Multilingual Website Development
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1. Introduction

In today's business climate, global is the new local. Any company that fails to expand the reach of its business and create demand in new markets abroad probably won't last very long. This fact can make some businesses get very nervous about their success in the future, but they needn't worry too much. As long as proper planning is done and all the right measures are taken, any business can easily expand into international territory and reap the rewards of doing so.

One of the first steps in that process is to turn the company's website into an international one, meaning multilingual. This doesn't need to be more complicated than it sounds, especially if you are working with a top-notch translation and localization team with experience in web development. They will know exactly what to do and help you breathe easier as you move into the international sphere.

Before any web content gets translated and localized, it would be a good idea to take a look at the original site's content and see if it doesn't need any editing or updating itself. Once that is done, it will make translating and localizing into different languages much easier, and make the final result more effective and streamlined. Formatting and images should be updated as well.

Some complications that you might run into in the process, that a good translation and localization team will know exactly how to deal with, include working with the different writing systems that are used by languages all over the world. Arabic, Hebrew, and a few other languages are written right-to-left, and others have characters that need special attention in terms of formatting, spacing, and more.

Images might need to be completely replaced when finalizing the localization process for the website. An image that makes sense and is appealing in the original language may not make any sense at all, or even seem offensive, when used in the version of the
website targeted at a specific culture. An experienced localization team will know how to manage this sort of issue and will have in-depth knowledge of the target languages and cultures.

Finally, social media has come to play a huge role in marketing and business in general all over the world. However, it works differently in different cultures. In China, for instance, the most popular social media sites are not the same as the most popular ones in the U.S. Also, it is totally normal to add a company as a friend on Facebook or any other social media site in some other countries. The type of content shared on these sites by businesses varies from country to country as well.
Companies are increasingly contemplating taking the leap into the global marketplace. This is especially true considering the fact that many of the barriers to these opportunities have been decreasing in recent years, as evidenced by the number of major companies that have their roots in Europe or Asia, but also have successful North American branches, including Sony, Samsung, Reebok, and Volkswagen. If you are considering taking your product or service global but can't decide if the benefits are worth the risks, you first need to understand why you are entering a new market then shape your go-to-market and localization strategies. So let's review the most common business reasons for entering a new market, and how companies make the go/no-go decisions.
Financial reasons

You have reasons to believe that entering this new market will double, triple or quadruple your revenues internationally. You have listened to your customers, your sales teams, and your partners. You have done your cost benefit math and everything checks out. Your final decision is based almost entirely on the financial analysis. While expanding into new global markets, you might be encountering some common early-stage frustrations in global growth. You will need a localized service or product and a partner to secure your localization efforts.

Legal requirements

You have an existing localized product, but national laws require you to provide the product in additional markets and languages. Or there may be government requirements to provide localized products and content if you have a local office, or you may first need to establish a corporate legal entity in order to sell products.

In these cases, your final decision will be based upon the overall net revenue value of being able to legally do business in this country, once you are allowed to sell in that market.

Business Strategy

Your company decides that a particular language or market is very strategic for your global expansion. You may want to establish a beachhead against competitors moving into the same market, maintaining a presence in an attempt to rapidly respond to any encroachment.

In this scenario, your final choice will upon the long-term strategic value that you place on this market and the overall net revenue over time to favor your greater business strategy.
Partnerships

Your company enters a partnership with another company and you think that this market is very important to your business. You now need a localized version in order to reach your common goals.

In this scenario your final decision will be based on the overall net value of your new partnership - what it brings to your company - based upon the incremental sales from a localized version.

Competition

Your international or home-grown competitors are providing the good or service in a localized form already. Sometimes they provide the same good or service, sometimes it is an alternative to your product, and sometimes it is just a public announcement of a future product. You need to respond quickly if you don't want to risk losing market share, falling behind and being squeezed out of the market.

In this case you are starting to lose ground, and your decision will be based upon the value of the potential loss of your existing customers, plus the value of any incremental sales or customers you can steal from the competition with your newly-localized version.

Today, more and more people around the world are making online purchases from companies that aren't even located in their own country. If you make the decision to enter foreign markets, you should be aware that it will probably involve changes to your business strategy and goals, including how your company conducts its marketing and interacts with customers. Your decisions will involve several of the above reasons.
3. Using WordPress to Translate Your Website

From the onset WordPress was the content management system (CMS) and blogging platform that made many of us fall in love with its ease of use, clean interface, and availability in many, many languages. WordPress, the superstar web content management system is now behind 20 percent of today's web sites. WordPress is available in more than 70 languages and counting, while the total number of locales with some level of localization done to date reaches 160.

WordPress developers and users worldwide have long relied upon the multilingual features of this open source CMS. Although its display default is in U.S. English, the core application offers complete localization in numerous languages - from Arabic to Ukrainian - and the team behind the software has a transparent commitment to complete localization in many more languages.

In addition, WordPress enjoys a strong developer community that regularly releases free and commercial plugins and themes - WordPress-speak for code extensions and design overlays - and organizes user conferences (or WordCamps) in their native languages. Because of this and WordPress's multi site option, many developers have created robust, multilingual and multi-locale web sites.

WordPress has now announced it is holding a Global Translation Day on April 24, 2016. The aims of this event are to:

- Show people who are interested in translating WordPress into their languages how to get involved.
- Translate and validate strings in current projects under the supervision of the current general translation editors.
- Add more general translation editors to various translation teams.

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Why is it important to you?

If you have a strong interest in leveraging web publishing, this is your chance to help bring WordPress closer to your community. It is also your window into the fascinating world of translation. If you run a business, pay close attention to the activity being generated in the languages of your target audience. It might be your cue to start supporting those languages on your website.
4. Translating and Developing Your Website

Building a multilingual site presents many interesting challenges. Perhaps the most challenging among them is how to build the client-facing CMS to easily and intuitively allow for the management of this multilingual content.

With our experienced software development team, we developed a unique concept of integrating our translations skills with website development skills. Through multilingual website development we have helped many businesses compete in their industry. We can create multilingual websites to any degree of sophistication, from individual homepage sites to high-end database craven applications. One of our overarching goals is to build multilingual sites that are customized to support the client's content strategy as closely as possible.

The way the language-specific content variations tie together is critical, both architecturally and from a content-entry standpoint.
Organizing your content

First of all, you can take a look at the content you have on your original website. Some of this content will be translated into any and all languages once you go global, but there might be some that isn't relevant to the target audience. If you don't already use a CMS (Content Management System), now is a good time to start, and to choose one that works well with many different languages. This will help you keep all of your different content organized and make it easy to update content in all languages when the need arises.

A typical website is organized into various content types for specific uses. For example, you have:

- A "menu page" content type where most of the site's structure and information hierarchy is contained.
- Blog posts, news items, and case studies, which contain the bulk of the recurring content that brings visitors back to your site.
- The utility content, such as home page content, standard headers and footers, CTA introductory text, form response pages, buttons and labels, and so on.

Managing a multilingual site is no different from a unilingual website - there's just more than one set of content to maintain. This can all be done by the same administrator in the CMS, or, if you want it more organized, separate administrator groups can be set up for each language (the content administrator console in the CMS is much more manageable when it is showing only one set of language content.)

The only significant difference between managing multilingual sites over a single-language website is the ability to edit all of the various buttons and labels that appear throughout the site (submit buttons, search-field labels, etc). These are usually hard-coded in the template for sites in a specific language, but we set up something called a translation table for multilingual sites. This is a single piece of content (one for each language) that contains a list of label text in the default language, and the editable translated equivalents. The templates are set up to search this translation table for the right language-specific text and, if no translation is found, the label text in the default language is used.
5. Managing Languages

How will the site automatically switch to a different language?

This is something you have to thank your CMS for. Despite all site content being in the same database and utilizing the same templates, what actually makes the switch is the work of the "language identifier". Where can this be modified? You will find it in the standard configuration file depending on the type of domain shown in the URL. If your site has English as the default language, the URL yoursitename.com will take someone to the English
version. If you change the URL to es.yoursite.com or even yoursite.es, that is enough to trigger the switch of content from English to Spanish.

You can also find the language identifier in the base HTML template, which tips off search engines and browsers about what language something is in. If you open up the HTML tag in a document, you will see a "lang" attribute, such as: `<html lang="es">

The ISO 639-1 table is where the language identifiers come from (take a look at http://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/English_list.php). For languages such as Hebrew and Arabic where the script goes from right to left, site configuration files automatically add an attribute known as "dir" followed by "rtl" (right to left) in the template for the site. You will see this: `<html lang="ar" dir="rtl">

The Unicode (aka UTF-8 encoded) character set makes it possible for any CMS to work around having to deal with non-Latin characters.

**Does a change in language affect images or attachments?**

It depends on what kind of images you are using. Usually images don't have any language-specific content. Images of archetypal and everyday things should be understandable to everyone. If this is the case, just upload them along with the default language content and they will be added to all versions of the site. Nothing will be duplicated and updating is easy as just one image needs to be changed.

If there is any text, even numerical, in an image, then it should be considered specific to one language. All you have to do is find a different one for that language content and upload it for that target language and it will be ready to go.

**Do I need to translate forms too?**

Forms are very important for generating leads and facilitating communication with users. Having all forms translated into every target language is imperative to continue to get more leads and feedback from users.
You don't necessarily need to have different forms for each language. This is related to what the data will be used for and how form submission will be dealt with. Just as with buttons and labels, different translations can be added to the translation table and the CMS will take care of the rest. This makes it much easier to handle updates and maintenance in the future. If there is anything specific to any language in a form, it can be dealt with through form preprocessors.

For instance: using the CRM of even the marketing automation service, the correct direct form submissions and fields for each language can be set up. The same kind of language-switching can be used to show response pages, custom validation alerts, have submissions sent to other administrators, and set any other actions specific to a language in motion. The downside is that the CMS won't be able to sort out submissions based on language, so you will have them all in the same list.

To Sum Up:

Hopefully this has helped you to see that making your website multilingual doesn't have to be so complicated, especially if you plan accordingly. Setting it up will save you time and effort later on too, so it is something you just have to do once and then occasionally tweak and update.
About Alpha Omega Translations

Alpha Omega Translations founder, Dimitra Hengen, gained her experience in the technical translation industry since 1974.

Our experts have been very successful in executing high-end multilingual projects for two decades. We have over 20 years of experience as an agency in translation, and localization in all languages.

Our translation services are employed by some of the best companies who consider us their partner, not just a vendor. With our Translation and Localization services, we help our clients double their revenues by enabling them to sell their products globally. Our expertise cover all aspects of production of international products including legal translation, website translation and development, multimedia and video translation, marketing translation.

We strive not only to make each and every client fully satisfied, but also to ensure that their end-users are satisfied. We raise the standards in the industry and we have fulfilled our duty when our clients’ end-users are successful.

For more information about Alpha Omega Translations, please visit our website as www.alphaomegatranslations.com