

Which values do international customers value?

Tradition. Qualität. Erfolg. Innovation. Kompetenz. How many times have you seen these words in German marcoms – alone or together? “Qualität aus Tradition”, for example, returns tens of thousands of Google hits. While quality, success, skills, expertise, innovation and tradition are all important, they’re often abused as a crutch or catch-all solution. Companies that rely too heavily on these values may wind up with little to distinguish them from the competition.

Something else to consider: the way different cultures articulate values. Outside Germany, tradition might come across as stodgy, not reassuring. Firms in the English-speaking world tend to draw on diverse values that are complementary in striking ways and paint a rich, layered picture of the company. Here, we explore some of the many alternatives:

Openness and accountability. Many modern consumers no longer expect or accept top-down or impersonal relationships with brands. They want their voices to be heard – and a clearer picture of your company. Microsoft’s values statement reflects these new ‘rules of engagement’, characterising the firm as “open and respectful with others” with a desire to be “self critical, questioning and committed to personal excellence and self improvement” and “accountable for commitments [and] results”. Applied rigorously, this approach does more than show how human the business is – it helps companies transform values such as transparency, responsibility and self-criticism into tools that help to maintain high standards.

Teamwork, trust and inclusiveness. Highlighting these values shows that your company holds customer and employee interaction in high esteem. Let customers know they’re in safe hands by talking about trust, integrity, honesty, professionalism, respect and commitment. “Trust is the foundation of the BBC: we are independent, impartial and honest,” states the BBC. Values such as diversity also contribute to business excellence: “We respect each other and celebrate our diversity so that everyone can give their best. [...] Great things happen when we work together.”

A pioneering spirit. Underscoring peace of mind and quality may be an excellent strategy for your German marcoms, but when your business goes abroad, it’s equally important to show you’re not afraid to take risks. So tell your audience about your company’s ambition, courage, passion, leadership, originality and vision. Levi Strauss takes this attitude. “It takes courage to be great,” Levi’s explains. “Courage is the willingness to challenge hierarchy, accepted practices and conventional wisdom. Courage includes truth telling and acting resolutely on our beliefs.” Levi’s certainly had courage when they introduced the world to jeans – and their ambitious, pioneering attitude certainly paid off. It could for you, too.

Marcams for international audiences need to close cultural gaps, not accentuate them. What do your materials say about your brand to customers around the globe? Investigate it – and you might open up a world of possibilities for your company.