

# Expertise maximizes global web presence

High ranking on search engines can pay big dividends

By Christina Friedrichsen  
Business Edge

**Y**ou've got the products, you've got the website, but to crack that foreign market you've got to speak the right language and be in the right place.

That, according to experts, means having multilingual websites and earning high rankings on search engines, including Google and Yahoo.

Huiping Iler, owner of wintranslation.com, a translation company based in Ottawa and author of *Maximizing Visibility for Multilingual Web Sites*, says not hiring a professional translator can be the kiss of death for companies trying to break into global markets.

"Translation is something that nobody notices unless it sounds awful or laughable. When it is done right, you don't even notice that it was translated. When it's bad, it can either make you look like an amateur, or even worse, it can make you seem rude or offensive. Either way, it can be a huge turnoff."

Iler says even large organizations have been known to make dreadful translation errors when they start selling in other markets.

"The Dairy Association's huge success with the campaign 'Got Milk?' prompted them to expand advertising to Mexico. It was soon brought to their attention that the Spanish translation read 'Are you lactating?'" says Iler. "Imagine how that would have gone over."

Iler says the cost to translate a page is \$350-\$500. She advises companies who are going global with their websites to "start small and build on your success."

"It is easier to start with one language and maybe a portion of your website instead of the whole thing," she says, adding that you should remember to set aside a budget for updating your site regularly.

She points out that keeping a multilingual website up to date can be time- and money-intensive, so it is wise for companies to have a realistic evaluation of their business needs, and to be clear on what they can afford.

Iler says it's essential to hire a translator who not only has excellent language skills, but who also understands search-



Photo by Kumru Bilici, courtesy of wintranslation.com  
Huiping Iler, owner of translation company wintranslation.com, says professional translators can prevent embarrassing errors.



engine marketing. There are unique challenges to getting multilingual websites ranked. For example, all webpages have a language-encoding tag. If it is not properly declared, visitors to the site will see an entire page filled with question marks.

She also highlights the importance of using the right keywords.

"In Portuguese, for instance, 'computador portátil' refers to a portable computer. A translator can translate it into English as a notebook computer or a portable computer," Iler says. "Both are correct, but there is a big difference between the numbers of searches for each term."

"In August, 877,219 notebook computer searches on Yahoo were conducted for the term 'notebook computer,' while only 2,772 for the term 'portable computer.' That's a huge difference."

Contrary to what some might think, getting ranked on search engines does not involve black magic.

And it doesn't involve paying off someone at the Googleplex headquarters, according to Calgary search-engine optimization (SEO) expert Ian

McAnerin, who owns McAnerin Networks Inc.

What it does involve is knowledge about how search engines work, which is something many small-business owners are lacking. This is especially true for companies trying to create a global presence on the Internet with multilingual websites.

"Search-engine optimization is just coming out of its infancy," says McAnerin. "Many small businesses assume their web designers are doing it for them, which couldn't be further from the truth."

In English-centric North America, the assumption may be that English is the most important language on the Internet but, according to Internet World Stats, 70 per cent of online searches are done in a language other than English.

And Internet users aren't just looking up phone numbers and addresses.

They do price comparisons. They research products and services. They're hungry for information, as long as it's quick, straightforward – and in their own language.

The lack of SEO knowledge is even greater when it comes to optimizing multilingual websites, says McAnerin. Language and cultural differences can create obstacles for companies targeting foreign markets online.

## WEB FACTS

- Search engines generate close to 90 per cent of traffic to a website.
  - Most searchers (about 82 per cent) don't look past the first three pages.
  - There are an estimated 70-80 SEO companies in Canada. Most SEO consultants are women.
  - Ten countries/regions with more than 60 per cent of the population accessing the Internet: Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Norway, U.S., U.K., Korea, Japan.
- Source Bill Hunt, author of *Search Engine Marketing Inc.*

### Tips on Creating a Multilingual Website

Louis Bertrand, senior manager at the Business Development Bank of Canada, provides one-on-one consulting for small businesses wanting to go global.

He offers these tips on creating a global web presence:

- Keep the design simple. You don't need to spend \$25,000 for a fancy flash website. That will only distract your customers from what you are trying to sell. A good website shouldn't cost more than \$2,000-\$3,000. Bertrand says it's also essential to be involved in the design process so that the website accurately reflects your business. Letting a web designer 'have at it' without any input from you can be a costly mistake.
- Make sure your website is easy to navigate. The first page should say exactly what you can do for the customer.
- Check out the websites of your competitors to see how they have targeted their customers. Also find out which keywords they are using.
- Don't spread yourself too thin. Go after one global market at a time. If you go after too many at a time, there's a good chance you won't be able to serve your customers as well as your competitors.
- Plan ahead. Make sure you are prepared before you go after global markets. Part of being prepared is knowing your budget.

The first piece of advice he has for companies who are going global is to understand the markets they are targeting. If, for instance, a company is going after China, business owners should visit the country so they can get an understanding of the language and culture before they create a Chinese website. He also suggests hiring someone who has a sound knowledge of the culture.

Also, before companies create multilingual websites, McAnerin advises them to have their English websites optimized for search engines. Hiring a SEO consultant to do the work costs anywhere from \$60 to \$600 per hour.

Business owners can also do it themselves. Seminars and workshops on SEO are held in major Canadian cities, and books such as *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.: Driving Search Traffic to Your Company's Web Site* by Mike Moran and Bill Hunt, and Shari Thurrow's *Search Engine Visibility* are also helpful resources.

There are other important factors to the success of a multilingual site aside from translation.

McAnerin says companies should use different websites for each country. He advises companies to use top-level

domains for each country. For instance, in Canada a .ca domain will rank highest, while in China a .cn domain will get the highest ranking.

He also recommends that companies use subdomains for each language within a country.

"Often there is more than one language within a country. To switch between languages you should use subdomains," he says.

McAnerin admits there is still an element of mystery to how search engines such as Google rank websites. "Google doesn't tell anyone what the secret sauce is," he says.

However, SEO consultants have most of it figured out. That's why many large companies pay big bucks to hire SEO consultants.

In fact, McAnerin says it's not unusual for large companies that rely heavily on search engines to attract business to allot 20 per cent of their marketing budget for SEO. Some companies that sell exclusively online devote their entire budget to SEO.

"If your business is based at least in part by search, it can be dramatically affected by SEO," he says.

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Ian McAnerin