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Many American business owners and top executives recognize (or should) that to attract consumers from around the globe, they must develop multilingual and multicultural Web sites so that international visitors feel

comfortable spending their marks, pesos, yen, or euro in cyberspace. This article looks at a few sites that have dared to do so and reviews the results.

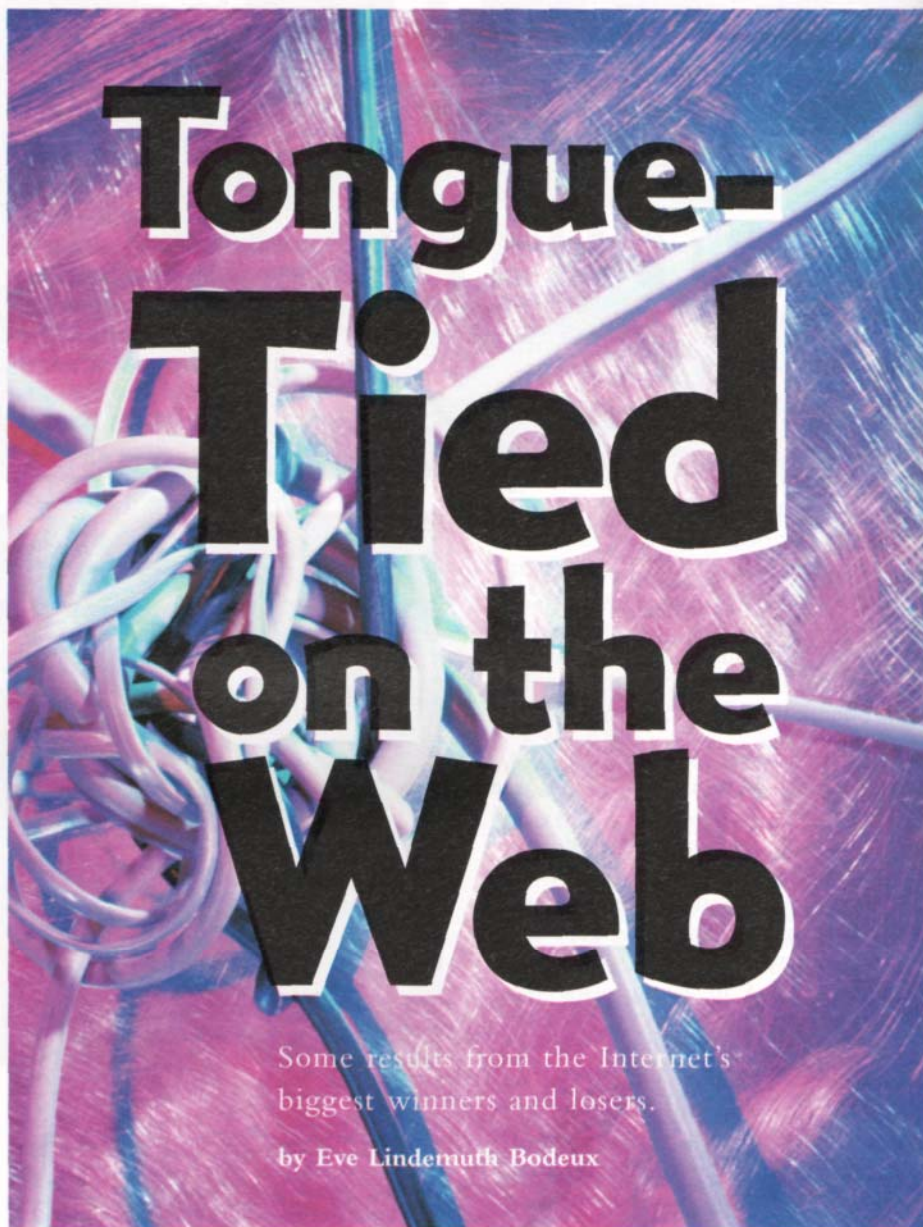
Companies within the localization industry are hoping to benefit from this rush to go global and are jumping on the Internet band wagon. LanguageWare.net's recent full-page ad in the *Wall Street Journal* offers Web-site localization, and Lionbridge's splash-page announcing the recent acquisition of INTL.com touting its e-services are just two examples of the industry's full focus on the Web.

And why not? According to Global Reach (www.greach.com), 43 percent of today's netizens do not speak English and by 2005, a whopping two thirds of Internet users will speak languages other than English. In response, major Internet sites offer varying degrees of internationalization. Indeed, a global presence is becoming necessary to be considered a serious player on the Internet. How dot-coms approach international markets varies widely and so does their success.

A Good Try: AltaVista

AltaVista, for example, offers visitors several options. The first is that users can specify the language of the sites to be searched with the results coming back in English. This entails using an English interface, entering a search term, and specifying that Web sites in one of 24 other languages will be searched. A user can either choose one search language each time, or permanently designate one or more by using the language settings. AltaVista even offers help tips (in English) on how to enter accents and on encoding for non-Roman alphabets. This set-up, however, is most convenient for users who are native English speakers with knowledge of a second language.

One problem with this approach is that it is not clear how AltaVista determines the language of a site—and it is often wrong. Specifying “English” as the language to



search but entering the French word “ordinateur” brings up many Web sites in French that AltaVista erroneously lists in the results as being in English. AltaVista does not appear to use the language tag to determine a site's language (which could feasibly cause errors if left out).

A second problem with this technique is that the “related searches” that AltaVista proposes at the top of the screen seem oblivious to any language designation. Although “restaurant” is a word in French, when French is the designated language, the proposed “related searches” are still all in English, and include such obviously un-French responses as San Francisco Restaurants, McDonalds Restaurant, and Restaurant Supplies.

AltaVista also offers fully localized sites for Canada, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. For other international areas, AltaVista has partnered with search engines around the world that are powered by AltaVista. This includes partners on every continent, with four in Asia, and one in Latin America.

AltaVista's strategy is not entirely clear and appears somewhat haphazard, but the company deserves points for trying to please international consumers worldwide. AltaVista can certainly claim to have a worldwide presence, but its image in various markets fluctuates widely between being a strong brand and going unnoticed.

Getting Better: Amazon.com

Like AltaVista, Amazon.com currently approaches international customers in a variety of ways. On one hand, it offers international consumers sites specifically tailored (language, stock, presentation) for the United Kingdom and Germany. Interestingly, the URL www.amazon.fr redirects automatically to the UK site, instead of a French site. These localized sites offer users a look consistent with that of the US site, but lack some of the extras like the Wish List and access to the DVD & Video, Electronics & Software, Toys & Video Games, and Home Improvement product lines.

Considering that Amazon ships products to people who order them through the Internet, it is understandable that the necessary infrastructure would take time to set up for worldwide consumers. Amazon seems to be adhering to the rule that high-quality global branding is more important than putting up sites quickly that don't live up to the expectations set by the original.

A second appeal to international visitors that wish to order directly from the US Web site is a page with links to country-specific information about searching for books in non-English languages, payment methods, shipping options, and customs duties. Special instructions apply to a smattering of countries in each of these regions: Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East, North America (Canada in English and French), and Europe. The explanations are in various (Western) languages, but the actual searching and ordering still takes place in English. Amazon promises to add this type of information for additional countries soon. As far as additional fully localized sites, possible clues to the com-

pany's future international intentions are its job openings throughout Europe.

Trail-Blazing: Yahoo!

Yahoo! is blazing an international trail with individual sites aimed at eight countries in Europe, three in Latin America, and eight in the Asia Pacific region, including China, Korea, and Japan. Considering that Yahoo is a directory that depends on humans to rate Web sites, the amount of work that must have been completed to produce such international offerings is impressive.

Yahoo's localized content appears tailored to each market. Search terms are entered in the chosen language, results referencing culturally specific data are returned in that language, and the interface is also thoroughly localized. For the Asian sites that require language support, users are even guided through the installation (although they are not totally up-to-date, lacking information about IE 5, Windows/Office 2000, and the newest Macs). Products like free, localized email are consistently offered in each market.

Yahoo's localization strategy digs deep and separates sites using culture as well as language. For example, the company offers a variety of options for the Chinese market, including differing sites with information in Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese, plus individual sites aimed at Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. There are even several English-language sites that have been localized for various regions of the world—Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong (also including a Chinese version), Singapore, and the UK/Ireland. This is in addition to language-specific sites aimed at countries around the world like

Brazil, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and Mexico.

The only continent to which AltaVista gave a nod that Yahoo missed is Africa, but overall, Yahoo's coverage is not only deeper, but also much broader. The company's international sites follow the look and feel of the original, keeping its brand intact.

Mapping Disaster: MapQuest

Companies sometimes fail to adapt their sites successfully, offering a wide open marketing opportunity to the localization industry. In contrast to Yahoo's enthusiastic embrace of the global marketplace, MapQuest.com's attempt to wave an international flag is a surprising failure. Recently on the auction block for US\$1.1 billion in a purchase deal with AOL, this portal's attempt at internationalization shows that mucho money does not an international player make.

In addition to several products for the American market, MapQuest does offer driving directions between postal codes for Great Britain. Door-to-door driving directions are "coming soon." This effort to expand internationally is without blame; however, it is humorous to note that MapQuest offers a feature for the British to locate Denny's Restaurants along the route (according to Denny's Web site, there aren't any Denny's in the UK). This seems to be a case of reusing a US-based template that is not appropriate for the UK market. Overlooking this type of detail can be forgiven, but MapQuest's use of "foreign languages" elsewhere on its site is a shocking reminder that "international" is not taken seriously by all serious companies.

When a user in search of driving directions accepts MapQuest's invitation to "select language" and chooses Spanish, for example, most of the information returned, and the entire interface, remain in English. A small portion, with the actual directions (still labeled in English) pops up in Spanish text that is acceptable save for a few typos. It's hard to classify this page as one that's been translated, never mind localized.

In English, a user inadvertently requesting an invalid destination address sees the message *Sorry, directions could not be found. Please try again. Or try city to city.* If a user requesting Spanish does the same, he is greeted by this strange mishmash of Spanglish (amid a mass of English): *Por favor try again... Or try ciudad to ciudad. Por*

amazon.com

YOUR ACCOUNT | HELP | SELL ITEMS

WELCOME | BOOKS | MUSIC | DVD & VIDEO | ELECTRONICS & SOFTWARE | TOYS & VIDEO GAMES | HOME IMPROVEMENT | AUCTIONS | ZSHOPS

Information for International Customers

This page is designed to provide our international customers with country-specific introductory information about searching for books in non-English languages, payment methods, shipping options, and customs duties:

Africa

- [South Africa--English](#)

Asia-Pacific

- [Australia--English](#)
- [Hong Kong--English](#)
- [Japan--English](#)
- [Japan--Japanese](#)
- [New Zealand--English](#)
- [Singapore--English](#)

Central and South America

- [Brazil--English](#)
- [Brazil--Portuguese](#)
- [Mexico--Español](#)
- [Mexico--English](#)

Middle East

- [Israel--English](#)

Europe

- [Austria--English](#)
- [Belgium--English](#)
- [Denmark--English](#)
- [Deutschland--Deutsch](#)
- [España--Español](#)
- [Finland--English](#)
- [France--English](#)
- [France--Français](#)
- [Germany--English](#)
- [Greece--English](#)
- [Iceland--English](#)
- [Ireland--English](#)
- [Italy--English](#)
- [Italia--Italiano](#)
- [Luxembourg--English](#)
- [Netherlands--Nederlands](#)
- [Netherlands--English](#)
- [Norway--English](#)

favor try entero an intersection or just a ciudad. Huh? Spanish it ain't.

French users encounter *Sivouzples try again. Or try bourg to bourg...Sivouzples try entering an intersection or just a bourg.* It is doubtful that *Le Petit Robert* lists "sivouzples" as an alternative spelling for the French word "please."

Germans are greeted with *Bitte try again. Or try city to city...Bitte try entering an intersection or just a city.* This "German" sentence has only one German word. The Italians get *Por favore try again. Or try Rome to Rome...Por favore try entering an intersection or just a Rome.*

These bizarre pseudo-foreign phrases are reminiscent of the ugly American who thinks yelling louder and adding some i's, o's, and z's on the end of his words will make a foreign-speaking compatriot understand what he is saying. The foreign visitors to MapQuest's site who have seen these phrases surely didn't get the impression the company was aiming for.

Amazingly, these errors have been on the MapQuest Web site for at least three months. One is compelled to ask, how did this happen? Did MapQuest's strategists decide that a free machine-translation tool gave them the best return on their investment? In fact, this level of quality is an insult to machine translation. Did they decide the task of localizing this high-profile site was best accomplished by the boss's friend who traveled around the world for a year and "speaks" 10 languages "fluently"? Did they get taken by an unethical translation agency? We may never know, but evidently, MapQuest missed the lesson



Yahoo!

Benvenuto a Yahoo! Italia Mail

Sono un nuovo utente

Vuoi un indirizzo E-mail? Registrati su Yahoo! Italia Mail. E' gratis!

Registrami!

Sono già registrato in Yahoo!

ID Yahoo:

Password:

Ricorda la mia ID e password (Cosa vuoi dire?)

Hai dimenticato la tua ID o la password?

[Aiuto per l'accesso.](#)

• Ottieni il tuo indirizzo Yahoo! gratis.

• E' gratis. E' facile.

• Accedi ai tuoi messaggi dovunque tu sia.

• Sarai registrato per tutti i servizi di Yahoo! Italia.

• Stai in contatto con i tuoi amici online con [Yahoo! Messenger](#)



that bad localization is worse than no localization and that accessing international markets cannot be an afterthought, but takes sophisticated strategy.

While the MapQuest case is extreme, we have all seen examples of awkwardly translated and localized content that makes us snicker at the company involved. Sometimes we forgive the error, happily continuing to surf a particular site, and sometimes we don't, clicking off in disgust. How much flexibility do we extend if we'd been considering spending actual money there? When mapping out a localization strategy, companies have many options, as evidenced in the examples above. What's important is to have a respectable international Internet presence, and, certainly, to avoid inciting chortles and ending up as a negative case study in international management classes. This is a tricky business in the fast-paced world of multilingual technology.

The companies who are most successful in the international Internet arena recognize that adaptation is a complicated task that involves serious attention to detail along with specific technical and linguistic skills, and is best left to professionals. Those who neglect this aspect often end up regretting it, especially those whose existence depends on an inherently public forum such as the Web.

The MapQuest example reminds us that even billion-dollar companies make mistakes, and opportunities for localization vendors abound. However, localization and the ideas behind it are by no means universally recognized by mainstream media or even clients of the industry itself.

At the annual conference of the American Translators Association in November 1999, the need for a positive public-relations campaign for translators received considerable attention. As noted by Tom West, president-elect of the ATA, clients or others who may need translation services often don't even know translators exist, much less what they do. The localization industry seems to suffer from a similar fate and industrywide efforts at publicizing what we do can only help the MapQuests of the world.

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Sorry, directions could not be found. Sivouzples try again. Or try bourg to bourg.

North America

Enter Starting Address
Select:

503 17th Street

City: Denver

State/Province: CO

ZIP (Optional):

Enter Destination Address
Select:

1234 Asdf Street

City: Denver

State/Province: CO

ZIP (Optional):

Route Type

Door-to-Door Very specific directions... best for navigating downtown. (US only)

City-to-City Route overview... best for long trips. (North America only)

Display Type

Overview Map with Text

Text Only

Turn-by-Turn Maps with Text (for Door-to-Door route type only)

Select Language:
 English French German Italian Spanish

Locations Along the Way (for Door-to-Door directions only)

Show Me:

Denny's Restaurants Holiday Inn hotels Fairfield Inns

Pet-Friendly Hotels from Pet Planet within miles of my route