



# Web Globalization

## Why you should consider a multilingual web presence

### Introduction

As online productivity tools, e-commerce applications and web services become ever more ubiquitous, the need for businesses to address the fact that the Internet is indeed a global medium, becomes increasingly crucial. Through the early years of Internet popularization, many North American companies were blissfully unaware of the fact that only 5% of the world population considers English its mother tongue. With the recent downturn in the local markets, gaining access to new foreign markets is considered a good diversification practice. The issue of globalizing one's web presence has thus become an important strategic decision for many companies in their efforts to leverage their products and services in more markets.

### The need for globalization

For internationally active companies, such as the member companies of the SCCC who may be commercially active on both sides of the Atlantic, there are many good reasons to consider and then implement a globalized Internet presence. Aside from the obvious facts, that anything on the web can be seen by anyone anywhere in the world and that users on the web are becoming progressively more international and multilingual, there are also more immediate business reasons that may sway a company to localize its websites.

English may currently still be the language of choice for the majority of people connected to the online world, but it will not be long before non-English web content is more preponderant. Especially when it comes to completing a commer-

cial transaction, it is extremely important to give the customer as much comfort as possible and communicate to her/him as clearly as possible what the details of the transaction are.

Even though there is a trend towards unified markets and removing trade barriers between jurisdictions, the reality still is that as a company you have to address your customers with a customized message and you cannot expect that one solution will fit all. Customers will feel more comfortable when content, services and processes are tailored to their personal needs, their market and their cultural environment.

Companies can now easily reach new markets thanks to the omnipresence of the Internet. A company's ability to address its target markets in a customized fashion becomes a competitive advantage.



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Furthermore, taking into account that online customers are three times more likely to complete a purchase when addressed in their own language, localization of websites becomes indispensable.

Certain cultures and societies may historically be more in tune with cross border business and multilingual trade (typically smaller countries that are not self-sufficient, such as Switzerland, have been good at this). An imperialistic approach to doing business may often rub foreign prospects the wrong way. Internet strategies nowadays should therefore always be designed with all target markets in mind. The earlier a global web strategy is adopted, the easier it will be to create local sites that will facilitate the entry into new markets. The complexity of multilingual publishing may be a daunting enterprise for many small and medium sized enterprises who are used to dealing in only one language and the cost may be a prohibitive entry barrier. However, with the sensible use of the available technologies as well as the introduction of certain publishing processes, creating and maintaining high quality multilingual sites may be easier than expected.

### Business benefits

Even though we claim that the risks of foregoing web globalization are too important to ignore, a company needs to understand on a practical level how such a new endeavour will benefit its bottom line before it makes the commitment to globalize its websites. The following is a number of measurable benefits that may make the case for your globalization initiative.

Through the centralized management of all online activities an organization gains control over its worldwide brand. Design guidelines and corporate ID can be enforced more effectively and will ensure that the organization's image is presented consistently everywhere. Of course, it is important to have design guidelines that are flexible enough to allow for local details and idiosyncrasies.

A well-managed Internet presence that is in sync with the markets that a company serves will help increase global market share. Personalized (i.e. localized) web experiences will help serve up more accurately what web users may be looking for on a company's site and greatly enhance loyalty to the brand. Not only can the website serve as an e-commerce outlet but it can also be utilized for such tasks as customer service or even as an internal (intranet) tool for the company's worldwide employees.

In terms of immediate windfall there are reduced translation costs that are a

result of the corporate translation memory. Given the fact that much corporate literature is repetitive, it is sensible to create a terminology database for an organization that can then be used by any translator. Translators can download the corporate vocabulary and then match source text against target language, which will both reduce the number of words that need to be translated and accelerate the actual process. The quicker translation cumulates in faster time-to-market and increased market opportunity by simultaneously reducing entry costs.

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It is important to keep in mind that website localization may be more than just adapting online content. To truly support a globalized web presence it will not be sufficient to merely install the proper technology tools but there may be other elements such as marketing collateral and resources for customer support that will also need to be addressed.

### Technology

The two main technology elements in a globalization solution are a content management system (CMS) and a translator's workbench with translation memory.

The CMS tool allows organizations to publish online content more quickly and in higher quality while establishing or maintaining the publishing workflow that is necessary to ensure the accuracy of the content. One of the main reasons for accelerated publication is the fact that technical resources are no longer necessary to publish online.

A translator's workbench is software that translators use to support their translation projects. The tool matches any content from a new source text against the translation memory and can thus sometimes pre-translate a large percentage of the new text. The translator still has to translate and clean up the text but his/her task is greatly assisted and accelerated by the tool.

Many readers may be aware of the automatic translation engines that are available on the Internet. While the text output of these tools may be good enough to get the gist of a foreign language text they could never be used in a professional context. We therefore recommend you not use them on any of your websites.

### Processes and commitment

One of the most important things to remember with a multilingual web presence is the commitment to keep all content across all languages as up-to-date and accurate as possible over time so that communications with all users is consistent.

For a company that is only starting to publish in multiple languages it will be important to approach the project with a phased methodology, i.e. it will probably make more sense to start with one or two foreign languages before committing to covering all languages. This will give the organization time to understand the intricacies of launching and maintaining foreign language content.

However, globalization is not merely a question of translation, as some content from a parent site may not be appropriate for sites in foreign markets and cultures. Good localization will also include original copy for the regions that you are serving. This will also include website elements such as colors and iconography, which may be interpreted distinctly in your foreign markets.

### Mesh Innovations

Mesh Innovations is a small Internet consulting firm; the localization and globalization of web applications is one of our key areas of expertise. This means both the localization of the front end as well as the internationalization of the back end in order to support online publication in multiple languages and for multiple markets.

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