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Why bad English-language writing is bad for business

BY LAURA MATHESON



Customers and potential customers judge you and your company by the content you produce – and if you’re marketing to an international audience with poorly-written English-language material, you can expect to be judged harshly. In an era of ever-increasing concern about fraud and [personal data safety](#), badly written content could be scaring away even more potential customers – and making you look like a twit.

A visceral reaction to English-language mistakes

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SUMO

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BY LAURA MATHESON

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Customers and potential customers judge you and your company by the content you produce – and if you’re marketing to an international audience with poorly-written English-language material, you can expect to be judged harshly. In an era of ever-increasing concern about fraud and [personal data safety](#), badly written content could be scaring away even more potential customers – and making you look like a twit.

A visceral reaction to English-language mistakes

Recently, a business acquaintance did a website relaunch and, after having a peek, I just about had a fit when I immediately spotted four English-language mistakes on the first page. The lack of a comma, using ‘weather’ instead of ‘whether,’ a misspelled word, a badly-conjugated verb. Taken independently, these mistakes are no big deal – but densely concentrated on the front page of their website, they made me wonder about the competencies of the company and the people behind the site.

Like any good defender of the English language, I fired off an email to my acquaintance suggesting a few corrections. They rapidly removed the English-language faults and saved any further visitors from this grammatical assault on their senses.

I’m not alone in this nearly allergic response to improperly-used English. For high-level English speakers, these kinds of mistakes are reason enough to reject a business – or, even worse, snap a photo and [create a meme](#) poking fun at the poor English-language writing.

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First impressions matter

Consumers are understandably cautious and want to deal with trustworthy companies. A regular onslaught of phishing emails and fake news is pushing the standards for credibility even higher. Typos, improper grammar or a confusingly-worded headline could make your desired audience think your company or product are bogus – driving them to one of your competitors.

Back in 2009, [Usability.gov did a study on factors that impact website credibility](#) – and typos are one of them. As the web has progressed and [online research has become standard for B2B purchasers](#), these points have become even more important. In a world of fast, flashy media, users perceive credibility cues even quicker – and do not hesitate to swipe or scroll away if their initial perceptions are negative.

‘Idiot’ is ‘idiot’ in every language¹

Writing high-quality text in English is challenging for most native English speakers. Throw in the complexity of a different mother tongue with nuances that don't translate, and you're bound to end up with muddled content that doesn't resonate with your target market. Not only that, the [price of poor language](#) could be your personal credibility.

Thanks to LinkedIn and Google, it's easier than ever to figure out who's behind the scenes – so, in addition to creating a sense of untrustworthiness about your company and what you deliver, you could also be seen as personally responsible for English-language mistakes.

Don't let sub-standard English-language writing negatively impact your brand or your own image. There are ways [international companies can overcome the language challenge](#) – and good reasons to steer clear of cringe-worthy copy.

¹ For the record, the word idiot is pretty much the same throughout Europe, with Germany (Dummkopf) and Ireland (leathcheann) as notable exceptions. The concept is universal!

Published on the Integrated B2B blog:

<https://integratedb2b.cylindr.com/2018/12/07/why-bad-english-language-writing-is-bad-for-business/>