

HOW TO USE GEOTARGETING TO IMPROVE RANKINGS IN YOUR TARGET COUNTRY

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR RANKING IN NEW MARKETS

Ranking well in a range of different markets is vital for any international business, but to do this effectively there are a variety of different steps that you can take. This process is known as geotargeting. In this guide, we will introduce the most important elements of a successful geotargeting campaign and how to effectively implement them for your own website.

CCTLD

A **country-coded top-level domain** (ccTLD) is a well-recognised method of making sure your website ranks in a specific country. Using country-specific domain identifiers in the URL (for example, .fr for France) clearly indicates the site's location, helping it to rank higher in the local versions of search engines.

However there are disadvantages of ccTLDs, most notably that maintaining separate top-level domains for separate countries can get very expensive. Read more about choosing your best domain structure [here](#).

SUBDOMAINS

If creating ccTLDs is not the best option for your business, then you can always use a **generic top-level domain** (gTLD) and create subdomains for your country-specific websites. Subdomains are easy to set up and can be hosted from different server locations, which allows each subdomain of your website to have an individual local IP address.

If you're targeting a specific country, you should always use the country code of that country, for example, .fr for France, .de for Germany and so on.

SUBDIRECTORIES

A subdirectory is essentially a folder on your website that stores all of the country-specific pages and other assets. Normally this will be accessed with a URL such as www.example.com/fr.

Using a subdirectory, rather than a subdomain or ccTLD, means you will capitalise more on incoming links as they will help to raise the overall trust of the whole domain. However, subdirectories are not as efficient as subdomains in optimising for certain geographical locations.

WEBMASTER TOOLS

If subdomains or subdirectories are used instead of ccTLDs then your search engine's webmaster tools [Google Search Console, Bing Webmaster Tools, Yandex Webmaster Tools] will have the option to assign them to a specific country.

If you're using ccTLDs, you won't need to use this feature as it is already considered that the domain targets the specific country in the URL. Additionally, there is often no need to geotarget sites that are aimed at a global audience or those that have a language that applies to multiple countries. For example, there is no need to geotarget a French website to France if it is also the same website that will be used to target Swiss and Belgian audiences.

If you are using Bing Webmaster Tools then you can actually geotarget at page level. This means you can geotarget a single French language page to target a Canadian audience if you wish. Using webmaster tools to geotarget can be very effective in boosting the rankings of a website in the targeted country and if it makes no sense to attract visitors from other countries worldwide.

HOSTING LOCALLY

Hosting your site locally in your target country is a good way to indicate to search engines that the content is geographically appropriate. This will also speed up the loading times of your sites. It's worth noting that, whilst this is not always possible in certain markets, it isn't a serious problem as many search engines, especially Google, prefer proper location optimisation over physical server location.

USING A CONTENT DELIVERY NETWORK

A **content delivery network** (CDN) is a way of hosting specific content on separate servers from the main website. For example, a website may be hosted on a main server, whilst all of the images are hosted on another. This system is primarily used to deliver content to a user quickly and more efficiently, to speed up your website. In addition to this, CDNs can be used to direct search engine bots to the location of specific servers, such as those that target certain countries.

This works because a CDN can be used to access servers at data centres in different geographical locations. Because the server for each geographically optimised site is hosted in that same location, a website can have a locally hosted server in each of its target markets while keeping its main point of access somewhere else. For example, a US-based retailer that also wants to target the French market can have its main server in the US and the server that hosts its French site in France.

RANKING SIGNALS

If there is a physical business address for the target country, then it should be displayed on the respective landing or contact pages. This should be assigned schema markup to make the address readable by a search engine.

If there is no local address then you can register a local account on the social media sites that are popular in the targeted country.

IP DETECTION & AUTOMATIC REDIRECTS

It is possible to detect IP addresses and automatically redirect the visitor to the country-specific page and language. This can be very user-friendly as there is no need to search through the site to find the relevant page, particularly when using websites displayed in a foreign language.

Sometimes, however, visitors that need a specific language may be redirected without choice based on their location. This is often a problem for tourists and holiday makers looking for information in a foreign country.

Instead of IP redirection, it's considered best practice to present the visitor with a list of languages at the start for them to choose from themselves. [Read more](#).

LINKS

If you want to rank in certain countries it's important to earn links in those countries. For example, a website targeted at a French market should have quality links from sites in French with a .fr domain. To earn these links you need to produce high-quality content designed specifically for the regions you want to target.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Properly optimising the keywords you target is crucial to ranking well, and this is no exception for international markets. Do not simply translate keywords for one market into the language of a secondary market as these may not be relevant. Instead, carry out unique and original keyword research in each language you wish to target.

HREFLANG TAG

Google uses hreflang tags to identify the language and the country of the targeted page to make sure that the right content is being presented to the visitor. Therefore, it is important to add the correct hreflang tags to every site you want to locally optimise.

See below examples of hreflang for English language pages that target users specifically in Ireland/Australia:

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://example.com/en-ie" hreflang="en-ie" />
```

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://example.com/en-au" hreflang="en-au" />
```

CONTENT

When creating content targeted at specific international markets it's important that the content you produce is in the correct language. When producing content for secondary markets, native speakers should be used to ensure cultural and linguistic nuances are considered.

CONCLUSION

Geotargeting your website can have a profound effects on your Google ranking, although it has to be done properly. By combining elements such as country-specific top-level domains, subdirectories and subdomains, local hosting, and making efforts to produce optimised and engaging content driven by proper keyword research, a website will have the best possible chance of ranking well in any market.

For more information about successfully planning and managing international digital marketing campaigns, please [read here](#).

If you need more tailored advice on taking your website into new overseas markets, please feel free to get in touch on +44 (0) 113 212 1211. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.