

## Quebec, More or Less?

**Is there a significant change in the amount of made-in-Quebec advertising? Danny Kucharsky examines how the debate over French adaptations of English ads has evolved into one of regionalizing national and global strategies**

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When Quebec advertising pioneer Jacques Bouchard returned to Quebec a few years ago after living more than a decade in France, he reportedly deplored what he saw as a return, in force, of translated TV ads. "Did we bloody our noses for nothing in the 1960s?" said the man credited with leading the fight against adaptations and for original made-in-Quebec creative, as recounted in a biographical study of the BCP co-founder by the HEC Montreal business school.

But while Bouchard may have had his nose out of joint, the jury remains out on the extent to which advertising adaptations have really made a comeback in the province, primarily in the form of TV ads.

"Many people in this business believe there are more adaptations than ever and we're back in the '60s or the '50s," says Daniel Demers, president of Ogilvy Montreal and president of the Association des agences de publicité du Québec. "But I would say it's not only local (adaptations), but more international than ever. It's not just Quebec; it's also Canada."

While there may *seem* to be more adaptations now than a decade ago, there is actually less adapted media content and more original media content, says Pierre Arthur, director of marketing and research for Montreal daily *La Presse*.

Agency executives note that the advertising world has greatly changed since the Quiet Revolution of the '60s when Bouchard helped reshape the Quebec scene. Globalization, the proliferation of technology, fragmentation of the media scene, and explosion of voices in terms of brands, channels and options have all changed the dynamic of the world compared to the one in which Bouchard operated, notes Louis-Eric Vallée, president and CEO of Saint-Jacques Vallée Young & Rubicam in Montreal. Nowadays, he says, "You've got to operate across borders, geographies and languages as a result of the diminution of regional marketing initiatives."

There has been an increase in adaptations in Quebec, says Vallée in contradiction to Arthur, but adds "there's always been a pendulum between globalization and localization." Brands that are succeeding are those that "ascribe to global thoughts but local actions."

He cites the Toarino campaign created by his agency in Quebec for the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation as "truly a local campaign at its best." The billboard campaign began as a teaser using exotic beaches and festivals for the mysterious destination Toarino. That unknown locale was later revealed as Ontario, positioned to fulfill Quebecers' vacation needs by being perceived as having more attractions than just Marineland and the CN Tower. Previously, most Ontario Tourism marketing in Quebec was simply translated versions of the English campaigns.

MasterCard took a similar path earlier this year. Citing the need to create an ad that would resonate exclusively among Quebecers, MasterCard ran a 30-second Quebec-only spot by Marketel showing the misadventures of a French tourists visiting rural Quebec, who come face-to-face with confusing Quebec expressions.

Still, there is no shortage of TV fare that is virtually the same in both languages. To name but a few recent examples: A man mimics a crabby cat in both the French and English versions of recent Whiskas; the same partygoers dunk the burnt marshmallow in the Baileys; Canadian Tire ads with falling aisle signs feature different casts but the same messages; and the Toyota Sienna ad is the same but features different bald guys getting their toupées ignominiously tossed out the window.

What's more, it's sometimes Quebec-based agencies who are creating the adaptations in both languages for national accounts – whether it's Céline Dion warbling “You and I were meant to fly in spots” by Marketel for Montreal-based Air Canada or, more recently, Cossette's Bank of Montreal ad with a father trying to talk his son into buying a pink T-shirt to save on bank debit card charges.

If Quebec-based agencies or marketers are creating similar fare for both English and French Canada, it can make it more difficult to convince Toronto-based marketers that there may be a need for different creative for the two markets.

But the situation goes well beyond Canada, Vallée believes. More adaptations are being seen in Quebec – and the rest of Canada - because brands tend to derive greater efficiencies by taking a global stance to communicating benefits. “At the same time, there will always be room and opportunities to translate or adapt or express those global equities in a relevant local manner.”

Quebec's strong star system remains a phenomenon that shouldn't be forgotten by marketers, and a strong selling point in creating original creative in the province, Vallée warns. But out of sight is out of mind (“loin des yeux, loin du coeur”), and when marketers are headquartered in Toronto or New York, they will be influenced by their own perspectives.

He also notes the fact Montreal lags behind Toronto and Vancouver in its percentage of immigrants can be another reason for the continued need for different creative in different markets. “It's up to us to demonstrate it sometimes pays to do something specific. Otherwise, our job is to create value by applying the right global standards.”

For marketers, doing adaptations is an issue of efficiency, says Paul Hétu, Montreal-based vice-president of the Association of Canadian Advertisers. He's seen adaptations that fit the strategy - “people would never have known it was an adaptation” – and others that were “incredibly awful,” such as ads showing the lips of an English speaker moving totally out of sync with the French overdub.

Original creative can often be sloppy and won't do the job any better, he notes, while great ideas can carry over languages and countries. “If it's a good idea it's a good idea. There's no rules or regs,” adds Michele Leduc, president and creative director, Zip Communication, a Montreal agency that frequently adapts or translates everything from brochures to Web sites. “Each case has got to be analyzed as per its own creative merit and how that creative is working for its market.”

However, Hétu cautions that saving costs in production by going the adaptation route should not blind marketers to other issues. “You're going to pour the bulk of your money into transporting the story, so get the story right,” agrees Arthur. “If you as an advertiser are content with the limitations of adapts, more media weight won't correct any shortcomings. In fact, it might do the reverse – it might even amplify the shortcomings. Media can only carry what it's given to carry and I would rather have a few pennies less as a carrier but have the strongest possible message.”

Demers does the math: If you save 15% of your production budget by doing an adaptation, but your media costs \$1 million for a campaign that doesn't work, "you're spending more money than you would on creative."

He cites the Dove "Real Beauty" campaign – the Quebec version of which is handled by his office – as one that works extremely well in all languages. "It's stunning everywhere in the world. It does the job, it's on strat."

But most of the time, spots made in Quebec for Quebec seem to be more effective when you look at studies on awareness, he says. "The most noticed spots were specifically made with a Quebec perspective. Research after research says that."

The same theory holds for Quebec television fare, Arthur says, noting it's probably at least a decade since a dubbed TV show has been in the top ten in the Quebec ratings. "It would suggest that if indeed there is a trend to more adaptation, it would seem to go against the grain of what the media itself are doing."

However, that's not to say that everything that works in Quebec is uniquely from the province. He cites some of the leading programs, the singing reality show *Star Académie* and the gabfest *Tout le monde en parle*, both of which are locally produced spinoffs of imported ideas. Those shows prove Bouchard's original proposal that "you've got to make the idea work here," he says, noting that the original version of *Tout le monde en parle* from France gets "microscopic ratings" in Quebec compared to the blockbuster numbers racked up by the Radio-Canada version.

Despite research showing the merits of original creative, and ratings showing the merits of original Quebec TV content, Demers speculates adaptations may be on the increase because marketers' budgets are tighter and local agencies have not succeeded in proving that additional investment in creative is worth a difference.

"People still have to fight to make sure their concept is talking to the target group and is distinguished from other spots. Of course, it has to be on strategy, but it also has to be remarkable, and that's sometimes what we've forgotten in the process."