Seven tips for successful international websites

Doing business worldwide: why a successful international website is teamwork, which experts you should get on board and how to ensure that your project will succeed.

Let's leave Switzerland for a moment – imagine you are just getting off the plane in Mexico City. What do you hear? What do you see? How are you greeted? Maybe you first try to get your bearings in this new city. Perhaps you don't know your way around at first. Either way, for local people, what you perceive as new, foreign, warm, loud or quiet is simply everyday life. That is exactly what we build on.

Keyword: localisation

"Different countries, different customs" is an old saying. However, it has not lost its relevance even in a globalised economy – and it is also valid with regard to successful international websites. The key question is: Is it sufficient to copy the website and simply translate the texts in order to ensure successful internationalisation?

The website and the online shop are key tools when it comes to rolling out a business model worldwide and gaining access to new markets. But beware! In most cases the existing website is used for the domestic market and was designed in view of its special features. Our long-standing experience shows that the secret to success is a little more complex – what is referred to as localisation is what has to succeed. This is the key to your success.

Tip 1:
Think of localisation as an opportunity and put together a corresponding team.

Does that strike you as odd?

So who do you need for your "my internationally successful website" project? Let's briefly return our thoughts to Mexico City. Yes, Spanish is spoken here. However, language professionals know that this Spanish is by no means identical to what you would hear in Barcelona, for example. Once again, the devil is in the detail, as the saying goes.

Company

Founded in 1994
160 employees
100 languages
> 2,000 language professionals
> 5,000 clients

Advantages

- In-house linguists
- Internal team of developers
- The latest translation technologies
- Customised corporate solutions
- Expert advice

Security

100% discretion and maximum security for your confidential data thanks to data hosted in Switzerland and ISO 27001 certified processes.

For your success, mother tongue translators are therefore required who know every subtlety and finesse, always strike the right tone and know how to appeal linguistically to potential customers in the target market. An important keyword here is transcreation. For example, slogans are not translated literally but adapted or specifically developed for the target country according to your brand image and message. In this way, you will be convincing instead of risking misunderstandings or committing a faux pas, for example.

Tip 2:
Adjust the language to suit local usage.

Experienced language professionals add value to your team: they are familiar with cultural customs and local conditions. They apply this knowledge to their work. That extends to the right keywords and appropriate content, as we will see below. Both are search engine relevant.

Tip 3:
Include the cultural realities of your target market.

Prevent losing potential customers

It is important not to view the text and its translation in isolation. One of your tasks is to create an appealing corporate image – appealing to the (potential) customers on site. This not only includes the language, but goes (far) beyond it: graphics, illustrations, images, special characters (which we will come back to later) and also colours – what is perceived as attractive and convincing locally differs from country to country.
For example, photographs of scantily dressed women in the context of Central Europe tend not to be a problem but can cause a stir or even outrage elsewhere. Colours also have a great effect. For example, white stands for purity and freshness here in Switzerland, whereas in many Asian countries it stands for mourning and death. Symbols (such as social media or chat icons) can also be misunderstood: whereas we use the "thumbs up" emoticon when we want to say "OK/everything is great/well done", in Greece or Russia this gesture is considered impolite or obscene. It is therefore important to take a close look here as well. After all, you do not want to lose potential customers due to your website before they could even get to know your products and services.

Tip 4:
Create a suitable overall experience.

Simplify processes; minimise sources of error

We are sometimes asked if all of this is complicated to implement. No, our experience shows that this involves, on the one hand, subject area expertise (such as the mother tongue language professionals who know the local context), and, on the other hand, well-managed interaction with experts on technical issues in the broadest sense of the word. Accordingly, the right web developers should be part of your team. Together with the appropriate tools, they give you huge support with your project.

The most important tool is the content management system (CMS) that you use to manage your website. There are CMS that simplify localisation and others that create extra work and sources of error. Make sure you choose a CMS that saves you from having to complete the error-prone process of copying and pasting the content. CMS with a localisation plug-in are advisable. Interfaces can be used to automate and perform the data exchange between the CMS and the translation management system of language professionals without the need to convert data formats. You benefit from the fact that the automated export of the texts to be translated and the subsequent import of the finished translations is possible at the push of a button. The easy management of different language versions in a CMS should also be considered during the decision-making process. Are country-specific special characters accepted and fonts like Chinese or Cyrillic correctly displayed? All of these items should be reviewed in advance when choosing the CMS to make the internationalisation process successful.

Tip 5:
Select the appropriate content management system (CMS).

It depends on the address

The address of your country-specific website also plays an important role. Here, too, web specialists will help you. In principle, a distinction must be made between country-specific top-level domains (e.g. yourdomain.ch; yourdomain.mx), subdomains with a generic top-level domain (e.g. mx.yourdomain.com) or subdirectories with a generic top-level domain (e.g. yourdomain.com/mx) (MX stands for Mexico in this example). The choice of domain has an impact on search engine optimisation, which we will examine in the next section.

Tip 6:
Pursue a well thought-out domain strategy.

How machines work for you

With our last tip, another "specialist field" is added: today, search engine optimisation (SEO) is a discipline of its own, and there are experts who specialise in international search engine optimisation (SEO). If international SEO is implemented correctly, it gives you a competitive advantage.

It is important to bring together the needs of people and search engine(s). While the experts in international SEO take over the technical part and implement a whole package of measures so that your website is found and accessed, the language professionals also come back into play. They provide assistance with prior localisation of relevant keywords and search engine relevant content.

Keywords reflect the search intentions of search engine users. A website can only be found if the keywords with the highest search volume of the target-country-specific search engine are used and they are in the right context of the website. Defining the right keywords thus determines the success or failure of international online expansion. In principle, we recommend the following procedure:

1. Optimisation of the source text taking all SEO measures into account
2. Selection of the country-specific search engine (for which you then optimise your website)
3. Keyword search and definition of the main and secondary keywords relevant for the target country
4. Translation of the content into/adaptation of the content to the target languages

The expertise of language professionals is also important where the content of your website is concerned. This is because they can assess which content, if any, is also relevant for the local target group. Perhaps you are trying to appeal to fashion-conscious young people; however, there will also be differences between Zurich and Mexico City where that is concerned. Check the content accordingly for its relevance. This will not only score points with customers; sophisticated content is also rewarded by the search engines. In any case, allow enough time for these processes.

Tip 7:
Take advantage of the benefits of international SEO. Use the right keywords and provide relevant content.

Successful on the market

To sum it up again: more than 80% of consumers buy products exclusively on country-specific websites. And only if they feel like their needs are met there. Localisation of country-specific websites should therefore be seen as a strategically decisive step in the internationalisation process.

To that end, it is worthwhile and profitable to assemble a team of language professionals familiar with the respective target country, web experts and specialists in international SEO, who work together to make your international website and thus your business successful. Our seven tips will help you in the process.

Company

Apostroph Group is the leading language service provider in the DACH (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) region with a total of 10 sites across Switzerland and Germany.
Today, more than 5,000 companies and institutions rely on Apostroph's expertise. With 160 employees, including 40 linguists, and over 2,000 certified specialist translators, Apostroph offers language services in all disciplines and 100 languages, providing all industries with products tailor-made for the local markets. Extensive experience in language technology and process digitalisation as well as the targeted collaboration between man and machine are the core components ensuring the quality and efficiency of Apostroph's services.