

Alexander Repiev

Independent writer



Advertising
Public Relations
Marketing
Translations

Ul. Generala Berzarina, 19-1-70
123585 Moscow Russia
Tel./Fax: (pr.) 194-52-21
Tel./Fax: (of.) 175-0554

To: Whom it may concern at O&M
From: Alexander Repiev, independent writer, Moscow
Date: 10 April 1994
Subject: **Microsoft Account**

Dear Sirs:

I am an independent copywriter with years of experience in advertising, marketing & PR. Among my clients there have been some computer and copier companies. I was on the board of a software company BIS of Donetsk. (Please find enclosed my CV and some of my products.) Also I am a keen computer user myself. Now I am considering becoming a full-time marketing manager at the Moscow office of a Texas-based computer company that is quite active in Russia. This all explains my interest in Russian computer and software markets. I plan to undertake extensive marketing analysis of this market and to contribute in some ways, including advertising, articles, electronic databases of U.S. publications on computer, networking and related technologies, and so on.

Recently I began freelancing for O&M Moscow on Microsoft account. It is an honor and privilege for me to work for this major software company, and I would only be too happy if my modest contributions could help its excellent products become more popular in Russia.

My very first Microsoft (MS) assignments have shown to me that there is very much room for improvement in the company's advertising in Russia. I voiced some of my concerns to O&M Moscow offices and they proposed that I commit them to paper. This memo is a sketch of some preliminary ideas of mine. To be sure, the Russian software market and MS advertising policies are in need of a more rigorous and extensive research to arrive at more meaningful marketing results.

Present advertising effort

At present MS texts meant for Russia are produced outside Russia. They generally ignore the peculiarities of the Russian market, its psychological, economic, technological and even linguistic aspects. One of the texts contained even wrong system requirements and factual mistakes.

It is only at one's peril that MS can continue to follow this practice. If it wants to boost its sales in Russia, it must revamp its advertising to make it *sell* — *or else!*

Some ideas on the Russian software market

In the mature software market of, say, Germany one sees virtually no piracy, with even *Finanzamt* strictly controlling unauthorized uses of software; mostly unprotected software products; high level of legal and computer culture and education. By contrast, in the Russian scene one sees:

- nearly 100% piracy;
- low level of computer education;
- few computers, especially powerful enough to run Windows and its applications.

Piracy

Historically, software piracy, especially of Western products, was not considered reprehensible in Russia. It was only recently that appropriate legislation was passed by the Russian Parliament. But it is going to take decades for its implications to sink in with most Russians, especially considering the low level of legal culture of the country. Some companies, e.g., DEC, have initiated amnesty programs that authorize stolen copies of their software in Russia and encourage users to pay for upgrades.

If software companies ignore to educate their potential customers in advantages of buying products instead of stealing them, properly advertised products will be appreciated all right and copied.

Computer proficiency

Whereas the computer has long been a valuable tool in Western offices and households, with people used to it from their nappies, Russia is way behind. There are, of course, some computer experts, but generally the level of computer proficiency is much lower than in the West for a number of reasons, the major one being shortage of computers. (Attached is my translation of an article from *Kommersant*.)

Hardware

As follows from the article, the fleet of PC's in Russia is currently dominated by low-end computers (286s, and even XT's), which have to use obsolete software.

Hopefully, this year will see a sharp increase in sales of 386s and 486s, platforms for Windows-based applications. MS and O&M should be prepared for it.

MS advertising in Russia

I am in no position to judge the quality of the brochures and other advertising materials used by MS in the West, because I have no idea of those markets. Perhaps they are good. Most of them look like catalogues of features, which is perhaps reasonable for a market in which most of the customers needn't be explained, say, what desktop publishing, spreadsheet, database (especially, relational database) is. What they need is some hints on the upgrades of a program. Maybe they just purr with delight when fed with a diet like the following (MS *Access* brochure):

- Graphical System Relationship Builder
- Union Queries
- Subqueries
- SQL Pass-Through

- Transaction Support
- Referential Integrity
- Cascade updates and deletes
- Rich event model
- Named pipe support
- Code behind forms

(I'd love to see some results of pre- and after-testings of texts the above on Western prospects.)

More of education, less of “catalogue”

And now we try and use such texts to sell Access, or even MS Works, to a minor Russian company, which has on its computers a simple word processor and maybe an elementary Russian-made accounting program. The company doesn't know that it might benefit from MS products, but all that jargon will be lost on them, or even put them in a blue funk, although every other word in the copy is “simple” and “easy”.

If we stay with *MS Works* for a while, we will have to explain to people (used to documents produced using a mechanical typewriter) the importance of professional-looking documents for the image of a company, the striking user-friendliness of the Windows environment, the capabilities of Windows applications in terms of fonts, automated routine operations, etc., etc. — things that have already become second nature to Western office workers.

When I was marketing manager at Rank Xerox Moscow, I used to give copier and Ventura seminars. I took great pains explaining how important it is in a market economy to improve the image of a company and what good-looking documents can do for them, I tried to make my demo sessions as problem-oriented as possible. My knowledge of the office problems mattered more than my knowledge of Ventura mechanics. One testimony of this was the harvest of orders after those seminars.

In Russia's immature computer and software market advertising should be more educational. O&M should recommend MS educational campaigns, including articles, educational brochures (*e.g., A Computer in Your Office*), TV demonstrations, educational computer programs, and an array of other things.

Selling solutions

It is well known in selling theory that companies should sell solutions, not products. The marketing and advertising program of MS in Russia should become solution-oriented. The ad materials should explain to lay audiences how to solve this or that problem best using MS products.

Terminology

High-tech ad materials are known to be oriented at two audiences: non-specialist decision-makers, and influential non-buyers (back-room boys). Some (or most of MS materials are read by non-specialists only.

The bulk of the copy should include introductory and educational material, containing *a minimum of terminology*, the copywriter should think twice before using a new term. The materials may also include some food for experts, set in a smaller type perhaps, laden with terminology, abbreviations, tough jargon, schematics, and so on.

Positioning

The current MS ad materials leave a non-specialist to wonder as to the possible uses of the product; a specialist finds no answers to many of his questions either. It would perhaps make sense to reconsider the positioning of MS ad materials in Russia.

Ads for new versions of products

When MS issues a new version of a product, it may be of interest to new users and users of earlier versions alike. It would save some reading time for old hands and some money for MS to issue very short, and cheap, upgrade sheets for those who just need the details of what is new in the new version.

Microsoft image in Russia

O&M should help MS to build the image of a solution-provider, educator, and enlightener. Image-building devices may include a wide variety of PR & ad things, such as roadshows, regular seminars to work out Russian MS terminology, the creation of glossaries and dictionaries, sponsorships, and what not.

Exhibitions

O&M could also help MS at exhibitions. My experience with exhibitions shows that pretty much depends on homework. Please find attached my exhibition flyer.

Presentations and press-conferences

The efficiency of these events varies from elementary champagne-and-caviar parties to productive PR exercises. Again they must be carefully prepared. The agency could produce press-releases, programs, and other materials, and even ghost speeches for MS V.I.P.'s. One example: I prepared a press-conference for Digital Equipment Corporation devoted to the launching in Russia of the Alpha processor. Each representative of mass media received a press-release (attached) with several articles. Nearly all of the papers and magazines represented at the event published editorials. On the other hand, I knew of high-tech press-conferences that have produced virtually nothing. They were played by the ear, without any homework.

Production of MS materials for Eastern Europe

The current practice of concentrating all the MS creative for Eastern Europe at one place may be not bad, provided adequate consideration is given to the peculiar features of this market, including its linguistic aspects.

Most of the above seems to be of relevance for whole Eastern Europe. But this is only to be borne out by research.

This means that most copies will have to be written anew.

Linguistic aspects

The master copies will still have to be produced in English, but in a slightly different kind of English. Eastern Europe speaks in Slavonic languages plus Hungarian and Rumanian. Not all English words and phrases can easily be translated into them. For example, translation into, say,

Russian of the words like *computing*, especially *high-end computing*, *networking*, *full-featured*, *sharing*, etc., can take several words. In the body of the copy an experienced translator can handle this, but titles and headings including “problem” English words may look extremely cumbersome when translated.

Therefore, English-language master copiers for this region should be written with this in mind. Translatability is especially important with slogans.

Slogans

Admittedly, for high-tech brands slogans are not that important as for consumer commodities. Expensive durables and devices are not bought on the strength of slogans, but a bad slogan can hardly increase sales.

We taught the world to copy. In a cross-cultural situation slogans must be tested for translatability. For example, when I was thinking up a slogan for Rank Xerox that would have to be used in English, Russian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian, I ended up with *We taught the world to copy*, which, among other things, was easily translatable. When I left the company, RX began to use the slogan *The Document Company* — a perfect example of untranslatability and other qualities.

Мы научили мир копировать.

Ми навчили світ копіювати.

Мы навчили світ копіювати.

O&M Moscow was asked to translate a MS slogan created elsewhere (something about wheels). Strictly speaking, it *can* be translated into Russian, but only to produce a meaningless phrase.

My proposals

I would propose O&M Moscow to entrust me with the production of (a) English-language master copies of MS ad materials for Eastern Europe and (b) Russian versions of the materials. I might compete for the job with copywriters in Vienna or elsewhere.

I am prepared to provide for each document a marketing and positioning brief, recommendations on where to insert some local elements, etc.

The effort would have to be phased in carefully and flexibly, and it would include some preliminary coordinating.

Faithfully yours.

A. Repiev

Independent copywriter

Enclosures