



SEARCHLABORATORY
Global Search Marketing Experts

A large graphic of a white silhouette of a globe is formed by a pattern of binary code (0s and 1s) scattered across the page. The text is centered over this graphic.

WEB MAGNETISM:
Attracting Global Trade
Online
The Power of Multilingual
Internet Marketing

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of the UK's recent economic uncertainty and the perpetual need for businesses to source new revenues, this paper examines the role that internet marketing can play in supporting large companies as they look to boost revenues by expanding overseas.

The paper provides strategic and tactical insights for domestic B2B and e-commerce/online retail organisations, highlighting key takeaways for executives seeking to attract online sales and business requests from the global market. It strongly advocates the use of mother-tongue linguists in the formulation of a multilingual internet marketing strategy, and explores the relationships between foreign language use, online customer experience, commercial website development, and search engine indexing.

The paper asserts that with the right partners, it has never been easier for a large domestic company to start doing business abroad, and suggests that now is the time for firms to embrace the internet as the primary vehicle for driving growth in the world market.

The paper is aimed at senior decision makers in large UK based businesses with interests in attracting overseas customers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Ian Harris has worked in website internationalisation and multilingual search engine optimisation for the last ten years. His background prior to this was in developing applications for e-commerce. He has helped a wide range of enterprise companies take their web presence abroad, including British Airways, IBM, Novell and HSBC.

ABOUT SEARCH LABORATORY

Search Laboratory is a global leader in search engine marketing, specialising in English and multilingual search engine optimisation (SEO), pay per click (PPC) campaign and bid management, real-time bidding, social media, analytics and conversion optimisation. It has a customer-centric ethos to campaign planning and delivers tangible, revenue-driven results, based on scientific rigour and a deep understanding of language structure, colloquialisms, and customer buying habits.

Founded in 2005, Search Laboratory is today widely recognised in its field for its technical ability. BidLab™, the company's proprietary PPC bid management software is used to drive greater PPC returns for a range of multinational clients around the world.

For more information on any of the themes explored within this paper, or for a free audit of your current search engine marketing capabilities, readers should contact our business development team at: info@searchlaboratory.com.

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INTRODUCTION

While every brand's internet marketing strategy is different, there are a number of specialist techniques that successful companies blend in order to support their online business in foreign markets. This paper will provide key insights into a number of these, including:

- Foreign language keyword selection and their impact on PPC and SEO
- Translation workflow
- Local versus central domain registration

Particular emphasis has been placed on the importance of communicating with foreign audiences in correct, localised languages when establishing and enhancing online visibility in new markets; getting this right can be the difference between making or breaking a business' expansion overseas. Attention is also focused on the processes and workflow involved in the planning and execution of the techniques outlined. Where possible, recommendations are provided to help businesses overcome some of the challenges and pitfalls faced on the road to fulfilling commercial online potential overseas.

Setting the Scene: Independent market research

This paper has been informed by a UK-wide independent research study conducted by The Leadership Factor which investigated prevailing attitudes amongst 350 senior decision makers within "large enterprises", defined as companies with 200 employees or more, spread across the UK.

The study assessed attitudes towards the power of the internet as a channel for attracting international trade and activities relating to overseas trade, particularly since the recession started in 2008. In order to inform as complete a picture of attitudes as possible, the study spanned a wide variety of vertical market sectors, including retail, technology, travel & tourism, manufacturing, finance and professional services.

Classifications

Over the course of the report, we will discuss a variety of internet marketing techniques in the context of two types of business: 'B2B' and 'e-commerce / online retail'.

B2B

Defined as businesses seeking to generate sales requests only, which will subsequently be taken offline and handled personally by a sales team. Search Laboratory acknowledges that there are a significant number of exceptions to classifying B2B companies in this manner, most notably where businesses may engage and transact with other businesses all over the internet. For the purposes of this paper, such exceptions should be considered part of the 'e-commerce / online retail' sector (see below) and should instead note the key insights and considerations offered to this classification.

E-commerce / online retail

Defined as businesses looking to sell products and services directly to customers via the transactional capabilities of their websites. The majority of these businesses are consumer facing, and include the online arms of brick-and-mortar retailers, or directory-based businesses that have transferred their sales from printed catalogues to internet stores.

THESE TIMES ARE A-CHANGIN': STRENGTHENING REVENUES WITH GLOBAL TRADE

It would be hard to overstate how tough the last few years have been for UK enterprises. Amid an uncertain economic climate, companies previously reliant on domestic trade alone have been forced to look abroad for new sources of revenue. To the uninitiated, going global can pose significant challenges. Firstly, it can be costly. In a world where corporate credit is scarce and the ability to control spending is vital to business stability, it takes a steely board of directors to accept the risks, commit the funds and make the leap. Secondly, effective expansion requires specialised knowledge, skills, and experience - none of which are likely to be present in a business that has 'grown up' operating domestically alone.

But fortune favours the brave, and there are many reasons why larger firms should strengthen their resolve to push out to new markets. Advances in e-commerce systems have vastly simplified the processing of multi-currency transactions, making it easier for companies to both buy and sell in foreign markets. The mass migration to the web of retail and business to business (B2B) trading also means that each year there is more business to be won online than in the preceding twelve months (subject to market fluctuations). While it may not be apparent to a board of directors faced with the choice to 'go global or go bust', the truth is that it has never been easier for a business to start trading abroad.

A Rising Tide: Overseas business is on the upswing

To investigate how the UK's bigger businesses have responded to global trade opportunities since the recession hit in 2008, Search Laboratory commissioned an independent research study in Q2 2012.

93% | Have been forced to rely heavily on the global markets to maintain or grow their revenues since the recession began

The study revealed that 42% of respondents have witnessed a marked increase in foreign trade as a proportion of their overall business since the recession began. With 51% reporting that their volumes of global sales had remained consistent over the same period, it is clear that almost all large companies with international interests surveyed, some 93%, have been forced to rely heavily on global markets to maintain or grow their revenues since the markets crashed and the recession began. Turn that figure around and it is equally compelling: just 7% reported that their overseas sales had declined over the same period.

If more evidence was needed, the study also confirmed that international trade is now well established on the agendas of the UK's largest firms. More than 38% of respondents reported a heightened awareness of overseas sales as a key source of new revenue since the recession began.

38% | Reported a heightened awareness of overseas sales as a key source of new revenue

Foreign trade has played a significant role in sustaining large UK enterprises throughout recession, and it will no doubt continue to do so in the months and years of austerity that lie ahead.

So, international trade is both a huge opportunity and a considerable risk to UK businesses. The next important question to ask is: are those businesses, and their counterparts on this side of the Atlantic, sufficiently equipped with the knowledge and skills required to establish themselves in foreign markets?

Changing Minds: Embracing the web

While historically, Britain may have led the world in global trade, thanks to early explorers discovering new markets, the reality is totally different in today's hyper-connected world. Businesses must focus on being discovered by customers, who are able to browse a global online marketplace, unconstrained by location, currency or, in many cases, language.

Global e-commerce trade sales are set to exceed this figure in 2013 | \$1 Trillion

This need to focus on being discovered will intensify as time passes and more domestic businesses around the world adapt to exploit cross border trade over the internet. As each month goes by, customers searching the web for products and services are presented with ever more suppliers from which to choose, making it increasingly difficult for a UK business to capture a share of the market. In essence, the sooner a company can establish a brand online in the markets it wishes to trade in, the greater its chance of success.

With this in mind, Search Laboratory's research study has revealed an alarming trend. Just 36% of UK senior executives with international interests ranked 'the internet' in their top three most effective channels for generating mass visibility with foreign customers. The clear majority (64%) still considered more traditional marketing channels, like events sponsorship, email marketing and print advertising, as more potent methods of "being discovered" by overseas customers.

64% | Of businesses are missing the potential opportunities the internet can bring them in terms of "being discovered" by overseas buyers

With global e-commerce sales likely to exceed \$1 trillion next year, surely it is time for board and marketing directors to reassess this mindset. With the stakes so high for UK businesses, it is now imperative that companies seeking overseas revenues wake up to the need for a 21st century approach to international marketing. The internet is a primary force for generating international business, so the development of a strong online presence must be at the very top of the list of marketing priorities.

WEB MAGNETISM: ATTRACTING GLOBAL TRADE ONLINE

Large businesses that successfully harness international sales via the internet invariably display two powerful attributes. Firstly, they are easy for customers, across all markets, to find online. Secondly they provide an impeccable online customer experience, regardless of the customer's geographic location. New market entrants need to master these requirements to stand a chance of attracting and converting significant foreign business.

This was clearly recognised by Search Laboratory’s target group of large businesses in the UK. Respondents cited the following as the top three challenges associated with selling into overseas markets:

- Establishing trust with foreign customers
- Gaining visibility in the marketplace
- Competing with established local businesses

For most domestic businesses, meeting these challenges involves remodeling their online presence to suit the shopping habits and language preferences of foreign customers, coupled with the adoption of a search engine marketing strategy designed to gain local visibility amongst customers searching online for the products in question.



The effective use of foreign language in a brand’s local market communications online is absolutely critical here - a fact well reflected in Search Laboratory’s recent research, with 73% of respondents describing the use of native language as “very important” to the buying process with overseas customers. In the overwhelming majority of cases, connecting with customers in anything other than their own language will drive them away from the brand, rendering all subsequent marketing efforts worthless.

As a first step, therefore, domestic companies should explore how the “language of their business” is employed online by foreign market customers and use this data to inform an engagement strategy.

The importance of Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) and mother-tongue linguists

It is news to no one that the most popular means of finding information online is through the use of an internet search engine. What is less clear, however, is how search engines like Google (globally), Yandex (Russia) or Baidu (China) go about indexing the web, or what processes they follow to identify relevant websites to users in response to their search queries.



An organisation’s prominence on the search engine results pages (SERPs) retrieved by potential customers is crucial to its chances of ‘being discovered’ in new geographic markets and is the first step toward attracting new customers. There are a variety of techniques that search engine marketers employ in their attempts to achieve priority rankings on relevant SERPs (see ‘So, advertise or optimise? Key takeaways for budding trade magnets’ below), but invariably the starting point lies with the identification of the search terms that target customers enter into the likes of Google in order to retrieve information relating to a business, product or service.

For UK businesses looking to attract custom from overseas, this means not only coming to grips with the search terms used by English-speaking customers (which themselves vary hugely between different

English speaking countries); foreign language search terms used by overseas target customers must also be identified and harnessed.

In order to ensure accurate identification of foreign language search terms, search engine marketers must consider how native speakers employ local phrases, alongside the variety of alternative terms that could be used to make the same search request.

73% | Describe the use of native language as 'very important' to the buying process with overseas customers.

Authenticity is crucial here. Native speakers are naturally equipped with a unique range of vocabulary and knowledge of how their local language is spoken. It is therefore critical to engage mother-tongue linguists to creatively and effectively explore the full variety of potential search terms that could yield results in a search marketing campaign. Today's automated translation tools are simply not up to this challenge. Indeed non-native speaking human translators also fail to capture important local phrases, due to how they have been trained to translate from one language to another. Consider a race-to-the-finish crossword competition, in which a fluent but non-native speaking translator was pitted against a mother-tongued linguist. The chances are high that the native speaker would finish first thanks to their innate familiarity with the language.

Example: A car hire company expands to French

A UK car hire company is expanding into France and is starting to explore French search terms in order to inform its search marketing strategy. Back in the UK, the company has already identified the following terms that its customers use in search engines in order to find companies offering this service:

- "Car hire"
- "Vehicle rental"
- "Automobile lease"
- "Charter motor"

Going a step further, the company has also identified that there are sixteen possible combinations of these search terms which could all be entered into a search engine in order to retrieve similar SERPs: 'vehicle hire', 'automobile rental', 'car lease' etc.

In this case, it is likely that both human and automated translators would reduce these sixteen possible combinations down to one or two phrases - "location de voiture", for example. Both are trained to find the 'best match' between words and phrases through which they can transport meaning from one language to another.

This is a reductive approach to translation and is actually the opposite of what our car hire company requires. To inform a French search marketing campaign that will ensure its website appears on the SERPs of as many French-language consumers as possible, the company needs to identify the highest possible number of alternative search terms, not only those that provide the "best match".

The reductive approach taken by automated and human translators will drastically restrict the number of French search terms that the car hire company identifies, limiting the number of SERPs it could target. This means that its visibility on French-language search engines is equally restricted, regardless of how effective subsequent techniques may be at establishing a high ranking for the company.

Only mother-tongue linguists have the skills to creatively explore alternative phrases during the initial keyword identification process. With this in mind, American companies exploring foreign language search terms should always insist on the use of native speakers during this early phase of their search marketing activities.

Cultural sensitivity: A native linguist's added value

There is another reason why companies should insist on the use of mother-tongue linguists in their multilingual search marketing. Social norms vary greatly from one country to another, so the insight that a "local" can provide about business and consumer culture in their country of origin can be of great value to a UK company targeting that market.

Example: "Additional information" vs. "did you know?"

Search Laboratory's native French linguists have rejected content used in a perfectly translated French version of an English website, on the grounds of it being culturally inappropriate for French businessmen. In this particular case, an English page offering customers a number of market insights entitled "Did you know...?" was deemed by French linguists to be patronising to French businessmen who, rather than have it suggested that they may not be in possession of all the facts, vastly prefer to be guided toward a neutral page of "additional information". The true value of what initially looked like an overly-fastidious observation was revealed when the requested amend was made to the page and the subsequent click-through rates of French visitors surged as a result.

While such nuances may seem trivial when taken in isolation, it is often these hidden traps that can discourage a potential customer, causing them to navigate away from a webpage where they may otherwise have continued on to make a purchase or initiate a sales inquiry.

A local language speaker is also well placed to advise on the appropriate use of colloquial phrases in website copy.

Picture perfect

Native language speakers may also make a valuable contribution when advising on cultural sensitivities relating to website design and image choice. Pictures that are clearly US-centric (left) may not work in more reserved European markets, for example. Naturally, due consideration must also be given to the appropriate use of gender and ethnicity in website imagery.



CAMPAIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The previous section “*Web Magnetism: Attracting global trade online*”, explored the importance of ensuring a search marketing campaign encompasses the full range of key search terms in the local languages of target overseas markets. This section provides guidance on how those keywords should be applied in the context of a supporting campaign.

Defining the disciplines

When companies are considering how best to approach “getting discovered” on SERPs in foreign markets, typically their campaigns comprise a blend of techniques that fall into two distinct categories: ‘pay-per-click advertising’ (PPC) and search engine optimisation’ (SEO).

PPC PPC is an internet advertising model employed by search engines that attributes highly visible positions in SERPs to organisations that provide the most relevant content to the search and are prepared to outbid competing firms for the space.

Among PPC providers, Google AdWords and Microsoft adCenter are the two largest network operators, and both operate under a bid-based model.

SEO SEO refers to the wide range of techniques that search marketers employ in order to boost a website’s ‘natural’ position on SERPs of relevance to their target market.

Untangling the Web: Spiders, algorithms and their importance to SEO

The task of ‘optimising’ a website to help it achieve high SERP rankings against specific keywords requires a deep understanding of how search engines explore and index the web. The programmes that search engines have developed for this task are known as ‘spiders’, which crawl endlessly across the internet to seek out new pages and apply algorithmic filters to them in order to determine their potential value to users. When a new site or page is identified, the spider will record its location on the web and assign a set of values to it which enables the search engine to appropriately retrieve the page and present it to a user searching for content of the same kind.

Since billions of pages now exist online, the spider’s job of determining what content is ‘best’ for users is an extremely difficult task. Aside from keeping track of the sheer volume of information available on the web, the spiders must also keep pace with all manner of variables, including the technical evolution of the web, its impact on loading speeds and site functionality, the popularity of specific sites, the balance between commercial and independent content, the ease with which a user can navigate through a site, the relevance of the content displayed, regulatory restrictions in different countries, and, of course, the immense variations in culture, geography and language inherent in the internet’s global user base.

All this means that Google, for example, changes its search algorithms frequently. Indeed, in its bid to enhance the overall internet experience of its users, Google’s ‘indexing policy’ determines how its search algorithms assess and rank content. Understanding Google’s indexing policy, therefore, is the first step toward building a sustained strategy for optimising a business website overseas.

The customer experience comes first

This can be understood in fairly simple terms: put the customer experience at the heart of everything that is done online. In practice this is far from straightforward, but as a guiding principle, it is sound. Google’s indexing policy revolves around the notion that it should strive to make the internet a better place for everyone – an environment that is fast and easy to navigate; a place where it is easy for a user to retrieve relevant content that is tuned to their own social and cultural situation. For UK companies doing

business abroad, this means developing an understanding of native spoken language, geography, and culture and building this understanding into every step of its online engagement with foreign customers, from the moment they initiate a search, through the entire sales cycle to the point they chose to disengage with the brand. In practice, this means generating high-quality, relevant content that the customer cannot find anywhere else on the web.

Snooping around: Competitive analysis

As always, a close look at the competition will pay dividends. Attention should be paid specifically to those competitors that command high listings in the key search terms that share the retailer's campaign focus. This process will usually provide clues as to how a company can capitalize on the shortcomings of its competitors and also indicate what strategies are proving effective for those that are thriving. A careful inspection of the competition will also reveal those that seek to subvert the system in order to achieve higher rankings. Emulating these techniques should be avoided – they consistently fail to deliver a quality customer experience and rarely result in high rankings for any sustained period of time.

So, advertise or optimise? Key takeaways for budding trade magnets

While an exhaustive exploration of SEO and PPC is beyond the scope of this paper, there are several aspects of each that have direct relevance to large UK companies looking to attract custom from overseas markets. The following sections will explore PPC initially, followed by SEO. When best practice varies between 'B2B' and 'e-commerce / online retail' (see 'Classifications', above), each classification gets its own section.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR PPC

No.1 - Translation: The enemy of PPC

For reasons already explored (see 'The importance of Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) and mother-tongue linguists' above), it is almost always a mistake for a company to hand over its English PPC keywords and ads to a translation company, or to put them through an automated translation tool. The creation of a search marketing campaign in other languages isn't a translation job, and attempts to shortcut the process are likely to drastically reduce the organisation's scope for success.

No.2 - It's rude to point: Why translating PPC ads alone just doesn't work

Given that PPC advertising has been around for more than a decade, it is safe to assume that most large UK companies have at least explored the model as part of their efforts to attract domestic traffic to their sites. Indeed, many will have fully fledged PPC campaigns already up and running.

With this in mind, it is not unreasonable to suppose that a valid first step into foreign language PPC would be to translate English PPC ads into the languages of new target markets and use these as a means of driving overseas traffic 'back home to the UK site. Perhaps the company in question is already receiving a growing number of online orders or enquiries from overseas without doing anything at all. In this instance, why not encourage more foreign users to visit the English site through local language PPC? Perhaps they have even considered 'softening the blow' for these foreign visitors by landing them at a page that apologises for the fact that the site they are about to enter does not support their language.

Sadly, this is very unlikely to result in actual business. The problem here is that the foreign attention the company has received so far is very unlikely to have come via a search engine. The referral is far more likely to be via a personal recommendation, a forum, or from another unrelated source. In these instances, the user already knows that the site is in English and has decided to press on regardless.

This is not the case with website traffic attracted via PPC advertising. Here, UK companies are competing on foreign soil for cold inbound leads. Regardless of how attractive a company's solutions are customers investigating new sites remain very language-sensitive, so the vastly reduced conversion rate caused by the language barrier almost always renders them uncompetitive. To make matters worse, customers will only drop out of the cycle after they have triggered a charge by clicking through the sponsored link, resulting in considerable wasted investment and some very uncomfortable conversations at the next board meeting.

No.3 - B2B companies: Fully localise the language page

Companies intent on generating enquiries from overseas customers can capitalise on foreign markets using a fully localised landing page and PPC advertising.

If large B2B companies use a reputable PPC multilingual agency that employs native linguists to create (not translate) the campaigns, then this approach can be very effective and surprisingly straight forward. Typically a company can be up and running in a number of languages in a matter of weeks. Data gathered on the online behaviour of foreign traffic to a B2B company's site during this phase can also be used to evaluate whether or not a full site translation is required. This is a significantly larger project, so collecting evidence to support or oppose the move is invaluable.

No.4 - Testing the water: A little PPC goes a long way

Utilising a contained 'paid for' PPC campaign can help inform the selection of search terms that are used in the 'natural' SEO search strategy for that market. PPC campaigns can be used as exploratory tactics to

test the effectiveness of potential keywords, the most potent of which can subsequently be built into the corresponding SEO campaign.

It is important to stress here that only a fraction of internet users searching on any given topic will be doing so with an 'intent to buy', or to initiate an enquiry. Those that are searching in 'buying mode' have often completed their research and narrowed their key search terms to enable the identification of their desired product or service.

With this in mind, the majority of search terms used to retrieve information on a subject are unlikely to convert into an enquiry or a sale. Executing a contained PPC campaign can provide valuable and cost effective insights here, highlighting the variances in search habits between geographies and their market sectors.

Measuring PPC Success – Focus on ROI



VisitBritain is the UK's national tourism agency, responsible for marketing Britain worldwide and developing Britain's visitor economy. VisitBritain Shop is part of its family of websites with the aim of supporting British tourism as well as driving ticket sales for a range of British tourism products in a range of foreign language markets around the world.

Rumina Hassam is the Online Marketing and Analytics Manager at VisitBritain Shop:

“We work with Search Laboratory to manage our multilingual PPC campaign across five languages, including French, German, Dutch, English and Italian. Focusing on ROI from our PPC is a key measurement factor, so Search Laboratory's commitment to continually focus on reducing our cost per click while maximizing revenue is a vital factor for the success of the campaign. As the National Tourist Board, protecting our brand is also essential. Search Laboratory's commitment to providing high quality ethical practices in search marketing is very well aligned to our overall approach to marketing the organisation.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR SEO

No.1 – Convenient and relevant content

A well-optimised website should provide the user with a good quality experience. Increasingly, Google's search algorithms consider a site's usability when determining its SERP ranking. Today's fully optimised sites present content in a convenient and user-friendly manner. Remember, Google's indexing policy is intent on making the internet a better place for users. This means a user searching for 'ladies shoes' for example, should be presented with results that guide them not only to websites specifically featuring ladies shoes, but to those that present their content in a logical, structured and familiar manner. The use of correct, fully localised language is key in this regard (see 'The importance of Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) and mother-tongue linguists', above).

Navigation through a website should also be simple and intuitive, with the desired content presented to the user through the lowest number of clicks possible. A site structured in this way is likely to receive a more favourable listing in Google's SERPs, ensuring the site retains a stronger position for a longer period.

No.2 – Be diligent about market to market variations

There are a variety of other regional differences which must not be overlooked. Address formats, for example, differ from market to market, and need to be accommodated on pages where users leave their mailing details. Some nations, such as Ireland, do not use a postcode at all. Custom forms, therefore, need to be developed to ensure that the user can easily input their details and proceed with making a purchase. Failure to attend to even a simple structural task like this can make the difference between a customer completing a sale or pulling out, having lost confidence in the system.

No.3 – Enlist technical as well as linguistic help with website translation

Preparing a domestic website for translation into multiple foreign languages requires considerable technical prowess as well as linguistic skill. For sites that will need to provide regular and consistent updates across all language versions, preparing the English content management system is crucial. For a developer, the process is fairly simple when they know how to avoid the pitfalls, but when they do not, the penalty can be immense: translation becomes difficult or impossible and the site may fail entirely to list on foreign search engines. It may also mean that future updates become prohibitively expensive and complex because the legacy structure has made it impossible to apply cost-saving tools and techniques.

81% | Of respondents deemed it important to have a locally registered internet domain in each of their overseas markets.

If separate partners are being used for translation and web development, it is vital to ensure there is collaborative dialogue between them. There are several factors at play here. First, there are 'hidden' elements within the site's infrastructure that are important to optimise from an SEO perspective, which will require accurate translation if they are also to benefit the foreign language versions of the site. An example of this is the use of URLs. 'SEO-friendly' URLs include strategic keywords in the directory structure or filename. These keywords are then identified by search engine spiders and contribute to a site's overall page ranking.

A SEO-friendly URL: www.yoursite.com/digital-cameras/kodak-x1.aspx

A non-SEO-friendly URL: www.yoursite.com/products.aspx?cat=1&subcat=9&prod=3

When placed in the hands of a translation agency, the URLs are often forgotten in the localisation process. This leads to two problems. Firstly, the foreign customer will see immediately that this is an English site. This can be acutely detrimental to the customer's overall appraisal of the organisation, effectively driving them away. Secondly, the keyword friendly URLs that remain in English will not support foreign language SEO, where the search engine spiders are tuned to identify and favour keywords in their local language.

If SEO-friendly URLs are going to be used, brands must ensure they translate clearly between languages. If this is not possible, brands should stick with non-friendly URLs. The detrimental effect on a foreign customer's disposition toward a site when they are exposed to URLs that are clearly tuned for English customers will usually be greater than the benefit the URLs will bring to the site's overall search ranking. In other words, it doesn't take much to turn a foreign customer away.

No.4 - Don't assume you need a locally registered domain

81% of respondents in Search Laboratory's research study deemed it either "important" or "very important" to have a locally registered internet domain in each of their overseas markets. This is not necessarily the case. In fact, it can be easy for a domestic company to tie itself up in knots trying to adhere to this premise.

For e-commerce/online retail companies:



How a retailer's domestic site is registered will have a bearing on the approach it should take when expanding overseas. When looking to target a new geographical area such as Germany, a UK retailer with a ".co.uk" address, for example, should consider registering a Germany specific ".de" top level domain (TLD). This will instill both assurance and familiarity in German customers which is not imparted by a '.co.uk' domain.

A few words of warning however... This approach does not always turn out to be practical in the medium to long term. While a locally registered domain is useful for gaining the trust of foreign customers, there are additional variables which need to be managed.

For many large e-commerce companies, overlooking these variables could lead to massive wasted investment, unnecessary systems complexity, and needlessly high maintenance costs.

For example, some countries, like Australia, require a company to have a local country registered office before a country specific TLD will be granted. How simple it is to quickly establish a foreign premises varies widely from market to market and should be investigated thoroughly before a final domain strategy is approved, especially if the retailer is intending to limit overseas business to 'distance selling'.

Caution should be exercised here even if the retailer is intending to establish a locally registered office and operate via a locally hosted site. The problem here is one of complexity. Most large e-commerce retailers offer a wide range of products through a catalogue-style web store, which is updated automatically in real time according to the movement of stock through the business. In order to maximise stock control and provide customers with a complete picture of all available products regardless of geography, these sites must be integrated. The task of linking and automating the publishing functions across sites that are hosted in different countries requires significantly more resources than 'localising' a centrally hosted site (see below). This is a bigger challenge than stock control alone. Should the need for an addition piece of 'business logic' be identified (where the site's functionality is expanded to provide more customer options), the volume and complexity of cross-site integration work can grind operations to a halt and cause web development costs to spiral out of control.

So, what's the alternative? If the retailer holds the more universally accepted ".com" domain extension, then creating specific subdirectories for each new market, such as ".com/de" for Germany, or ".com/fr" for France, will greatly simplify the initial integration and ongoing management of the site. Here, automated updates and modifications to business logic can be applied simultaneously to all markets via a centralised dashboard. While it is true that this approach will sacrifice some of the SEO benefits offered by a locally hosted domain, this can be at least partially offset if care is taken during the creation of the localised subdirectories.

Specific coding techniques can be employed to engage with search engine spiders to inform them of the geo-specific nature of each subdirectory. These techniques ensure the spiders review the subdirectories accurately and assign them an appropriate search value. Finally, since the localised subdirectories remain part of a much bigger, centralised site, they will also benefit from the wider site's overall SEO value – something that is not attainable with individual, locally hosted domains.

So, diligence in planning and exploring options for site registration and hosting is vital. Throughout, maintenance and development resources need to be weighed against the customer benefit of providing a fully local web store.

For B2B companies:

For B2B companies looking to attract enquiries from foreign prospects, a locally registered domain is usually the best approach subject to the market by market restrictions outlined above. Here, a well-planned mixture of PPC and SEO will generally provide the awareness and local market credibility needed to stimulate demand.

Cause and effect: Consider the implications

Sometimes it's worth stating the obvious: companies that decide to translate their site or landing page and deploy supporting search campaigns open themselves up to customer service calls and emails in other languages. Care should be taken to ensure appropriate resources are in place for dealing with these when they start to flow in.

Selecting the right partners

This can be a difficult first step. The intricacies and range of techniques that can be used to help a brand establish an international presence online inevitably means that domestic companies with little experience in the field may struggle to identify the right specialist partners to work with. Companies embarking on multilingual internet marketing for the first time should ensure they thoroughly investigate their prospective partner's credentials, experience, and references, not just in internet marketing per se, but in the specific task of expanding their presence in foreign markets. Only when they are reassured that the appropriate level of technical, linguistic, and strategic skills are available in-house within the agency should they add their signature to a contract.

CASE STUDIES: THREE MASTERS OF WEB MAGNETISM

1 | CASE STUDY: NORGREN EXPRESS



Jez Ashton is the Web Experience Manager at Norgren, an international market leader in pneumatic motion and fluid control technologies, which delivers Engineering Advantage to its customers through a commitment to innovation and technical expertise, high-performance products, and exceptional local service.

“PPC is our primary source of customer acquisition”

Jez Ashton, Web Experience Manager, Norgren

He is responsible for the company’s aftermarket webstore, supplying replacement components to maintenance, repair and operations managers across the globe.

From Norgren’s UK base in Lichfield, Staffordshire, Jez liaises with Norgren country managers to ensure users of the company’s market-leading pneumatic and fluid control technologies enjoy a high-quality online customer experience.

Jez works with Search Laboratory to deliver the Norgren Express multilingual PPC campaign across Finland, Benelux, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, China, and the USA.

“PPC is our primary source of customer acquisition, so it has to work well,” he explains.

“Instead of proactively looking for customers, we attract them online, at the time when they are searching for components they need”

Norgren produces pneumatic components which are built into industrial equipment which is sold into a range of sectors, from life sciences to commercial vehicles.

“Because Norgren’s brand can be several degrees removed from the end user, effective customer identification is almost impossible. Norgren’s systems operate within larger, branded machines, so most of our users do not necessarily know they are using Norgren technology,” adds Jez. “Without PPC we would need to proactively market to the businesses that have bought machines containing our systems. For our webstore, this would mean identifying the right person within the purchasing company and ensuring they think of Norgren Express when they need replacement parts. By using multilingual PPC we are able to shortcut this process entirely. Instead of proactively looking for customers we attract them online, at the time when they are searching for components they need.”

As with any multilingual PPC campaign, the resultant value is dependent on the effectiveness of the initial keyword identification process. “Search Laboratory’s approach does not start with English-language keywords. The team wanted all our foreign language product catalogues so they could review the language used to describe our products in each market. Their mother-tongue linguists then review them and creatively explore the range of possible keywords that could be applied to a Norgren-related search in each language. The result is a much more impactful list of local language PPC keywords around

which we build the campaign. This process attracts a higher volume of quality traffic to the web store, resulting in an increase in sales.”

Throughout the lifecycle of the campaign, Search Laboratory tracks and analyses the performance data for each individual search term, tweaking the list of priority keywords as time goes by to ensure the overall ‘cost per conversion’ is minimised and the most value is gained from the PPC investment.

“The truth is always in the data,” adds Jez. “The team has identified some keywords that we thought we needed, but which have actually attracted very little attention. Equally, some keywords that we would not have otherwise considered are proving to be powerful conductors for new business. Finally, we have found that quite a few terms are appropriate in one market and language, but not in another. Given that these are technical, industry-led terms, the process definitely requires native speakers in order to maximise returns.”

Following an initial trial in Finland, Search Laboratory’s multilingual PPC work has expanded rapidly over the last twelve months and has resulted in significant cost-per-conversion reductions. In some markets the volume of PPC investment required in order to generate online sales conversions has been reduced by more than 50%.

2 | CASE STUDY: PEARSON EDUCATION

PEARSON

Brian O’Flynn is the Head of Web & Digital at Pearson. Pearson, owners of the Financial Times Group and Penguin, is the world’s leading education company.

Active in more than 70 countries, Pearson is leading the way in providing curriculum materials, multimedia learning tools and testing programmes that help to educate millions of people worldwide.

In a market entrenched with competitors, increasing the number of students, educational institutions, corporations, and professional bodies around the world that engage with Pearson Education’s services is key to the London-based company’s continued success.

“We were managing English language PPC across a wide range of markets including China, Korea, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, and were aware that we could appeal much more to local businesses and consumers if we adopted their local language”

Brian O’Flynn, Head of Web & Digital, Pearson PTE

English-language testing is one of Pearson’s key services worldwide, testing and certifying students that require evidence of their English-language proficiency to support their academic, personal or professional development. Non-English speaking academic students, for example, are often required to include an English-language certification with their American, British, or Australian college applications in order to be considered for a place. These applicants, and others, take PTE Academic, a ‘high stakes’ English test reserved online and administered in one of Pearson’s 200 secure testing centers around the world.

“Until spring 2011, we were managing our international PPC campaigns internally with some success, but we knew we didn’t have the resources to maximise our return on investment,” comments Brian O’Flynn, Head of Web and Digital in the language testing division of Pearson. “We were managing English

language PPC across a wide range of markets including China, Korea, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and were aware that we could appeal much more to local businesses and consumers if we adopted their local language. We also knew we weren't using the various PPC management platforms, like Google AdWords, to their fullest potential."

Pearson initially engaged Search Laboratory on a three-month trial basis, intrigued by the organisation's scientific approach to multilingual campaign management, and quickly gained confidence in the company's abilities. "Search Laboratory maintained our level of spend, but increased our click-through rates dramatically, reducing our cost per click and, crucially, also bringing down our cost per sales conversion," adds O'Flynn. "We are now working with the team to manage foreign language PPC campaigns in Korean via the Naver search engine, Simplified Chinese script via Baidu, and Traditional Chinese script via Google. We are also preparing to launch in a variety of other languages."

Search Laboratory employs mother-tongue linguists to inform the keyword and key phrase identification process for every new market Pearson enters. "The challenge lies in consistently communicating our key USPs across all languages. This requires a familiarity with keywords and phrases that can be provided by the native speakers at Search Laboratory," adds O'Flynn.

Pearson has also engaged Search Laboratory to provide strategic recommendations for its SEO link building campaign. Through its international customer network, the company already holds strong relationships with well-respected academic institutions, whose websites can positively impact Pearson's own organic search rankings if links can be established. "Search Laboratory adds value by analysing which sites offer particularly high value for our own SEO," says O'Flynn. "Again, this requires a level of analytical expertise that we are unable to resource in-house. We prioritise our link building outreach based on these strategic recommendations, maximising the impact of the time we invest in the campaign."

"The search marketing industry is evolving fast, so we rely on the agility and international expertise of agencies like Search Laboratory to keep us ahead of the game"

Search Laboratory also produces SEO keyword-rich content that Pearson can use strategically to engage online with its customers and audiences.

Results from SEO are harder to measure than from PPC, but O'Flynn has identified a clear impact since the work began. For key organic search terms, such as 'English test', 'English exam' and 'academic English test', Pearson now appears on the first page of Google's search engine results.

In order to drive yet more international sales, Pearson is planning further expansion in the near future, with an increase in the number of markets operating multilingual PPC and a continuation of its current SEO strategy. "The search marketing industry is evolving fast, so we rely on the agility and international expertise of agencies like Search Laboratory to keep us ahead of the game. We have been impressed with the team's work to date and are excited about the future."

Best practice multilingual SEO: ASOS.com is 'trouncing the competition'



ASOS is a global online fashion and beauty retailer offering over 50,000 branded and own label product lines across women's wear, menswear, footwear, accessories, jewellery and beauty. The company ships to over 190 countries from its central distribution centre in the UK.

ASOS is by far the leading online fashion retailer in the UK and is heavily pushing to take over internationally through good organic global Google rankings. In 2011, the fashion company, which started out by selling copies of celebrity clothing online, proved its leadership in the online fashion retail sector, achieving over 90% coverage in the UK for its brands in organic search results.¹

The organisation's multilingual natural search strategy supports websites targeting the UK, USA, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Australia.

In April 2012, ASOS appeared in the top ten for 66 out of 72 generic fashion search terms in Google. ASOS led all retail sites with 8.2m clickthroughs, while Coast, Debenhams and House of Fraser also holding top ten rankings with 3m, 1.8m and 1.8m respectively.²

Today, ASOS targets fashion forward twenty-somethings globally, attracting 17.5 million unique visitors a month and as of March 31, 2012 had 8.0 million registered users and 4.4 million active customers from 160 countries (defined as having shopped in the last 12 months).

¹ BrandsExposed 'SEO and Google rankings keep ASOS growing YOY'

² Econsultancy.com "ASOS is king of natural search among fashion retailers"

CONCLUSION: NOW IS THE TIME, SEIZE THE DAY

A key success factor in the economic recovery will be the ability to stimulate demand from foreign markets, creating an exports-led springboard to growth.

The private sector must lead the way here. Yet it seems that decision-makers in the business world remain trapped in a 20th century mindset - one that is yet to fully appreciate the power of the internet as a vehicle for driving international trade. In the meantime, the practice of international and multilingual internet marketing continues to evolve, widening the knowledge gap between clients and their strategic partners and making it harder for key decision-makers to get to grips with the concepts and processes involved.

If businesses are to generate new revenues from overseas and spur a new economic boom, their key players need to embrace internet marketing as a strategic fundamental. Those that focus their efforts on attracting and converting buyers who are already 'in the market', searching for their products and services online, will limit their marketing expenditure and generate additional revenues faster than their competition.



As Main Street growth flags, the future of the domestic business continues to hang in the balance. Those that will prosper in these conditions will have the vision and courage to adapt their operations to engage the global market. Even for them, success will depend on their ability to expand quickly, efficiently, and with minimal additional investment. Right now, what boardroom discussions could be of greater importance?