



## Global Link

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### 10 Tips to Localize Your Website When Going International

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By: Gary Muddyman

Going international can be a complicated task. In order to ensure that your organization is well prepared for the changes involved in global business, consider the following ten items:

#### 1. See the Big Picture

It is often said that whatever is online is global. To a certain extent, that is true, but you need more than a .com address to be globally successful. Don't forget that, like any other business, to be successful online you must have some key advantages over the competitors. Ask yourself what parts of your website the new market needs to see? In general, it is better to have a smaller site that appeals directly to your target customers and is hosted and optimized locally than a bad translation of your full domestic website. Many companies that have succeeded abroad have started off with microsites that highlight a core offering for new customers. As your success grows locally, so may your website.

#### 2. Understand What You're Trying to Achieve

Don't just say, "I want to go global." Ask yourself which countries you want to go to and why. Then ask, for each market, "Who are my competitors and what can I offer that they can't?"

Research global markets and make sensible decisions about where your product or service has the best chance of success. It is often a good idea to start small and to test the waters in one market and expand gradually. What drove you to the decision to expand abroad? What did you hope to achieve in that initial decision? Come back to this every time you decide to launch your site in a new market. Having a sound strategy and a detailed plan before you begin goes without saying, but you'd be surprised by how often these things are missed in the race to produce in a website in as many languages as possible.

#### 3. Know the Market

Do your due diligence so that you understand the new market very well. You'll have to know in terms of business and culture what you're getting yourself into. Make sure you know who your competitors are and what your advantage over them is, and keep an eye on their marketing efforts. The lesson to remember is to strategize globally but market locally (see tip number four). There are professionals who can help you with this, such as language services agencies and professional translators.

You'll probably need to use in-country specialists to help with your marketing, including your search engine marketing, pay-per-click marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, and social media.

Ensure that marketing activities match the nuances of the local area and plan around them. For example, if you're launching in Australia, know when Australia Day is and celebrate it.

If you're using affiliates, pick a local one. One affiliate network is rarely efficient or effective in more than one market.

#### 4. Culturally Customize Content and Design

Communicating locally is critical when trying to expand internationally. It is critical to accept that there is no such thing as marketing *to Europe* or *to Asia*. Cultural differences in foreign markets span from the use of color and images to what certain cultures find funny or acceptable in copy. The most persuasive copy often includes references to popular culture, which can only be written by a local. For this reason, it is important to take note of tip number nine.

As for design, this is a balance between brand consistency and adaptation to the local culture. It can be as simple as a change of colors and symbols and adapting design to fit with local web standards. Equally, it can be as complicated as starting a design from scratch to fully customize it according to graphical trends and customs, colors, symbols and other cultural influences.

For example, in China, the color red symbolizes good luck, but white, blue, and black represent death; these colors should be used with caution. There are examples similar to this in almost every market. Make sure you're working with people who understand these cultural nuances thoroughly. It would be terrible to fail because you used a clock on your homepage, which represents death in China.

#### 5. Be Aware of Legal and Regulatory Requirements

They vary widely from country to country. In the digital age, this means keeping on top of such things as data capture and privacy laws as well as those relating to the sale of your particular product. If you're selling a product or service online, pay particular attention to the checkout and transaction procedure.

As the complexities and security issues surrounding e-payments increase, some online retailers are turning to outsourced payment processing companies to manage their e-payment solutions.

Make sure your site complies with the [Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard](#).

#### 6. Have Back Up and Support

Reaching international audiences may be easier than serving them. You must think through your service proposition from start to finish before you choose the market to enter.

Plan for success and ensure that you are ready to respond to the demand you expect to generate. When an order or request comes in from an international buyer, what happens? Is there someone who can speak in his or her language and in his or her time zone? If not, don't expect many sales.

#### 7. International SEO

Once you have got your site localized, you want it to be found, and just because it's got a page-one Google ranking in the United States does not mean it will achieve the same result in China. In fact, your new customers may not even use Google.

The terms and phrases your customers use to search for your products in the new market are probably not a direct translation of the terms and phrases your domestic

customers use. Research will need to be undertaken to find out how the locals talk about your products and the terms and phrases they use to search for products or services similar to yours. Those phrases will need to be briefed to the translator so they can be included on the site, and they will also be used in your meta data.

It is advisable to register the site locally and to host it locally too with the appropriate top-level domain, (i.e., .co, .uk, .de, .com, .au, and so on); search engines love this.

**8. Use Appropriate Technology to Manage the Site**

Trying to manage multiple internal and external sites, plus translations of these sites in multiple languages with different technology or content management systems, can be costly, time consuming, inefficient, and generally a nightmare for everyone involved. The Gilbane Group, a company that analyzes content management technology, says best why you need the right technology to manage multiple websites:

“Given the strong demand for multiple websites and the potential costs and inefficiencies of building these out separately, there is a natural need for the right technology. At minimum, organizations need web content management technology that uses IT resources efficiently and supports centralized strategy and governance; at the same time, the technology must give site managers and contributors the means to create and manage the content quickly and easily.”

A good content management system will provide ease of use for your marketing staff, IT staff, content contributors, and translators. The technology that is right for you will depend on the complexity and number of your websites, intranets, extranets, and so forth. Check out the Gilbane website at [www.gilbane.com](http://www.gilbane.com) for more information on the technology that will best suit your needs.

**9. Use Professional Translators**

Translators are not just people who speak two languages. Qualified translators are trained professionals whose job is to make sense of your message to a new audience. They can advise you on what will and won't work in your target market and will make sure the copy resonates with the audience. Their job is to make the copy as appealing to your new audience as possible.

It is their job to understand the market, know the audience, be up with the lingo and popular culture references. When sourced and used correctly, professional translators will be an invaluable resource to you.

The nonprofit [Globalization and Localization Association](http://Globalization and Localization Association) has a searchable database of service and technology providers worldwide. All good language services providers have a database of worldwide translators. If you're not using a service provider, sites like [www.proz.com](http://www.proz.com) or [www.translatorscafe.com](http://www.translatorscafe.com) will help you source a suitable translator. These sites are also valuable resources for learning about translation and localization.

**10. Take the Cultural Customization of Your Website Seriously**

This one is worth repeating. Lack of cultural customization can lead to cultural blunders, translation blunders, users finding your website unfamiliar and strange, lack of stickiness (time user spends on the site), lower propensity to make a purchase, lack of repeat visits, bad word of mouth, and many other attitudinal and behavioral actions from your customers that can undermine your web globalization efforts.

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