SEARCHLABORATORY
Global Search Engine Marketing

A GUIDE TO GEO-IP REDIRECTS, HREFLANG **AND LANGUAGE SELECTORS**

WHY GEO-IP REDIRECTS CAN DAMAGE YOUR SEO

A form of geolocation, Geo-IP targeting uses the IP address of your visitors to automatically redirect them to the local version of your site.

Although Geo-IP redirects can be useful from a user point of view, they are non-optimal for search engines because they can often leave their crawler bots confused.

The search engine crawlers are vital for ensuring your site ranks well. Geo-IP redirects can lead to certain sites and pages not being crawled. This can cause a whole range of complications including:

1. Search engines not recognising which content on your site should be served for a certain location, thus offering the wrong domain in local searches.

2. A reduction in traffic as the domain, meta titles and descriptions are not localised and optimised to the specific countries being targeted.

3. Valuable localised content not being displayed in the SERPs, which otherwise would be if it were regularly crawled and indexed correctly.

Many of the major search engines only crawl from their data centres in the USA, meaning that if your site is redirecting all traffic based on IP address, then they will always be sent to the US version of your content. In-country sites may therefore struggle to rank locally.

For these reasons it's recommended that you avoid Geo-IP redirects, and turn to both **hreflang mark-up** and **language/country selectors** in order to direct global traffic and optimise your search rankings without complication.

HREFLANG

The best method for those looking to build a global search engine presence; hreflang allows you to organise your localised content dependent upon language and, if applicable, location.

The benefit of this approach is that you get **recognised local relevance** – hreflang code is easily processed by search engine bots, making it simple for them to see which content should be presented in the search engine, depending on where the user is located.

Using hreflang not only reduces the risk of duplicate content on your site being penalised, but increases your competitiveness when trying to rank in various international markets, and your ability to penetrate new territories more effectively and efficiently.

SO HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE HREFLANG INTO YOUR WEBSITE?

It is a process of organising your content targeting multiple languages, or single-language content targeting multiple locations. An example of how you might structure your site can be seen below with the United Kingdom, France and Spain.

UK:	**www.yourdomain.com/uk/**
France:	**www.yourdomain.com/fr/**
Spain:	**www.yourdomain.com/es/**

Once the content for each country has been organised, and your web pages have been localised to the local languages, search engines will crawl the different sites and recognise which content is relevant for which country by following the hreflang mark-up that has been implemented on each page.

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**" />

LANGUAGE SELECTORS

A language selector allows a user to easily pick and choose what language and currency they want to browse your website in. But there are three things to consider when incorporating language selectors into your website:

1. **Above-the-Fold** – A language selector should be visible as soon as you land on a website. The ideal place for it to be located is above the fold, in the top right hand corner of the screen. The reason behind this is that a user may want to change the language straight away to suit their preferences.

2. **The Three-Click Rule** – If a user wants to change the language of your website, this should be achievable in less than three clicks in an effort to reduce bounce rate. This saves the user getting frustrated and leaving your site.

3. **Crawlable** – Make sure the links to your multilingual sites are crawlable by search engine bots – this allows link authority to be passed between them effectively, thus boosting your SEO.

CONCLUSION

For optimal results, thinks about both the search engines and your users when preparing your new localised in-country websites. Always implement hreflang properly at page level and use language selectors to help users navigate your site and allow link authority to pass between sites which will help boost your in-country rankings.

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.