

## **Semiotics, the unconscious cultural voice.**

Cultural behavioural patterns and habits dominate a big part of our daily interactions in the environment we live in. A lot of our cultural response comes from our philosophical and religious education, tradition and psychological impulses which gives direction to our lives. Beside all these automatisms there is another *arche* moderator which operates on the unconscious level of our mental live. This component is called Semiotics.

Especially in cross cultural Marketing and Advertising will you need guidance from principles out of Semiotics.

### **An introduction.**

We are all familiar with written alphabetic language and with graphic language under the form of logo, emblem, icon, sign etc. Both types are fundamentally different in operation. In a sign language the message is hidden in the sign itself; in the alphabetic language the message will be decoded out of the linear string of letters from an alphabet.

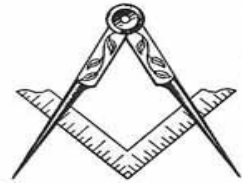
Some graphics in sign language are simple and straight forward, like the traffic or warning signs. Others are mysterious, like a sphinx or even very complicated, like a Mandala.



All graphic signs can be reduced to simple patterns like circles, squares, triangles which drafted in different sizes, proportions, relations, colours etc. will compose different messages. These messages are culture dependent and sensitive.

## Graphics.

In the East is 'balance' a key issue. In the West, we are dominated by the sign of 'dominance' which is the triangle. This is best illustrated with e.g. the yin-yang sign and the logos' of Freemasonry and the Scientology Church.



## Colours.

Different cultures make different associations to colours. Yellow and red are the preferred colours in the East, while green will be associated with Islam.

Be aware that the colours used in your advertising might signal a wrong message.

## Brand names: 'Noman est Oman'.

How do brand names make appeal to customers? Also this has a cultural biased answer. Is there is a link between logo and brand name?

Most Western Brands are built on their founder who is an individual person, like Bekaert, Phillips, Solvay. Asian brand names mostly herald a mission, like Hitachi ( sun rise), Samsung (three stars), Daewoo (great house).

But also be aware that the translation of your brand name should associate the core of your product and not fool it. BMW is translated in Chinese as *bao-ma*, what means 'precious horse'; Peugeot becomes *biao zhi* or beautiful or handsome. When Google got into discussions with the Chine Government about free and open access, the Chinese made from the word Google, *gougou* with the meaning of dog, or *goule* as enough.

## Advertising.

If you like to get an advertising which is appealing, you first have to know what the cultural values of the targeted audience are. There are many examples of brands that have killed their own image with propagating content which in the home country is neutral but considered as offensive in another market. If you want to align your brand values and product magic into a cultural different market than your own customers, you will have to know the taboos, the superstition, the nostalgia, the values and the dreams of your new customers.

Once you have mapped all these cultural sensitive vectors, then only you can start building a semiotic framework for your media match to your new business environment.