Website Translation Version 2.0

Thinking with your Clients about opening their websites for International Business

by Bill Dunlap

More and more translation agencies and translators are working on projects involving multilingual websites. One aspect of website translation that is often underestimated is the fact that web pages are used as an important marketing vehicle for companies doing international business. A website translation project includes not only pages with product information, which often can be translated as is into other languages. Often, sites also include marketing-related content, which requires an additional focus and skill set. Increasingly, companies requesting translation services expect translation service providers to be more tightly integrated with their international business development team and to think with them about how to position their company in the respective markets.

This article covers the various aspects of globalizing a company's online marketing message, discussing the following topics:

- Where to target your clients' marketing?

- Communication by email (marketing, ordering and support)

- Overseas email communications

- Virtual overseas offices

- Payment and delivery mechanisms

- Language issues on a website

- Promotion and advertising of the website

Where to Target the Online Marketing?

As your clients start using the web to present their products or services to the international market, translation service providers need to keep in mind two factors:

- Which countries your clients already sell to

- Which countries are sufficiently online to attract clients

If a client company does not have much experience in international sales, then they might as well target the markets with the highest concentration of online population: Japan and Chinese-speaking countries (both have about 53 million people online) and German-speaking Europe (39 million). As of March 2002, there were approximately 22 million French-speakers (Quebec, France, Switzerland and Belgium), 41 million Spanish-speakers (U.S. Hispanic, Spain, and Latin America), and 20 million Italians

online. The most recent figures are available on http://global-reach.biz/globstats.

Communication by Email

How do your clients deal with direct inquiries by email when their prospects come to their website in other languages? After all, English is not written well by most potential online customers in Europe, Asia or Latin America, and your client's website should make it clear that they can inquire in their own language. The idea here, of course, is to gather as many leads as possible. Of course, as a translation agency, you can propose your own services, although the price and turnaround times may prove prohibitive for simple email inquiries. The most economical solution you might offer them is to use a machine translation software product such as Systran. The resulting text isn't perfect, but your clients can understand what is being asked and can respond easily.

Virtual Overseas Offices

International marketing includes the issue of offering the sales leads and customers the choice of how they want to communicate. Besides email there are other basic means to attract more prospects and customers. A local phone and fax number in the targeted countries can be useful for prospects and customers contacting your client, and not as expensive as they might expect. There is a lot to be said for the concept of "virtual offices" abroad, whereby a company has a phone number in important cities that doubles as a voicemail or fax contact point local to the prospect/customer.

Another option is for your clients to create a toll-free number in other countries that terminates in their own office or in the office of a call center speaking the language of that country.

Payment and Delivery Mechanisms

Once the prospect is convinced to place an order, there are several mechanisms that exist for payment. For all amounts over 10 euro, it is simply necessary for your clients to take credit cards—either by email, by a secure form on your website, by fax, or over the phone. If they are not set up to accept credit cards, Paypal (www.paypal.com) can provide this service at a reasonable charge. Be sure to have your bank references handy if the amount is over, say, 800 euro, in which case a wire transfer is more appropriate. Travelex

(www.travelex.com) and CustomHouse (www.customhouse.com) both offer an international online payment service.

International delivery is probably the most difficult problem to tackle for most products, as it needs to be reasonable in both price and delivery time. International delivery may be too expensive to consider top services such as Federal Express, UPS, DHL, etc.

Your client needs to research this area well for their city and analyze what options exist. These vary from city to city, and there is no general solution. It all depends on the size, weight and target markets (which countries) for your product. Obviously, services and software do not present this difficulty.

Use of Language on Your Clients' Websites

When your client markets a product/service to European countries where English is spoken well (e.g. Scandinavia and the Netherlands), they must realize that people in these countries don't particularly go to English-language sites just because English is readily spoken. The Scandinavians and Dutch read their local websites in their own native language. If English comes up, it's no problem, but advertisers in their local magazines certainly do not market to them in English. Normally, the local language is used. So you need to impress on your client that they still have to make an effort to localize in these countries, even if people there read English.

Your clients need to understand that they can "fold in" languages over time, so that their website can start with, say, two languages, gradually develop them, while planting the seeds in other languages. Each language section of their website will start taking on a life of its own, as well as the characteristics (even visual) of that culture. Hence there is no reason for your clients to shrink away from localizing their websites because of cost.

A good approach is to couple your efforts as a translator along with your clients' marketing efforts on the language sections. Your client's first international sales will probably start in the country where they have invested the necessary work to make their website credible. As in the offline world, a business needs to be credible before customers start spending money there.

Ready? Set? Fire! Promote and Advertise Your Clients' Websites

Now that you have established the beginnings of your clients' translated web pages, how can visitors be attracted from other countries? The techniques of web promotion in any language are the same as in the English-speaking world, except that they need to be performed in other languages now:

- Submit the site to country-specific indexes, directories and search engines

- Optimize pages for foreign search terms in search engines in other countries

- Press releases

- Working the local Newsgroups and forums

- Strategic links

Translators can easily register the home pages they translate in foreign indexes. A German translator will know the top indexes and search engines he uses to make searches on the web, and it is simply a matter of listing these indexes and registering the home page of the client in these indexes. Of course, there are also companies who specialize in submitting non-English websites to the top indexes and search engines.

Once a Home Page is registered in search engines associated with the language of the page, there is the eternal problem of getting noticed. Potential visitors go to search engines, type in keywords (in their own language), and would like to find sites like your client's site in their own language. Alas, the site is often buried some 10 or 20 pages down in the "results" pages.

The solution: search engine optimization. This work places your client's site at the top of the search engine listing when a search for a foreign keyword is done on a major search engine. There are several companies in each country that specialize in this work, and a few companies are able to do the work in any language. So never just translate keywords, instead translate them and add keywords that you expect people will use in your language to search for the website's content.

Press releases: It helps to have someone local in each country send the press release, as they can act as an interface if the press wants more information. They also most likely have contact with the press already.

Working email discussion groups, forums and Newsgroups in the countries that are targeted by the website. Again, there is no substitute for having someone local represent a particular website in these forums in that language, and tactfully bring attention to the website in question.

Strategic links: Although there are not as many indexes and searches engines outside English-speaking countries, there is a good deal of private lists of links about certain subjects. It is to your client's advantage to get on these lists and point people to their website. And again, someone who speaks the language well is needed to do this work.

Conclusion

The Internet as marketing medium is still quite young, but is maturing rapidly in Europe. The sooner that your clients take their marketing online in multiple languages, the sooner they will move up the learning curve and their online marketing will start turning into sales.

Bill Dunlap is CEO for Global Reach (global-reach.biz), specializing in building traffic to multilingual websites to help them gain overseas visibility and yield international sales.

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