Building sites and apps for a global market

Creative professionals now work in global markets, servicing clients that don’t just want to sell their products locally but engage in commerce around the world. The worldwide market for digital products, including music, video, apps and games, is booming—potentially hitting $20 trillion by 2025 according to the Financial Times—and more and more businesses want a piece of the action. As a web designer or app developer, you might be working with clients in the US or Asia who want to sell into Europe, or with UK-based clients looking to sell into Brazil or China.

Even small businesses have big opportunities. The best digital products reach across borders, and there is no need to worry about shipping or customs or some of the other sources of friction that slow down international sales of physical products. You can find something that only serves a small niche audience in your own country, then come to realize that on a global scale, it wasn’t a niche at all. Crowdsourcing, outsourcing, and localization toolkits make it easier to reach customers in different territories. With the right products and vision, a tiny company can go micro-multinational.

Even creative pros might want to get in on the act, selling their work in downloadable formats either for public consumption or for commercial use as stock photography, stock illustration, or stock audio and video. If what you do is good enough for the UK, France or Sweden, why not expand distribution to Taiwan, India or Mexico? And while there are big online stores through which you can already do this, there’s something to be said for a direct connection with your customers; for making sure your work gets the credit it deserves and your business maintains the lion’s share of the profits.

Bumps in the road

This isn’t to say, however, that going global is easy. There are many ecommerce solutions out there, some designed for small businesses, but not all will get you over all the hurdles. Scale can be an issue. You can build a web store for a client who is used to fairly low volume business, only to find that sales pick up and you are dealing with thousands of transactions every month. Can the ecommerce solution handle the bandwidth, or will it buckle under the demand?

And then you have the challenges of handling different currencies and languages. While some intrepid souls are happy to work in GBP, Euros or Dollars outside of their native language, the simple fact is that most people prefer to work in the currency they’re used to using and in the language they speak every day. That’s something worth thinking about if you want to get buyers all the way through the shopping basket to the final Confirm Payment button.

Most importantly, as a seller, you have a whole range tax laws, regulations and consumer rights legislation to contend with. Different countries have varying levels of VAT or GST that apply to digital products, and these apply when you are selling to a customer inside that country (no matter where you or your client happen to be based). Even within the EU, there are different rates of VAT, making the notion of an EU-wide VAT rate something of a myth. Those countries that haven’t become wise to the revenues they can seize from digital sales are learning fast, with Canada, Brazil, Israel and Argentina all considering imminent legislation.

Then you have consumer rights. Will your store offer the cancellation and refund rights required by certain countries, or does it have the correct notices in place to make it clear before purchase that no refunds can be given? Is the territory covered by data protection laws, like the EU’s GDPR, and is your ecommerce solution compliant? As creative pros, we tend to think that this stuff has nothing to do with us. We are

artists and designers, not full-time tax and trade professionals. The simple fact is that we either need a handle on this stuff or need to work with someone who has.

Take it easy

This is where FastSpring comes in. The FastSpring platform covers sales and downloads of digital products in a way that's easy, secure and compliant. It gives you the tools you need to sell digital products all around the world, with automatically localized languages and currencies. The platform is PCI-compliant, so you are fully covered for credit card transactions, and it uses 256-bit encryption to store account information once submitted. And as the platform uses Amazon's global file distribution network and bandwidth, buyers get a fast, trouble-free experience every time.

With FastSpring, you can get on with designing and you or your clients can focus on the sales and marketing. The platform deals with correct taxation and handling currencies, so you don't have to think about them. The customer experience looks slick and professional, but it's also fully customisable, so that you can ensure the entire site – from the product page to the shopping basket – has one coherent look and feel. There's no awkward experience disconnect where customers are sent from your site and over to the payment provider. FastSpring can also handle subscription billing models and in-app purchasing, giving the store flexibility to expand into new areas and grow.

Global markets are a big opportunity, and one we and our clients want to make the most of. Why do that the hard way when FastSpring makes it so much easier? Learn More

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