

A global web strategy for local markets

•XTRA Translation Services

As the number of web users increases worldwide, global players will be required to present web content in local languages if they want to be successful in the global arena.

An expanded customer base via the web is too great an opportunity for companies to ignore. In the past, concerns about security, privacy, and expensive internet access have presented major obstacles to buying online. However, advances in technology and infrastructure and the proliferation of new internet access devices, such as WAP-enabled mobile phones, are expected to rapidly increase potential e-business worldwide.

It is common sense that for a company to successfully target a local market, it must cater to the differences in consumer needs, preferences, cultural conventions, and shopping habits of the respective target audience. Today most international companies address the needs and tastes of local web communities by linking to a national or regional website that is locally managed. This approach may fill the need to maintain a local web presence for selected markets, but it is also ineffective. Furthermore, although those in charge of controlling corporate finances worry about the current corporate costs of web maintenance, they are likely to have only seen the tip of the iceberg. As emerging markets mature, companies may be forced to quickly increase the number of local websites.

At present, customising content to foreign markets — referred to as localisation — often does not include translation, but local language will become an increasingly important issue in the future. As the web becomes more popular among

less well educated people, English will no longer suffice as a universal language for countries representing a smaller market. The desire to affirm local identity will make local users in many regions of the world less likely to accept content that is not provided in their preferred language.






International companies have long been dealing with localising products for foreign markets. Therefore, they recognise that time-to-market in web terms often means updating a site every week. To date, however, answers as to how to effectively manage a corporate website are in short supply.

On an organisational level, the challenges of managing a corporate website are very similar to those linked to globalising the company itself. The current interpretation of globalisation by most multinational companies seems to be that globalisation means selling in major global markets with few links among national operations. However, the web is likely to promote a different view of successful global companies, in which being truly global is much more dependent on a company's ability to communicate and manage information across borders than on selling worldwide. On a technical level, global companies are pushing the use of web globalisation technology to implement a global web infrastructure designed to accelerate the localisation process and provide a platform for managing and streamlining content development and release. A technical infrastructure, for

example, takes into account the need to automatically detect changes across a distributed network and triggers defined processes according to predetermined rules.

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Mastering the organisational and technical challenges to effectively manage a corporate website is not only a matter of cost-efficiency. It also enables a company to provide consistent content globally, while providing localised content where required. Moreover, it is indicative of a company's willingness and capability to fill the needs of local markets while maintaining a corporate brand and image. What else is global competitiveness all about? *

About the author:
Stefan Lampert is managing director of XTRA Translation Services, a company he founded in 1993 and that specialises in providing localisation services and consulting to multinational companies. He has given numerous presentations on language-related issues, such as outsourcing strategies, quality management, web globalisation, and machine translation.

