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INTERNATIONAL SEO

REACHING A GLOBAL AUDIENCE



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WWW - World Wide Web – the clue's in the name. The internet is truly global and as such so is the audience. So how can businesses utilise this global appeal and how can they reach beyond their original customers? These are the questions that this eBook will answer as we look at international search engine optimisation (SEO) and the benefits of utilising a multinational strategy.

INTRODUCTION

As we all know, SEO is the process of increasing your website visibility online by helping more users find your business and reach your website based on their searching habits. International SEO is the branch of search that focuses on increasing your visibility in different international markets and the targeting of global users and not just local ones.

Developing a strong international profile for your brand involves more than just the creation and translation of articles, blogs and industry news pieces – that's why you have to integrate multilingual marketing solutions which are multifaceted and fit for purpose from the offset. Remember it's not what you say, but how you say it.

It has long been the theory that by simply translating text from one language to another you are developing an international marketing presence. In today's connected world, this couldn't be further from the truth.

In order to understand the issues that face your business you must have a mix of local knowledge and that prior to starting your international SEO and make sure that it is locally responsive whilst developing your international search visibility.

A good international SEO strategy ensures that search engines show users the correct content and in the right language of the website, according to the version they're using.

For example, if users are located in the Ireland, it is fair to assume that they are more likely to use the Irish version of Google (google.ie). A high performing strategy would therefore help Google Ireland (google.ie) show the pages of the website that are relevant to those users, and would bring together the consumers and the businesses based in Ireland. The search results would also show those businesses not based in Ireland but who can supply services and products to the country.

The second phase is to get the language right. For example if somebody was in Ireland but their first language was French, you would want Google to show them the correct pages but translated to French, thus contributing to the enhancement of your online business performance and global reach.

One of the main benefits for conducting international SEO or generating a strategy that lends itself to global expansion is foresight.

FORESIGHT

One of the main questions that businesses will ask is “Why now?” The reason for incorporating an international SEO strategy early is that it gives you the foresight to see where your business may be in the years ahead. It is about moving forward and by starting early and making sure that you sow the seeds you will be in the best possible position. This is critical so that [when you are ready to expand](#) you can hit the ground running.

Many in the industry feel that this could be a waste of time and resources but it is part of a long term strategy not a short term tactic. If businesses remember that then they may well be ahead of their market rivals.



One thing that you may consider is the development of a specialist role for an international community manager. Community managers provide an in-depth analysis of the marketplace across their own territories. By working closely with them across Europe and Asia, you can develop a network of local marketing knowledge whilst continuing to respond to the needs of the ever changing digital market.

You can then develop a clear understanding of the content marketing mix, language nuances and the things people are talking about on a day to day basis.

This will naturally increase the links back to your website and in turn increase the exposure and authority of the site.

The process of generating an international SEO strategy starts with the business owner and the questions that they have to ask. First of all you must decide on why you want to start the international process and what the main considerations are. The two that spring to mind initially are the importance of keyword research and which search engine your content needs to rank with.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Here in the UK the vast majority of those working in SEO are big advocates of using the Google Keyword Planner to identify the words, phrases and terms which you want to rank for. Once you have your audience determined and you have highlighted the areas in which you want to grow both as a business and online, then keyword research is a must.

If you are able to be competitive for the terms specific to your industry, products and services as well as having the ability to see the long-tailed variations that perhaps your competitors have missed or aren't focusing then you can make quick wins and gain the upper hand. One thing to note when it comes to your [keyword research](#) is that there is no 'one size fits all' approach and the terms need constant review.

Working under the simple assumption that you have covered the market is dangerous, just because a competitor isn't targeting a particular term at the moment doesn't mean that they won't in the future. Getting your keyword strategy right and finding yourself at the top of search engine results pages (SERPs) doesn't mean you can take the foot of the gas, and cut your SEO budget either, people may still find you but in truth it is your rivals that will increase their activity and spend to overtake you.

Focus is business critical and when it comes to international SEO the markets are tougher to crack and the volume of businesses vying for number one can be far greater than the number in your base country.

This means that it is imperative that you use other versions of the Google Keyword Planner to find the terms that are ranking on other browsers in other countries. You may also find that some of your products and services are found differently on the various international search engines.

Instead of the Google Keyword Planner, you also can use the Bing keyword research tool, Yandex keyword tool, or the keyword tool of the search engine used by your target market.

These are useful to get not only more relevant keyword ideas but also the “official” organic search volume and trends provided by the search engine, although the numbers shouldn't be used as an absolute, but as a reference.

Be mindful of selecting the relevant country and language from the options to make sure you get

more accurate data for the desired market, too. Failure to do this can be a waste of time and effort and could lead to a delay in progress.

You should also monitor and update your content regularly based on testing. Just as with English language search algorithms, pay close attention to content that is changing regularly and to keywords used on the site.

If you're finding difficulty identifying or ranking for terms you consider to be key then it might be that you have a gap in your knowledge or your testing. Think outside the box and think about how your users may find you.

You should consider updating your keywords and track the impact the changes have on your rankings. Make sure you re-submit your website for indexing every time you make a change to ensure your changes are captured by the relevant search engines.

This part of the strategy is essential to developing an international website that is optimised for the key factors evaluated by search engine algorithms to determine:

- Is the content meaningful?
- Is it fresh content that is keyword-specific?
- Does it use descriptive tagging?
- Is it considered rich media?
- Can the work be shared and understood on social media?
- Are the internal and external links in place?

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH ENGINES

One common mistake that many businesses make is to assume that when they branch out as part of an international SEO strategy, Google will form the backbone of their focus. In truth this should only be the case if Google is the primary search engine for the region in which a business operates.

Google's position as the number one global search engine should be a starting point for businesses operating in the UK, US, Europe, Africa but in other parts of the globe it is not the search engine of choice.

Internet users in the Middle East use Google, Bing and Yahoo as their preferred search engines whilst those in Russia and Eastern Europe use Yandex and users in Asia prefer Baidu, Naver and Yahoo Japan.

It is also important to conduct research on the various international search engines and find out what type of content they show preference to when it comes to their rankings. There are plenty of theories that search engines such as Baidu and Yandex offer more weight to posts made from social media sites and that user generated content also appears more trustworthy than that posted from other official sites.



STRATEGY

There are a series of questions that you have to ask in order to get the best from your strategy. They are:

- Have you researched your international SEO potential?
- How will you target the chosen audience?
- Is it better for you to use a country-targeted or language-targeted approach?
- Which is the best possible international targeted site structure?
- Have you used the hreflang tag to steer clear of duplicate content?

With these questions in mind, let's go through them.



RESEARCH

Any international SEO process should begin with an initial research process to validate both the starting point and the potential for each international market. This will show you where your focus should be and the changes that you need to make in order to get the most from international SEO.

The first step of the process is to ascertain your current international organic search visibility, as well as your traffic, conversions, and conversion rate. You can do this in a number of ways.

By looking at your starting point and going into a platform such as Google Analytics you will be able to identify the secondary countries and languages which are already providing organic search visibility and traffic for your website.

The answers that you receive to this query will show you if there is already a potential market that you are missing and will highlight any demand you may need to fulfil.

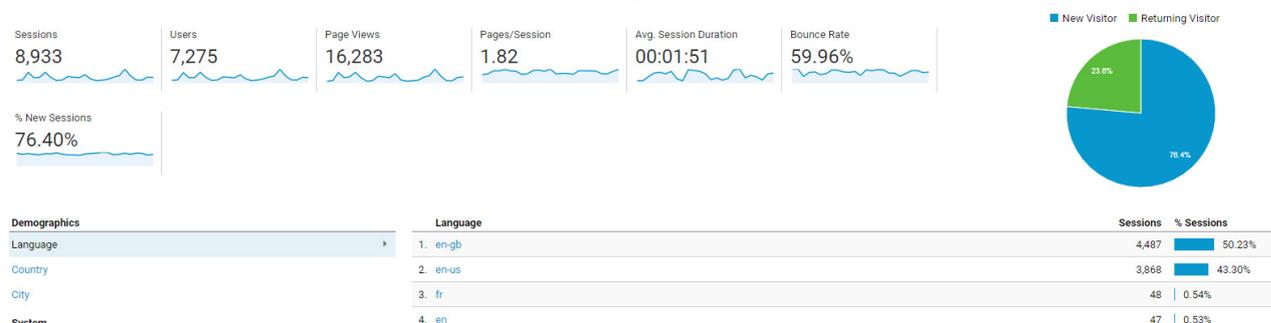
From your base of where you rank for certain terms following a period of keyword identification, you will be able to ascertain answers to several questions.

Identifying the volume and trend over time of your organic search visibility and traffic coming from each country and language will allow you to highlight what opportunities are currently worth exploring. Doing similar research on competitors both in your native market and in international markets which you are targeting will highlight new opportunities.

Asking which keywords and pages have attracted the highest search visibility and traffic for each of the top identified international market, will give you the long-term aims for an international SEO campaign. They will highlight the pinnacle of the market and something to aim for.

Looking at the stats and determines the organic search click through rate (CTR) and conversion rate of the visitors coming from each of the top international markets will give you a true reflection as to whether or not there is a financial benefit to conducting SEO. It will tell you if the business and demand are there and whether or not you should target certain terms.

You can answer these questions by analysing your existing website with Google Analytics, using the “Geo” reports under the “Audience” section:



Answering these questions will allow you to identify your top current international countries and languages markets and the behaviour and trend of your current international visitors coming from each one of them. If you already have a relatively high organic search visibility with a positive trend or above-expected conversions, you might want to prioritise these markets and directly validate each one of them for their organic search potential.

These will form, the next stage of an international SEO strategy be vital as they give you a chance to hit the ground running. It is better to run tests and expand in areas with some existing audience rather than starting from zero.

If you determine that you have only minimum organic search visibility and traffic, it doesn't mean that you shouldn't take these markets into consideration for a potential international SEO process. It just means that, if, in the next step, you find that there's enough organic search volume for them, your starting point with them will be lower and you might need more resources and time to earn the desired search visibility.

After assessing the potential of each of the country and language markets you're considering targeting (already identified in the previous step), then more keyword research is required. This will help to identify potential by collecting the following data for each one of them:

- Relevant keywords and phrases used as queries by your international audiences to search for your business, products, or services
- Organic search volume for these keywords per country
- Level of competition of the keywords per country
- Your current rankings for these keywords in the target markets

TOOLS

When it comes to search marketing there is a wide variety of tools that can be used in order to help you identify keywords, new users, existing audience and performance. The following list represents some of those that can be utilised across the industry and how they can help.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Standing at the helm of the industry it is no surprise that the vast majority of those operating within the industry use Google Analytics as a starting point. Google Analytics is most widely used to analyse website traffic offered by Google.

It generates detailed statistics about website traffic, and where the traffic is coming from all whilst measuring conversions. Google Analytics is so dynamic it can track the visitors from any reference point, including search engines and through social media networks. It even tracks visitors directly to the site and through links and referrals.

Its popularity is also in part due to the fact it can display email marketing campaigns.

Primary Dimension: Language

Plot Rows Secondary dimension Sort Type: Default

Language ?	Acquisition			Behaviour		
	Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages/Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?
	160,897 % of Total: 100.00% (160,897)	63.51% Avg for View: 63.42% (0.15%)	102,184 % of Total: 100.15% (102,036)	45.60% Avg for View: 45.60% (0.00%)	6.19 Avg for View: 6.19 (0.00%)	00:04:02 Avg for View: 00:04:02 (0.00%)
1. en-gb	100,690 (62.58%)	61.56%	61,988 (60.66%)	42.87%	6.75	00:04:12
2. en-us	46,881 (29.14%)	64.45%	30,216 (29.57%)	47.00%	5.69	00:04:07
3. en	2,825 (1.76%)	76.78%	2,169 (2.12%)	84.92%	1.51	00:00:36
4. fr	993 (0.62%)	62.54%	621 (0.61%)	58.51%	2.70	00:02:24
5. es	549 (0.34%)	73.41%	403 (0.39%)	49.73%	3.67	00:02:54
6. de	537 (0.33%)	74.30%	399 (0.39%)	54.38%	5.14	00:02:57
7. en-au	494 (0.31%)	76.92%	380 (0.37%)	58.10%	4.00	00:02:44
8. pl	476 (0.30%)	78.99%	376 (0.37%)	57.14%	6.07	00:04:38
9. fr-fr	413 (0.26%)	64.41%	266 (0.26%)	51.33%	4.03	00:02:59
10. ru	349 (0.22%)	76.22%	266 (0.26%)	58.74%	4.44	00:03:12

MOZ RANK TRACKER

This is one of the most important tools to measure the rankings from the relevant countries depending upon the visits and conversions. Offering a currency-setting for those looking to make sales abroad as well as country and traffic visits, and cross-domain tracking, Moz Rank Tracker is vital. It allows the user to measure every international website you control for visits, average conversions, locations and the source of the traffic by country.

You can use the Moz Keyword Difficulty tool to identify their competitive level, based on the popularity and relevance of the competitors.

Once you have the level of competition, you can check your current rankings for the selected keywords. (You may already done this if these are keywords in the same language of your current site but targeting another country)

To verify their rankings for the targeted markets, you can use rank checkers like AuthorityLabs, Advanced Web Ranking, or position.ly, among many others.



SEARCHMETRICS

One of the premier search marketing platforms, Searchmetrics has a host of features that can be beneficial for those wanting to not only form an international SEO strategy, but for those who want to review the strategy. The winners and losers section of the keyword results, shows you the volume of traffic for various terms as well as how much each term weighs towards your search visibility. This is beneficial for those looking to move their campaigns forward and evolve as new terms become popular with the user.



SOCIAL CRAWLYTICS

It is very important that you should understand your international competitors' strategies, link-building strategies, and the popularity gap your brand has with them. Through Social Crawlytics you can target their international preferences rather than focusing on trends, links, sources etc. It allows you to look at their social profiles, most shared content, the terms used, and the most used formats to see what is resonating with your new potential audience.

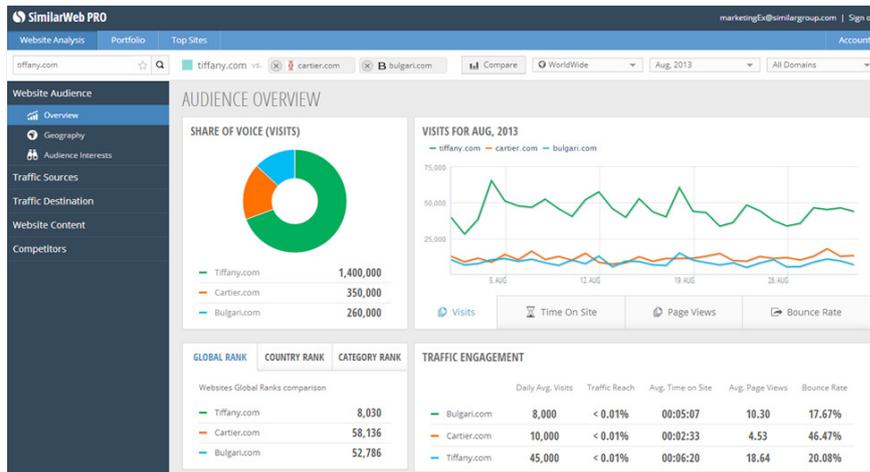
SUGGESTMRX

This tool provides you information from Google Suggest, allowing you to select from 11 countries and six languages, and you can use it to get additional ideas for your target audience queries.

SIMILARWEB

With a “Top Sites” list, it allows you to identify the websites with the highest traffic of any country and sector, giving you your potential competitors for each international market.

It also features a profile for each of the listed websites, including information about their top organic search keywords and search traffic channels that can be used for your keyword research.

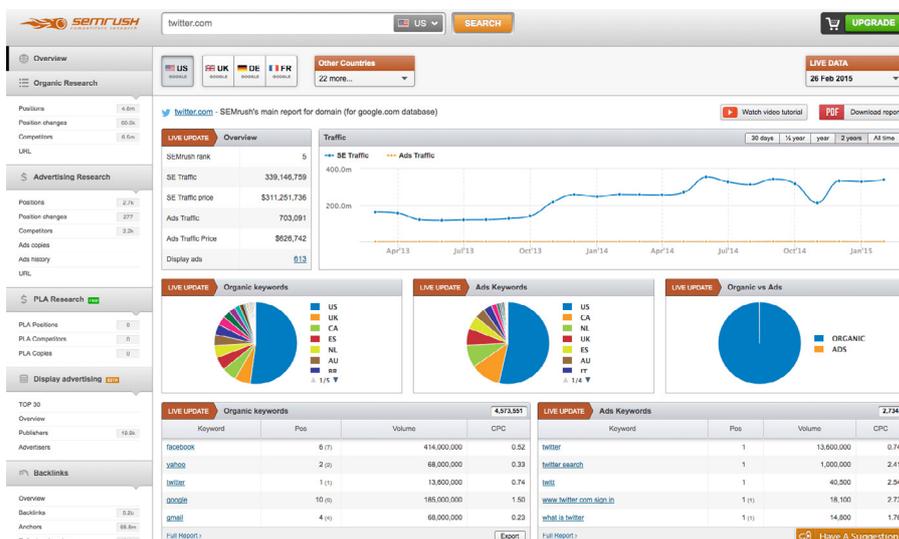


SEMRUSH

SEMrush is a keyword finding tool where you can find all the keywords relevant to your search, and you can search a bulk of keywords in any language and country that you are targeting for.

It's a great additional source of keywords (supporting 25 countries) as it allows you to search for ideas and volume not only with a keyword but also any website. For this, you can use the websites identified with SimilarWeb as your potential competitors for each country.

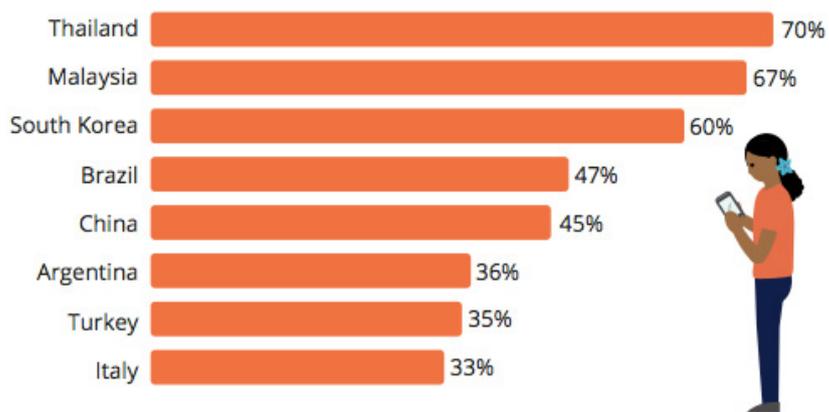
Another consideration is that you will need native language support in order to accurately develop this keyword research, even if it's your own language in a different country, due to localisation.



CONSUMER BAROMETER

The Consumer Barometer is one of Google's interactive tools, which helps to target an international audience's statistical characteristics and online consumers' buying preferences not just researching by your site, but by browsing it too. This site will let you interact and collect data from almost every country and industry to highlight the statistical characteristics of your market and your potential audience.

Percentage of internet users who go online more often via smartphone than computer/ tablet



GOOGLE TRENDS

It is important to create well designed and highly-optimised content for your international audience that's not just should not be based on keywords, but on audience preferences which, will ultimately help you achieve your international SEO goals.

Looking at Google Trends will allow your copywriters to become well versed on international trends and current topics, all of which will help them to write the best content for your website. Like Twitter and other social media sources you can use Google Trends to take a look at the most recent and popular searches across your target country.

LINK PROSPECTOR

To promote your international websites link building is the important factor to build with media and local influences, and to track the best work in country to build your International presence. Link Prospector is one of the most useful link builders with Link Target Score feature. It helps you to find best link at the top of your list and discover the thousands of link building opportunities by identifying your keyword.

SEO ROI CALCULATOR

As with all business activity the main objective is to see a return on any investments that you make. Using a tool such as the SEO ROI calculator you are able to work out the potential returns of a project and understand the number of new conversions that you need in a particular country in order to make the expansion worthwhile. It's very important to measure your conversion goals and that high ROI in your international SEO process can be monitored easily.

The International SEO ROI Calculator

Use the calculator to identify the expected conversion rate of your SEO process (it was initially targeted to International ones, however it can be any SEO related projects or processes) by using the expected visits & conversions. This calculator was created based on the [SEO ROI analysis of Himanshu Sharma](#).

1. Find the Number of Conversions & Visits for a Break-even

Cost of International Web Project	<input type="text" value="10000"/>	\$	Number of Conversions for a Break-even
Average Conversion Rate	<input type="text" value="50"/>	%	25
Average Conversion Value	<input type="text" value="400"/>	\$	Number of Visits for a Break-even
			50
<input type="button" value="Calculate your Break-Even Point"/>			

2. Calculate what would be your International SEO ROI

By number of Conversions	<input type="text" value="50"/>	The expected international SEO ROI is
		100%



ADWORDS DISPLAY PLANNER

Display Planner is a free AdWords tool that you can use to plan your Display Network ad campaigns. You'll just need a few basic details to get started, like your customers' interests or your landing page. Display Planner then generates targeting ideas along with impression estimates and historical costs to guide your plan.

You can save your plan directly to your AdWords account as a new campaign or as an addition to an existing campaign or ad group. You also have the option to download your plan to review or add at a later time.

You can discover ideas to help you get started and ideas for keywords, placements and all other Display Network targeting methods help you to plan your campaign.

Impression estimates and historical costs can help to guide your decisions. The estimates show how ideas may perform based on past results whilst historical costs point you to ideas within your budget and help you set bids for ideas you adopt.

Be aware that although you might be attracted to using tools like the Google Global Market Finder since it relies on automated translation (the Global Market Finder works with Google Translate); the translation is not always accurate and can end up misleading you. Although it's okay to have the support of an online translator, it's fundamental in this case to have the input of someone native.

After selecting the most relevant keywords that target the different types of searches (whether informational or transactional) of your international audience and identifying their organic search volume, it's time to verify how difficult it would be to rank for them.

Now you have the information and the tools you need to identify the search potential for each country and language, and the best way to target them.

COUNTRY VS LANGUAGE TARGETING, WHICH IS BETTER?

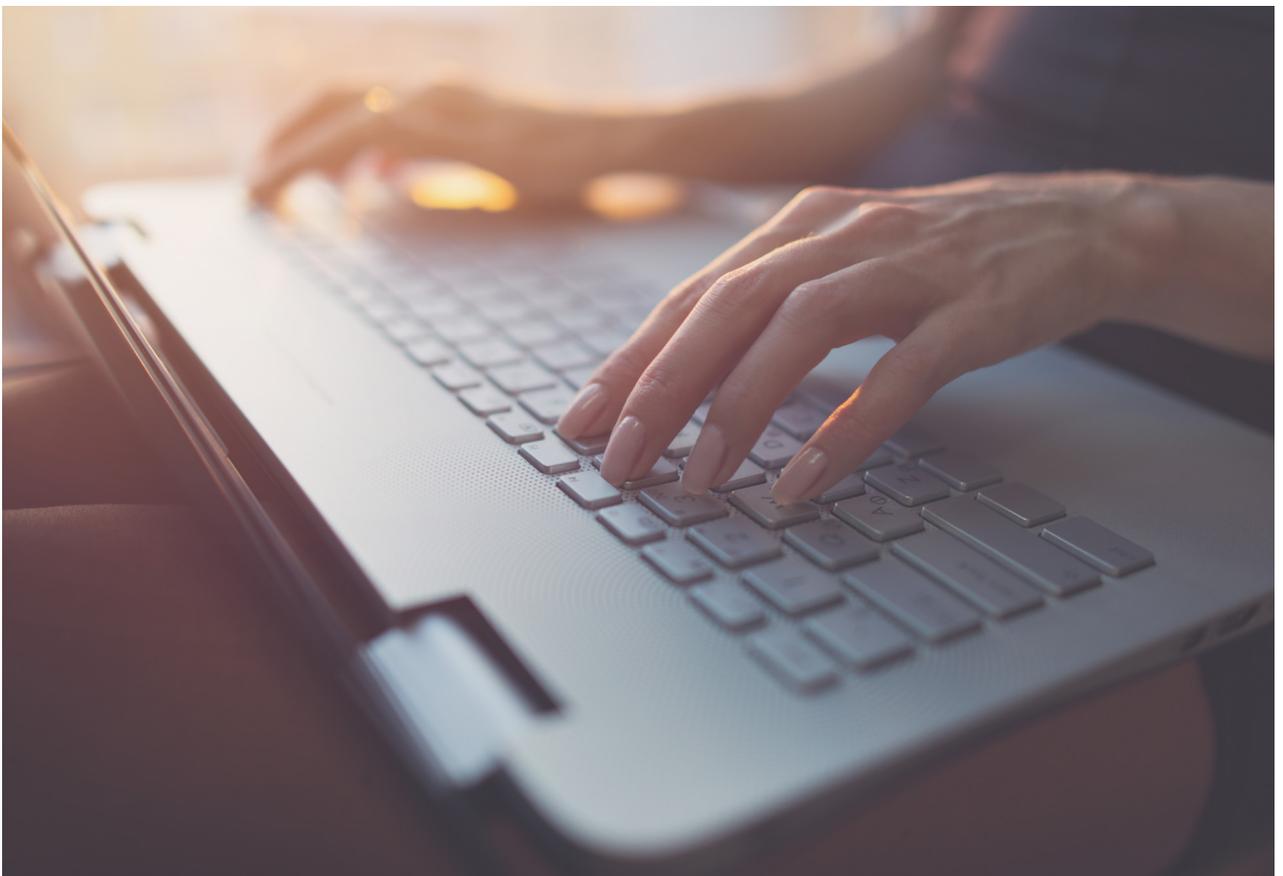
When it comes to choosing your audience the clues are often in the data that you already have. You should immediately identify which countries have enough organic search volume of relevant and reasonably competitive keywords that would aid your overall visibility and SEO efforts.

By selecting these as areas to target and prioritising them in your international SEO process you give yourself the best opportunity to rank highly.

If on the other hand, you have determined that there's not enough organic search volume to target a specific country, you can start by targeting the language instead.

Location would be a more critical factor to take into consideration for an eCommerce site, like Amazon (that is country targeting with versions for Spain, the UK, etc), than for service software like Skype (with Spanish or German language versions)

This will allow you to get the desired traffic and conversion traction at the start and later migrate to the ideal country-targeted approach to maximise the site's chances to connect with its audience and succeed.



COUNTRY TARGETED APPROACH

Utilising a country targeted approach is becoming increasingly popular, largely due to the perceived influence that Google places on geo-targeting in relation to search engine rankings. Getting the Country Code Top Level Domain (ccTLD) correct is vital and, if your research suggests that you should be expanding it a particular market, then you must have the domain in place to follow the demand.

If you have information relating to the geo-targeting aspect of Google this can be used to help webmasters and SEO professionals make clear decisions as to where the website and its users are oriented.

Secondary dimension			
Country ?	Acquisition		
	Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?
	160,897 % of Total: 100.00% (160,897)	63.51% Avg for View: 63.44% (0.10%)	102,184 % of Total: 100.10% (102,077)
1. United Kingdom	125,343 (77.90%)	60.78%	76,182 (74.55%)
2. Nigeria	5,341 (3.32%)	71.09%	3,797 (3.72%)
3. United States	4,509 (2.80%)	81.10%	3,657 (3.58%)
4. Kenya	4,046 (2.51%)	69.13%	2,797 (2.74%)
5. Bangladesh	1,231 (0.77%)	79.37%	977 (0.96%)
6. Australia	1,096 (0.68%)	75.46%	827 (0.81%)
7. France	1,081 (0.67%)	59.39%	642 (0.63%)
8. India	1,049 (0.65%)	83.03%	871 (0.85%)
9. Germany	934 (0.58%)	75.91%	709 (0.69%)
10. Ireland	853 (0.53%)	69.17%	590 (0.58%)

For country targeting, ccTLD is the strongest structure that sends indications to both users and search engines where your targeted audience should be located, despite it not being a ranking factor.

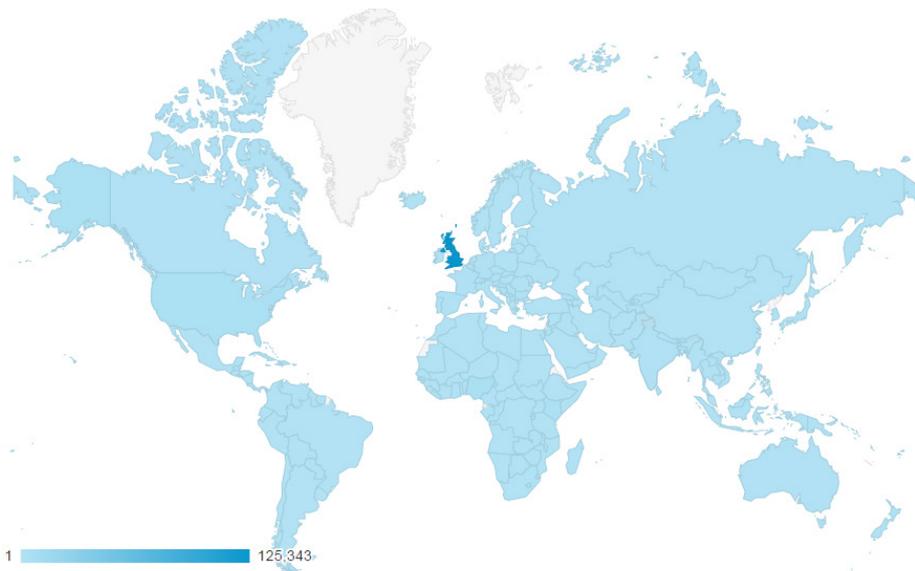
If you have a website with domain extension (.fr) like www.mybusiness.fr, then users and search engines will recognise that this website is targeting people who live in France. However, it doesn't mean that your website won't have a chance to rank or drive traffic from other countries.

If you decided to expand and target a new market like United Kingdom and use www.mybusiness.co.uk you will start with zero Domain Authority as Google will differentiate the links to www.mybusiness.fr from www.mybusiness.co.uk and would consider them as two separate domains.

Using many ccTLDs to target more than one market could work perfectly for big brands having the following privilege:

- Huge potential users to target international markets.
- Offices in each of the targeted markets.
- Enough resources to develop localised content for each country.

If however you are not considered one of the market leaders and you are trying enter into another market then it is important that you look at the pros and cons of this type of strategy.



Pros and cons of using a ccTLD strategy:

Pros:

- Reliable method for search engines and users to quickly identify the origin of a site
- Ensures higher rank in the SERPs for target users
- Gives out a geo-localised signal
- Easily marketable
- Isn't affected by any Google Panda or Penguin update if another ccTLD is penalised

Cons:

- Needs a separate SEO strategy
- Potential for separate hosting costs and technical support for each domain
- Possible subjection to censorship measures (based on law in the hosting nation or region)
- Separate crawling
- New links to gain for a ranking

LANGUAGE TARGETED APPROACH

You should go for a language targeted approach when the location of your audience does not represent a factor that can influence services/products, content, and website goals. Websites can start with a language targeted approach and move towards a country targeted approach as they identify enough activity from a specific country.

For language targeting, you can make alterations and use one of the following methods:

Creating subfolders e.g.

mybusiness.com/ar/
mybusiness.com/en/

Creating subdomains e.g.

ar.mybusiness.com
fr.mybusiness.com

Primary Dimension: Language

Plot Rows	Secondary dimension	Sort Type:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Language ?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. en-gb	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. en-us	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. en	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. fr	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. es	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. de	
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. en-au	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. pl	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. fr-fr	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. ru	

Sub-folders

Enable your main language on your root domain and set additional languages as sub-folders. This is one of the easiest and most effective solutions for language targeting. Because it inherits the properties of the root domain, your SEO efforts won't have to be doubled on the sub-directory.

Sub-domains

Set the main language as the www domain, and additional languages as sub-domains. This strategy is effective for a large number of pages. Although this solution is better for indexing a large number of pages it also requires separate link-building and SEO efforts.

OPTIMISATION

Once you have selected your desired targeting method and the type of structure to use, it's time to optimise it to make sure it is crawlable, indexable, and relevant, providing the desired targeting signals in order to avoid search results misalignment issues.

Whether you're targeting by country or language two of the most important factors are:

1. Crawlability and Indexability

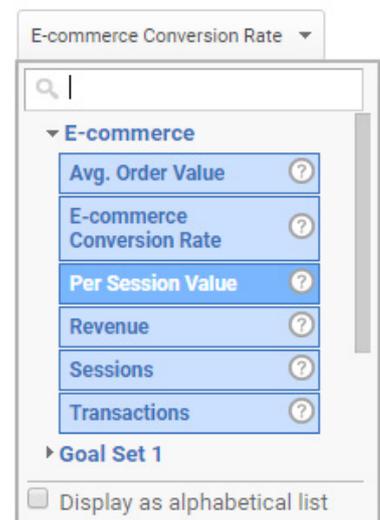
Every one of your international websites need to be crawlable and indexable, and they need to be featured in their own URLs under their relevant web structure (language targeted or country targeted) and not using scripts or cookies that don't allow search engines to correctly index the content.

According to Matt Cutts, it's also important to cross-link between your different international websites but be warned that if you have too many of them, it might be better to link only from the main pages to the most popular international versions and then feature them all in an internal "international web versions" page, from which they can be crawled and found by the users, as Microsoft does.

2. Relevance

It's necessary to translate (if language targeted) or localise (if country targeted) the different elements of the pages of each of your international versions, using the keywords and phrases that you have identified during the initial research, these include:

- URLs
- The title and meta description
- Menu and navigation elements
- Headings
- Images and alt descriptions
- Main body information
- Reviews



SITE STRUCTURE & CONTENT

When it comes to site structure there are a few things that you need to remember if you are to put your brand in the optimum position and get the best possible results from your global efforts.

The first thing that you need to have in place is a plan for your international SEO needs. Once you have a clear direction you are able to develop the most effective types of website prior to launching them. Global SEO shouldn't be a follow-up item on your business to-do list: it should be embedded in every step of the marketing and sales strategy.

As we mentioned, the planning process begins with keyword research to determine what keywords your target customers are likely to use and whether they will search for your products using the exact translation, or local variations.

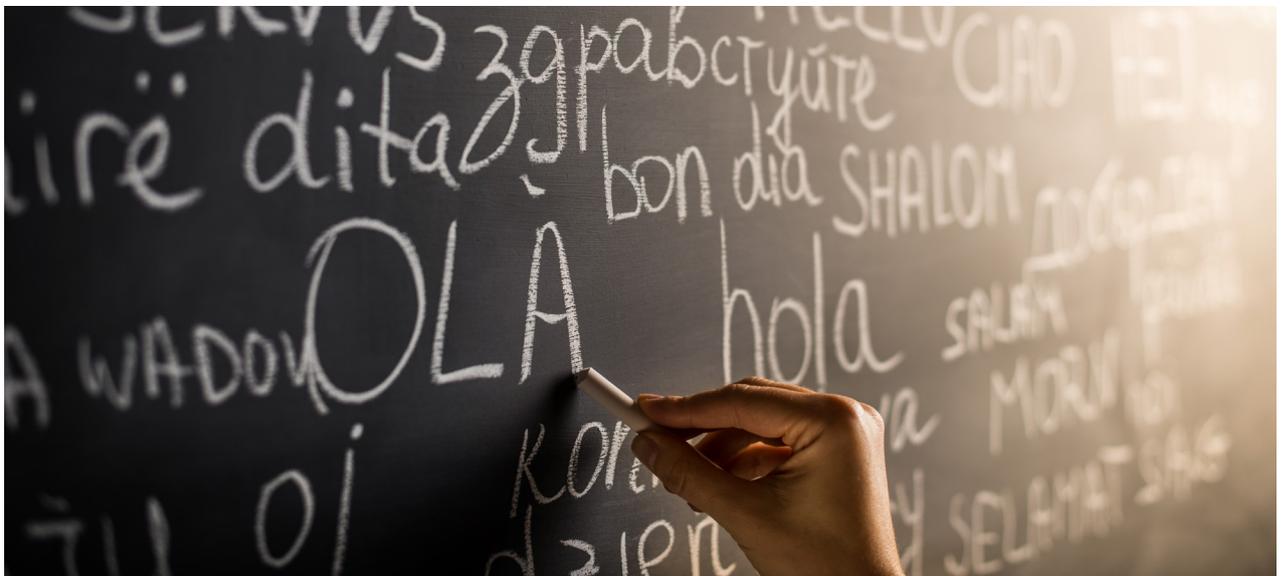


Once you have identified the keywords for you site it would be silly to misuse them. Therefore in order to encourage the authenticity of your site you should avoid automated translation completely.

When entering a new market it is vital that you make the right first impression. If you are operating in a new market or attempting to engage with prospects on social media, then an authentic voice is critical. Consumers can easily share any mistakes you make in this area, staining your reputation abroad before you ever gain a foothold in the market.

Whilst multilingual brand messaging can be difficult, companies should not opt for a 'quick fix' and leave it to machine translation. Businesses need human experts who can quickly identify faults in automated translations and repair them before damage occurs in important markets.

For optimum results, copy should be written from scratch and in the target language. Translated content may not convey the same meaning as content that is created with the local audience in mind.



SEO keywords, language and topics that are relevant to the cultural environment of the user should be considered as well as other factors like prepositions, accent marks, and different symbols that may be part of the native language.

When preparing your content seasonality is an important consideration in regards to international SEO. Understanding your regional target market will help create rich targeted landing pages aimed at those areas.

When summer falls in Australia, it is winter in Europe so you may have to take different paths in terms of your content. Holidays may also fall on different days as well meaning it is vital to conduct research on public holidays and cultural events significant to the region you are targeting.

Another important part of the site is the imagery. The images that you choose for your site and the message you want them to convey need to be as carefully chosen as the actual text you put on your website. An image can rapidly signal your company's knowledge or ignorance of a target market.

Localisation professionals can be helpful here, too, as they are familiar not only in languages, but in cultural norms. Without proper research some companies might face unexpected difficulties if one of its photo selections carries a negative connotation locally.

Once you have the content in place it is important that you look at local link-building. If you are able to build relationships with local sites relevant to your products and/or services then the traffic and visibility you can gain as well is far more beneficial than another unrelated link. You can also sign up to local networking sites and submit your website to local directories to reach your audience.

As the aim is to establish a presence overseas you need to make sure that your site contains organic incoming links from relevant and quality local websites. If you are able to do this then local search engines should give your website a higher ranking.

In addition to the domain extension, search engines also consider the IP address location of your server to determine the geographical relevance of your website. You may want to target another country but your service provider may be based in a different region.

Using a local server to host your website may increase your chances of being indexed for that particular region and improve your global SEO.

USING HREFLANG TAGS

One of the most important things to when it comes to assisting the search engine and helping them find and rank your content is the language that you use. Whilst some businesses look to external sources to achieve their Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) needs, the vast majority upload their own content. This could be to a newsletter a blog or simply to a page on the website. Having the tools in place to go into the backend of a website and make changes to the code are highly beneficial and one of the best ways to get noticed in your chosen international market or on foreign search engines is to select the correct language tags.

The hreflang attribute (also referred to as rel="alternate" hreflang="chosen language X") tells Google which language you are using on a specific page, so the search engine can serve that result to users searching in that language.

The following sample code would highlights that the page contains content written in English but for an American audience.

```
<link rel="alternate" href=http://demo.co.uk" hreflang="en-us" />
```

When Google first launched the hreflang attribute they did so to show the search engines the relationships between various pages in different languages. This is particularly important if you are writing content that is designed for a specific local audience or is to entice a wider audience. Users who are looking for information in the language which appears in the highlighted part of the code (rel="alternate" hreflang="chosen language X")

There are many variations of the code and the hreflang tags can be applied to replicate pages specific to users as follows:

Businesses looking to target English speakers in Ireland would expect to use a (*en-ie*) hreflang tag, for Canada they could expect to use (*en-ca*), and in Australia the code would be (*en-au*).

The primary part of the code forms the target audience and the secondary part shows the native language, (de) for example highlighting German content, independent of region but (de-es) showing German content, for users in Spain. It is important that you do not specify a country code by itself as Google does not automatically derive the language from the country code. A specific language code will simplify your tagging but to restrict the page to a specific region you have to add the country code after the language e.g:

- zh-Hant: Chinese (Traditional)
- zh-Hans: Chinese (Simplified)

These would be the starting points for users in China but the code would then change to zh-Hans-TW to specify Chinese (Simplified) for Taiwanese users.

This practice is important because you want to let your users make their own choices regarding language preference. Just like the web countries are diverse and with the movement of people easier than ever many countries have enough residents from other regions. With this being the case it pays to give visitors a choice of language on your website.

If we take Canada for example a targeted user might speak English, French, or any number of other languages, whilst in Switzerland, a consumer might prefer to read your content in French, German or English. Limiting yourself here could mean a lost conversion so the lesson is that you mustn't presume and choose what you feel is the "best" language option for your international websites. Instead, offer a dropdown menu with a wide range of language choices.

For those wanting to implement the hreflang code on their website: Google has communicated three technical ways in which to do it. Firstly at page level in the HTML code, then on the sitemap, which is optimal for large websites. The final way is to make your edits in the HTTP header, a manoeuvre that is perfect for the non-HTML pages like PDFs.

POST STRATEGY AND BUSINESS CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Many businesses find it difficult to rank for their key terms in their chosen market place and it is no wonder that so many neglect the idea of investing in international SEO. Many are put off also by big businesses who scare off the competition in foreign markets due to their nature as an established brand or through their additional spend, which is often far higher.

Then there's the more heavily saturated industries such as legal, insurance, finance or marketing where there are so many vying for the number one spot for similar keywords you can see why the vast majority of spend stays in the primary market.

Another thing to consider when it comes to international SEO is what you need to do following a successful strategy. Ask yourself whether you can deliver your products or services to an international market and delve into the business based questions that need answering such as:

- Have you got the means to ship products?
- Will you need to invest in the logistics arm of the business?
- What will your international SEO spend be and how does this compare to the possible ROI for international SEO?
- Are you allowed to trade in certain countries?
- What additional costs do you need to cover when trading abroad (translators, sales teams, logistics etc.)?
- What do you need to do in terms of pricing in relation to currency fluctuations?

As we alluded to at the start of this eBook international SEO is instrumental in helping businesses get found online and ensuring visitors remain once they land on your site. If you have the correct content in the correct format, and you can communicate your products and services in the preferred language of the user then you are in the best possible position to make conversions and improve your ROI.

Whatever you do, don't make your international SEO strategy an afterthought; it should be part of your planning process from the moment you decide to expand internationally.

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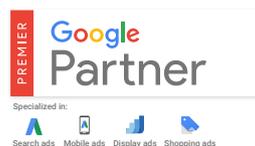


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