

Multilingual websites: a smart move for content with a global reach

Today's businesses can operate in a global marketplace like never before, allowing them to continue working hyper-locally or spread their wings far and wide. Having a website that caters to international audiences and spans multiple languages is great for reaching potential customers across borders to expand the reach of your business.

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With multiple benefits for designing a multilingual business website, success comes from providing an exceptional user experience for each of your target market. Your content should address the unique needs and expectations of each prospective visitor with high-quality, well-translated and locally optimised content.

Optimise content for each language

Simply hiring a professional translation for your content is not enough for a multilingual website. If you are rolling out your business and *expanding your site's content to reach an international audience*, any translated text needs to be well written from the start. Consider a professional translating service as your content also needs to be targeted and optimised for local search engines in each language.

- Choosing important keywords and phrases – these must be right for each language and the potential customers you are targeting in the

country.

- Ensuring translations sound natural – they must be sense checked to ensure they are appropriate for each language and culture.
- Creating unique content for each language version – key information like contact details should appear on all sites, but also provide additional words and descriptions tailored to each audience.
- Providing geo-located page titles, meta data and headers – these should include the city or country targeted by each language site.

By tailoring your content and optimising it for *the right keywords*, search phrases and locations in each language, you help search engines determine the most relevant versions of your site to rank for searches in different countries.

SEO-focused content

SEO-focused content is important in any language, and before the specifics about multilingual sites are mentioned, it is important to understand the difference between *local and global SEO-optimised content* and keywords. Global SEO is also known as ‘International SEO’ is typically defined as ‘normal SEO’ i.e. generally targeted towards readers using search engines. Whereas, ‘Local SEO’ refers to geo-specific content.

For a multilingual site, when you have multiple language versions of your website targeting different countries, search engines have to determine which version to rank and serve to users based on complex factors like location, language settings and search query. If your content is not SEO-focused effectively with an international strategy, the wrong language version could end up ranking prominently for a local search, or different versions could ruin each other’s rankings.

Success in this area comes from the sum of many parts, from various technical factors like navigation, interactive elements and back-end site

architecture to more reader-focused issues like locally engaging content, cultural awareness, relevancy and language.

What content should you create?

Having high-quality, relevant content is extremely important for optimising websites for international search engines. Besides locally focused text for your pages, listings, reviews and descriptions, consider including:

- Your local business or product – your local SEO content will highlight your bricks and mortar business site, your USPs, an exact location and showcase your brand to build an audience and grow your awareness in that area.
- Location content – Develop local guides, information, relevant blog material and reviews that highlight the appeal of your location, areas of interest, restaurants, transit options, community information, reviews etc.
- Market insights – Provide updates or reports on the local region.
- Spotlight interviews – Consider arranging interviews with local people and sharing their stories along with helpful advice or insights.
- Lifestyle articles – Highlight the benefits of living in a particular city or region you target by showcasing various aspects of the local lifestyle.
- Local events – Share information about upcoming local events like festivals, cultural activities, concerts, family events or sporting fixtures that people outside the region might be interested in.

Localised content

Content that means something to customers in one country may fall flat in another if not adapted to the local audience. So to thrive globally, focus on creating useful content that ranks organically in each country market it serves. This might mean conducting keyword research in each language

to determine what potential customers search for locally. It also means crafting text around these keywords so that you rank highly on pages across the world.

However, ranking alone is not the only goal and your content also needs to engage audiences. For example, for a business that is property orientated, use location-specific examples by referencing cultural preferences, or uploading *local guides* or specific market conditions. By doing so, your messaging becomes relevant and personal to the reader in the destination interested in property or local area information.

Use country code top-level domains

Another technical factor that cannot be ignored when vying for success with a multilingual format is using different web addresses, known as URLs, for each language version of a website. The easiest way to do this is by using different *country code top-level domains*, or top-level domains (TLDs).

Using country code TLDs helps search engines clearly identify which language and target market each of your sites is meant for. So your French site will rank well for searches in France or your German site for searches in Germany, etc. Importantly, without the TLD distinction, search engines may get confused and rank the wrong language version for a particular country.

These country code TLDs are one of the strongest signals you can give to search engines about the intended audience and purpose of each language version of your website. For the average estate agent looking to optimise a multilingual site, utilising country TLDs should be top priority.

Tackle different writing systems

If your agency sells properties in regions with different script types, then the possibility of a multilanguage website is a challenge. But there are some solutions that can allow you to thrive in your chosen markets.

- Host a separate subdomain – Launch a subdomain specifically for non-Western language content. The subdomain can use a CMS and language plugins that fully support Arabic, Cyrillic and other alphabets.
- Install a language plugin – See if there are any plugins available for your CMS that enable full support for the alphabets you want to use. If not specifically for your CMS, there may be Javascript-based solutions you can integrate.
- As a last resort, you may need to build separate CMS platforms or even entire websites specifically for Arabic, Cyrillic and other languages your main CMS cannot support.

While multilingual websites can be a valuable strategy for business growth, creating and maintaining one brings challenges for search engine optimisation in the local market or country you are targeting. It is therefore important to ensure that the right content is created in a professional way and is visible to your industry's target audience in any specific location.