

A 3D rendering of a magnifying glass with a silver handle and a large lens. The lens is focused on a portion of a globe showing the Americas and Europe. The globe is displayed on a computer monitor. The background is a dark blue gradient with faint reflections of the globe and monitor.

Multilingual Search Engine Optimization

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An online multilingual marketing strategy is essential for any business wanting to expand into international markets. Today, companies are spending thousands of dollars to develop and maintain localized websites outside their domestic market. What good is this expense, however, if a company's website cannot be found?

Perhaps the most difficult part of gaining online credibility is promoting a company's website in a variety of search engines, thereby allowing potential and existing customers to locate it easily. With so much research surrounding search

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engine optimization, it is important to understand that multilingual search engine optimization (MSEO) is a more intricate process—without it, international marketing efforts will almost always be hidden behind domestic competition.

The Challenge

Regardless of the fact that con-

sumers in Germany or Spain do speak English, they do not shop in English. In 2006, the research firm Common Sense Advisory published a study, *Can't Read, Won't Buy*, in which the preferences of 2,400 online shoppers outside the U.S. were examined.¹ More than half of the respondents indicated that they make purchases only on sites with content in their

native language; in France and Japan, over 60% of the respondents indicated similar preferences. Accordingly, when buyers search online with Google Germany or Google Spain, they do so in their native language. If a website is not set up with at least one² native language localized page and corresponding keywords for the search engines, it will not receive a good ranking in the search results and will most likely not be found. It is that simple.

In Jupiter Research's 2008 *Website Globalization Report*, senior analyst Zia Daniell Wigder wrote: "Translation enables content to be locally read, but may not be sufficient to attract and retain international audiences if the content is not tailored to and optimized for local

keyword searches in foreign languages, specifically languages with special characters such as Hebrew, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean. These difficulties are a result of inefficient tracking technologies that are unable to function with certain languages. Additionally, Google, in conjunction with other search engines, is still trying to define how to register international search volume in the Google Trends system. Currently, it is difficult to obtain search data with international words because English measurements do not apply in different languages. Per language, the volume of search data is still lower than English, but by combining languages such as German, French, and Spanish, it is easier to achieve better results.

- Performing linguistic research of popular industry terms.
- Performing search engine research on competition and popularity (as much as possible).
- Executing a full competitor analysis in the target language.
- Consulting regularly with the product team to determine new keywords and industry terms.

Website Modifications

With an MSEO strategy in place, the next step is to make any necessary website modifications. In general, MSEO involves rapid adjustment of multilingual text to fit the ever-changing algorithms of search engines. In addition, the MSEO vendor the company hires to handle the localization project often needs to add a significant amount of multilingual content to the existing website. The modification process is similar to general localization, requiring ongoing management and, optimally, the involvement of four separate teams:

- The MSEO team is in charge of modifying the content and working closely with the localization and quality assurance teams.
- The localization team translates new content while providing regular updates and translation memories for the website.
- The quality assurance team performs ongoing verification of the updated Web pages and ensures that the content maintains its integrity.

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preferences and behavior. For example, companies should incorporate basic search engine optimization (SEO) for international markets to ensure translated content includes the most relevant search terms in each local market."³

A Multilingual Search Engine Optimization Strategy

Defining an MSEO strategy is an elaborate, time-consuming process because targeting keywords outside the English language requires research and expertise.

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A typical SEO strategy begins with a solid keyword research process. In MSEO, however, the keyword research is more complex. Five standard MSEO steps include:

- Understanding key industry terms (construct a glossary when possible).

- Finally, the client must remain in control of the website content. If the client is unable to ensure the validity of foreign language content, the content creation and localization process must be designed to work in partnership with the client.

The last point is critical. Many companies do not have the in-house resources to validate the changes an MSEO vendor will suggest or implement. This results in inconsistent marketing messages and diminishes the quality of the website. In order to tackle this challenge, the MSEO vendor should provide a testing team, completely separate from the SEO and localization departments, which can offer an objective review of each change. An approved glossary from the client is still necessary, but this supplementary team will help ensure international consistency for the company.

With the appropriate teams established, genuine optimization of a global website can begin. The process of MSEO is similar to the English SEO process, with the addition of the following steps to promote the multilingual website:

- Website code optimization.
- Website content optimization as per the keyword algorithm.
- Website usability optimization.
- Website quality testing.
- Website submission.
- Website link building in the target language.

Translation/Localization Process

The translation process is affected by the intention to perform MSEO on future or existing multilingual websites. Due to frequent content changes and potential new keywords, transla-

The Benefits of Multilingual SEO

The benefits of the MSEO process are immense. It is important to realize that even though most Internet users are not native English speakers, the majority of the search engine compe-

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tors will already have a pre-SEO guideline to follow once the localization process has begun.

It is not uncommon for translated websites to be unable to compete in their relevant online segment, and for drastic or complete relocalization and rewriting to occur in order to regain a favorable position in the search engine rankings. For example, one client, a homeopathic medical herbs company, had already localized their website in German, Spanish, and French before seeking MSEO services. Starting the multilingual SEO process with this unique range of products and treatments revealed that the selected terminology and key phrases used were not directed to the proper target market, nor were they popular search terms. In this case, conducting a full linguistic analysis of the website and retranslating the entire site with the correct online terminology was essential.

tion is still conducted in English. MSEO provides a relatively fast technique to brand and expand a company's business in the global market. A website designed with SEO tools will enjoy a diversity of visitors, rapid growth, and steady traffic, ultimately improving the website's online position in search engine results.

MSEO will also affect a company's international branding and allow it to create online connections and additional business opportunities that were previously beyond reach. Likewise, the ability for potential non-English partners and affiliates to search actively for the company increases awareness of its services and products in the global online community.

MSEO can actually provide market advantage. For example, let us examine the following keyword combination in English and German—website translation and Website *Übersetzung*—using Google.de (the major stakeholder of online searches in Germany). The amount of competi-

tion for this keyword combination in English is about 12 million. In German, however, only 9,000 are competing for this same combination, even though just about as many searches are performed in German as in English. This is a perfect chance for a company using MSEO strategies to advertise their brand and achieve top search engine rankings more quickly.

Today, companies that practice MSEO enjoy increased traffic, international branding, and higher conversions from their website. There are many vendors that can help with localization, translation, and MSEO strategies. For instance, one source for finding a vendor to support an MSEO project is the Globalization and Localization Association's *Language Technology and Services Directory*.⁴ You can also search ATA's online directories for localization experts.⁵

A Worthy Investment

A business will find investing in an MSEO project worthwhile. In today's Internet landscape, multilingual websites are essential in order for a company to reach its entire target market.

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Notes

1. You can read a summary of the survey findings by registering for free at www.common senseadvisory.com/members/registration.php.
2. In general, it is important to note that the amount of quality localized content on a website is positively correlated with the opportunity for that website to appear in the top rankings of major search engines. Additionally, by only having one localized Web page, potential clients will be unable to access everything a website and brand has to offer. A company's international marketing strategy can be compromised when the global market has limited access to valuable website information that could contribute to worldwide brand recognition and online sales.
3. Jupiter Research, www.jupiterresearch.com.
4. Globalization and Localization Association Language Technology and Services Directory, www.gala-global.org/vendor-database.html.
5. Go to www.atanet.org/onlinedirectories, select *Directory of Translation and Interpreting Services* or *Directory of Language Services Companies*, then go to Advanced Search and specify "localization" in the Keyword option.