How to integrate SEO into the translation process to maximize global success



When expanding internationally, there is common misconception that SEO, and in particular technical SEO, should be done once the website has been built. However, by implementing any SEO recommendations after a website has been translated, there could be extensive rework which will delay a website launch and impact on budgets. There are also some aspects in a site's infrastructure that are essential to optimize in advance to avoid extensive rework later. So, how do you go about building this into the translation process?

The old approach to translation

For a while now, companies have been aware of the need for a local language website when targeting new global markets. Back in 2014 a Common Sense Advisory report stated "75% [of web visitors] prefer to buy products in their native language. In addition, 60% rarely or never buy from English-only websites." Competing in global markets with a non-translated website is no longer seen as a viable option if a company wants to compete against local business.

The traditional approach has been to focus on translation only, with the key debate being around whether you should use

a human translator or machine translation, such as Google Translate.

This approach is now shifting as companies have begun to realize the benefits of localizing their content and website for their target markets. Instead of a single piece of content being translated word for word, companies are now adapting the content to resonate and engage, allowing them to compete more effectively against local competitors. This is known as *transcreation,* where marketing messages are adapted to different cultures and languages whilst maintaining the original context and intent of the messaging.

However, localization and transcreation are still not enough to succeed globally. Customers need to be able to find your website and the only way to do that is to increase your online visibility. This is where integrating SEO into translation workflows comes in.

A new approach to succeeding globally

To succeed in new markets, you need to maximize the visibility of your products or services. To do this SEO needs to be woven into the translation process, but it needs to be adapted to different markets. The key elements to consider are localized keyword research, site structure and hreflang implementation.

Localized keyword research

Many companies simply translate domestic keywords in the hopes of ranking well in new markets. The problem with this strategy is it doesn’t take account of the search volume in different markets or country-unique keywords that may have high search volume but no domestic equivalent terminology.

The only way to ensure you are targeting the right relevant keywords is to use a vendor with native linguists who also

understand the process of keyword research. However, many believe keyword research is enough to help you rank in new markets. This process needs to occur alongside technical SEO, two elements of which we will now discuss.

Site structure – which domain?

When it comes to site structure, it is important to consider future expansion plans and ensure the option you pick is future proofed for your needs.

There are three main options to consider:

1. **ccTLD – Country Code Top-Level domain (example.fr)**

In general, this is the preferred domain option when expanding internationally. By using the ccTLD you're not only sending a strong signal to search engines that you are targeting a specific country, but you are also establishing trust with the user, which will result in a better click-through rate from the SERPs. For example, users in France are notoriously swayed by .FR websites and will be more likely to click on these than generic domains such as .com

The downside to ccTLD is there is no sharing of link authority from any parent top-level domain. In essence, you're building up the link authority of these sites from scratch, which can make it harder to rank. There is also the potential for your domain to be unavailable in new markets.

2. **Sub-folder (example.com/fr)**

The main benefit of using the sub-folder approach is the shared link authority of the top-level domain. Any links built across all the country sites will benefit each subsequent site because that link authority is held within the top-level domain. This can have a real ranking benefit for all your regional sites, even if they are relatively new.

The downside is it creates less trust than using a ccTLD

structure and as a result, this may impact on the click-through rate. It is also a weaker location signal to search engines compared to ccTLD and using a sub-domain structure.

3. **Sub-domain (fr.example.com)**

This approach sits between the other two in terms of pros and cons. Firstly, there is a degree of location signal given to search engines because you can host separate sub-domains in separate countries, which could potentially give you a ranking boost in that country. There is also some sharing of the authority of the main domain, but certainly not as much as you would see with the sub-folder approach.

The downside is that there will still be some linking activity required because you won't benefit from all of the link authority of the ccTLD. The location signal is also not as strong as you would get with a unique ccTLD.

It is important to choose a domain structure that is right for your business and future expansion plans. ccTLD is the ideal structure but for some companies it may not be possible, or you may decide the sharing of link authority is more important and opt for a sub-folder structure. Whichever option you chose, it is important to consider site structure before building a website, not after.

Implenting hreflang

Hreflang is an HTML tag that you can add directly to the source code of a page when you have duplicate content in multiple languages. It helps search engines understand the language of a piece of content and therefore help ensure it's served to the right users in the right market. Correct implementation of hreflang is essential to ensure your localized websites are ranked correctly.

A key element to consider is how to implement hreflang correctly for two bits of same-language content that target

two different countries e.g. French for France versus French for Canada. By incorrectly implementing the hreflang code you could not only affect your chances of ranking organically in an entire market but also affect the original and other connected sites.

One vendor or two?

When it comes to integrating SEO and translation into one workflow, a big consideration is whether to have one vendor who specializes in search engine-optimized website translation or two vendors, one an SEO specialist and the other a professional translation company.

If you already have agency support for SEO as part of your integrated digital marketing strategy, deciding to just outsource the translation element may seem like the easiest option. However, managing two vendors can become a tricky task and it is difficult to weave the SEO into the translation process this way. Also, some digital agencies may be experts in SEO but they may not have the same expertise when it comes to international site structures or international keyword research. Finally, every time you update content, there is also a potential for previous SEO work to be overwritten and this can lead to large costs as previous SEO work will have to be redone having implications not only on project costs but also search traffic to your site.

Having one vendor allows you to manage the process much more easily. The workflows of the language service provider should be refined to weave SEO in throughout and there should be one upfront cost for the SEO work, which should save you money in the long run. Having one vendor also helps with ensuring keyword research has been carried out that is relevant to the new market rather than a simple translation of domestic keywords.

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So, what next?

The translation industry has changed a lot in the last few years, moving from just accurately translated content to localizing content to resonate and now optimizing on a local level for increased organic visibility. Whilst incorporating SEO is a big step in the right direction, there is still more that can be done to increase the chances of success in new markets. The next step for companies is to consider the cultural elements when they expand internationally. This includes the best payment methods, delivery options and trust signals for those markets. By incorporating this with SEO, you will improve your online visibility, conversion rates and ultimately your overall ROI.

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rarely take SEO recommendations seriously, especially when there are no direct re

percussions of not following them. So, when in 2014 Google recommended that all

website should migrate to HTTPS, few website owners took it as a direct instructio

n. Fast-forward to 2018, however, and things are looking very different. So what

is the state of HTTPS in 2018, and why should you migrate?



If you haven’t hear

d of Single Page Applications (SPA for short), or if you have been resistant to lear

ning about these JavaScript methods for creating websites, the time for hiding



your head in the sand is over.

Today’s SERPs are a far cry from the humble list

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of marketing we can do on-site. But that's not entirely true; the two elements

work hand-in-hand on a website to support its organic successes.

https://searchenginewatch.com/2018/04/19/how-to-integrate-seo-into-the-translation-process-to-maximize-global-success/