

A Quick Guide to Getting Started in International SEO

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International SEO is becoming more important than ever for many businesses.

When it's executed correctly, even a small businesses can expect a huge ROI.

The good news: there is a lot of information about international SEO available for you to read and learn.

The bad news: there is a lot of outdated information that may cause you to be misinformed.

I've met some SEO professionals who have managed global sites for years yet completely missed out on some basics due to updates and changes.

This post will cover some basic but frequently asked questions at international SEO sessions in some of the conferences I've attended.

If you know these already, great. Just consider them as the confirmation of your best practice knowledge.

How is International SEO Different from Regular SEO?

Your global sites should not be the “copied and pasted” version of your home country website in different languages, though I see that happen to many websites.

Yes, translation and localization of website content are one of the first steps. But then, you need to optimize the sites for each country’s local audience from messaging and offerings to the overall user experience of the site.

A site with popular and well-performing content in the U.S. market may not do as well in Asia or in South America and may require additional content edits and optimization work.

While you pay attention to each site, you must keep an eye on the overall performance. Otherwise, your websites may be competing against each other or the worst case, may not be indexed at all.

For example, your website designed for Mexico should not outrank or appear in the search results in Spain, if you have a different site designed for Spain.

If you misuse the canonical tag or hreflang tag, certain sites may not be indexed by the search engines, or create duplicate indexing.

Should I Go Global? and Where Is My Market?

If you are not sure about the opportunities in different countries or have some convincing to do with your bosses, it’s

always a good idea to review some market reports, stats, and even your own website data.

Here's some information that you can use to decide or prioritize the countries/markets to go after.

- **Government and trade organization websites**, such as Trade.gov and WTO.org provide the latest international business and trade news and statistics.
- **Many companies provide Internet-related reports and statistics**, such as Internet World Stats, Econsultancy, McKinsey & Company, and eMarketer. There are numerous sites providing information about specific countries, too.
- **Your own analytics data**. Do you see anyone visiting your site from other countries? Is there any country that sends more traffic to your site than other? It's worth paying attention, especially if any of them are converting already.

Do I Need a Site for Each Country?

Most definitely, yes, if the market is big enough for you to invest.

Not just for SEO reasons, but also to provide a better user experience to the local visitors, it's always a better to have a dedicated site for each of your target countries.

However, this may not be a feasible option for you, at least not at the beginning. In that case, you'll have a site for each language that is spoken in your target countries.

It is OK to do this as you may want to test the waters first before you dive in too deep. Luckily, we can use Hreflang tags to tell Google which language and country each site is created for.

What Domain to Have – ccTLD or gTLD?

If you asked me this question in 2008, my answer was always to go with a ccTLD. The reality is that not everyone can have this option for different reasons.

In 2018, it doesn't have as much of an impact on your SEO as the search engines have come a long way, and we have other options to geotarget the sites especially with Google.

Note that some of the search engines such as Baidu still favor websites with local ccTLD. Also, people outside the U.S. tend to click websites with local TLD over sites with .com or other generic TLDs.

What Kind of Hosting Should I Get?

The location of the website host was one of the important signals for the international SEO related to the geotargeting.

However, it's not as important now that we have other ways to correctly indicate your website's target market to the search engines and regionally managed CDNs.

The host location has a large impact on the page speed. Make sure that your site can be accessed in the target countries quickly.

How Should I Go About Alternative Geotargeting?

Perhaps, geotargeting is one of the simplest practices where many websites make mistakes as site owners moved from ccTLDs and local market hosting.

There are several ways to geotarget your websites and pages.

Here are some of the popular methods:

- Geolocation assignment in Google Search Console
- Hreflang tag for Google
- Language meta tag information for Bing

Side Note: Recently, Google started to generate the search results based on the searcher's location no matter which local version of Google a searcher is using.

For example, you used to get different search results from Google.com than Google UK (google.co.uk) or Google Australia (google.com.au) even when searching for the same keyword.

But now, you will get the same results in all three Google searches unless you do that search in three different countries.

Google or Not Google?

While Google is by far the most popularly used of the search engines around the world, in some countries, there are locally grown search engines that are far more popular than Google.

If your target country is one of those below, you'll need to pay some extra attention to monitor these local sites and for additional optimization work.

- China (Mainland, Simplified Chinese language)
- Russia and Eastern European Countries
- South Korea

What Else Should I Consider Before I Go Global?

One of the biggest challenges that most companies with global websites face, even the multinational Fortune 100 companies, is the local resources.

No one has the luxury of having unlimited resources in each target country, and this can become a major bottleneck especially since SEO is not an “one-off” project but requires continued efforts.

The key is to plan-ahead the task and responsibility allocation between the headquarter and local offices such as:

- **Technical resources:** IT and web operation
- **Language resources:** Content localization and optimization
- **Website data analysis:** Reporting and identifying SEO opportunities

Now, you may not have any offices or representatives in other countries, or no resources available in local offices. In those cases, you need to consider whether you’d want to hire one or multiple outside resources.

Conclusion

Above is a quick guide to getting started in international SEO.

There are so much more go into the international SEO, even the ones I touched in this article.

I plan to dig deeper into each of the main items that are obviously important, and some that are overlooked or viewed lightly in my future articles.

More International Search Resources:

<http://tracking.feedpress.it/link/13962/8186999>