



Advanced International Marketing

MAY 14, 2026

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I. Examples of Marketing Failures by the Global Firms

1. Pepsi — “Come Alive” in China

- **What happened:** Pepsi’s 1960s slogan “Come alive! You’re in the Pepsi Generation!” was mistranslated in China as “Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead.”
- **Lesson:** critical in

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1. Pepsi — “Come Alive” in China

- **What happened:** Pepsi’s 1960s slogan “Come alive! You’re in the Pepsi Generation!” was mistranslated in China as “Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead.”
- **Lesson:** *Cultural misinterpretation can destroy a campaign.* Localization and linguistic checks are critical in global marketing.

2. Ford Pinto — Brazil Launch

- **What happened:** In Brazil, "Pinto" is a slang term for "small male genitals." The car's name became a joke and damaged its reputation.
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3. Coca-Cola — "New Coke" in the U.S. (1985)

- **What happened:** Coca-Cola reformulated its classic drink to compete with Pepsi, but customers hated the change. The backlash was so severe that the company reintroduced "Coca-Cola Classic."
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- **Lesson:** *Brand names must be tested in each target language to avoid unintended meanings.*

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- **Lesson:** *Ignoring customer emotional attachment and brand heritage can cause failure.*

4. McDonald's — India Menu Launch

- **What happened:** McDonald's initially offered beef burgers in a country where cows are sacred to many Hindus. Public backlash forced an immediate change.

5. HSBC — "Assume Nothing" Campaign

- **What happened:** HSBC's slogan "Assume Nothing" was mistranslated in several countries as "Do Nothing." The global rebranding cost over \$10 million.

4. McDonald's — India Menu Launch

- **What happened:** McDonald's initially offered beef burgers in a country where cows are sacred to many Hindus. Public backlash forced an immediate change.
- **Lesson:** *Failure to respect local culture and dietary norms can alienate entire markets.*

5. HSBC — “Assume Nothing” Campaign

- **What happened:** HSBC's slogan “Assume Nothing” was mistranslated in several countries as “Do Nothing.” The global rebranding cost over \$10 million.
- **Lesson:** *Consistency in translation and message clarity are essential in global branding.*

6. Gap — Logo Redesign (2010)

- **What happened:** Gap changed its iconic logo without warning customers. Backlash on social media forced a reversal within a week.
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7. Sony — PSP White Campaign

- **What happened:** Sony ran an ad for its white PlayStation Portable showing a white woman dominating a black woman — criticized worldwide as racist.
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- **What happened:** Gap changed its iconic logo without warning customers. Backlash on social media forced a reversal within a week.
- **Lesson:** *Brand identity changes should involve customer engagement and testing.*

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- **What happened:** Sony ran an ad for its white PlayStation Portable showing a white woman dominating a black woman — criticized worldwide as racist.
- **Lesson:** *Visuals must be reviewed for cultural and racial sensitivity.*

8. Colgate — “Cue” Toothpaste in France

- **What happened:** Colgate launched a toothpaste called “Cue” in France, unaware that “Cue” was also the name of a pornographic magazine.
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9. Walmart — Germany Exit

- **What happened:** Walmart failed in Germany due to cultural mismatches (e.g., enforced smiling seen as fake, and centralized pricing). The company exited the market in 2006 after huge losses.
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8. Colgate — “Cue” Toothpaste in France

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- **Lesson:** *Market research must include local brand associations.*

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- **Lesson:** *Adapting management and service styles to local consumer expectations is vital.*

10. Kellogg's — India Entry

- **What happened:** Kellogg's cold cereals didn't fit Indian breakfast habits (warm, savory foods). The product didn't sell until the company localized it years later.



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- **Lesson:** *Consumer behavior and eating culture should shape product strategy.*

11. Apple – Newton PDA (1993)

- **What happened:** Apple's first personal digital assistant (PDA) promised handwriting recognition but often misread words. It became a media joke and was discontinued.
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12. Starbucks – Australia Exit (2008)

- **What happened:** Starbucks opened too quickly across Australia without adapting to local coffee culture, where independent cafés dominate. It closed 70% of stores.
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13. Target – Canada Expansion (2013–2015)

- **What happened:** Target rushed into Canada with 133 stores but suffered from empty shelves, high prices, and poor logistics. It exited within two years.
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 - **Lesson:** *Overpromising on unproven technology can destroy credibility.*
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- **Lesson:** *Operational readiness and supply chain efficiency are vital to brand success.*

14. Adidas – “Boston Marathon” Tweet (2017)

- **What happened:** Adidas congratulated runners with the message: “Congrats, you survived the Boston Marathon!”—unintentionally referencing the 2013 bombing tragedy.
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15. Netflix – Qwikster (2011)

- **What happened:** Netflix tried to split its DVD and streaming services into two brands (Netflix and Qwikster). Customers hated the confusion and price hike.
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16. Samsung – Galaxy Note 7 Recall (2016)

- **What happened:** The Galaxy Note 7 was recalled after reports of batteries catching fire. The crisis severely damaged trust.
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 - **Lesson:** *Brands must review messages in historical and emotional context.*
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 - **Lesson:** *Poor communication and sudden changes in pricing can alienate customers.*
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- **What happened:** The Galaxy Note 7 was recalled after reports of batteries catching fire. The crisis severely damaged trust.
- **Lesson:** *Product safety is part of marketing—brand reputation depends on reliability.*

17. Heineken – “Sometimes Lighter Is Better” Ad (2018)

- **What happened:** The beer company’s ad showed a bottle sliding past darker-skinned people before reaching a lighter-skinned woman, sparking racial criticism.



18. Tropicana – Packaging Redesign (2009)

- **What happened:** Tropicana replaced its familiar orange-with-a-straw logo with a minimalist design. Sales dropped 20% in two months.



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 - **Lesson:** *Unintended racial or social implications must be screened before launch.*
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- **Lesson:** *Visual familiarity and emotional connection are crucial for consumer goods.*

19. Bud Light – Dylan Mulvaney Controversy (2023)

- **What happened:** Bud Light partnered with a transgender influencer, leading to a major backlash and boycott from parts of its customer base.
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20. Nokia – Decline of a Giant (2010s)

- **What happened:** Once the world's largest phone maker, Nokia failed to adapt to smartphones and user experience innovation, losing to Apple and Android.
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- **What happened:** Bud Light partnered with a transgender influencer, leading to a major backlash and boycott from parts of its customer base.
 - **Lesson:** *Social or political branding requires careful audience analysis and risk management.*
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- **What happened:** Once the world's largest phone maker, Nokia failed to adapt to smartphones and user experience innovation, losing to Apple and Android.
- **Lesson:** *Complacency and failure to innovate lead to brand extinction.*

IV. Q&A and Quizzes

