



by Richard Houdmont, CIM's Director for Ireland

Nelson Mandela said "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart" and as marketers we want to win the hearts of our customers.

Research from Common Sense Advisory shows 72 per cent of customers abroad would rather buy products that provide information in their own language. Fifty six per cent say language is more important than price, so that means translating could improve your sales and margins.

So how do you decide whether to invest time and money in localizing your web site?

The decision to launch local sites is influenced by factors such as the 'cultural distance' between home and target country, geographical distance between home and target country, website traffic volumes originating from target country, demand conditions in target country, and competition intensity in the target country.

According to research firm IDC, web users are four times more likely to purchase from a company that communicates in their language. Additionally, visitors to websites stay twice as long on sites that are in their native tongue, according to Forrester Research.

"A new study from OC&C Strategy Consultants suggests UK retailers could potentially achieve overseas online revenues of £28bn by 2020" remarks Anna Bastek of Wolfestone Translation.

"Growth in overseas sales is set to increase three times faster than domestic sales. Considering that current overseas ecommerce revenues are at around £4bn, that's a lot of potential. Big companies have already got a presence abroad, for example Debenhams recently launched a German website."

Simple word-for-word translation often doesn't work. It's difficult enough with the English language, when 'trousers' become 'pants' in America.

You also have to be aware of local cultural and religious sensibilities. Search Engine Optimization must be undertaken with care. A literal translation of a popular search term in English may not be the word used by

consumers in the target market. Equally, when using AdWords to gain business, take care to check local context.

Fortunately there are keyword tools and trending tools to help exporters select appropriate terms and phrases, but employing in-country advice or a professionally qualified linguist could save you a lot of money, and embarrassment.

Pay per click advertising can be very effective, but if you are targeting an export market, then Google might not be your first choice (especially in China), so consider instead using a local search engine.

Only 30 per cent of web users have English as their first language, and as internet usage increases, this percentage is likely to decrease. Some 60 per cent of European citizens are at least bilingual and English is spoken by an estimated 38 per cent of EU citizens as their first foreign language, making it the most widely-used language of the European Union. That might explain why businesses in the British Isles have thought that they can export successfully without localizing their web sites in European markets.

A study undertaken for the European Commission showed that firms can lose business opportunities through a lack of language skills.

According to the study, up to 11 per cent of European SMEs have lost contracts with potential clients in other EU countries because of language barriers.

The study also stresses the growing importance of multilingualism for winning business in world markets. Luckily for us English is the key language, but the study stresses the growing importance of Chinese, Arabic and Russian.

Anna Bastek adds "The number of overseas customers searching for UK brand names has increased by approximately 46 per cent per year recently, so increasing your chances of being found is important. You can increase your chances by getting an in-country website domain - for example in France a .fr domain.

This increases your chances of being picked up by the search engine of choice in that



country, and gives the customer the reassurance that you have a genuine commitment to delivering services to that country.

There are even plug-ins for some content management systems where you can manage multiple domains in different languages. For example, in WordPress content management system, there's a plug-in called Multilingual Press which helps you to easily manage multiple domains."

Exporters need to consider not only translation costs (including time), but also judgments about tone, humour and indeed what the most appropriate language might be. With the move to global branding and standardisation of advertising messages, humour does not travel well. While the level and type of humour can be difficult to gauge even in the context of a domestic target audience, cultural differences seriously impede the transfer of jokes around the world.

Visual humour is said to be more universally acceptable than word-based humour. This is partly because word-based humour can get lost in translation, without local references to provide the clues in order to decipher the joke. Humour, therefore, is a potentially powerful yet dangerous form of appeal.

Once you've started getting orders from abroad, the hard work begins. Customers in some countries might be happy to deal in English, but taking the extra step of translating your communications may be a necessity to maintain your competitive advantage.



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