ccTLD vs. SUB-FOLDER vs. SUB-DOMAIN
WHICH SHOULD I ADOPT?

CHOOSING A LOCALISED DOMAIN STRUCTURE

When entering international markets, companies have a decision to make about the organisation of their website and how they arrange their folder structure to best accommodate multiple languages. This is an important decision, and each available option has its own pros and cons.

The three main structure options (we've used a new French site as our example) are as follows:

1. **ccTLD** (country code top-level domain), e.g. example.fr

2. **Sub-folder**, e.g. example.com/fr

3. **Sub-domain**, e.g. fr.example.com

We asked our Head of Technical SEO, Jamie White, what the major influencing factors to consider are, and how each structure ranks in terms of quality, so you can make more informed decisions about which method to adopt in your global online expansion plans.

The key decision-influencing factors were identified as:

1. Authority

2. Trust

3. Cost

4. Geo-targeting

5. Short-term impact

6. Long-term impact

HOW THE THREE MAIN STRUCTURE OPTIONS COMPARE

	ccTLD			Sub-folder			Sub-domain		
Authority	Low ●	The domain authority for each site would be self-contained and not be shared across the sites.		High ●	Each sub-folder would benefit from the link authority possessed by the top-level domain, especially if internal linking was used efficiently.		Low ●	The site will struggle to benefit from authority held by the main site.	
Trust	High ●	A native user in each market is likely to place the highest degree of trust in a ccTLD that is specific to their country or region.		Medium ●	The localised sub-folder would be looked upon favourably, but native users may place less trust in this compared to a ccTLD.		Medium ●	As with a sub-folder, the localised sub-domain would be looked upon favourably, but native users may place less trust in this compared to a ccTLD.	
Cost	Medium ●	The additional cost of buying, setting up and maintaining each domain could be costly, depending on the size of the website.		High ●	There would be low costs to set up each individual sub-folder and maintain them through the parent domain.		High ●	There would be low costs to set up each individual sub-domain and maintain them all through the parent domain.	
Geo-targeting	High ●	A ccTLD is a strong location signal to Google, which increases ranking potential. It can be geo-targeted in the Search Console.		Medium ●	The region-specific sub-folder would be viewed favourably by Google, but only if hosted on a generic top-level domain such as .com or .org. It can also be geo-targeted in Search Console.		Medium ●	The region-specific sub-domain would be viewed favourably by Google, but only if it was hosted on a generic top-level domain such as .com or .org. Again, it can be geo-targeted in Search Console.	
Short-term impact	Low ●	It would take a while to build link authority for a brand new domain and therefore the site may not rank as quickly as a sub-folder.		Medium ●	More immediate authority would be passed through to the site, due to it being hosted on the top-level domain which already holds inbound link authority.		Low ●	It would take a while to build link authority for a brand new sub-domain and therefore the site may take longer to rank than a sub-folder.	
Long-term impact	High ●	An authoritative domain on a unique ccTLD would have strong long-term ranking potential and be conducive to improved performance.		High ●	A localised sub-folder on a generic domain has the potential to hold a lot of link authority, ranking potential and be appealing to native users.		Medium ●	An authoritative sub-domain on a generic TLD would have strong ranking potential but may be slower to rank.	

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, it's down to each website and the business' individual needs. If companies want their various country sites to rank as quickly as possible, for example, then implementing a sub-folder structure would be immediately beneficial. However, if long-term consumer trust and geo-targeting were more important to a business, then a ccTLD might be the most appealing choice. Assess each option carefully before deciding.

If you need more tailored advice on taking your website into new overseas markets, please feel free to get in touch on +44 113 212 1211.

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