

Multilingual Websites

One of the key reasons for the success of the internet is its international and cross-cultural reach and ease of use. For clients who run businesses that have a global audience, building a multilingual site is a cost effective, high impact way to complement international sales efforts.

In this issue of Interact! we will examine some key reasons why a multilingual website can be useful for your business, some technical points to keep in mind when creating a multilingual website and also some business considerations before embarking on this project.



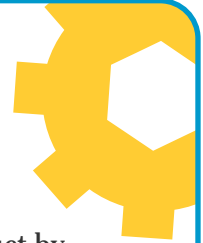
REASONS FOR A MULTILINGUAL WEBSITE

- **Remove a Barrier to Entry - Take the First Mover Advantage**

With the increase in globalization, other countries and languages are playing a greater part on the world wide web. If you want to establish yourself in the world's growing markets, it will benefit you to have the first mover advantage, to establish relationships and your brand with your customers.

- **Cost Effective Marketing Tool**

A multilingual website gives you the ability to communicate with a segment that was previously not available to you. This will increase your brand equity in their eyes and create awareness of your service and product. In terms of branding, it elevates your company onto the global scale and hence the impression of your company changes.



- **New Customers and New Sales**

Creating multilingual websites is one way to increase profitability of a product by making it available to previously untapped segments. Translating your website in 2-3 other languages may increase your sales if, for example, they are languages such as Mandarin, Arabic and Spanish which large populations speak.

- **Culturally Sensitive**

A multilingual website, if designed properly, overcomes potential cultural barriers through allowing access in a native language. You must ensure that the navigation and layout is appropriate for the target market. Also when translating your website, please make sure that it is done by a local or someone who understands the nuances of a language. You do not want to commit a cultural faux pas.

- **Search Engines**

In the online marketing realm, search engines are proving to be the Goliath. In countries such as China, Japan and France, Google, Yahoo and MSN are not necessarily the default search engines. Look at this [SearchEngineWatch.com](#) article for a list of popular search engines by region/country. Homegrown search engines are an emerging force to be reckoned with as they have strong followings within the local arena.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Be sure to consult all stakeholders as you determine your language requirements, and list all the languages that you might need to support in the future.
- Get technical advice on how best to code the languages – this is especially important for character-based languages such as Chinese. For example with simplified Chinese the character coding is usually GB2312 or Unicode. The situation varies from language to language. It's easier to install language support during initial deployment than to try to rectify this midway.
- Ensure translations are done by people who are fluent in the language and familiar with the culture. Getting a Taiwanese to write for the mainland Chinese market is probably not good enough. You do not want to commit cultural mistakes.

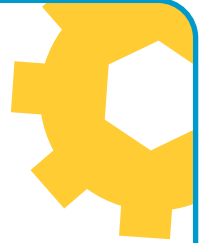


- Consider buying local domain names in different countries as this gives you more of a local presence.
- Invest in a system that will auto direct Chinese users to your Chinese site, Japanese users to your Japanese site etc. An example of this is IP2Location.com
- Ensure that if you are doing a number of promotions, you have all the promotions in 1-2 locations if possible. This will make maintaining your site easier.
- If you are using some programming in your site, ensure that all the languages will be able to support it.

BUSINESS CONSIDERATIONS

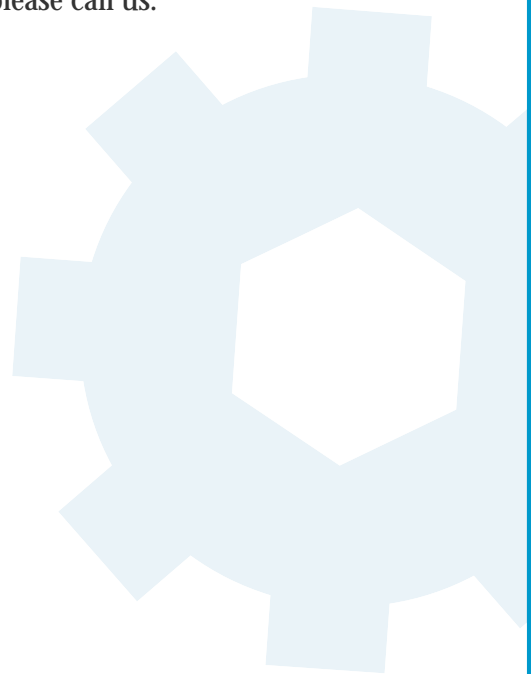
Even though it might seem appealing to just create a website in another language and put it up, there are some key BUSINESS questions that you need to consider. Below is a list that is by no means exhaustive, but will point you in the right direction.

- Will you be able to serve this customer?
- Do you have the excess capacity in your company or can you grow in order to serve them?
- Can you export your product effectively where it needs to go?
- Do you have the logistical support? Will the cost of this outweigh any benefits of the export?
- Can your service staff communicate within the new market or can you hire someone to do so?
- Can you expatriate your earnings from that country or can the customers pay you abroad?
- Are there any barriers to entry such as prohibitive tax environment or laws of the land?
- If you are selling online products where people have to download files, are the lines in the target countries stable enough for easy download?



Businesses continually undergo shifts and changes. At present, the multilingual website is still in its early stages, with mostly large multinational companies using them to secure an international foothold. However, the trickle down effect will naturally occur and the multilingual website will become part and parcel of an internet presence. Whether you chose to invest now or later may be the only choice you have.

Should you require some guidance in this matter, please call us.



PS: Found this newsletter informative and useful? Email us with your comments, questions or other topics you would like covered at custservice@designdepot.com.sg

Not subscribed to our Interact! newsletter? Subscribe now at www.designdepot.com.sg to get on our preferred customer mailing list!