

# **HYPER LOCAL**

**SEO & MARKETING**

**How US Marketers  
Win Global  
by going **Local****



**DONALD L. DUNNINGTON**

# **Hyper Local SEO & Marketing**

---

How U.S. Marketers Win  
Global by Going Local

By Donald L. Dunnington  
Copyright © Donald Dunnington, 2015  
All rights reserved.

Hyper Local SEO and Marketing - How U.S. Marketers Win Local by Going Global

Donald L. Dunnington

Copyright © 2015 by Donald L. Dunnington

All Rights Reserved

Copy Editors: Angela Speakman and Karen Thorla Denny

Proof Reader: Mary Vaccara

Cover Design: Khaled Bazzi, graphic designer, London

Interior Design: Steve Racz, graphic designer and web developer, Philadelphia

All rights reserved. This book was self-published by the author Donald L. Dunnington under Online Communicators Press.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any means without the expressed permission of the author. This includes reprints, excerpts, photocopying, recording, or any future means of reproducing text.

If you would like to do any of the above, please seek permission first by contacting the author at [www.DonaldDunnington.com/contact](http://www.DonaldDunnington.com/contact)

Published in the United States by Online Communicators Press

ISBN 978-0-9962529-0-4

# Contents

## Forward by Miranda Miller

*A Friendly Word for U.S. Marketers from Your Neighbor in Canada* i

## Preface

*On Becoming a Virtual Expat:*

*A Travel Story for the Internet Age* iii

## Chapter 1

*When Staying Home Isn't an Option* 1

## Chapter 2

*Lost in Translation* 6

## Chapter 3

*When Your Delicious Colors Turn Sour* 20

## Chapter 4

*Word Choice, Global SEO and PPC* 25

## Chapter 5

*We're All Content Marketers Now* 38

## Chapter 6

*Misruled by a Thumb* 44

## Chapter 7

*Global Strategy, Local Scope* 50

## Chapter 8

*China's Really Big Market* 69

## Chapter 9

*Conclusion* 83

## **Forward by Miranda Miller**

# **A Friendly Word for U.S. Marketers from Your Neighbor in Canada**

If there's just one thing you take away from this book, I hope you will take to heart its message that the hyper local world of global digital marketing is going to turn your world upside down. Even if you're just going next door to sell to those of us in Canada, simply extending what you are already doing into a new region is no longer enough.

You're not just sending trucks into a new area, or scheduling an extra cargo flight, or building a relationship with another supplier. There's more than a language barrier to cross if your goal is to connect with and convert buyers in a new region.

Forget about what it is you want to do – what does your target market want and need? Who are they? Where do they live online? How do they seek out information, make decisions, and prefer to connect with brands? These insights are going to drive your search and social strategy, as going global essentially means going local in someone else's locale.

Email or direct mail that converts really well in one region might completely bomb in another, even if you have the linguistics to a science. A style appreciated in one culture may be overbearing in another. Or, you may find that your mobile strategy needs to be kicked up a notch in one market over another, thanks to greater smartphone penetration or different user habits.

There are thousands of considerations that influence a consumer's decision to purchase, but at the core of all of this is one very simple

thing: an understanding of how people learn. Regardless of the platform, the channel, or the tactic, you are trying to teach the consumers in your target market. You're teaching them about your business, your product or service, and its utility in their life, in an effort to influence and nurture them to the next step in the funnel. People in different regions, with different cultures and speaking a variety of languages, learn and are influenced by information in different ways.

As you will see diving deep into this book, your very first job in localizing content for any channel is to deepen your understanding of how your target market in that area finds, consumes and uses information. Let the practical experience of the many world-class marketers who shared their stories, coupled with the commentary of veteran digital marketing communications expert Don Dunnington, guide you successfully forward into new markets.

### **About Miranda Miller**

Miranda Miller<sup>1</sup> is co-founder of the digital content firm MediaAU. She describes herself as working “at the intersection of marketing and education,” which is a place that I think more marketers need to be occupying. She has ghostwritten more than 60 e-books, successfully completed 400 content projects, and written thousands of articles and blog posts for clients ranging from SMBs to Fortune 100 companies. The former Lead Writer at Search Engine Watch and Associate Editor at ClickZ.com, she is a member of both the [Professional Writers Association of Canada](#)<sup>2</sup> and Canadian Media Guild.

---

1 To learn more about Miranda Miller, see her website at <http://miranda-miller.com> or her LinkedIn profile at <http://linkedin.com/in/mirandamillerwrites>

2 [http://writers.ca/index.php?option=com\\_community&view=profile&userid=928](http://writers.ca/index.php?option=com_community&view=profile&userid=928)

## Preface

# On Becoming a Virtual Expat: A Travel Story for the Internet Age

*“You really need to live local to gain the feel of a market.”*

Kate Klemmer Terry

Twenty years ago I became a virtual resident of the digital world. I didn't know I was leaving home at the time. I just wanted my company to be the first kid on the block to have a site on the World Wide Web.

This book is about that journey and about the great marketers and communicators I've met along the way. In sharing these stories, my mission is to encourage other American marketers to make their own journeys. Perhaps this book will make your travels a bit easier, or it will help you explain to others why your organization needs to commit to venturing farther into this new world.

### **Work on the Internet Like an Expat**

It was a phone call with Doris Füllgrabe that brought me to realize I've been living the life of a virtual expat. Füllgrabe is founder of [Building the Life You Want](http://www.buildingthelifyouwant.com),<sup>3</sup> which provides global executive coaching, leadership development and team building across diverse cultures.

Füllgrabe told me: “The golden rule needs some adjustment when you're working abroad. Treating others the way you want to be treated just doesn't work in international relations. You have to learn how to

---

<sup>3</sup> Doris Füllgrabe was born and raised in Germany and has lived in Scotland, England, Spain, the Canary Islands and Mexico. She now lives in the U.S.A. where she provides global executive coaching and cross-cultural leadership development and team building services. See <http://www.buildingthelifyouwant.com>

treat them *the way they want to be treated.*” This is precisely what I had to learn as a new resident of cyberspace.

My journey as a virtual expat was set in motion long before the Internet came into our lives. It started with a trip on the Pennsylvania Turnpike in 1972, one of many tedious and sometimes harrowing winter-weather holiday trips my wife Karen and I would make to visit our families in Ohio. On my return to Washington, D.C., I saw a story by Washington Post reporter [Rudy Maxa](#),<sup>4</sup> about making a similar Turnpike journey over the same holiday.

I contacted Maxa to share our mutual turnpike stories. We later had dinner with our wives at a French restaurant in the Kennedy Center. Even later, our two daughters were born and grew up playing together.

In 1989, I joined K-Tron International, a manufacturing company in New Jersey, near Philadelphia. Meanwhile Rudy became a world travel writer. He launched an NPR radio show, *The Savvy Traveler*. Later he would host a long-running PBS TV travel series. The radio series led to hosting a travel channel on America On Line, where he was the “SavTrav” (AOL had an eight character limit to online names).

In 1995 Rudy called to tell me his sponsor, American Express, was moving his online program from AOL to the World Wide Web. The web is going to be big, he told me, and I told everyone in my company who would listen. Fortunately, I got the support, and after a long and

---

<sup>4</sup> Paul Theroux calls Rudy Maxa “one of the country’s premier travel gurus.” See <http://rudymax.com>

often frustrating effort to find someone both competent and willing to help us build a website,<sup>5</sup> we launched our first site early in 1996.

Since then I've flown around the world many times and made extended trips to Europe and Asia to help local partners with their websites. In the process I learned there's a limit to being a virtual visitor to other markets. I don't think you can really understand a distant market without actually going there and developing your local resources.

I'm not an advocate of one-day stands on those first visits, then on to the next country. Kate Klemmer Terry, founder of the Dash Group NY, an e-commerce and digital marketing agency serving the fashion industry, recommends taking time to really experience a country, its people and especially that sector of the market you're serving. "You really need to live local to gain the feel of a market," she says.<sup>6</sup>

When I started building websites for the Chinese market, Lukas Guenthardt, who was then a senior vice president at K-Tron International, told me I needed to go see China. He said I'd never really understand how different it is until I experienced it, that I needed to go for a couple weeks and visit both businesses and some of the major tourist sites. It was good advice from a personal development perspective and for the professional relationships I was able to establish.

We often hear talk about how the Internet has changed everything. But there's one thing that will never change, and that's the simple fact that people are different. And the farther you travel from your own

---

<sup>5</sup> The few companies I found offering corporate web development at the time were frequently quoting million dollar price tags. Many were so busy they didn't bother returning my phone calls. I finally found a small local developer that produced our first site for \$10,000. It's still easy to spend a million dollars or way more on bigger sites. But a site like our first effort could be done today on Wordpress for \$500, or no direct cost at all if you do it yourself.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Klemmer Terry, the Dash Group NY, <http://www.dashgroupny.com>

language and your own culture, the more baffling those differences can be. Sometimes we can't even see the differences, unless we know to look for them. Sometimes we need people we can trust to help us see the differences.

I have had the good fortune to travel the world and meet people at their work in their own countries. Everywhere I went, I found talented, creative people. Many became trusted resources and guides. Often we formed professional relationships that have lasted over a decade.

In her introduction, Miranda Miller writes something that's worth repeating: "Your very first job in localizing content for any channel is to deepen your understanding of how your target market in that area finds, takes in and uses information."

The need to go global, yet look local, has never been greater. The Internet gives us this powerful, global medium that lets us reach more people, more easily, in more markets than we ever imagined. But instead of becoming one, big mass market, markets have gone hyper local. For U.S. digital marketers the choice is clear: you win global by going local.

Donald L. Dunnington

# Chapter 1

## When Staying Home Isn't an Option

*"It's no longer about U.S. marketers going after international markets. They're going after you in the U.S."*

Noah Maffit

### **It's Time for More U.S. Companies to Go Global**

Noah Maffit and others like him are sounding a wakeup call for American digital marketers. He says those who aren't actively developing their international online markets are missing their best opportunity to do so before it's too late.

The former EVP and general manager of global digital business at Live Nation told an audience of some of North America's largest retailers that there are risks to taking your business online to other nations. But the risk of not going global, or of waiting too long to make the move, almost certainly will be greater.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Clicks Travel in Both Directions**

Chinese manufacturers are going online to target U.S. markets directly, rather than—or in addition to—producing goods for U.S. companies to sell. Alibaba's new Western-focused online retail store, 11mainstreet.com, could help Chinese manufacturers bypass American retailers, for example, and sell directly to U.S. consumers.

---

<sup>7</sup> Noah T. Maffit spoke at the Global E-Commerce Forum, New York City, May 15, 2014. Live Nation Entertainment is a global live entertainment and e-commerce company. Its services include Ticketmaster.com, Live Nation Concerts, Front Line Management Group and Live Nation Network.

Alibaba is already the leading e-commerce company in the world's biggest market. But charismatic leader Jack Ma isn't stopping at dominating China's fast growing markets: he's on his way to claiming the top ranks of the online world of commerce. His 2014 Initial Public Offering (IPO) in the U.S. raised a record \$25 billion, and Alibaba is now one of the world's most valuable tech companies.<sup>8</sup>

Although Ma told the *Wall Street Journal* that he is “more interested in bringing America to China,”<sup>9</sup> he would no doubt be happy to do both. Plus he'd be happy to challenge Amazon on its home turf and take market share from eBay in the U.S., just as he did in China.

Among the Chinese technology companies already targeting global markets are smartphone makers Huawei Technology Co. and Xiaomi Inc. and Lenovo Group, Ltd., makers of phones and computers. Taiwan's PC manufacturers Acer Inc. and Asustek (Asus) Computer Inc. are also major global players.

Three online services blocked by China's Great Firewall—Google, Facebook and Twitter—have set up shop in Hong Kong in part to sell advertising to global Chinese companies. Even state-owned businesses, such as Air China and the People's Daily newspaper have Twitter accounts, as reported by Ad Age's Angela Doland and Mark Bergen.<sup>10</sup>

---

8 See *The Wall Street Journal's* interactive page, “What is Alibaba?” at <http://projects.wsj.com/alibaba/>.

9 “How Alibaba Plans to Help U.S. Exporters,” *The Wall Street Journal* (November 3, 2014) p. R2. Also available to subscribers at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/alibabas-plan-to-help-u-s-exporters-1414962623>

10 “Why Twitter Is Opening a Hong Kong Office Despite Being Blocked in China,” Ad Age (November 7, 2014) <http://adage.com/article/digital/twitter-opening-office-hong-kong/295768/>

Here's Charlie Hollander, CEO of Gemstone King,<sup>11</sup> on China's move to compete in America: "More manufacturers are going to sell their products directly in the U.S," he warns, and U.S. companies need to be prepared.

In addition to using Alibaba's Western-oriented platform, Hollander says Chinese brands will soon be competing in the West through American online outlets such as eBay, Amazon and Walmart. "For example, eBay is building a warehouse in Los Angeles for Chinese manufacturers to make it easier for them to sell products directly to U.S. consumers," he says. "Those non-branded items that were sold by U.S. resellers are going to be sold by the manufacturers themselves."

Maffit and Hollander are among a growing number of e-commerce experts who say you need to take the battle to the home turf of emerging competitors—before they start arriving on your doorstep.

"The best defense for your domestic market is to go after the international markets that are starting to target your market," says Kent Allen, principal at The Research Trust and co-founder of the Global E-Commerce Forum.

Abundant opportunity exists for those who dare to go after their share of this global-mobile-social and hyper local market. And while there is danger of missing your target, the greater danger awaits those who think they can just stay home.

When you have home field advantage in what may be the world's best online (and offline) market, it can seem prudent to stay focused on the U.S. market. But if you want to grow where the growth markets are,

---

11 Gem Stone King is a 100 year-old diamond dealer that became a global leader in online jewelry retailing. The company is headquartered in New York, with locations in Belgium, Israel, and Thailand.

if you want to develop your overseas marketing competence before the competition brings the battle to your door, then it's time to get serious about global digital marketing.

Even if you don't look anywhere else, you should consider China. It has already overtaken the U.S. as the world's biggest e-commerce market and—by weight of population alone—China has more room to grow than any other market. The time is here for more American businesses to think as hard about selling to China as buying from China. Beyond China, in the digital world, even smaller international markets may offer more opportunity for growth than you had imagined.

### **But What About the Dangers?**

In addition to the added marketing challenges, there are bound to be operational problems when you go beyond the market you know best. For Americans, whose home market happens to be the world's easiest market to do business in, those dangers can seem all the more daunting.

As Maffit points out, senior managers are very much aware of the dangers. He says that to get board approval for your global marketing plans, you have to go well beyond showing them the great opportunities you've found. "You need to show them that you know the risks and have addressed how to overcome them."

While each situation is unique, I've found many hard-won lessons apply equally to all industries. Some of the insights that I gained from global B2C retailers, who tend to be the early trailblazers, have been especially valuable in my B2B efforts.

I have included in this book stories from a cross section of American industries that are active in global markets. You'll find stories about the close-to-home markets where many American marketers find it easier

to do business. Easiest of all may be the Anglophone and English-speaking markets where English use is high and the language barrier is lower (though not completely eliminated as we shall see).

Finally, we'll look farther afield at the challenges and rewards found in more distant parts of the world, with a special focus on China—the one really big market that no marketer today can afford to ignore.

## Chapter 2

### Lost in Translation

*“People might forgive you if the word-choice in your marketing reflects a U.S. sensibility. But the search engines won’t be so forgiving.”*

A U.S. digital marketing manager

### Get Your Language Right, Starting with English

The first thing I learned in going global is that getting language right is far more complicated than anticipated. It’s not just foreign languages where translation is a challenge. For those marketers like me, who are native English speakers—especially those of us who are accustomed to U.S. English being pretty much the world standard—it can be a shock to learn how hard (and how necessary) it is to adapt U.S. English to other English-speaking markets.

Thanks to our American penchant for British actors and BBC TV series, we’re all familiar with some of the differences between American English and British English. And most of us can recognize the difference between a Canadian accent and someone from Australia. Sometimes these differences seem minimal, but there are other, more troublesome times that you’re bound to run into if you’re doing business on the web.

An American company selling an American (or global) product doesn’t need a different English language website for each English-speaking market. However, if you have local operations in the UK, for example, you likely need a UK website with native content.

Whichever path you follow, you will need to pay close attention to language differences in your pay per click (PPC)<sup>12</sup> and organic search<sup>13</sup> efforts. I bumped into even greater differences in word choice and syntax when optimizing for market areas where English, though a second (and perhaps unofficial) language, is the one common language everyone understands.

### **The World of Multilingual English**

I was the global digital marketing director for an industrial equipment manufacturer that sells through manufacturer representatives in 85 countries. Most of these independent agencies have their own websites, and I embarked on a three-continent workshop tour to help them upgrade our company's online visibility in their territories.

The project was launched at regional sales conferences in Orlando, Milan and Bangkok, followed by workshops in targeted territories in Europe and Asia where we invited our manufacturers' representatives (reps) to assist us in creating localized mini-websites. These mini-sites were designed to help promote our products and services in select markets and drive more traffic to the main website, which offered content in English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Chinese. We also showed our partners how to improve their own sites and provided hands-on assistance in upgrading their sites to a more user-friendly content management system (CMS).

---

12 Pay per click (PPC) is an Internet advertising model where advertisers pay each time their ad is clicked, sending traffic to their website or landing page. Advertisers bid on keywords or keyword phrases on search engines. On websites, banner ads are sold at a fixed price or a fixed cost per click.

13 Organic search results are unpaid listings. For any search query, search engines seek to display the most relevant results first. The top two or three organic entries tend to receive far more clicks than either ads or the lower ranking organic entries.

In a number of markets, we decided to produce content in both English and at least one other language. In The Netherlands, where our rep office served the Benelux region (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg), our local partners urged us to publish in English only, even though that is not an official language in any of these countries.

It was a practical matter, the Dutch rep told me. “English doesn’t offend anyone,” he said, adding that no other language offered the same level of acceptance. He said that you wouldn’t get a positive reaction if you used French in the Flemish part of Belgium, for example. “Besides,” he said, “it’s easier for us to maintain the website in just one language.”

In working with them to develop content for the website, I found the Benelux team asking me to rewrite the pages they created. As we worked together, I came to realize my native English might not be the better choice.

Our purpose in creating these mini-websites wasn’t to be found by native English speakers, but by engineers just like the ones in this Dutch office. So while I helped with minor grammar issues, we all worked together to make sure we used the words our Benelux visitors would actually use in their searches.

### **My Lesson in Asian English**

It was at a Shanghai web workshop that I really began to appreciate the extent to which multilingual English can differ from American English. We had sales representatives from China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and India gathered together in a Shanghai conference room to build local websites. As I worked with our rep from India, a colleague came over to ask a question. Our Indian rep didn’t have an immediate answer, and so he replied, “I’ll revert to you later.”

His meaning was clear enough. But in America you'd probably say something like, "I'll get back to you later." I had seen *revert* used in this manner in emails from a friend in Singapore and assumed it was just an unusual word choice by someone whose first language is Chinese. But now I heard a man from India using the same word.

Since both India and Singapore have English-speaking roots not too far removed from England, I asked a friend in England for his opinion. He said *revert* isn't commonly used that way today. People in England would think it a bit old-fashioned, he added, to hear *revert* used to mean *reply*.

So I came to understand that our rep from India hadn't misspoken. His English is perfectly correct, just different, and probably pretty close to how English would be used in much of Asia. I began to appreciate the differences as well as the similarities in the language we share. Now when I need to localize content in an English-speaking market beyond the U.S., I resist the urge to Americanize local English speakers.

### **Globalize Your English Before You Translate**

Martin Schell is the founder of American Services In Asia, a consulting firm in Klaten, Central Java. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Communications at NYU's Stern School of Business and the author of "Developing a Global Perspective for Knowledge Management."

Schell is a proponent of "Global English" as the most cost-effective way to communicate on the Internet to the widest audience:

"The most cost-effective way to ensure that people from all linguistic backgrounds have a reasonable chance of comprehending your web site is to use 'Global English.' This means writing your content

in clear, globally understood English: smoother sentence structure, fewer idioms, less jargon.”<sup>14</sup>

Schell says even if you then translate the content for certain target markets, the translations will go smoother and cost less when translators don't have to struggle with American idioms.

Simplifying your English may also give you a little edge in your SEO ranking. There is evidence Google uses readability as one of its many metrics, though they don't tell how they measure it or how much weight they give it. Just be sure you employ your best copywriting skills as you simplify.

Yoast, the popular Wordpress SEO plugin, uses the Flesch Reading Ease Scale to measure the readability of your blog post or web page. This is the same measure you'll find in Microsoft Word's grammar checker, but Yoast uses it as an SEO metric. Its focus on short sentences and paragraphs can help if you tend toward over-complicated prose, but I find it often overdoes simplification. Over-reliance on any automated readability algorithm could lead to mechanical-sounding content, and that could cause you to lose your readers and the search engines you were trying to impress.

### **'Extreme Localization' Comes to English-Speaking Markets**

Although it's a good start, even global English isn't always enough. Our next-door neighbors in Canada provide a good example. I know a digital marketing manager in the media business (he asked to remain anonymous), who says extreme localization is going to be the next big thing for online global marketers. He says even in countries where you're

---

14 “How to Use English as a Global Language,” American Services In Asia website: <http://martinschell.com/web-global.html>.

targeting English speakers, you may not be speaking the same language well enough.

My friend says media businesses are being hit harder in foreign markets than at home. “Before the Internet, it had been easy to make loads of money selling the same thing to everybody,” he says. “Lots of very big, very successful companies have learned the hard way that their one-size-fits-all model isn’t going to work anymore.”

How bad is the disconnect? “There are companies that will go out of business if they don’t change,” he says, “and they’ll have to change in more markets than anyone expected. One of our biggest surprises is how much the English-speaking Canadian market has changed.”

He says that before the Internet, “Consumers were willing to accept U.S.-centric offerings because that’s all that was available. Now you have to deal with customers as individuals. They want—and can get—personalized information and products specific to their market.”

It isn’t just customer expectations that are forcing changes: “People might forgive you if the word-choice in your marketing reflects a U.S., rather than Canadian, sensibility. But the search engines won’t be so forgiving. If you get a search term wrong, people in Canada won’t find you.”

Of course, it’s more than language that has to become more locally attuned. For some marketing content, all you need do is tweak your words a bit to accommodate different spellings or word choice preferences, such as the familiar difference in color/colour. But in other instances, much more is required.

Form fields on “contact us” pages or order forms can be particularly frustrating for users from other countries. Before you decide on the

address fields on your order pages, take a good look at how addresses and phone numbers are presented in other countries. A surprising number of U.S. sites, for example, aren't able to handle foreign phone numbers.

### **Retailers Change Their Tone, Watch Their Calendars**

For many global brands selling online, Global English is still their first and best choice. To further limit the need for translation, marketers can also make greater use of images and visual cues that don't need translation.

Maile Lesica is the Senior Category Manager, International at Gilt Groupe, the hugely popular luxury retailer that pioneered the online flash sale of deeply discounted high fashion clothing. She says that Gilt offers too many items for too short a time in too little quantity for it to be cost-effective to translate everything.

Like many online retail marketers, Lesica finds it most important to translate the transaction pages where customers check out. She also translates site navigation, the all-important sign-up for email alerts and FAQs about how the sales work. In most countries, she says, "people appreciate the effort and don't expect you to be perfect."

The real challenge, she says, is to figure out the right tone. Gilt heavily promotes its flash sales via its email alerts. She varies the tone of those emails for each market to get the right "Gilt voice." In Australia, she says, "we want to sound like we're chatting with them at a BBQ." In South Korea, it's a more formal tone, "like you're going to a gallery."

The other key for retailers is understanding the cultural norms, getting timing right for local holidays and events, and being topical and relevant to what's going on at the moment in that market.

## **Not Just Words Change Meaning**

All kinds of things change meaning from country to country. If you were invited to attend a dinner party at a fast food restaurant, would you accept? In most countries, unless it's for a kid's birthday party, you might not be too enthusiastic about going, but in Japan you'd be honored to be invited to dinner at a KFC.

If you had to take a housewarming gift to a Costa Rican home, should you make it coffee? Only if you don't mind the host thinking you're cheap.

If going to Singapore, what should you leave at home? Considering it's against the law to chew it or even bring it into the country, you might want to leave your chewing gum at home.

Kentucky Fried Chicken, coffee, and chewing gum. Each may signify one thing in one country and quite another in the next country. Even global brands—some would say especially global brands—need local perspectives for their multilingual websites.

Online, it's far easier to offend customers, or even break the law, than you might expect. It doesn't matter if it's only a minor slip. In this competitive online global marketplace, one wrong note could send your visitors off to other sites before they ever get started on yours.

## **Technology Helps Translation, But Only to a Point**

Companies that are experienced in localization of their digital assets have developed standards on the technology and production side, so that localization changes can be made more easily. Some digital production short cuts are the same as what we used in the old dead-trees print days. For example, separating the explanatory text from an illustration so the graphic doesn't have to be changed when the page is translated.

You can also find an increasing reliance on technology to help with the translation process itself. Machine translation, though getting better, isn't nearly accurate enough to be used for anything more than a rough approximation.

But companies do save money and translators save a lot of time by capturing words and phrases in a Translation Memory (TM) system. The more you translate (and carefully review the results) the more valuable the TM becomes for the next translation. In addition to speed, your translator's quality and accuracy are enhanced with TM and other tools such as multilingual glossaries.

### **Transcreation and the Human Side of Localization**

While modern translations depend heavily on technology for efficiency's sake, only the human touch of a local, talented translator, with industry-specific knowledge, can make your text sound like it's been written by a literate expert. Sometimes marketers and content producers need to take their translations to a more highly evolved level. They need to achieve a level of localization where their translation is so transformed it's no longer a translation at all: it's transcreation.

With the increasing pressure for brands to become content marketers in multiple, global markets, there is bound to be a growing need for this higher level of multilingual content creation. To win on the global content marketing front, marketers want to reach that magic point of fluency where the translated piece matches the art of the original.

It isn't a duplicate of the original, because that could sound foreign. It is a unique work that is true to the intent of the original while achieving an authentic, local tone that resonates with the target market. This is the world of transcreation.

The global landscape is littered with big brands making big errors when they attempt to use one product name or slogan around the world. IKEA makes a point of putting Swedish names to all its products. It's part of the brand for everything to look and sound like it came from Sweden. But in Thailand that naming standard led to embarrassment when several names were found to sound exceedingly vulgar in Thai.

Transcreation depends on the art and understanding of truly talented and trusted creative people. You can and should use the science and technology that facilitate the translation process, but most of all you need trusted people.

As a freelance copywriter and partner at Brandframe Investigative Branding in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Claire Taylor<sup>15</sup> is constantly dealing with marketing messages that must resonate in multiple languages. "My work is often translated into several languages," she wrote in an email, "and I have to write with that in mind (e.g. no idioms). I advise my clients to find a good local copywriter to translate the copy."

She says translation agencies can be too literal when dealing with creative copy: "You need to get the right tone of voice, but translators are afraid to stray too far from the original text. So you lose nuances or it just sounds translated."

She says having a local copywriter do the work means it sounds more natural in the new language (if you carefully instruct the writer, and give them the freedom to interpret). But it can take a lot of time and an open mind to make it work. When we talked, Taylor was currently working on a big project for a global company:

---

15 Claire Taylor has worked on international campaigns for global brands such as Philips, Heineken, Yamaha and Bazooka Bubble Gum. You can find her at <http://www.taylor.nl> and <http://www.brand-frame.nl>.

“Just to translate simple short lines of copy has lots of back-and-forthing with our German copywriter. Even though I avoided idioms. It’s very interesting to hear how the German mind thinks, and that something we take for granted as English speakers is just untranslatable for Germans. I really enjoy those kinds of conversations—nitpicking and explaining nuances. Luckily we had a good copywriter who could get across the same message in German, even if she had to use different thoughts.”

Taylor is from the U.S. and has a degree in Journalism from Boston University. She has been working in Amsterdam since 1990 and speaks Dutch fluently, though she told me she never writes her own Dutch copy. She leaves that to native-born speakers. She no doubt learned that lesson from seeing, as she says, “so many Dutch copywriters write in English, and you can always tell.”

The same goes for using expats living in the U.S. to localize the content from their native countries. They can be a great resource for checking the quality of a translation or interacting with a native translator. But unless they spend time back in their home country on a regular basis, and keep their language skills up through native language news channels and local social media, their vocabulary will quickly become dated.

Sylwia Majewski<sup>16</sup> was born in Poland and came to the U.S. when she was 19, but she wouldn’t try to create Polish content for a client without the help of a copywriter living in Poland. She says when she

---

16 Sylwia Majewski is CEO of Adamus Media in Charleston, SC and Williamstown, NJ. See [www.adamusmedia.com](http://www.adamusmedia.com).

returns to Poland to visit family, “I’ll hear something on the radio and have to ask what it means.”

Majewski says the biggest problem is idioms: “They don’t teach you this in books. When I came to America I had to learn the American idioms.”

And you can’t just translate the way you say things in your native tongue, she added. “In Poland we say ‘eleven-teen,’ so an eleven-year-old is a teenager. In America, the teens don’t start until you’re 13.”

It takes courage, time and resources on the part of the global marketer to put a brand in the hands of someone who will transform it in ways that may be hard for non-native speakers to comprehend. But failing to take that transformative step can lead to embarrassing—sometimes even disastrous—losses.

### **Localization Is a Human Business**

Patrick Eve, head of TranslateMedia,<sup>17</sup> a global translation service with offices in the U.S., Europe and Asia, says translation is not a tech business; it’s all about service. “We use technology to bring down cost and save time,” he says. But he knows it takes people—lots of people—to provide the services that make modern translation possible.

The company started in London in January 2005. Today they have offices in New York, Hong Kong, Singapore, Paris, Munich and Austin, Texas. They employ 7,500 certified in-country translators covering 90 languages with another 5,000 in the pipeline to be vetted.

---

17 TranslateMedia is headquartered in London, England. See <http://www.translatemedia.com>.

“We get 25-35 applications every day,” Eve says. “It’s important to keep the pipeline full of new talent so that we can build strong country teams for every industry we serve.”

Eve says his biggest challenge when he set up the business was to find qualified translators: “We started by marketing ourselves to the translation community. We had to find them, test them and give them a good working environment with jobs that are fun, interesting and keep them engaged.”

The task of finding quality translators is further complicated by the need to find in-country people who already know the unique vocabulary and the local culture that the marketer is targeting. “If you’re marketing online gaming in Brazil,” Eve says, “you need to find a 25-35 year-old male who knows the difference between a royal flush and straight flush. He has to be current in all the expressions that players in that country are using.”

If global marketers face cultural challenges, imagine the problem posed for the company that’s managing such a large and diverse group of independent translators. “We had to create a business culture that travels well across nations,” Eve says.

You might want to apply Eve’s cultural approach to managing a global network when building your own team of content creators. He says TranslateMedia puts a lot of thought into how translators can be included in the agency’s culture.

“It’s a lonely world for translators,” he says. “You spend a lot of time on your own. There’s deadline pressure, with lots of nights and weekends on the job. Your attention may be divided among a number of agencies. It’s important to keep them enthusiastic about our projects.”

The same dynamic is at work for many global marketing communication managers, who often depend on freelancers or a loose network of local content creators. Even in larger companies, with local offices across the globe, keeping everyone connected and energized is a challenge. You may find yourself in a matrix organization where your local corporate resources are connected by a dotted line, which means you probably have less influence over them than you have with your freelancers.

### **It's All About Trust**

Translation, transcreation, localization—it can be an expensive and time-consuming proposition to get things right, and you have to make wise choices as to what you need to change and what can remain the same. But before you can make any changes you have to understand each culture.

That's the hard part. It's hard to be an expert in multiple markets, even markets where we sort of share the same language. Your only choice, I've found, is to find the local experts you can trust in the markets that are important to you.

As Eve does with his translators, all your local resources—not just the translators but also the skilled SEOs, the knowledgeable local content creators, the connected social media participants—have to be enthusiastic about working on your projects. There has to be a culture of trust within your online marketing group if you're going to succeed in building trust in your market.

## Chapter 3

# When Your Delicious Colors Turn Sour

*“The eyes are not responsible when the mind does the seeing.”*

Publilius Syrus<sup>18</sup>

## Hot or Cold: Do You Know What Your Colors Mean?

Navigating your online brand through the many design and color choices can be tough enough within your domestic market. The danger really escalates when you apply your brand’s corporate style to other cultures.

I know, style guides are sacred and can’t be violated. The bigger the company the more detailed and strict those guides become. But I have just one question: was your guide written and tested for a global market?

At a trade show in Shanghai, China, I saw two large booths in the distance. Before I looked at the identifying signs, I knew the one was German and the other Chinese. Their colors told the story.

The German booth was cool blue and white, with lots of stainless steel—a place of pure technical perfection. The neighbor next door was on the opposite end of the temperature scale: hot reds and gold, royal colors once reserved for China’s emperor.

Neither color scheme was right or wrong, but you can be sure they had a different effect, and sent a different message to these largely

---

18 Publilius Syrus, was a 1<sup>st</sup> century Latin writer of maxims. Born in Assyria, he was taken to Italy as a slave where he was freed and educated by his master. See [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Publilius\\_Syrus](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Publilius_Syrus).

Asian—mostly Chinese—visitors than they would have in the German company's home market.

What colors are right for your business? It may depend on where you're selling, but it also depends on what you're selling and whom you're selling to.

The real danger comes in either failing to consider cultural differences such as color's impact on your target market, or jumping to the wrong conclusions based on insufficient information.

How do you know you have it right? If you've asked that question, you've at least started down the right path. There are all sorts of color wheels and tables you can find online that may help break the cultural color code for you.<sup>19</sup>

Asking partners or studying people's reactions from the right demographic in your target market can help. Ultimately testing and measuring results are the best answers to this complex question.

### **The Trial and Error Method of Cultural Color Choices**

How do you know if you're choosing the right web colors for the Chinese market? For my first Chinese website, I was guided by the company's Chinese business consultant. We had long discussions with the consultant about what colors mean in China and what features people look for in a website. Since this was a relatively small company, we had the flexibility to stray a bit from the company's established English language website, as long as we didn't violate the logo colors.

As a result our design team created a color palette sure to resonate with Chinese visitors. The core structure of the site remained the same,

---

<sup>19</sup> One of the most popular and beautiful cultural color wheels can be found at <http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/colours-in-cultures/>

so that Chinese visitors who chose to go on to the company's English language site would find the same navigation as on the Chinese site. It was a good idea, but I learned later it might not have been the best solution for an American company selling Western technology in China.

For another Chinese site, I worked with a recently acquired company within the same division. It sells a similar product line to a similar global industrial market. I flew to St. Louis to meet their newly hired Chinese sales manager, who was in town for training. We spent several days together and even attended a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game.

I found a significant contrast in opinion between the two Chinese advisors. Our first advisor was native Chinese but had been living in the U.S. for many years. The second advisor lived in China and worked daily with the buyers we wanted to reach. His insights into our targeted Chinese Web visitors helped us build more complete personas. We profiled the engineers, managers and purchase agents who make the buying decisions, the companies and government organizations they work for, and the things that motivate them to buy from an American company.

From this Chinese engineer's perspective, the main thing an American company has to offer the Chinese market is western technology. In his experience, Chinese visitors will have a higher opinion of the products being sold if the site looks the same as the English language site and clearly belongs to a well-established western company.

When looking at the traffic and conversions on the two websites, we found the Western-look beat the Chinese look by a small but significant margin. In terms of branding message, the feedback we got from partners in China suggested the western-look was definitely the

better choice. On the next update of the first site, we changed to match the look of the main English-language site.

Today there are many more tools available for cultural testing before committing to a site design. While it may seem cheaper to pick your colors by trial and error, you have to consider the lost opportunities. It's easy to see what you save by not testing, and you may never know what you have lost. Or once you see you've missed the target, it may be too late to recover.

### **Learn to see with your eyes, not your mind**

Perhaps the first test you could try is a test of your own perception. If every marketing message you craft, every creative decision you make is shaped by your language and culture, how do you get beyond those limits? Quite by accident, one of the more valuable perceptual tools I have discovered came with an art lesson.

Several years ago my wife gave me a gift of oil painting lessons. It turned out my greatest challenge wasn't learning to apply color to canvas but to see color as it really is. "See with your eyes, not your mind," my art teacher told me over and over until I finally started to really see.

Before I was able to color inside the lines, I learned that grass and leaves are green, tree trunks are brown, and the sky is blue. Once I filed this information away in my mind, I never really looked closer again. But I learned that our eyes—if we let them—would show us there are many more colors in the grass and leaves, the trees and the sky. Then—only then—could I paint what I really saw.

I saw how the greens of the grasses and leaves changed from spring to summer, that they had yellows and blues and dark greens that turned almost black, depending on the light. The hardest part for me was

learning to perceive how the yellow sun casts its color across the blue sky. Who would have thought it takes yellow to make a blue sky look real?

Science tells us our minds want to take shortcuts. Thinking is hard work and takes lots of energy. So the brain has become adept at putting things into neat categories—like recalling color rather than really seeing color. It's a great strategy to reduce the amount of new information the brain must process, but it's a barrier to seeing things as others see them.

To win markets on a global scale, you need to train your eyes and all your senses to see and feel beyond your own culture.

## Chapter 4

### Word Choice, Global SEO and PPC

*“Your choice is clear. If you want effective keywords for your international SEO and PPC, you have to find local experts.”*

Greig Holbrook<sup>20</sup>

#### Why Homegrown Search Strategies Seldom Travel Well

When you enter the global search-marketing race, it doesn't take long to figure out that Google isn't the only search engine you need to focus on.

In my own case, one of the first challenges was understanding the different rules for SEO and buying keywords on Baidu, the leading search engine inside China's Great Firewall. Then it was Yandex, the major search engine in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). I even learned how Yahoo could be a better choice in Japan than Google.

By 2010 I was deep into taking our websites beyond translation and thinking about global search. It was at this point where I discovered that you couldn't just translate your domestic keywords for search campaigns in foreign markets. The second thing I learned is that the digital marketing strategies perfected for my home market seldom travel well in other countries.

---

<sup>20</sup> Greig Holbrook is the founder and managing director of Oban Digital, a multilingual SEO and digital marketing firm headquartered in Brighton, England. See [www.obandigital.com](http://www.obandigital.com).

It happens all too often: companies entering new international markets translate the same keyword lists from country-to-country. This expedient often fails on two key levels:

- It fails to account for the many different ways other languages or cultures express the same idea
- It fails to consider that searchers in different cultures have very different motivations and priorities when they look for a product or service online

Thus both words and strategies for choosing words in search terms have to be customized to each market. Here's a simple example from the B2B world of industrial equipment marketing: The standard Spanish translation for *spare parts* is *repuestos*. But in Mexico, they call it *refacciones*.

Sometimes, even the best translation isn't the best choice. Consider this example Oban Digital provided of a keyword analysis they did for a client who planned to advertise on Google Italy.

The client wanted to promote their discount airfares in Italy. Experience in other markets told them they should use the term *cheap flights*. The best Italian translation of cheap flights is *voli economici*, which Oban's research showed could yield on average about 33,000 searches per month on Google.it.

But Oban also knew that in Italy you'd find the most popular search terms often use a combination of English and Italian. For cheap airfares, the preferred term turns out to be *voli low cost*.

This English-Italian mashup gets eight times as much search volume, and it even offers lower competition scores. You won't find insights like this if you're just translating keywords. You have to conduct local keyword research.

“Your choice is clear,” Oban’s Greig Holbrook says. “If you want effective keywords for your international SEO and PPC, you have to find local experts who know the language and culture and understand your industry.”

### **Who Do You Trust with Your SEO Localization?**

For SEO localization, the cost of relying on the wrong resources can result in crippling search engine penalties. I talked with a global B2C marketing manager who told how his company was once banished from Baidu’s search pages. The company had hired an Asian search company to help improve their search visibility in China, with emphasis on getting better results with Baidu. It turned out the agency employed black hat SEO<sup>21</sup> techniques that worked at first but ultimately led to their expulsion when the search engine tightened its standards.

No one within the company understood what was produced in the Chinese-language SEO campaign. They had no idea what their vendor had done until it all went wrong.

At that point they turned to another agency to clean up their website and remove or renounce the offending inbound links. A representative from the new agency then paid a visit to Baidu to beg forgiveness for their client.

Eventually, all was forgiven, and the company was returned to Baidu search results. This makes them one of the lucky ones, but then if they had put their trust in the right people to begin with, they wouldn’t have needed luck. Personally, I wouldn’t trust anyone who claims SEO is easy, or any agency that claims SEO can be automated.

---

<sup>21</sup> Black hat SEO is a popular term for search engine spam. Until Google and others started penalizing it, some of the most common tricks involved keyword stuffing (artificially filling a page with your most important keywords), and link farms (low quality inbound links from sites setup strictly for that purpose).

Trust, security and compliance issues are an even greater concern than cost savings for regulated industries. These companies need to know precisely who is producing content for their websites, including freelance translators or SEO consultants.

At a minimum companies require a management process that protects them against fraud and negligence. In the case of banking and legal industries, the regulatory, legal and security requirements can be even more stringent, right down to what country the outsourced work is being done in.

### **SEO is the new PR and PR the new SEO**

When you talk to today's SEO managers, the conversation frequently turns to the sort of relationship building that was the foundation for the public relations I've practiced all my working life. The only difference is today's SEO-oriented media relations are largely focused on online media, and a major objective is to influence your ranking in Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs), not just count news clippings.

Quality in-bound links start with producing quality content to which others want to link. But unless you want to leave it to chance that your well-crafted content receives the links it deserves, you need a linking campaign.<sup>22</sup>

That means in every market and every language where you're competing for search visibility, you need close relations with respected bloggers and news sites. It takes time and creative skill to develop these

---

22 Google's page rank system has always used inbound links as a key measure of a web page's popularity, but they now put greater emphasis on the quality of the link. Even pre-Google, inbound links were an early means of driving traffic to websites. I interviewed Eric Ward, who specializes in link building, for my master's thesis on website promotion in 1997. For more information, see Ward's website at [www.ericward.com](http://www.ericward.com).

individualized relations on a global level. You only want links from quality news sites and bloggers whose links search engines value. This is something few organizations can do alone.

“We have individual relationships with bloggers, local news outlets and legitimate independent websites that have authority in a vertical market or technical expertise that the search engines recognize,” Oban’s Holbrook says. “Our blog relationships are built on relevancy, quality, and the value they bring to the vertical market they serve.”

He says Oban has to work on these relationships and maintain them even when they don’t have a campaign to send their way. “It requires a personal touch, staying in contact, developing a two-way relationship. We have to understand the content they need and what they expect from us.”

He says that to get valuable links, you have to send your global contacts valuable content that is customized for their needs. “When we have a story for them, we’ll send them a content brief and provide images that are a good fit. We don’t just send an article, we engage in a conversation and provide them the material they need to craft their own unique content.”

### **SEO and Global Branding in a hyper local marketplace**

Some brands need to maintain a high level of consistency even while competing for online visibility in hyper local markets.

I first learned about Regus at an SEO conference in San Francisco. They are a global workplace provider with “ready-to-go” office space, business centers, executive suites and corporate offices in 2,000 locations across 100 countries and 750 cities. The company is based in Luxembourg

and is listed on the London Stock Exchange. It was founded in 1989 in Brussels, Belgium.

Regus has to get search results right down to the metropolitan area, according to Jennifer Lillis, Director of Marketing for Regus in the U.S. and Canada. She told Angela Speakman: “The content we deliver has to be specific to the audience. Whether it’s Queen’s English, American English, Canadian English, or any other language, it’s essential to get it right.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Lillis, who oversees digital marketing in North America, global SEO starts with what she calls *local intel*: “We have regional marketing managers, and they provide the intelligence. Their information helps guide our SEO and ensures a local, in-tune experience for web visitors.”

Lillis says the company needs local insights right down to the neighborhood: the right keywords for searches, the best places to advertise online. It all changes from city to city.

The company encourages team members from different parts of the world to share what worked and what didn’t. When the Regus APac (Asia-Pacific) team pioneered mobile website development and mobile search, they then helped the North American group get their mobile program up and going.

In the North American market, when online classifieds on craigslist were found to be effective in the United States, but not in Canada, Regus team members in Canada suggested the more popular Canadian site, kijiji.ca. The results were positive, and the North American team shared this win with other Regus teams around the globe, leading others to search for their own local online classifieds.

---

23 From a phone interview with Jennifer Lillis by Angela Speakman.

While Regus has learned to be hyper local in its marketing, the strength of their brand is the consistency of their product around the world. “We make sure that customers have the same experience, whether they are in Dallas or Shanghai,” Lillis says. “Wherever they travel, they’ll find office space and technology that is familiar and comfortable.”

In keeping with this consistent global experience, the Regus website looks and feels the same, regardless of location or language. One main site links country-specific sites. The design and navigation are consistent for each site. Images are uniform in style, right down to using the same photographer for each location.

Of course, Regus makes a great effort to be sure website language is right for local visitors. Only native speakers translate the content, and it’s more than simple translation. Translators are more accurately described as transcreators. “We are a big company,” Lillis says, “but it’s very important to create that local feel for our customers, so they feel we are addressing their specific needs.”

You might call it the “look global, feel local” approach to doing business on the web.

### **Small UK Company Wins Japan’s Bicyclists**

Sometimes you don’t have to be a big company to win big in a fiercely competitive foreign market. Consider this story of how Wiggle, a small UK company with an odd name, became Japan’s leading online bicycle shop.

I met Dean Maskell, head of online marketing for [wiggles.co.uk](http://wiggles.co.uk), in London at an International Digital Forum hosted by Oban Digital and the Internet Advertising Bureau UK. Wiggle had no local presence

in Japan; yet they created that country's most successful online bicycle shop.

Japan is a very hard market for foreign companies to crack. The language, the culture and the buying habits of consumers make it difficult for outsiders to get inside. On top of these structural barriers, Wiggle was a small, unknown player on Japan's bicycle landscape, and there were three large domestic companies that dominated the market.

But Wiggle had one large advantage: they had developed a highly effective e-commerce website that carried the world's most highly regarded bicycles and accessories. It turned out many of these products were hard to find and harder to get online from Japan's established outlets. What's more, Japanese consumers love the bicycle lifestyle and are eager to own the latest and best equipment.

The challenge for Wiggle was to get found in Japan's competitive search environment. They turned to a global search agency that could provide in-country assistance in developing the right search terms for a PPC and SEO campaign.

Wiggle customers in Japan became vocal fans. Without prompting from Wiggle, they began offering suggestions to help the company gain more business. They referred their friends. They offered advice on what new products were hot in Japan. They even shared insight into the best search terms for product descriptions. This customer enthusiasm has made a small UK company a local institution to Japan's biking community.

The important point of this story isn't just how one UK company, with no prior experience in Japan and no local resources of their own to help ease their entry, could beat three deeply-entrenched Japanese

companies. The message here is that stories like this are being repeated countless times the world over.

And while this is a happy story for a small British company entering a tough foreign market, it is also a warning to larger Western companies. You may think your domestic markets are safe. But Wiggle's online strategy works in both directions. While you may be weighing your options to compete online in emerging Asian and Eastern European markets, there are companies in those markets taking aim at your home markets. Often your best defense is to take the offense wherever you can.

### **The Technical Side of SEO**

These days, every legitimate SEO expert tells you content is king. They all declare that digital marketing now rests on creating lots of original, authentic, compelling content for all the world's online, social and mobile platforms.

This is a refreshing change for those who have battled against the forces of mechanical SEO, the black hat practitioners who thought they could get ahead by turning loose an army of robots, or robot-like minions to spam the search engines.

It also justifies those content marketers who have fought for control of their company's websites, insisting that the web is a platform for content, not another IT project that has to compete with enterprise applications and email servers for attention.

But there is a technical side to SEO, and its correct implementation is an important factor in winning your international search battles. Consider the emphasis Google places on your establishing the "Canonical URL," a meta data statement that declares which of several URLs for the same page is the primary or authoritative page.

Search engines, for example, will see `www.mysite.com/page1` and `mysite.com/page1` as two different pages with duplicate content. Since Google penalizes sites that contain duplicate content, you need to tell them which page is the canonical page (the primary page to be referenced in search results). If you don't get it right, you could lose out to competitors who do.

There are all sorts of technical considerations that make a difference in your battle for SEO relevance. Server speed is a big one, and it's growing in importance with the growth of mobile browsing.

Beyond the usual optimizing of image size that everyone should be doing, there are things like `gZip`,<sup>24</sup> which compresses code, and `minify`, which takes redundant spaces and line breaks out of things like your HTML, CSS and JavaScript.<sup>25</sup>

Web server optimization is the first place to look when launching an SEO initiative. It can give you an early win while you're doing the market research, content development, testing and analysis that will take you even higher in the long run.

You don't have to know how to optimize your own servers, but you do need to be sure you have people, or know people, who really know how to do this. If you're hiring an SEO consultant, this is a task where they should be offering to help.

---

24 `gZip` is an open source file compression utility. See <http://www.gzip.org>

25 HTML, CSS and JavaScript are the building blocks of the modern website. HTML and XHTML are the Hyper Text Markup Languages that make up web pages. Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) make web design more efficient and browsers load content faster. JavaScript is the programming language that helps web pages interact with users. See [http://www.w3.org/wiki/The\\_web\\_standards\\_model\\_-\\_HTML\\_CSS\\_and\\_JavaScript](http://www.w3.org/wiki/The_web_standards_model_-_HTML_CSS_and_JavaScript)

## **Danger! Secure Your Site**

If there wasn't enough technology to worry about, now the security of even the most basic website or blog has to be high on your list. There is even a growing SEO component to securing your sites. Let me tell you a story of what can happen and why you should be scared, even if you have a small site that doesn't engage in online transactions where you are required to protect user data.

Late one evening just a few days before Christmas in 2011, Eric Davis, our website developer called me at home. He had been doing some routine file cleanup on our server when he noticed an odd but innocuous looking file appear.

On the surface it looked like the usual link-spam that shows up in everyone's blog comments and online forms. We've all seen them: links to pages selling ink cartridges, or razor blades, or perhaps a porn site with graphic descriptions so extreme you want to wash your hands after clicking the delete key.

The thing was, this file couldn't be deleted fast enough. It was replicating itself across nearly every form on more than a dozen of our websites hosted on that server. More disturbing, we found hidden, in what appeared to be commercial spam, bits of code that could combine with code hidden elsewhere.

We could only guess at what action the code, if we hadn't caught it, would have performed. But we were pretty sure this was more than a nuisance spammer: there was something criminal going on here. One likely purpose could have been to infect our visitors' computers.

Our fears were confirmed after a series of emergency calls with our hosting service that night and over the following days. From that

point on, website security moved from something we could leave to the hosting service to high priority for our own web developers.

Our global, localized mini-websites that use WordPress now require special diligence, and great care has to be taken to ensure security patches are implemented quickly. WordPress is open source and the world's most popular platform for blogs and smaller websites, making it a particularly attractive criminal target.

If you think secure browsing isn't a priority for your websites, consider the 1.2 billion user names and passwords that have been captured by a "Russian cyber gang" according to a Hold Security report.<sup>26</sup> As reported in a *New York Times* article on the Russian hackers, websites of all sizes and types are being attacked worldwide on a daily basis.<sup>27</sup>

"Hackers did not just target U.S. companies, they targeted any website they could get, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to very small websites," said Alex Holden, the founder and chief information security officer of Hold Security. "And most of these sites are still vulnerable."

This is where protecting your site and your visitors intersects with the search engines. The penalty for being found to harbor dangerous content can get you banished from search results, or publicly humiliated. Google, for example, may add a public warning when your page comes up in search results.

---

26 "You Have Been Hacked," Hold Security website (August 4, 2014), <http://www.holdsecurity.com/news/cybervor-breach/>

27 "Russian Hackers Amass Over a Billion Internet Passwords," *New York Times* (August 5, 2014), <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/06/technology/russian-gang-said-to-amass-more-than-a-billion-stolen-internet-credentials.html>

Recently I received an email from a friend whose organization is hosting a national conference that interested me. The email didn't include a link to the conference; so I Googled it. I found in the search results, right under the link to the website, a notice from Google that "This site may be hacked." I didn't click the link, but I alerted my friend that his site needed some urgent attention.

Google takes website hacking seriously, and they are actively promoting the use of encryption to protect visitors. On August 6, 2014, Zineb Ait Bahajji and Gary Illyes announced on Google's "Webmaster Central Blog" that it is experimenting with giving higher ranking to websites that are encrypted.<sup>28</sup>

---

28 "HTTPS as a ranking signal," by Zineb Ait Bahajji and Gary Illyes, "Webmaster Central Blog," <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/>

## Chapter 5

### We're All Content Marketers Now

*"Companies are finding today's world demands publication quality content from their websites and social media."*

Patrick Eve

#### **Good-Bye Mass Communication, Hello Custom Content**

I have to admit that much of my early SEO success could be attributed to dumb luck. When I started writing for the web, Danny Sullivan had just started his Search Engine Watch website, Google didn't exist, and SEO hadn't even been given a name. It turned out the websites I created were optimized for search because the content was optimized for our readers. In the early years, this wasn't the result of a strategic plan on my part. It was just a matter of editorial instinct and years of magazine editing, ad writing and PR. Without knowing it, I was practicing content marketing.

Now we know that the digital age has taken content production to a hyper level: We've got corporate websites, downloadable white papers, blogs, YouTube channels and social media that place the focus on consumer-friendly, authentic content.

It's a significant departure from the sort of advertising we saw with mass media. Content marketing is now the prime driver of sales and sales leads for B2C and B2B industries around the globe.

With organic search engine referrals as the primary source of today's website traffic, a whole new industry has formed around global SEO

and its close partner, content marketing. The secret to successful content marketing is no secret at all: a commitment to producing a continuous, quality stream of useful, engaging information, hyper localized and—if needed—in multiple languages.

From the beginning of online communication, there were those who instinctively resisted mechanical, quick-hit tricks to spam the search engines. These were the pioneers of content marketing, whose long-term commitment to creating and publishing valued content has given them a growing market advantage.

As Google and other search engines seek to penalize search engine spammers and reward those who produce original, authentic content, content marketing has become the gold standard for online success.

### **Google's Global War on Superficial Content**

Around the world, the click-tricks forces are in retreat, and producers of honest content are the clear winners.<sup>29</sup> Google, whose dominance in so many markets makes it a de facto arbiter of search standards, has escalated its war against search engine gamers. Their targets are the lame content creators and spammers who are seeking to capture the world's most highly-valued web territory: top ranking on the search giant's search engine results pages (SERPs).

There is a lot at stake for these link farms, black-hat SEO agents and link-spam bots. With organic search accounting for well over half of all visits<sup>30</sup> most websites receive, and with Google accounting for up to

---

29 To understand just how big this win is for content creators, see Joe Pulizzi's Content Marketing Institute: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/about/>.

30 See "Organic Search Accounts for Up to 64% of Website Traffic" by Ashley Zeckman, Search Engine Watch (July 11, 2014): <http://searchenginewatch.com/sew/study/2355020/organic-search-accounts-for-up-to-64-of-website-traffic-study>

90 percent of that traffic in many markets, the stakes are enormous for businesses around the world.

When Google discovers websites that don't add value, those whose content fails to meet their quality standards, they have the means to punish them—even banish them completely from the Google search engine realm. A series of Google updates—in particular Panda and Penguin—have affected those who took the quick and easy path to SEO. Those who turned to low-quality blogs or link farms, whose only purpose was to increase a site's inbound links, have been hit hardest.

### **It's Not Just Google Driving Better, Hyper Local Content**

Of course it's not just Google that's on the lookout for search spam, or that judges content for its originality and relevance, right down to its linguistic nuances and application to a specific location.

Michael Bonfils, president of SEM International, told Miranda Miller, “Yandex was built specifically around local. When they started, there were no other search engines in Russia, which counted Russian morphology.”

He told her local would be the method by which Yandex aimed to set themselves apart from Google. “Today, Yandex analyzes a wide range of local information, including language, local slang and specific local words, geolocation, current local time,” Bonfils said.

Yandex even looks at what previous users from the same part of Russia were looking for that is similar to a current search query. According to Bonfils, “They define about 1,500 regions of Russia and are trying to personalize SERPs for each one of them.”

Bonfils said China's Baidu is “hyper local and hyper sensitive to the dynamics of the language and the many, many different regional

dialect signals.” He added, “Baidu has over 200 character combinations that represent the phrase ‘weather forecast’ that they need to parse.” This helps the search engine determine in what locale the query is being done.

Clearly, if you want to be found on the web today, you have no choice but to become a publisher of quality content. And you have to figure out how to make that content travel well in markets that don’t speak your language.

### **Corporate Journalists Lend a Hand**

The hottest trend in content marketing may be the growing use of journalists to provide what TranslateMedia’s Patrick Eve calls “publication quality” web content and social media responses. While print media and broadcasters shed journalists at an alarming rate, translation agencies, SEO shops, PR agencies and content marketers are on a hiring binge to land journalists and writers with journalistic skills.

For the majority of companies, ideal candidates will have good English skills and great talent in their native language. A deep understanding of a particular industry adds even more value.

Journalists are able to provide fast, relevant and well-crafted content for websites, blogs and social media. A prime example is the global retail environment, where fashion changes in a heartbeat, and online retail sites have to keep up and keep ahead.

Even B2B companies are finding they need to create more content and update more often. A growing number require real time social media monitoring and need to respond quickly to customer comments posted on blogs and the world’s growing variety of social platforms.

Producing worldwide social media responses in seconds can be aided by technology. A combination of human and machine translation, with an emphasis on the human, will help speed the process and reduce the cost. The human touch is critical to make the machine sound less like a machine. It absolutely takes a savvy and experienced human writer—one who can write fast like a journalist and think strategically like a seasoned PR pro—to make sure the response doesn't inadvertently lose a customer or ignite an online firestorm.

### **No More Handwriting on the Wall**

The question for content marketers the world over is what kind of content will they need to produce in the future. Already images and video are trending upward in the content and SEO hierarchies. Forward-thinking SEO practitioners are working now on how you optimize for spoken search terms, which they find are not the same as written terms. Imagine the challenge as global marketers optimize for oral content and spoken search: How far will they have to go to get the accents or dialects right?

Some are predicting a post-literate world where nearly all content will have to be visual and spoken. At that point handwriting may be a lost art. We've already seen hints of this in the U.S., where the keyboard has replaced handwriting to the point that many schools in the U.S. no longer teach children how to write in cursive.

For Chinese youth the problem may be even more serious than not being able to read their grandmother's collection of cherished handwritten letters. Chinese computer users write with the same QWERTY keyboard we use in the U.S. They create Chinese characters by spelling the words in pinyin (also written as Han Pin Yin). Kent Lau, Executive Director of MadAboutDesign, a digital agency in Shanghai,

says the “post-eighties” and “post-nineties” generations (as the Chinese refer to them) only use the keyboard and don’t know how to write the difficult Chinese characters by hand.

“They are often not able to write the regular script (Kaiti), not to mention the cursive scripts, Xingshu and Caoshu,” Lau says. He says he sees Chinese frequently lamenting the situation online and in local newspapers.

The longer-term challenge goes beyond handwriting. As we let computers do more of the work for us, we might reach the point where no one reads or writes in any language without a computer.

## Chapter 6

### Misruled by a Thumb

*“The first thing global marketers have to learn is that cultural short cuts don’t exist.”*

Joe Doveton

#### When Your Instincts Fail, Try Data

Trusting your instincts (or rule of thumb) may well work in familiar markets where everyone is following the same rules as you. But applying your domestic template for success to global marketing is a formula for failure.

You know those magic moments when great design and really good writing combine into a complete creative package: when you have successfully focused your team’s creative instincts and knowledge to reach that ultimate goal of completing the sale.

But what happens when the magic doesn’t translate to another culture? When your instincts and the instincts of those above you fail? There comes a point in every marketer’s career where data needs to supplement—or even replace—our reliance on instinct. That time comes sooner in today’s global online market.

When you judge a design based on what pleases you—or pleases those in your organization with a similar perspective—you’re risking the trust of those who may be far away and not quite like you. You’re sending them a message you didn’t intend to send. You’re telling them they aren’t very important to you.

Sometimes personal taste, no matter how magical in your home market, just isn't good enough in another market. The only way you'll know for sure is to test your assumptions. The only way you might silence those in your organization, who think their personal preferences should rule everywhere, is to show them the data.

This is the hard part for those of us who would rather be creating. When your skills run toward words and images, you may want to run away from data gathering and number crunching. That's when you need to find data people whose instinct for numbers equals your instinct for content.

And while you're contemplating your data needs, consider the value of testing before you go jumping into a foreign market. If you really want to see magic, try learning how to fix a failed page while there's still time to recover, or optimizing your conversions beyond your CFO's wildest dreams. That will get everyone smiling.

### **Cultural Testing and Conversion Optimization**

SEO and PPC drive traffic around the world, but profitability depends on conversions. If you want to make a real difference in international conversion rates, the place to start is with testing tools that help you optimize for each culture.

The best testing systems offer tools that let you start seeing profit improvements even before the test is done. Say you're running four versions of a landing page, and one page quickly shows much better results than the others. The optimum system will then serve up that page more frequently than the others, optimizing your profits even before you have completed the test.

“The first thing global marketers have to learn,” according to Oban Digital’s Head of Conversion, Joe Doveton, “is that cultural short cuts don’t exist.” He says the only way to know for sure what works in what markets for your product or service is to test your web pages in each market.

His conversion group has developed a cultural multivariate testing tool, GlobalMaxer, that measures the impact on website conversion rates of key cultural factors. The tool can test for how changes in colors, headings, text, images, offers, and navigation can affect conversions in different local markets.

Doveton says GlobalMaxer has run direct tests and conducted research into conversion behavior in 23 countries on six continents for some of the world’s leading global brands. He says before cultural testing and conversion optimization became more widely available, marketers looked for simple rules, such as “always use green in Poland.”

“Today marketers don’t have to hope that if they get the color right, or some other simple feature, they will have the key to success in each country,” Doveton says. “While real cultural testing requires a bit more work than following simple rules, the results yield conversion increases of five-fold and more.”

### **3 Steps to Crossing your Culture Barriers**

Beyond translation, colors and design issues, you need a cultural awareness of customs, down to the tone of voice and the level of respect required to be effective in different markets.

“Some cultures are more hierarchical and reserved, such as China and Japan,” Doveton says. “Some are democratic and brash, such as the United States and Germany.”

Doveton recommends you do some research to find the cultural identifiers that are right for your markets: “Then see if you can match the unique cultural nuances you’ve discovered, when you build or renew the website that serves a particular market.”

Doveton listed three common things that research and testing can help you localize and optimize:

- 1. Language:** Research the search terms your customers use. You may be surprised how many English technical terms are used in other languages, though they may not be exactly the same English you use. Many foreign business cultures are Anglo centric and may not need wholesale translation.
- 2. Ethnicity:** Even in English-speaking cultures, it is best to use subjects of local ethnicity in photography. For the B2B market in Singapore, for example, the second language of the community is English. So using English in Singapore is fine, but the photography should reflect local people and places.
- 3. Technology:** Your customers may not have access to the latest technology. In Africa, web growth is led by mobile; so bandwidth-hungry rich media isn’t appropriate. In China IE6 is still the top browser, despite being officially declared dead. So your Chinese assets need to be backwards compatible with IE6.

### **Cultural Testing Not Just for Consumer Businesses**

I can hear the chorus now, “We know our customers. We don’t need to spend money on testing.”

I've found this "*we know our customers*" myopia particularly common among some B2B companies. It is almost always accompanied by one of these equally damaging presumptions: "*and everyone knows us,*" or even more presumptuous, "*and everyone in the market for this product/service knows we're the best.*"

While I've known lots of B2B marketers who would dearly love to do more market research and testing of their marketing messages and communication channels, too few seem to be able to pry loose the money when their annual budget gets its yearly haircut.

It's not just the small B2B businesses that fail to gather or act on the data. I've talked to marketers from billion dollar companies where market research and testing tend to be viewed as optional luxuries. At a recent search engine conference in San Francisco, I heard a digital marketing manager from a global gazillion dollar corporation (B2B and B2C) declare that when it comes to SEO and content marketing, her senior managers "just don't get it."

Rather than despair of people getting it, I think those of us who have had the good fortune to be a part of this digital revolution need to do a better job sharing our passion and our commitment to continuous learning *and teaching*. There has never been a medium like the Internet that offers so many opportunities to learn what really works in our marketing communications. The first step in getting more support for gathering and acting on this wealth of data may be to share with others in your organization all that you've seen and experienced in your online communication journey. A small demonstration of cultural testing could be your starting point.

## **Seeing the World Outside our Walls**

Like learning to see colors as they really are, cultural testing helps us see the world as it really is outside our walls. Too many global web initiatives are lost before they're begun because we human beings have a difficult time seeing beyond our own walls.

Language and culture give us the words and the rules that allow us to navigate the world we live in. Our businesses and professions add inner circles of special words and customs, and together they form the invisible walls that contain our perceptions of how the world functions. As long as we stay within the circle of those who do business in the same way, we may never connect with the many others—some of whom we'd like to have as customers—who don't see things the same way.

## Chapter 7

### Global Strategy, Local Scope

*“It doesn’t matter if your business is retail, technology, travel or education.... You can’t get away with saying, ‘give me a strategy for Europe, or South America or Asia’”*

Greig Holbrook

#### On Localizing Your Global Marketing Strategy

As part of my research for this book, I visited Oban Digital in Brighton, England, where managing director Greig Holbrook invited me to sit in on a conference call with a major U.S. luxury retailer. The company is well known around the world, but they were just starting to get serious about growing overseas online sales through their own websites.

In this second conversation they were to have with Oban, both the president and marketing vice president were on the line with us. They had identified six or seven markets where they were considering investing in SEO and PPC. Some were new markets they might enter, while in other cases they were looking to boost sales in underperforming markets.

The discussion touched on each market, and Holbrook shared his personal insights about the unique opportunities and challenges each one presented for a Western luxury retailer. I could tell by the tone of the conversation that Holbrook was giving away more market intelligence than the callers had expected to receive.

By the time he suggested that they should take the next step to produce formal market studies of the four best prospects, his callers were ready to take action. Apparently, it's an action many marketers overlook.

"It's surprising," Holbrook told me after the call, "how many companies think they can skip this step. It may be because they've seen so many so-called market intelligence reports that don't tell them anything new."

Holbrook showed me some of the reports they have produced. He calls it *market scoping*, and the final product is called a Digital Marketing SWAT Report. It entails both gathering data through proprietary resources and polling their local teams in each market. It's a labor-intensive process.

"We probably over-deliver on these projects," he says, "but we think it's worth the investment because it is so foundational to the SEO and PPC campaigns that follow."

Miranda Miller says your research needs to focus on the people you want to reach. "Forget about what you're doing for a minute and get to know what they're doing," she says. "Who is your target market? Where do they live online? How do they seek out information, make decisions, and prefer to connect with brands? These insights are going to drive your search and social strategy."

Holbrook sees this customized, detailed insight into individual markets as key to formulating a search strategy. "It doesn't matter if your business is retail, technology, travel or education," Holbrook says, "there are going to be large differences between each country in terms of search behavior, online social media and competition. And it's going to be different for every organization."

The thing about multilingual SEO, PPC or social media strategy is that it has to be customized for each market. “You can’t get away with saying, ‘give me a strategy for Europe, or South America or Asia,’” Holbrook says. “You have to get specific to each country, and in some countries you’re going to have to get a lot more granular as to which region or language or culture you need to reach.”

Just how local you need to get depends in large part on what target you choose. “Successful international or multilingual digital marketing starts with finding the right targets,” Miller says, “then quickly learning how to market to them locally.”

### **For Those who Target English First**

Many American digital marketers start with countries that, as a result of language or geography, are the easiest for them to reach. The first places most look are those countries that don’t require translation. Because it is so global—especially for the educated online consumer or business buyer—English may cover a very large share of the market you want to reach.

When your mother tongue is English, you are already speaking the global language of business, science, aviation, technology and—at least for the moment—the Internet. More than 90 percent of all Internet content was English when Michael Specter wrote in the *New York Times* in 1996, “the Internet and World Wide Web really only work as great unifiers if you speak English.”<sup>31</sup>

---

31 “Computer Speak; World, Wide, Web: 3 English Words,” Michael Specter, *New York Times*, (April 14, 1996) <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/14/weekinreview/computer-speak-world-wide-web-3-english-words.html>

Of course in 1996 the Web was still largely an American playground, with just 3.6 percent of the world population having access to the Internet. By 2014, 40.9 percent of the world's population was online.<sup>32</sup>

As of February 8, 2015, English content on the Web had dropped to 55.5 percent. You might expect China, which has passed the United States in online users, to be a close second with Chinese content, but the Chinese language was in seventh place, providing just 2.8 percent of all content. Russian moved ahead of German to second place with 6.0 percent of content. German was close behind in fourth place with 5.9 percent. Japanese, Castilian Spanish, French, Italian, and Polish round out the top ten.<sup>33</sup>

Estimates of the number of people speaking any language vary widely, but they all show English with broad distribution and the second language of choice in most countries. You'll find large populations of English speakers in 88 countries and territories where English is an official or de facto language.

In its 2013 annual estimate of "Internet Users by Language," Internet World Stats lists English at the number one spot with 800.6 million users, followed by Chinese at 649.4 million, then Spanish with 22.4 million. The world populations of English and Chinese are close: 1.37 billion English speakers and 1.39 billion Chinese speakers.<sup>34</sup>

---

32 "Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics," <http://www.internetworldstats.com/emarketing.htm>. (Accessed Dec. 1, 2014).

33 "Usage of content languages for websites," W<sup>3</sup>Techs Web Technology Surveys [http://w3techs.com/technologies/overview/content\\_language/all](http://w3techs.com/technologies/overview/content_language/all). (Accessed February 8, 2015)..

34 "Top Ten Languages Used in the Web - December 31, 2013," Internet World Stats. worldwide. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>. (Accessed Dec 1, 2014).

## English Use in Europe

Although I had studied German in college and had a good refresher course thanks to a program sponsored by my employer, I have found few instances in traveling to our factory in Switzerland where English wasn't more than adequate for any encounter. I have had much the same experience in much of Northern Europe, less so in Southern Europe, such as Italy.

The ease of finding fluent English speakers seems to be an inverse relation to the size of the country. For example, in Germany and France, the two largest Western European countries, I often found English didn't get me very far outside the major cities and tourist areas, though this has changed in recent years.

I found an explanation for this small-country English proficiency on a train ride from Zurich to Neuchatel, Switzerland, in 1998. A businessman sitting next to me asked if I had been to Neuchatel before.

We ended up talking through the entire trip, and toward the end of our ride we began talking about our homes. Judging by his Brooklyn accent I'd guessed he was from New York City. He answered Amsterdam. He said he got his English fluency and American accent watching U.S. TV shows.<sup>35</sup>

The Netherlands, he explained, is a small country. Unlike the large German market where American TV shows were dubbed, the Netherlands got by with less-expensive subtitles.

---

35 But where did he get the New York accent? It didn't likely come from the U.S. TV shows he watched. My guess is New Yorkers got their accent from The Netherlands. It was a long time ago, but the city was once New Amsterdam before it became English New York.

I have found this pattern repeated throughout Europe. A Swedish businessman who speaks perfect English told me about his motivation: “Sweden is a small country. No one is going to do business with me if they have to speak my language. If I want to sell to the rest of the world, I have to know English.”

Like the Dutch businessman, he said he grew up with subtitled American shows on Swedish TV. In his online “Language Knowledge in Europe,” Jonathan Van Parys writes:

“The use of sub-titling (sic) rather than dubbing or voice over in the media is highly (and positively) correlated with the knowledge of foreign languages. Sub-titling on television may be the cheapest language school there is.”<sup>36</sup>

Van Parys, an entrepreneur and former IBM-er from Belgium, provides a number of interesting insights and graphical visualizations on his website of the data from the European Commission’s 2012 survey, “Europeans and their Languages.”

The Commission’s report can be downloaded as a PDF.<sup>37</sup> Van Parys provides insights from the report that are particularly relevant to those weighing what languages to use on their European websites:

- German, English and Italian are the largest native languages in Europe.
- English, French and German are the largest foreign languages in Europe.

---

<sup>36</sup> “About Language Knowledge in Europe,” <http://languageknowledge.eu/about/>

<sup>37</sup> You can download the PDF at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf).

- Italy, Spain, Czech Republic and Hungary are the countries where young people speak the least English.
- Some 41 percent of European young people speak English. German and French follow with 21 percent each.
- For older people, just 25 percent speak English, 23 percent German and 18 percent French.
- The top foreign languages in Poland are English, German and Russian. For older people, the order is reversed to Russian, German and English.
- In the three Baltic countries, Russian is known by more than 40 percent of the population.

The 2012 report of “Europeans and their Languages” shows two thirds of the Europeans (67 percent) in the 27 EU countries consider English to be one of the two most useful languages for their own use. An even greater percentage, 79 percent, or about four out of five, say English is one of the most useful languages for the future of children.<sup>38</sup>

The European report also shows German as the most widely spoken native language in the EU. At 16 percent, the number of German speakers is in proportion to its relative population. The same goes for other languages. Italian and English follow German in number of native speakers at 13 percent each. French is at 12 percent, and Spanish and Polish at 8 percent each.

Of special note to online communicators, the report notes:

“The most notable changes since 2005 are an increase in the proportion of Europeans who

---

38 “Europeans and their Languages Report,” Conducted by TNS Opinion & Social at the request of Directorate-General Education and Culture, Directorate-General for Translation and Directorate-General for Interpretation, (June 2012).

regularly use foreign languages on the internet (+10 percentage points) and when watching films/television or listening to the radio (+8 points).”

Based on their other findings in the report and personal experience traveling in Europe over the past quarter century, I'd guess that the reported increase is in English usage, and it is driven by the Internet and globalization.

While I still find older cab drivers in Germany, for example, who only speak German, the younger ones, and the recent entries who have come from Eastern Europe, all speak English. One driver in Stuttgart recently told me the influx of Chinese visitors, not Americans, has been a driving force for German taxis to provide more English-speaking drivers.

Certainly globalization and the resulting global travel has had its influence, but I think the Internet is probably a larger force. Twenty years ago (pre-Internet), my wife and I drove across the Swiss border to a small German town to have lunch. When it came time to order, I needed to employ my college German to decipher the menu and communicate with the waitress.

A decade later (post-Internet), we happened upon the same town and went to the same restaurant. They handed us an English menu, and the waitress spoke perfect English. This experience has been repeated across much of Germany.

Even in France, where English wouldn't get you far before the Internet Age—especially outside the main tourist areas of Paris—I've found a greater ability and willingness of French speakers to use English.

## Asia's "Functional Native" English Speakers

The world's largest English-speaking population is in India, where English has official status for use in government and commerce even though it isn't the native language for the general population.

Hindi is the official language of India when written in the Devanagari script. At 30 percent, Hindi accounts for the largest number of Indian speakers. But Hindi speakers don't all speak (or understand) the same dialect. In a country where 1,635 spoken languages were listed in its 2011 census, English is the one language that everyone shares to some degree.

Although English is almost always their second language, most Indians will tell you it's their first language when communicating with those outside their own communities. In most cases, this makes English the best choice for the majority of online marketers in India.<sup>39</sup>

Braj B Kachru, professor of linguistics and comparative literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, claims in his book *Asian Englishes* that English is more widely spoken in Asia than anywhere in the world. While English isn't their native language, Kachru says Asians possess "functional nativeness."<sup>40</sup>

In addition to India, English is widely spoken in Singapore and all of Southeast Asia, Indonesia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. In Singapore, English is an official language and the government encourages English use in its schools. In Japan, English isn't often spoken except with foreign visitors, but it is widely read and understood.

---

39 Google.in offers a number of language options including Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Gujarati, Kannada, Punjabi, Malayalam, and English.

40 "Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon" by Braj B Kachru. Hong Kong University Press (2006).

## When English Isn't Enough

It would be easy to conclude that English is enough for many American brands in many of the foreign markets they want to serve. I think there are cases where English is enough, and the incremental cost would be too high for translation—especially to do it right.

As your market grows in a country and your base expands, you'll likely reach a point where it makes good business sense to translate. Your decision may be driven by how important it is for your product or organization to rank high in local search results.

In my own experience, translation is an important step, but that alone is no guarantee of good search visibility—even if you already rank high on U.S. sites. I find search much more competitive today in every market and every language I work with.

As you get deeper into translating your content, you may find the review process much more difficult and time consuming than expected. Many of the website translations I have dealt with were for technical products that require careful review by in-country partners with deep technical expertise. These tend to be very busy people who may not be willing or able to give your translation the time or priority it requires. Even with constant badgering, the delays can add weeks to your production schedule.

I also found myself at a disadvantage in judging just how well my reviewers actually write in their native language. I know they have the technical skill, but how can I be sure they have the language skills to be good reviewers? One effective solution I've found, when I can find the right person, is to ask a technical writer or journalist in that country to review our translations.

Some languages, such as Russian, are more difficult and tend to generate more controversy between translators and reviewers. Some markets also set higher expectations for the quality of your translation. Michael Robinson, the former Head of International at Anthropologie, says you have to be careful because “translations can raise expectations.”

Robinson tells of an American retailer that had been getting good German business on their English language site. As the German business grew, they decided to translate. As expected, translation resulted in more traffic, but they were shocked to see conversions and sales go down.

On investigation, they found it wasn't the translation quality, but backend details, such as delivery and the checkout process, that had depressed sales. German customers expected the new German language site to perform to the same high standards as the best native German retail sites. They had been more forgiving of a site in English because they valued the goods it had to offer.

### **First Steps: the Americas**

In 2013, according to the U.S. Commercial Service,<sup>41</sup> 45 percent of all U.S. exports went to countries in the Western Hemisphere—more than any other region in the world. There are 11 countries in the Americas with U.S. free trade agreements.

These lowered trade barriers, together with their close proximity to the United States, puts the Western Hemisphere in position as the region most attractive to U.S. companies. This attraction is especially strong for those companies taking their first steps abroad.

---

41 U.S. Commercial Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, “Discover Global Markets Business Forum Series 2014: The Americas.” See the event webpage: <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs159/1109229524407/archive/1117426340942.html>

Our closest neighbor, Canada, holds the most attraction of all. Despite its relatively low population, Canada buys more U.S. goods than any other market.

The perennial second place goes to Mexico, which like Canada is a big market for industrial machinery and agricultural products. The rest of what we call Latin America falls below those levels, but it is growing and holds enough potential to be worth exploring.

### **Canada: the Almost-Home Market**

I think the feeling is mutual for most of us: the 3,000-mile U.S.-Canadian border is the one international border we can cross and still feel—almost—like we’ve never left home. Canada is the closest and largest export market for the U.S. (\$300.2 billion in goods in 2013, up 2.6 percent from 2012). Vehicles, machinery and electrical machinery are the top exports.

The U.S. exported \$21.3 billion of agricultural products to Canada in 2013 and \$61.2 billion in private commercial services in 2012. Business, professional and technical services, and travel categories accounted for most of the U.S. services exports to Canada.<sup>42</sup>

Although it’s a big, continental country, Canada’s comparatively small population (35 million in 2014,<sup>43</sup> compared to California’s 38.8 million) makes it a fairly modest consumer market for those accustomed to selling to the U.S. On the other hand, the substantial industrial base in Canada makes it an attractive market for B2B companies.

---

42 All figures are from the Office of the United States Trade Representative, “U.S.-Canada Trade Facts.” <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/americas/canada>

43 Government of Canada, “Canada’s population estimates: Age and Sex, 2014.” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140926/dq140926b-eng.htm>

Lots of Canadian consumers do buy U.S. goods online. However, with 90 percent of Canadians living within driving distance of the U.S. border, they are even more likely to shop in nearby U.S. stores. This propensity to cross the border to shop in the U.S. became a problem for Target when they started building stores in Canada.

For a variety of reasons Target's Canadian shops couldn't match U.S. prices. Sometimes they couldn't even offer the same merchandise that Canadian consumers were accustomed to finding in bordering U.S. stores.

In the hope of countering these shortcomings, Canada's Target stores tried offering merchandise unique to the Canadian market. But on January 15, 2015, the company announced it was giving up its Canadian venture and closing its 133 stores.

### **Language and Culture in Canada**

Nearly 57 percent of Canadians speak English as their first language, compared to 21 percent who speak French. More than 85 percent have a functional knowledge of English, while just 30 percent can make the same claim for their ability to converse in French. Most immigrants, who make up about 20 percent of the population, choose English as their second language. There are at least 25 indigenous languages but very few people speak them.<sup>44</sup>

Unless your website needs to look and act Canadian, your U.S. English probably doesn't need a lot of rewrite for English-speaking Canada. But you better have it reviewed by a native Canadian who is living and doing business in Canada just to be sure you haven't written anything embarrassing (or against the law).

---

44 2011 Census: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Canada)

If you go the extra mile to produce French content, your French Canadian translation requires extra care. As Ontario native Miranda Miller points out, “French spoken in France and that of the Québécois are very different. In addition, you have Acadian French, written and spoken largely east of Quebec, in the Maritime Provinces.”

Miller says it’s more than a matter of correct translation: “Your selling points likely won’t be the same for a person living in Northern Quebec as they are for a resident of coastal New Brunswick.”

Effective localization goes beyond language, she adds. “It requires testing, and crafting messaging tailored to the unique needs your market.”

### **Latin America: a Multitude of Markets**

Latin America is a sometimes-useful construct that lets us talk about a market that covers 14 percent of the earth’s land area from the southern tip of Argentina to the northern boarder of Mexico. But global digital marketers have to be careful that they don’t start acting as if there is a “Latin American” strategy that will cover the whole region.

The regional differences can be larger than the similarities. How well you perform in any one of these diverse markets depends on how well you’ve scoped out and planned for it. So as you take in the big picture, beware the traps for marketers who fail to act more locally.

### **A Few Latin America Stats**

**Countries:** 20 countries encompassing North America (Mexico), Central America, South America and many of the Caribbean Islands.

**Languages:** Spanish (with pronounced regional variations) and Portuguese are the main languages. There are a great number of Native American languages, and you’ll also find French, German and a smattering of other European languages. English is common for

reaching B2B markets and the more educated populations, with up to 70 percent of educated Latin Americans searching on Google.com.

### **Latin Online Growth: Young and Social**

The shipment of U.S. goods to Latin America rose 9 percent from 2011 to 2012, compared to 4.4 percent for overall U.S. exports. Latin America has the world's highest growth in online users, 12 percent year over year, according to ComScore's *Futuro digital Latinoamérica 2013*. Latin Americans beat the global median of monthly online usage (26.8 hours vs. 23.4). The online population is younger than the global average, and it's very social.

"We are socials by culture," says Mariano Medina Walker, Search Advertising Lead at LATAM - Emerging Markets, Microsoft Advertising. "Five Latin American countries (Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Mexico and Chile) are among the top ten more engaged countries in social networks," Walker says. And they are engaged online with news as well, with 85% of the online users in the region visiting news sites.

### **Latin America's Languages and Cultures**

In the beginning, it can seem handy to think of Latin America as sharing a Spanish heritage that provides a common language and culture. An obvious exception is the largest market, Brazil, which is Portuguese, not Spanish. But the differences go deeper even within Spanish-speaking Latin America.

And while thoughts of Latin America might tend to bring up images of South America in many North American marketers' minds, we have to remember that Mexico—part of North America—is the largest U.S. market in Latin America.

You may also need separate strategies for Central America and the Caribbean, which are lumped together with Latin America but are a long way, geographically and culturally, from being part of a single Latin population.

Be especially careful of translators that offer to give you a “Latin American” Spanish translation. There is no such thing as a universal Spanish that will serve all of Latin America.

In fact, many experienced Latin American digital marketers have told me it’s better to use the accepted standard or Castilian Spanish if you’re looking for one translation to serve a global Spanish market. I learned the hard way that so-called Latin American Spanish translations will not be found acceptable in Spain.

I also learned that Latin Americans have a high respect for Castilian Spanish and Spanish culture, and you’ll do OK in these markets as long as you aren’t trying to look local on a country-by-country level.

But Castilian Spanish isn’t a complete solution, or even the right solution in all cases, as Jaime Gomez<sup>45</sup> reminded me when reviewing an early draft of this book. In an email he wrote:

“There is no such a thing as “standard” Spanish. Even people from Spain speak differently from one region to another. And they have plenty of slang and idioms from region to region. The purest Spanish is Castellano (the Spain from Castilla), but this does not mean much. It could be the purest, but

---

<sup>45</sup> Jaime Gomez is Vice President, Holland Colours Americas. A native of Colombia, he is fluent in Spanish, English and Portuguese. He received a PhD, Polymer Science from the University of Connecticut and MBA, International Business & Marketing from the New York University - Leonard N. Stern School of Business.

if you can't understand it in Bolivia or El Salvador, it makes no difference.”

### **A ‘Midwest Accent’ for South American Listeners**

If you're doing podcasts or videos for the South American, you might consider hiring a narrator from Colombia. In a phone call Gomez told me his native Colombian accent is the ideal “neutral accent” for broadcasters in South America. It's like the “accentless” Midwestern announcers on U.S. radio and TV broadcasts.

### **Latin America Translation Tips**

Clearly there is no single solution for all Spanish markets, only compromises to be made based on your target markets and budget constraints. In most cases I've found it's best to avoid “Latin American” Spanish translations. Stick with standard Spanish—especially if you need one translation for your website that will also work in Spain.

But recognize that there may be important keyword differences that you will have to account for (preferably on a country-by-country level). I learned, for example, that a number of key technical terms—words our buyers would search in their local search engines—are completely different between Spain and Latin America, or even within Latin America.

Gomez shared this example of how different words can be when describing a single thing in Latin America: “Take the word for describing a device used to suck liquids from a glass. In English, we call it a *straw*, though it's probably made of plastic.”

But for Spanish, Gomez said, every country has a different word for *straw*, making localization a country-by-country task. In Spain, a straw could be a *Caña* or *Pajita*. In Latin America, you'll find these variations:

- Pitillo (Colombia)
- Pajita or Pitillo (Venezuela)
- Popote (Mexico)
- Carrizo (Panama)
- Pajilla (Nicaragua)
- Sorbete (Ecuador)
- Calimete (Dominican Republic)
- Bombilla (Chile)
- Pajita (Argentina)
- Cañita (Peru)

### **It Has to Be Brazilian Portuguese**

If you want to do business in Brazil, you have to use Brazilian Portuguese. “Brazilians don’t have a lot of interest in Portugal,” an Argentinian sales manager who does a lot of business with Brazil told me. “They expect you to use Brazilian Portuguese.”

In addition, there are more than 210 languages spoken in Brazil, although most are indigenous languages with very small populations. Still, there are about 30 languages with large enough populations that you may have to deal with some of them in your target markets.

For B2B markets the equation is a bit simpler. For most business and technical people in Brazil and in Spanish-speaking Latin America, English works well, though good translations would likely work a bit better. English also works for B2C marketers targeting the more educated Latin American demographics. If you do stick with English, though, you will have to consider the impact on SEO visibility (or lack of it) in these markets.

## Target Countries in Latin America

Scott Polk,<sup>46</sup> a search-marketing consultant with offices in the U.S. and Costa Rica, says Mexico and Central America have the strongest commercial ties to the United States (both B2B and B2C). He says South America is more integrated with Europe.

“Except for Brazil, all of South America has a strong cultural tie to Spain,” Polk says. “But it’s more an emotional tie. Germany and the UK are the leaders when it comes to commerce.”

Polk notes a new commercial competitor has entered the Latin American market. “China is making big inroads,” he says. “They’re buying land, doing big construction projects, and selling products.”

---

46 Scott Polk is CEO and founder of MarketingNomads.com, Inc., an integrated marketing consultancy located in Nampa (Boise metro area), Idaho and San Jose, Costa Rica. See <http://marketingnomads.com>.

## Chapter 8

# China's Really Big Market

*“The time to go to China is now. Get in, start learning as fast as you can.”*

Tom Davis<sup>47</sup>

## Explosive Growth and Opportunity

There are more than a billion reasons why the huge Chinese population has overtaken the U.S. in so many consumer market sectors. The online Chinese market is so large and growing so fast that even smaller U.S. organizations—including those that currently don't do foreign business—need to consider China now.

China tops the list for digital marketers in just about any industry. Global SEO and digital marketing practitioners of every stripe tell me they are targeting China's consumers, and that more American organizations should at least be thinking about China.

At \$120 billion in 2013, China was the third-largest export market for U.S. goods following our next-door neighbors Canada and Mexico, according to the US-China Business Council. The Council says U.S. exports to China have grown faster than any other market, increasing 255 percent between 2004 and 2013.<sup>48</sup>

From education to travel to retail, Chinese consumers are taking the market lead around the world. For both B2B and B2C—from small

---

<sup>47</sup> Tom Davis is Global Head of E-Commerce at Puma, SE. He spoke about doing online business in Asia and China at the Global E-Commerce Forum, New York, NY, February 3, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> “US Exports to China,” the US-China Business Council, <https://www.uschina.org/reports/us-exports/national-2013>

U.S. businesses to the biggest brands—opportunity exists for those who figure out how to reach the Chinese market online:

- **Population:** At 1.35 billion in 2014, China has 20 percent of the world's population
- **Online market size:** China's 642 million Internet users make it number one, topping number two U.S. with its 268 million users<sup>49</sup>
- **Future growth:** 46 percent of China's population is online compared to 87 percent in the U.S.<sup>50</sup>
- **Income:** In 2013, China had 2,378,000 millionaires<sup>51</sup>
- **Foreign students:** In 2013-14, China sent 274,000 students to U.S. colleges and universities, more than any other country and up 17 percent from 2012-13<sup>52</sup>
- **Foreign travel:** Chinese tourists now top Americans as the world's biggest spenders<sup>53</sup>
- **Equipment Sales:** A lot of Western technology goes into all those goods China exports; in 2013 China imported

---

49 Internet Live Stats, "Internet Users by Country" (2014). <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>

50 *ibid*

51 *Time Magazine*, "China surged into second place behind the U.S for the highest number of millionaires," by Hannah Goldberg, June 10, 2014. <http://time.com/2852740/china-millionaires/>

52 *The Washington Post*, "Chinese and Saudis lead foreign student surge at U.S. colleges and universities," by Nick Anderson, November 17, 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/chinese-and-saudis-lead-foreign-student-surge-at-us-colleges-and-universities/2014/11/17/c45303b2-6e6f-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/chinese-and-saudis-lead-foreign-student-surge-at-us-colleges-and-universities/2014/11/17/c45303b2-6e6f-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef_story.html)

53 *The Wall Street Journal*, "The Great Chinese Exodus," by Andrew Browne, August 15, 2014. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-great-chinese-exodus-1408120906?KEYWORDS=Students+from+China>

American-made industrial machinery and electrical equipment valued at more than \$23 billion<sup>54</sup>

E-commerce has become so big in China that both big and little brands might consider taking a purely digital approach to this retail market. Angela Doland recently reported in *Ad Age*<sup>55</sup> how the British fashion store Topshop and the American big box retailer Costco have both focused exclusively on online sales to reach China's consumer market.

She writes that online sales are evolving and growing so fast that even the world's largest bricks-and-mortar brands may do better and take on less risk with a purely digital approach to China.

### **Where to Start in China**

Don't do as I did and produce your first Chinese websites without benefit of ever visiting China. Or without having resources on the ground, who know how to do digital business in China. If I had met Kent Lau and Jeffery Toh<sup>56</sup> at MadAboutDesign in Shanghai, China sooner, it would have spared me much of the miscommunication, misinformation and missteps I suffered in the beginning.

Once they were on board, I found this Shanghai agency could solve many of our technical problems, such as Chinese domain name issues,

---

54 Office of the United States Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china>

55 "E-Commerce Is So Huge Now in China, Some Brands Skip Opening an Actual Store," By Angela Doland, *Ad Age* (November 7, 2014), <http://adage.com/article/digital/china-brands-skip-opening-actual-store/295752/>

56 Kent Lau is Executive Director and founding partner at MadAboutDesign in Shanghai, China. He is fluent in English, Chinese and Cantonese. Jeffery Toh is also fluent in English, Chinese and Cantonese. He is IT Director and located in Singapore. See [www.madaboutdesign.com](http://www.madaboutdesign.com).

in a few hours. Some of these issues had gone unresolved for months, despite our best efforts from the U.S. and our local offices in China.

I could count on MadAboutDesign to support our local offices in China. Best of all, they could do it in real time and with far greater effect and efficiency than I could provide from the U.S.

Plus, I could rely on their good advice to keep enthusiastic but inexperienced local managers from being taken in by all those sales people offering the latest search-engine-spamming scheme.

Best of all, they opened a window to China for me and for my developers and content creators in the U.S. Over time, this collaboration went beyond China and Asia to the point where they became part of a global team of online developers and communicators who were sharing all sorts of insights and information on a regular basis.

### **Make Your Own Discovery Tour**

I found this unique Chinese digital agency headed by two Singapore natives through a contact on Twitter. But the thing that sealed the relationship was our meeting in Shanghai on my first trip to China.

There is a level of trust and commitment that ensues from a personal visit that no amount of email can duplicate. I also found in China, as in many countries I've traveled to, that showing up is an essential first step in developing a business relationship.

Tom Davis, Global Head of E-Commerce at Puma, did what he calls "discovery tours" of China and other markets before launching the company's Asian initiative.

“I’m a big believer in boots-on-the-ground,” he told the Global E-Commerce Forum in New York. “Especially being an American,” he said, “it was important for me to develop a global mindset.”<sup>57</sup>

He later told me he frequently takes his creative team along, so they can experience a new market first hand and establish more personal relationships with local resources. Davis is also an advocate of developing your own local contacts in a market. “Focus on those markets where you have the right contacts,” he said.

### **Navigating the Chinese Language**

In her book, *Dreaming in Chinese*, Deborah Fallows asks, “How hard is it to learn Chinese, really?” Despite her fluency in other languages and skill in learning new languages, she concludes it’s quite hard, indeed:

“I...realized, a bit heartsick, that after two years of being in China, I could understand more Spanish than Chinese—and the closest I had ever come to studying Spanish was French!

Language teachers and linguists generally agree that Chinese is one of the world’s most difficult languages for English speakers, along with several others, like Japanese, Russian and Arabic.”<sup>58</sup>

---

57 Global E-Commerce Leaders Forum, New York, NY. February 3, 2015.

58 Deborah Fallows, “Dreaming in Chinese: Mandarin Lessons in Life, Love and Language” (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2010), Kindle edition. Fallows has a PhD in linguistics. She lived in Shanghai and Beijing and traveled across much of China with her husband, James Fallows. Her insights on language and culture are a great help for those of us who have neither the linguistic skills nor opportunity to live there for several years..

It's not just learning the vocabulary. Words change their meaning with the tone that is spoken: high tone, rising tone, a falling-rising tone, falling tone or no tone.

Then there are the characters. Estimates go as high as 80,000 characters, but a more realistic estimate is 50,000, according to the BBC and other sources. In its online mini-guide, the BBC indicates most Chinese dictionaries list about 20,000 characters. It says the average Chinese reader can recognize 8,000 but you can read a Chinese newspaper if you know 2-3,000.<sup>59</sup>

Mandarin, also known as Standard Chinese and Putonghua, is based on the Beijing dialect and is the standard spoken language for Mainland China. It is the language of government, media, business, science and education.

Although Mandarin is the first language of 1.2 billion people—70 percent of all Chinese-speaking people around the world—the Yue (Cantonese) and Min dialects are spoken among major populations in Southern China such as Hong Kong, Macau and the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, while the Wu dialect is commonly spoken among populations in Eastern China, such as Shanghai and neighboring provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu.

If you have to choose just one flavor, Mandarin is the logical choice. The 30 percent who speak other dialects usually have some understanding of Mandarin. In Hong Kong, English is the preferred alternative for communication among those speaking different Chinese dialects.

---

59 "Real Chinese Mini-guides - Chinese Characters," BBC, accessed February 7, 2015, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/chinese/real\\_chinese/mini\\_guides/characters/characters\\_howmany.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/chinese/real_chinese/mini_guides/characters/characters_howmany.shtml).

English is the most widely understood second language among all educated Chinese. On my first trip to China, within two blocks of my hotel in Shanghai, I counted five schools with signs in their windows advertising English language training.

There are seven Chinese dialect groups, many so different that some linguists consider them different languages. The Chinese distinguish between written and spoken Chinese and have different words for “Chinese” depending on whether it’s written or spoken.

For those translating text, you have to choose between two styles of Chinese characters: Simplified Chinese is the standard for Mainland China, while Traditional Chinese remains the norm in Hong Kong, Taiwan and among many Chinese-speaking people who have emigrated around the world.

While Chinese may not understand one another when speaking different dialects, they all read the same written words, which are symbolized by either the paired-down Simplified characters or the more complex Traditional characters.

### **Going from A to Z Without an Alphabet**

There are more technical complications in translating from English to Chinese than I ever anticipated when undertaking my first Chinese website. Consider, for example, writing without an alphabet.

Jeffery Toh at MadAboutDesign Singapore answered a question I hadn’t even thought to ask until faced with the challenge: Since the Chinese character system isn’t an alphabet, how do you alphabetize a list in Chinese?

Toh explained to me that in most cases that sort of organization isn't even attempted. A common solution on Chinese websites is to create lots of categories or tags so users can simply browse by topic.

He gave an example of the popular movie and TV site Douban,<sup>60</sup> which classifies movies in 36 categories such as love, comedy, and thriller. Some choices get more granular, such as family, youth and children. The site also organizes movies by the country or region where the film was produced.

Travel sites organize ticket sales by type of transport (bus, train, sea, air), lodging by hotel type and location. The biggest travel site in China, Ctrip.com<sup>61</sup> also offers categories for packages and ratings.

### **Count the Strokes**

Another common practice is to organize a list by the number of strokes in the first character, usually by an ascending number of strokes, as in this short list of names:

1. 王小二 (Wang Xiaoer)
2. 方晓佳 (Fang Xiaojia)
3. 薛栋梁 (Xue Dongliang)

Notice the first character (the family name, which always comes first when spoken or written in Chinese) becomes more complicated to write (more strokes) as you go down the list. If you install the Chinese language pack in Microsoft Excel, you have an option to sort a list by the number of character strokes.

---

60 [www.douban.com](http://www.douban.com)

61 Ctrip.com currently offers a choice of viewing their site in 10 different languages including English, German, French and Spanish. You can see the English site at <http://english.ctrip.com>. Note how different the images are from the Chinese site.

Toh said you can find an alphabetized list in a Chinese dictionary. “It may be organized by the number of strokes in a character, but it could also be alphabetical based on the Hanyu Pinyin spelling of the words,” he wrote. Pinyin—as it is often written—is a Romanized form of Chinese writing using the Latin alphabet we use in writing English.

If a list is based on words with an English origin, they may be alphabetized according to the original English. Of course, when displayed in Chinese characters, alphabetizing loses its original meaning.

You can see an example on the Bank of China’s exchange rate page.<sup>62</sup> Currency units are in Pinyin and match the nearest Chinese words that have the same sound.

### **Translating Brand Names**

Foreign names and brands are often written using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. To help Chinese readers with pronunciation, the name may also be translated. Toh explains: “My name *Jeffery* is 杰弗里. It’s pronounced *Jie Fu Li*. Linda is 琳达 and is pronounced *Lin Da*.”

When proper names or brand names are translated into Chinese characters, you need to choose characters that not only approximate the sounds of the translated word but also have a positive meaning. The characters chosen to represent *Linda*, for example, could translate as *Distinguished Beautiful Jade*.

The last thing you want is to represent a brand or company name in Chinese characters that have negative, obscene or contradictory meaning. When writing a translated name, the custom is to follow the translated characters with the un-translated word in Roman letters using parentheses.

---

62 URL: <http://www.boc.cn/sourcedb/whpj/index.html>

## China's Online Ecosystem: It's All Different

It's not just the spoken or written language, or the population size that makes China so different from other online markets. China has its own digital ecosystem of online malls, search engines, payment systems and social media you need to understand.

In e-commerce, Alibaba is the leading force. The company's main e-commerce platforms are Taobao (a Customer to Customer or C2C shop similar to craigslist and eBay), Tmall (a B2C retail platform for big brands) and Alibaba.com (a B2B site largely serving small companies). Payments are processed by Alipay, Alibaba's analog to PayPal. But Alipay is more than a PayPal and has expanded into mobile payments and financial services.

Alibaba is famously responsible for creating Singles Day, which falls each year on 11/11. It has surpassed America's Black Friday as generating the world's greatest volume of sales in a single day.

Kent Lau told me he finds Jingdong<sup>63</sup> to be the most trusted and lowest priced site for electrical and electronic goods. Yihaodian<sup>64</sup> is the most comprehensive online supermarket for local as well as imported goods. Both e-commerce websites offer next-day delivery, and they often include free extras such as fresh fruits.

In social media, Tencent is one of the biggest Chinese online firms. The company owns the QQ messaging platform, the WeChat mobile messaging app, and produces games for PCs and smartphones.

Lau said WeChat is an interesting phenomenon in China and a growing one in Asia: "It's a complete ecosystem encompassing social,

---

63 See [www.jd.com](http://www.jd.com)

64 See [www.yhd.com](http://www.yhd.com)

mobile O2O, banking, branding and CRM. It's a WhatsApp-Facebook-Twitter-PayPal all-in-one, and it's ad free.”

As of January 2015, WeChat had more than 700 million users in China and more than 100 million registered users in other countries. Lau noted an unexpected social benefit that WeChat has brought to China: “No more uncivil queue-jumping for cabs on the street,” he said. The Uber-like app provides both cab drivers and passengers incentives to arrange cab rides on WeChat.

In search, Baidu is China's leading search engine, with Google-like dominance in ad revenue, maps and video. Baidu bought the 91 Wireless Websoft app store in 2013, which is a leader in smartphone application downloads in China. Government censorship has discouraged use of Apple and Google apps, and Google's Chinese search engine, based in Hong Kong, is often blocked by China.<sup>65</sup>

By December 26, 2014, the Great Chinese Firewall had succeeded in completely blocking Google Search, Gmail and all Google-related apps. Some users, however, have already found tools to help them circumvent the Google blockade.

### **The Thing About Trust**

I think trust is going to be a growing issue for Internet users the world over: cyber crime, privacy issues, spam and fraud have all taken advantage of this wide-open territory. In China, trust<sup>66</sup>—or the lack of

---

65 For a number of excellent graphic depictions of China's online ecosystem, see *The Wall Street Journal's* “What Is Alibaba?” mini-website. In addition to a full rundown of Alibaba's sprawling operation, they provide a good summary of all the other players. See <http://projects.wsj.com/alibaba/>.

66 This issue of trust in part explains the Chinese system of *guanxi* (关系), which means “relationships.” Building these personal/social/commercial networks is central to doing business in China.

trust between consumer and buyer—is a bigger issue than you might expect.

Every time I go to China I get bronchitis. Some say it's the air pollution. I think more likely it's the 13 to 14 hours in the air in an excessively crowded tourist class cabin. On the third trip I was prepared with an antibiotic my doctor had prescribed to take with me, but I was leading website workshops in Shanghai for three days and wanted to be sure I didn't lose my voice.

I asked the secretary in our office what I should take for cough and sore throat. She recommended a Chinese herbal remedy and took me to a shop where we bought a bottle of heavy black syrup with 18 different herbs. The most important selling point, she said, is that the medicine is made in Hong Kong, not Mainland China.

Quite simply, consumers don't trust Chinese manufacturers or retailers. They don't trust food and medicine purveyors, unless they have personal experience or a trusted person recommending the product. They don't trust retailers dealing in name brand merchandise to be selling the authentic product.

### **Social Media the Key to Trust**

According to Sherri Wu, the head of international business development in the Americas for Alibaba, the U.S. is the number one foreign market destination for Chinese consumers. I suspect one of the reasons is that Chinese consumers have a higher level of trust in American products that they know for sure are coming from America.

“Authenticity is now more important than bargains to the Chinese consumer,” she says. “Social media is a big influencer in their product choices.”

Andrew Chen, Director of Gilt's product development and UX team, says having a good reputation in local social media is essential for brands in China: "Consumers want to know products are real, not counterfeit." He says they will check what others are saying about the retailer on social media before buying.

"The top three issues in China are trust, trust and trust," says Tim Lee, Vice President and Regional Head of Greater China at SingPost, the e-commerce division of Singapore Post.

He says you really need a Chinese website in addition to being on a major retail mall. "The first place they look is on Tmall," he says, "but then they'll look on your .cn site to validate your authenticity." He says mistrust runs so deep that consumers will suspect a foreign product is a fake if it's delivered the next day.

### **China's Expressway to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

I think the quickest way to experience the new China is to take a ride on their modern and crowded freeways. Before my first trip to China, a friend who visits there often warned that most drivers had little experience behind the wheel—maybe three years by his estimation. The young magazine editor who picked up my wife and me on our arrival in Beijing proved the point. As we got into her car, she said she hoped the ride wouldn't be too rough. The car was new, she said, and she learned to drive after buying the car.

There were some tense minutes searching for reverse gear to back out of the parking place, but she did well in Beijing's unending traffic jams. It takes a lot of nerve to enter this aggressive mix of cars, trucks, motorbikes, bicycles and pedestrians, all playing their own unforgiving game of chicken.

To a first-time visitor, China's crowds can overload your senses. It's not just on the highways. The next morning at the Forbidden City, we dodged busses disgorging masses of Chinese visitors beyond imagination. Crowds of shoppers filled malls built on a scale beyond anything I'd ever seen. You might conclude that the weight of China's population is the driving force behind its role as a major player in the world economy.

But if you look more closely at China's love affair with the automobile (it's the fastest growing auto market in the world), I think you get a more complete picture of what's really driving China's markets. Most of those cars on the freeways have just one or two people in them. Each car has its own individual driver plotting his or her own individual path to an individual destination. This is the thing that's driving China's market revolution: the masses have become individual forces of their own.

While big numbers still play a role in marketing, in the Internet age mass doesn't carry the weight it used to. China had its masses in the twentieth century—the age of mass communication, mass consumption and all kinds of mass movements. Yet it wasn't in the last century—the century of mass everything—that China came to the fore. It's in this new century, the century of the networked individual, where China has emerged. It came when China's people began to have the opportunity to devise their own stories.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

*“All Websites are global.”*

Mike DeSimone

#### **The One Conclusion You Need: It’s Time to Go Global**

If there is one thing you have taken from this book, I hope it has helped you come closer to upping your global online marketing game. As Borderfree CEO Mike DeSimone pointed out at the Global E-Commerce Forum in New York, your website is already global, whether your business is or not. So what are you waiting for? “You have a rare window of opportunity to globalize your brand now,” DeSimone told the audience.<sup>67</sup>

To seize that opportunity DeSimone warns, “Remember it’s not a cut and paste world.” You’re going to have to adapt to each market, and that’s going to take time and learning. You have to be prepared for lower returns on your initial investment.

“ROA [Return on Ad spend], is going to be lower than what you get in the U.S.,” DeSimone said. “You’ll have to fight for marketing dollars, but remember: you’ve had 20 years to optimize your U.S. ad spend.” The same could be said for what you’ll need to spend on global content marketing, social engagement and SEO.

---

<sup>67</sup> Mike DeSimone is CEO of Borderfree ([www.borderfree.com](http://www.borderfree.com)), a global e-commerce service provider that offers global logistics, marketing and customer support to online retailers. He spoke at the Global E-Commerce Forum, New York, NY on February 3, 2015.

## **The Future of Globalization and Localization**

I'm not in the business of making predictions, but following are five conclusions I have come to about the future of globalization and localization and what it means to digital marketers.

### **1. Are online brands going global or local?**

For more and more companies, the answer needs to be “both.” The mix between universal brand consistency and complete localization will vary, but the truth is that brands have to learn how to localize and customize right down to the individual customer. Both visitors and search engines that send you visitors demand it.

### **2. Will English remain the global language of the Internet?**

Yes, but you won't always recognize it, and global English alone won't let you off the hook for translating and localizing your content.

Even if you're serving a technical, scientific or business market where “everyone knows English,” many of your readers won't fully understand as much of your English content as you hope.

Navigating and reading a website that isn't written in your first language is hard work.

Once while in Paris, I needed to make a reservation for a flight from Cologne, Germany to Milan, Italy. I found the best fares on a French site that didn't offer an English version. I bought the ticket but was a bit nervous about clicking the purchase button when I wasn't 100 percent sure of what I was reading.

Ask yourself: if you're the customer, how long will it take you to move on to a competitor's site that has worked harder to localize the content for you?

### **3. Is one global culture emerging from the Internet?**

No, but there are lots of global sub-cultures growing all around us, and many more are coming.

Supported and promoted by social media, we've got global online fan cultures, consumer cultures, business, scientific, technical and all sorts of special interest cultures that never could have formed without the Internet.

Seth Godin calls these new subcultures “tribes.” The digital world provides you the tools to tap into these global tribes, or even—as Godin champions—start your own tribe.

### **4. Will there be a global style that we can all follow in our online designs?**

I don't see a single style that everyone in every market will find ideal for websites. But just as globalized English does better online than American English, we are already seeing web styles that travel better around the world. There are many branded styles that span the globe. Some brands have done a remarkable job creating their own global styles. German luxury car brands have been especially effective selling a world product that people everywhere aspire to own. Italian luxury clothing has travelled equally well. McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, Starbucks and many other global American brands are contributing to the stew of global styles.

On the other hand, to remain competitive, many of these same global brands are localizing their products and their marketing messages much more than they used to.

This trend in localization has also led to emerging local competitors who create mashups of products where a foreign style is merged with

local elements. Like fusion restaurants, global styles are being infused with just the right touch of local elements to feel both imported and comfortably local at the same time. The same process is happening in the ways we communicate online.

### **5. Will the growing demand for the globalized and localized content be automated?**

Not in the long run. I've seen examples where email subject lines generated by algorithms perform better than copywriters.

But consumers eventually catch on, and they will start recognizing the game when everyone is using algorithms to write marketing messages. Mechanical short cuts only work for a limited time.

Your readers and viewers (and the search engines) will continue to seek out and reward handcrafted, authentic, original content. The same trends that drive us to buy handcrafted beers, or go to restaurants serving locally sourced food, will be a strong balancing force against those who would reduce online copywriting to algorithm-driven automation.

### **A Final Word about Global Brands**

We know companies have brands, and many of us work very hard to take those brands global. We also know that people have brands, and most of us recognize that countries have brands, too. All those brands are going global. They travel with us wherever we go, and people we visit will judge us by all the brand reputations we bring along.

I've known global business travelers who would prefer to hide their country brand, others who wear it proudly. But whether you hide it or display it, your country, like your company, is going to show through. Sometimes people tell you what they think and feel about your brands in ways you never expected. Here is one example I'd like to share.

A few years ago, following web workshops I had conducted in Shanghai, I flew up to Beijing to meet with a new marketing manager who had recently been hired to open an office there. I took the opportunity to connect with my friends Lu Yanyan and Zhao Xu, two magazine editors I had met on my first day in China.<sup>68</sup>

This meeting was my last day of a two-week trip, and I still hadn't gotten over my usual China cold. When Yanyan heard my cough she insisted on taking me to a pharmacy in the shopping mall next to the office building where we met. She bought an herbal remedy (not made in China), and then we went to lunch where she ordered a pot of chrysanthemum tea for my cold. The glass pot came filled with these big golden flowers. Just looking at it made me feel better.

Since I had last seen them, Yanyan had had a baby, her first and possibly the only one she will be permitted to have. She and Xu seemed to be happy in their work and hopeful about their futures. Like most of the people I met in China, they had lots of questions about America.

The Chinese are curious about life in America and are not bashful about asking personal questions: what is your social class, your religion, how much does your house cost, how many square meters, what car do you drive, how old are you? The most frequently asked question was, how many children do you have?

During lunch, Yanyan and Xu wanted to hear all about the various cities and regions of America I had visited. Yanyan had recently been to

---

68 Lu Yanyan is Assistant General Editor at Machinery & Electronics Business. She specialized in power engineering in college, and at the time of my visit she had been working as an editor for eight years. Zhao Xu is an Editor/Reporter with the same magazine group. He is trained as an electrical engineer and had been an editor/reporter for two years.

a trade show in Las Vegas, not exactly the best representation of life in America, I thought.

I told them about some of my favorite cities: San Francisco, Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Chicago, New Orleans, Atlanta, New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Columbus, Ohio. Of course they also wanted to talk about Disney World in Orlando and some of the natural wonders like the Grand Canyon.

After I completed my long but incomplete list of the places I cherish in the U.S., Yanyan smiled. She looked at me and said, “America is the happiest place on earth.”

### **The Happiest Place on Earth**

The happiest place on earth: It’s a brand quality I’d never thought of applying to America, or by extension to the things Americans market. In truth, I hadn’t really thought about what America’s brand might be to other markets.

Germany sells perfection; especially in big expensive things like automobiles and industrial machinery. Switzerland sells precision; especially little expensive things like the best fine watches and most accurate industrial weighing technology. When I was at K-Tron, some of our marketing success came from our Swiss-made Smart Force Transducer with a weighing resolution of 1:4,000,000. A friend in Singapore says the Singapore brand in China means trust, an attribute that holds great value in any market.

What exactly is America’s brand? Can American brands sell happiness? Let’s look at what just two very large and very global American companies have actually accomplished.

On February 10, 2015, Apple Inc. became the first U.S. company to achieve a market value of more than \$700 billion. On that day, CEO Tim Cook told a Goldman Sachs Technology and Internet conference in San Francisco that Apple's great financial results came from its success in selling high-priced products—especially the new iPhone 6—to China's consumers.

According to Daisuke Wakabayashi in *The Wall Street Journal*, Cook told the San Francisco audience that Apple's rapid growth in China comes from ignoring conventional wisdom that “Chinese consumers were too price-sensitive for Apple's high-end products.”<sup>69</sup>

You might argue that Chinese consumers are willing to pay a premium for the iPhone for its status. But Apple earns its status by consistently delivering delight: delight in its design, in the way its products work, even in the way products are packaged. If Apple ever quits delivering delight—extreme and continuing happiness with their products—its premium status will evaporate overnight.

The second example also has a China connection. For my friends at that lunch in Beijing, Disney World in Orlando was at the top of their list of places they want to visit in the U.S. A friend in Singapore said he plans to take his daughter to Disney World when she's a few years older. What's the magic that Disney has so successfully sold over so many generations? Happy endings.

From the early Disney cartoons, to the Disney feature films to Disney Land and Disney World, the one thing Walt Disney knew how to sell was happy endings. If you need convincing, just watch the movie, “Saving Mr. Bates.” It tells the story of how the very success of

---

69 “Apple: \$710 Billion and Counting,” by Daisuke Wakabayashi, *The Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 2015 (B1).

the “Mary Poppins” movie depended on finding a happy ending. To this day, Disney gets a premium price for the happiness it delivers.

As Lu Yanyan observed at our lunch in Beijing, we’re free in America to choose happiness. The thing is, when we choose happiness, we can also choose to carry happiness with us in the products we make, the services we provide, and the friendships we win around the globe. Perhaps we can’t put a value on making our global partners and customers happy. But Apple and Disney suggest that we can take the profit to the bank.

So pack your bag, go global, learn to look local, and don’t forget to take a lot of happiness with you.