

June 4, 2004

Why should website localization matter to you?

by *Myriam Siftar*

The global economy is more than a catchy phrase. According to IDC's Software research group, "The reality is that over the past decade the percentage of companies in the United States engaged in international trade has increased from 8% to 25%" (Steve McClure, VP, February 2003).

Some of the factors leading to greater globalization: global supply chain, increase of Internet use, e-commerce and trends towards global outsourcing. Organizations seek partners all over the world for the right product at the right price with quality. Telecommunications have made it easier to work with suppliers located in different time zones. But we still experience the language and cultural barriers that arise when selling, purchasing and collaborating with foreign companies. This is where the Globalization, Internationalization, Localization and Translation (also known as GILT) industry comes in. Providers of GILT services help businesses with the globalization challenges. For example, they provide consulting for a global strategy and for international product releases. Such GILT services cover a wide range of activities: from addressing the need for global branding and global back office operations to adapting marketing documentation and website content to a new locale and implementing cultural sensitivity training.

As a subset of the GILT industry, website localization help businesses adapt their on-line communication for an international and multilingual audience. Demographics show that the profile for internet users has evolved considerably in the past 5 years. English is no longer the language of choice to reach a large number of potential web users. At the end of 2002, only 32% of internet users were native English speakers according to the Aberdeen Group. This has serious implications for organizations that do business on the web. The Aberdeen Group found that if a website is presented to users in their native language, they spend twice as long at the site on average and are four times more likely to buy something from it. Therefore, there are obvious commercial benefits for a company to have its web content available in many languages. Let's review some of these benefits.

1. Increase reach without increasing printing or distribution costs

Any corporate message can be delivered to a multilingual audience without the need to manage an inventory of printed material for global distribution. Rapidly changing content can be published and revised in many languages in less time and cost while maintaining consistency in branding, content and quality.

2. Increase revenues

Non-English speakers outnumber English speakers and they can be reached more effectively in their native language. More prospects will lead to more sales. In addition, non-English speaking markets are set to boom. Consider the ethnic markets in the US : the purchasing power of the Latino and Asian communities is increasing. The expansion of the European market as well as China's and India's evolving business environment create numerous selling opportunities outside the US for which a multilingual internet presence is key.

3. Create a virtual branch office for less than a brick-and-mortar option

The price of a fully functioning multilingual website is much lower than the cost of setting up a physical office at a new location. If you plan your website with globalization and localization in mind, it will be more cost effective and easier to maintain with every new language.

4. Lower support and customer service costs

Companies who have translated product instructions and information into their users' native language have experienced a sharp drop in their customer support costs. Multilingual customer support is expensive, but companies have found that it more than pays off in customer loyalty and satisfaction. By covering users' standard queries and concerns in their native tongue, companies have reported savings of up to 60% on multilingual phone support. That's a saving no company can afford to ignore.

With such commercial benefits in mind, it becomes worthwhile for a business to consider the services of a localization provider. In most cases, the initial step includes an assessment of a company's localization readiness. This assessment will provide the elements needed to estimate the return on investment. Will the costs of website localization outweigh the benefits? They probably will, especially if more than one language is rolled out.

Moreover one should consider the intangible benefits. With a multilingual website, a business seriously announces to the world its intent on being global. Brands, products and services are ready for global markets. Prospects, partners and investors will see that the company is truly "walking the globalization talk".

Now that you found out how website localization can help you achieve business goals and competitive advantage. Next steps involve the inclusion of localization as part of your global marketing strategy and product development roll out. When ready to localize your website, additional tips will become handy. Please contact [Lauren Calkins](#), editor of Thinking Aloud, if you are interested in finding out more.

Published by [WorldWIT](#)

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