

# Web translation about more than words

## Sites must also reflect cultural preferences

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The Canadian Tourism Commission knew exactly how to optimize its website to foreign markets. It knew that Germans prefer canoe trips, while the Japanese are fond of organized bus tours. The multilingual version of its website reflects these preferences.

"It all comes down to understanding your clients," said Huiping Iler, chief executive of **WINtranslation.com**, a Web translation service in Ottawa.

But there are few examples like this one, she says. Most companies don't bother to understand their audiences when they

translate websites. Sloppily made multilingual sites either turn off international clients with bad translations or don't show up at all in Web searches.

Take the concept of an open house for a home for sale. This is a practice unknown in many countries, yet companies nonetheless push the service on their foreign language sites, even translating the words "open house" literally.

This is not only a linguistic and cultural blunder, but it also keeps search engines from pointing to a website.

"There's a real lack of understanding," Iler said. "People who do marketing are often unilingual. When they have to make

content for another market, they may not know a lot about search engine marketing."

Iler said companies too often ignore the combined power of search engines and good translation. In a marketing era when **Google** is a measure of reputation and people rarely search past the first page of a search result, making a website visible to foreign markets is crucial.

This means knowing the keywords that people use to find information in different countries.

For instance, a company that sells laptops needs to know whether people in a given country search for "notebook computers" or "portable computers" and put those words prominently on a Web page.

But this can be problematic, said Sylvain Amoros, the head strategist for Magnet Search

Marketing, a division of Cossette Communications. Certain industries, like seniors' residences, demand a semantic sensitivity in their marketing.

"You can't put words like 'old people' or even 'seniors' in the content. So you have to find ways around that," he said.

But even proper translations sometimes aren't enough to keep foreign eyeballs coming in, said Duncan Moore, an online marketer who recently joined Cossette. Sites have to keep updating the content to reflect changing attitudes.

"If you're a company that sells sports jerseys, you have to keep up with new teams or new events that come up," he said. "Once you translate a site, it doesn't mean the work is done."

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