International SEO Considerations with Aledya Solis [PODCAST]

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Optimizing a global website for international search is no easy feat.

To properly execute an international SEO strategy, practitioners must have a solid grasp of technical SEO and understand the factors that affect how search engines crawl, index, and rank international websites.

For episode 148 of Search Engine Nerds, I interviewed Aleyda Solis, Founder of Orainti, about international search.

Solis discussed how you should approach international SEO, the top considerations when internationalizing your website, and everything in between.





What are some of the core initial considerations that a company needs to address when they're starting that challenge of going international with their websites?

Aleyda Solis (AS): I will say that it's going back to basics – supply and demand. Another thing is wanting to diversify or expand your reach.

But first, are you actually able to do it based on your content, your services, your products?

Sometimes, it's very straightforward. Let's say you have a blog, so what you provide to users is content. It's more or less straightforward because you just need to hire copywriters that are natives in those languages.

But in other cases, it is about providing physical products that you need to research and validate.

- Is there any potential for your products and services in international markets?
- Is it possible for you to deliver to these countries?
- How you will manage systems?
- What will be the conditions?
- How are you going to process payment and currency exchanges?

And all these types of additional considerations.

How do you go about content translation/localization?

AS: That is actually the second step… Let's say that you're interested in targeting Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America.

But then you realize that most of the searches are coming from specific countries like Mexico or Argentina. We know that Spanish in Mexico is different than Spanish in Argentina.

[Content localization] is not just hiring a Spanish-speaking person and that's it.

It's very important as a next step – right after you realize that you're able to provide your content, products or services – to have the resources and flexibility.

Identify which countries or languages to target. Which are the ones where there is an actual interest regarding what you provide?

How do you determine whether there's interest in the content, product, or service you provide?

AS: The most basic way is to do a keyword research to determine which are the markets that you should work with.

For example, to assess the interest in the Spanish-speaking markets, then it's important that you hire someone native in Spanish.

Then later on, if you identified that there's much more search volume coming from Mexico, and the person that you've hired is not a native of Mexico but from another Latin country, it would be better to have additional validation from someone who is actually Mexican.

So this person can verify the type of behavior or preference people from that specific country has. You are able to validate, not only the interest but the whole behavior regarding the search of your particular product or service.

That is the fundamental way to do it – to hire someone native.

After selecting the market and identifying search volume, you should also do competition research.

Are you competing with powerful domains – well-ranked sites with tons of links and content?

Perhaps it would be much easier for you to start with a particular market because of language proximity but then, on the other hand, you have a high level of competition.

It would depend from place to place, of course.

Brent Csutoras (BC): So let's keep walking on that path. We've determined that we have product or service viability in a region, identified specific regions we want to target, and decided now – for the sake of conversation – that we're going to use a subdirectory for that region.

What is the next step? What are the key things that you need to consider when you're starting to build out that section of your site?

AS: You need to be consistent with your existing URL structure and your regional version. All the URLs on your regional version should ideally follow the same structural logic as with your original one.

It would be much easier for you to map each page to the other alternate versions and more useful towards users.

How do you make sure you're doing hreflang right?

AS: Most of the problems are not caused by you having English and Spanish versions but they arise when you have at least a dozen different versions and each version of course has its own URL.

You need to make sure that:

- Each URL specifically points to the alternates without any errors and you don’t link to redirected URLs.
- Each of the URLS is actually indexable.
- These are the original pages to refer to in every language or country versions.

Ideally, you should make sure that the tags are correct and that you’re following and using only the ISO country and language values that Google support.

I have created this free tool that you can use to generate your hreflang tags – whether to use in the HTML head or in the XML sitemap. It’s very straightforward to just copy and paste.

You will have the patterns to use for the tags and values, the syntax for each, and you can send them to your developers to just switch the URLs in each case.

A lot of the complexities also come when each international version has a completely different type of URL structure so it’s very difficult to map each other.

Sometimes, you’re using a subdirectory or a subdomain. Sometimes you have categories, subcategories, products and I.D. levels in your URL, and sometimes you don’t.

It’s easy if you have a good platform and a consistent URL structure. But it can be a pain if you don’t have proper development resources and there is no way for you to do this program automatically through your platform. And you need to go page by page for example.

Most SEO crawlers nowadays have an international validation functionality that will include hreflang validation and will be able to tell you if you have common errors.

What do you say to people who want to do IP direction where they have subdirectories?

AS: In any scenario, I would say, don't do it.

First, from a user experience perspective, as you mentioned before. You can't assume too much from the user and end up taking the user somewhere that is not necessarily as relevant…

Also, most of the crawlers have a US-based IP address. So if you do this, you will end up redirecting most of the crawlers to the US version. And probably some of your international version will never be crawled because of this.

You don't want to mess with this at all from a technical perspective.

Additional Resources from Aleyda Solis:

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