to represent a computer virus, the bug is a "doozy." But in the U.K., the virus is a "humdinger."

TBWA also wrote a new spot for the U.K. that uses a real statistic to deliver one of the key messages of the campaign: that PCs are designed for work and Macs for fun. In the ad, Mac points out Brits work longer hours than any other nationality in Europe. "And they get less holidays," says PC. "Smashing, isn't it?"

Even with the use of local comedians, the ads haven't received a completely warm reception in Britain. One newspaper columnist, Charlie Brooker of the Guardian, mocked Apple for trying to be too cool and delivering a "series of brutal coordinated attacks." "When you see the ads you think 'PCs are a bit rubbish yet ultimately loveable, whereas Macs are just smug, preening tossers,'" he wrote on February 5. (A tosser is a pretentious person.)

A polling firm, YouGov PLC, found respect for Apple fell in Britain after the ads started appearing in cinemas and Web sites January 29. According to a YouGov daily survey of 2,000 people, perceptions of the Apple brand, measured on a scale of 1 to 100, fell to 8 from 14 in the five days after the ads first appeared. "There was nothing else happening that we know of that would have moved the figure," says Sundip Chahal, brand index director at YouGov.

Some consumers in Japan were also offended. An ad that "slanders rival products can never be popular in Japan," wrote one anonymous poster on Kotaro Blog, a pop culture commentary. Others said the popularity of the comic duo the Rahmens made the comparison approach palatable.

Apple declined to comment on the campaign.

Side-by-side comparison ads are still rare in Japan. Pepsi broke taboos when it unveiled its aggressive "Pepsi Challenge" comparison ads in Japan in 1991, and faced a backlash. "In Japan you're considered particularly dumb and obnoxious if you're caught bragging about your strengths, and smart and nice if you play them down," says Mr. Reichenstein in Tokyo.

That's a challenge, because aggressive comparison has long been at the heart of Apple's advertising. In the U.S., Apple is often perceived as a "scrappy underdog," says Denise Lee Yohn, an independent branding consultant. If people in other countries are not as familiar with the brand, Ms. Yohn suggests, they might interpret such advertising as "a more aggressive challenge."

Another issue: In the process of localization, Apple may have lost some of the meaning in the actors' clothing, meant to personify the Mac and PC brands. In the U.S. ads, Mac's office-casual clothing implies that he could be an Internet entrepreneur or a hip rocket scientist. But that's not what the clothing means to some Japanese viewers, who haven't adopted America's "office casual" movement.

"The Mac guy looks like he is wearing Uniqlo, the Gap, or Muji. These say simple and low cost -- low-end brands," says Ms. Kovarik. As for the PC guy looking like a nerd, "They're really quite revered now in Japanese culture," she says.

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