

To attract attention from international visitors, make your website “quack like a duck”

International visitors, with money to spend, are already here:

- Multinational corporations (Microsoft isn't the only one) are bringing hundreds of business partners and employees from all over the world to Western Washington.
- 200 cruise ships a year now use Port of Seattle facilities, up from only 5 in 1999.
- International visitors spend twice as much as domestic travelers. And they're looking for ways to immerse themselves in the culture of the communities they visit.

They're already on your doorstep, invite them in!

Don't let the language barrier scare you!

The easiest way to make someone feel welcome is to show them you care. Greet your potential visitors in their own language—quack like a duck!—by adding foreign-language pages to your existing website.

Which languages should we choose?

Mine the data:

- Your local Chamber of Commerce has facts and figures about international tourism and businesses in your region.
- Analyze your own website's traffic for country domains (i.e. .fr for France, .ru for Russia). Who is visiting your site more frequently than others?

Decide on your targets:

A specific country? A specific market due to your unique location or facilities? Germans, for example, love kayaking and mountain biking. Scandinavian visitors may be particularly interested in Nordic Heritage events.

Machine translation vs. Human translation

On your own, experiment with Babelfish or similar software tools; you'll quickly recognize their limitations: they translate words but don't present your particular business properly or fulfill the expectations of your foreign visitors. (You'll get a laugh from the comic results, though!)

Computers and tools do help translators and are crucial for saving time and money.

Our view: only human translators can comprehend both the critical linguistic distinctions and essential cultural nuances. You need real people to help you succeed with your website.

Be Global – Make it Local

A foreign language website isn't just a translated copy of your English website. Simply translating your web text is only the first step. There's more.

Adapting that site to a specific country or region and its language is called localization. Some elements to consider:

- the display of numbers, dates and addresses varies widely by country; i.e. 02-12-2006 reads in America as February 12, while in Germany as December 2.
- Icons and pictures; i.e. pictures, such as women in bikini on beaches might be innocent in America yet be offensive in Iraq.
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO); keywords, site description, alt tags, country code etc. all need adjustment so that foreign search engines find your international website and rank it highly

Let's talk Budget

Yes, website localization can be expensive. Nevertheless, you can prepare your website, make key decisions and reduce your localization costs dramatically:

Make Decisions

Ask yourself: how ready are you, your staff to respond to foreign language inquiries?

Do you want, will you need, and can you handle:

- **Full-scale localization:** a foreign website as fully functional as your English website (for example: www.goldentulip.com, www.hotel-france-bordeaux.fr)
- **Partial localization:** translating only key pages and stating clearly for your visitors that you don't yet provide all the information in their native language (http://www.naturetoursyukon.com/de/d-summer_trips.html)
- **An abstract:** a one- or two-page summary with the most important information about your property (for example: www.unionoysterhouse.com, www.aronsborg.se)

Keep it simple

- Simplify your web texts. Translation is typically charged by the number of words to be translated.
- Avoid embedded text images (images with text). Most text translations expand the space by 10% to 30% depending the language. A page with graphics that looks perfect in English will often be off-balance in translation.
- "Newsy" features like the latest property updates are costly to maintain across localized sites. Frequent news means frequent translation.

Getting it done!

Whether you hire a person to manage the whole project in-house or out-source to a contractor, here are a few points essential to a successful project:

- Communicate well and regularly, via email, phone or in person
- Make sure that all translators and editors translate into or edit and proofread their native languages only
- Use translation tools to manage your budget efficiently

Conclusion – "Roma" Wasn't Built in a Day

You don't have to do it all at once. Making your website international can be approached gradually.

- Start with an abstract of your property, of your business. “Test the waters” of new markets without making a large initial investment in localization.
- Continue with a partial translation and justify your return on investment (ROI).
- Grow into a full-scale localization which involves all your staff, your whole business.

You can succeed with small steps...one duck at a time.

Katrin Rippel has a passion for cultures, languages and technology. She has 16 years of experience in the hospitality and tourism industry, and in translation. With MENU International, a translation company, she provides services to the hospitality and tourism industries. She can be reached at krippel@menuintl.com

© 2005-2010 Menu International www.menuintl.com