



## The Little Known Truth About Launching Your Website Abroad

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By [admin](#)

**Weekly Interview: You claim to have a secret strategy for successfully launching a website abroad. What is it?**

**Gary Muddyman:** In a nutshell, it's cultural customisation. It is a huge mistake to believe that just because your website has been a smash hit in the States that it will work in the UK or Australia, let alone France, South Korea or Brazil.



Culture affects the way consumers do such things as browse websites, make the decision to purchase and even how they are willing to pay for purchases online. Expectations of delivery times and privacy vary widely from country to country, and there are also legal and regulatory requirements that you must know about if you're selling something or using people's information. This all sounds obvious, but you would be surprised at how often people get this wrong.

**WI: So what you're saying is, before you launch your website in a new country, you must customise it for that country. What does that entail?**

**GM:** Yes, you must culturally customise it. In the language services industry, we call it localization.

Localization is the cultural and linguistic adaptation of products, communications and messaging. Yes, it involves the translation of words so that they make sense in a foreign language, but it also 'localizes' these words and messages to ensure they make sense linguistically and culturally. Localization also refers to the process by which software is translated and engineered so that it functions in the new language according to the new market's local protocols.

I like to use the definition on CIO.com, which states: "In localizing a product, in addition to idiomatic language translation, such details as time zones, money, national holidays, local color sensitivities, product or service names, gender roles, and geographic examples must all be considered. A successfully localized service or product is one that appears to have been developed within the local culture."

I think that's a great definition because it encompasses everything you need to think about. You can translate the words, that's easy, but does the meaning of the translated words have local currency? In other words, does it click with the local audience? Are the colors, symbols and images you've used offensive in any way? This is more important than you may think. For example, in India the head is considered the seat of the soul and one should never touch another person's head, not even a child's. In Turkey, on the other hand, patting a child on the head is good luck. What kind of imagery have you used on your website? Are people touching? What do they look like?

I have a great real life example of just how bad this can be. In Hindu culture, the swastika is a highly revered religious symbol of peace and wellbeing. It is actually used ceremoniously to ward off evil. When an Indian company tried to launch its Swastika brand of clothing in the West, however, it soon discovered that particular symbol has an altogether different meaning there! There are probably hundreds of examples of faux pas like this taking place on the internet every day, and it's actually quite easy to avoid.

**WI: How do you avoid them then? Where do you gather all this information?**

**GM:** It's important to get a good language services provider to help you.

A full directory of providers can be found at the non-profit, international Globalization and Localization Association's website (<http://www.gala-global.org>).

A good agency will always use local people to translate and localize your website. Their local knowledge will help answer many of your questions. In addition to using translators local to the market, however, your agency should also have experience in your industry. This is particularly important because, while I've just said that you have to culturally customise, not all industries or markets will demand the same level of localization.

**WI: How do we know how much to localize our individual website then?**

**GM:** That is a very good question. There is a tool, known as the GOST-buster, that can help you find the answer to this question. The GOST-buster is an audience segmentation tool, which segments your audience according to the cultural preferences of your target audience. Which segment your audience fits into dictates how much you need to localize your website in order to maximise your ROI on localization.

**WI: That sounds interesting. Can you explain in a bit more detail please?**

**GM:** We call it the GOST-buster because it turns your new customers from murky, ghost-like figures into real people – it gives you a clear picture of them. But also because GOST stands for Global Online Segmentation Tool. The tool was developed by Dr. Nitish Singh from the international business school at Saint Louis University after an investigation into how national and global identities affect the way people consume the internet.

The research found that there are generally four types of online consumers and each category differs in its preference for degrees of website localization.

**WI: So what would you say is the overriding message for companies about to launch their website abroad?**

**GM:** It's simple: understand the local language, local culture, and how your industry works in that new market. That should give you some good background on what your target customers want and therefore how much you need to localize your website. With that knowledge, you can't fail.

*Gary Muddyman is a businessman and entrepreneur and is currently CEO of Conversis, one of the world's fastest growing language services agencies. Gary started Conversis in 2003 with the intention of advancing the understanding and use of localization as a strategic business tool. He received his MBA from Warwick University. Gary's website can be found at [www.conversisglobal.com](http://www.conversisglobal.com) and he blogs about international business and marketing at [www.internationalbusinessblog.conversisglobal.com](http://www.internationalbusinessblog.conversisglobal.com).*