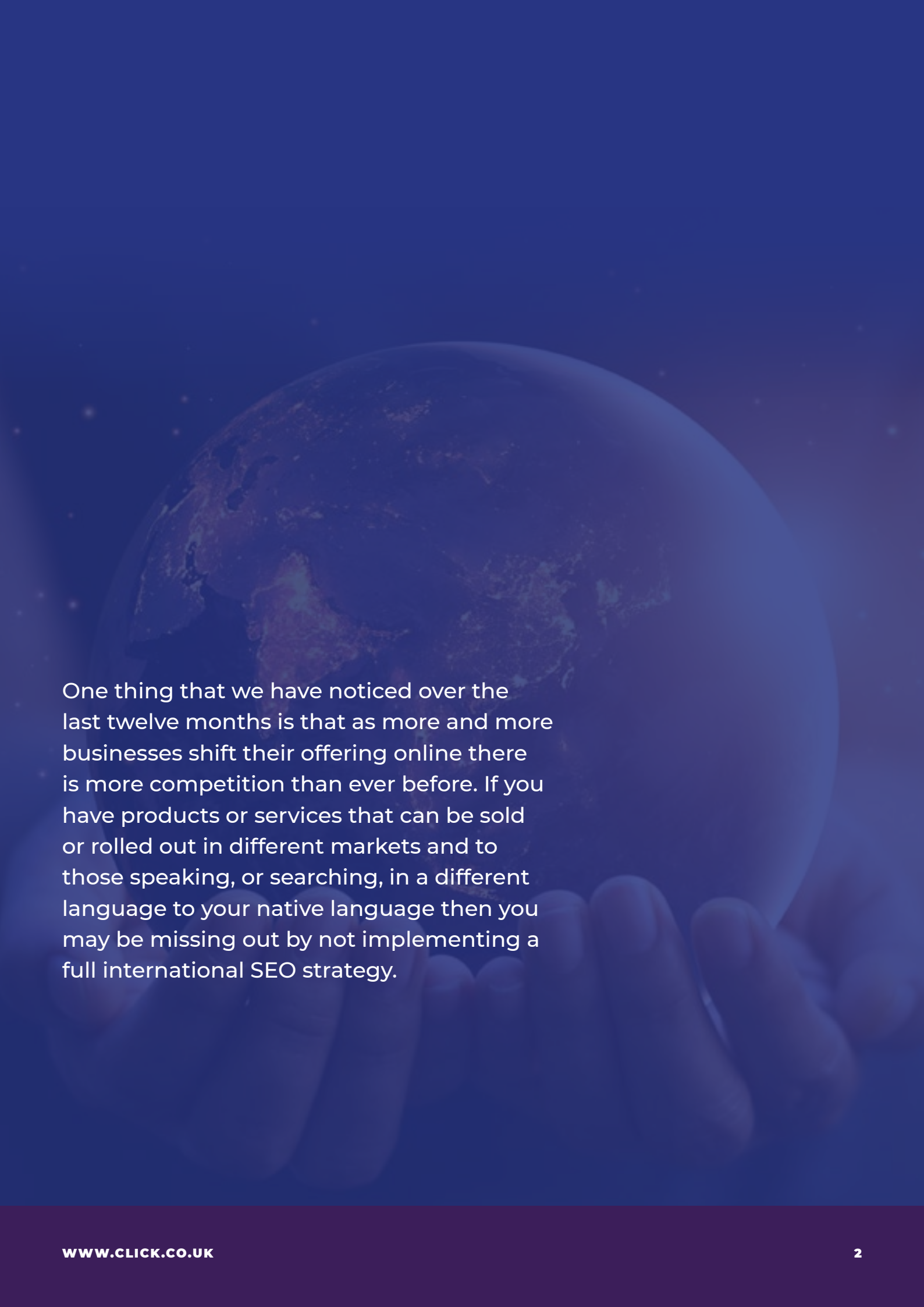


The background of the entire page is a deep blue space scene. It features a dense field of stars of varying sizes and brightness, some with prominent diffraction spikes. In the lower portion of the image, the curved horizon of the Earth is visible, showing the dark blue of the atmosphere and the white, textured clouds of the planet's surface.

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# THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL SEO 2021



One thing that we have noticed over the last twelve months is that as more and more businesses shift their offering online there is more competition than ever before. If you have products or services that can be sold or rolled out in different markets and to those speaking, or searching, in a different language to your native language then you may be missing out by not implementing a full international SEO strategy.

Part of pulling together an organic search (SEO) strategy is that you assess the needs of the businesses, the needs of the audience and the potential to break into new spaces. Neglecting a potential audience based on their location might not be fatal in terms of your numbers but it may be that you do not achieve the growth you expected, and worse still, you could cede ground to your competitors.

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.



# WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL SEO?

International SEO is the process of optimising your website so that search engines can easily identify which countries you want to target and which languages you use for your business.

With more and more emphasis on data, tracking and location services and the rise of mobile search there is an argument that this is the future of search and that getting to the right people when they are in your location can be a real aid to your business growth.

If you know that a good share of your website visitors come from a different country than where you're located, speak different languages, or both, then it may be time to make some changes to your website to create a better user experience (UX).



# DEVELOPING AN INTERNATIONAL SEO 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 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.

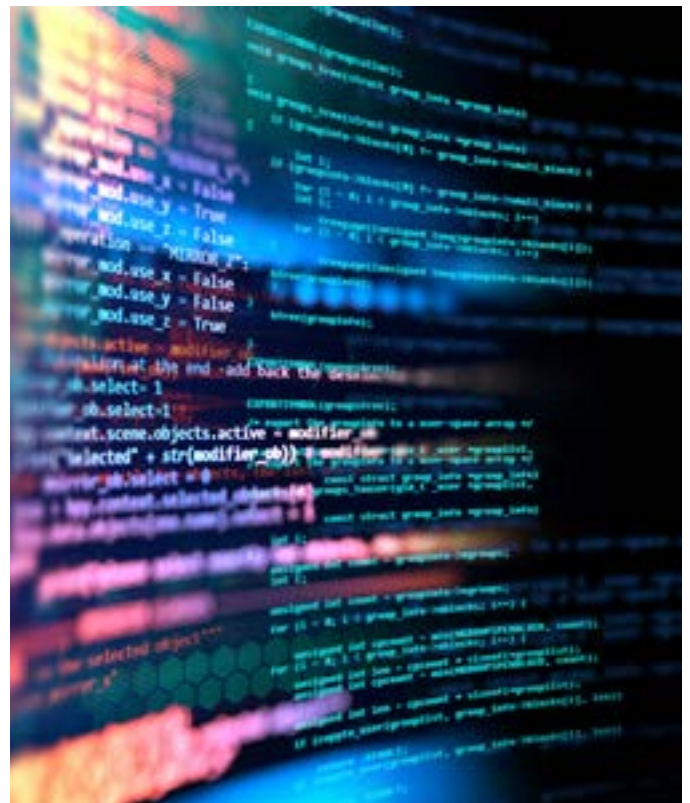
Standing at the helm of the industry it is no surprise that the vast majority of those operating within the industry use Google Analytics as a starting point. Google Analytics is most widely used to analyse website traffic offered by Google. It generates detailed statistics about website traffic, and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

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 have 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.

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.

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.





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.

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 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. 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.

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 by researching 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.

It is important to create well designed and highly-optimised content for your international audience that 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.

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.

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.

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.



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.

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 to 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.

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](http://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 decide to expand and target a new market like the United Kingdom and use [www.mybusiness.co.uk](http://www.mybusiness.co.uk) you will start with zero Domain Authority as Google will differentiate the links to [www.mybusiness.fr](http://www.mybusiness.fr) from [www.mybusiness.co.uk](http://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

# ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL SEO TIPS

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 post 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.

# INTERNATIONAL SEO CHECKLIST

One thing that we often get asked here at Click Consult is which steps we would consider in order to get the most from an SEO strategy. For brands looking to boost their international SEO we feel that these are the most important areas to focus on.

## HREFLANG

When it comes to SEO, your strategy needs to ensure that search engines show users the correct content and in the right language of your website, according to the version they're using.

And it's not just about simply translating your English strategies and content in other languages; you need to capture the nuances of other languages to really engage with your audience. To that end colloquialisms, humour and cultural sensitivities all need to be taken into account.

Importantly, not all (or even many) countries have a single dominant language. In 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. So, for those looking to increase their visibility in different international markets, it often comes down to a choice: country versus language targeting.

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).

## URL STRUCTURES

When you (or your web dev) initially built your site, there would have been a fairly strict hierarchy in place – through your main nav menu, for example, and through category and other pages that have been stocked with well researched copy, are keyword targeted and which point to all appropriate pages. However, over time – no matter how careful we are – this structure will begin to fray at the edges and, if left unchecked, the whole thing can unravel altogether.

## PAGE EXPERIENCE

Page experience is a set of signals that measure how users perceive the experience of interacting with a web page beyond its pure information value. The existing page experience signals are:

- Mobile-Friendliness
- Safe-browsing (ie, safe malware and no security issues)
- HTTPS
- No intrusive interstitials

## OPTIMISING FOR PAGE EXPERIENCE SIGNALS

The existing page experience signals can be measured by:

- Using the Google Mobile Friendliness test
- Using the Security Issues Report in GSC
- Check that the site connection is secure (ie, HTTPS)
- Ensure content is easily accessible and there are no intrusive interstitials affecting how easily content is accessed.

For this reason, it's vital that part of your organic search (SEO) strategy is a periodic assessment of your internal linking. This is not to say all pages need to lead to all other pages – just that as a site expands (and if you're successful, they almost all do), it is important to nurture the consumer journey and allow for Domain Authority (DA) and Page Authority (PA) to flow through the site well.





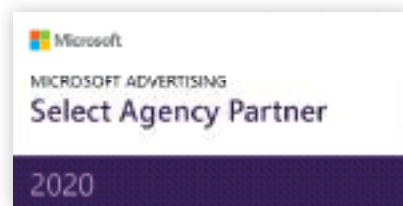
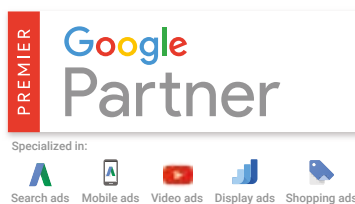
## ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning digital and search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

Our complementary services include content marketing, outreach, social media, conversion rate optimisation (CRO) and international/multilingual search marketing. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named both SEO Agency of the Year and Organic Search (SEO) Team of the Year 2020; ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, and a Microsoft Advertising Select Agency Partner.

## OUR ACCREDITATIONS



## HOW CAN WE HELP?

Find out what an award-winning search agency can do you for your brand.

Call us on **0330 158 8234** or send us an email via **hello@click.co.uk** and we can arrange a video consultation to help you get started with your next digital marketing project.

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