

Best Practices for B2B International Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) continues to be a key component of B2B marketing campaigns. Marketers, in general, are becoming more sophisticated at implementing SEO techniques and best practices. However, globalization has added a new layer of challenges and opportunities to this process, many of them involving the issue of the various languages that are relevant to global users. When companies are looking to expand their reach into countries outside of North America, they need to consider several key factors in order to get the most out of their SEO approaches.

The following are recommendations and rationales for practices to follow regarding the issues of domains, content, translations, links, keywords and search engines worldwide.

Single Domain

Most search engines try to determine the main language of each page on a site. You can help to make language recognition easier if you stick to only one language per page and avoid side-by-side translations.

RECOMMENDATION:

- When using a single domain, you should utilize directories or sub-domains to separate the different language versions of the site.

EXAMPLE:

www.godfrey.com/en/		www.godfrey.com
www.godfrey.com/fr/	or:	fr.godfrey.com
www.godfrey.com/jp/		jp.godfrey.com

Multiple Domains

RECOMMENDATION:

- A Top-Level Domain (TLD) should be acquired for each country you're targeting. Many countries mandate that you have an actual physical business location in that country before you can obtain a TLD.
- You should use a local domain, IP address & hosting provider, for example, to gain a German (.de) top-level domain, you must operate an office in Germany.

RATIONALE:

- This is a valid consideration for search engines, as they're trying to rank the most relevant search result for the searcher. Typically, geographical proximity is used to determine relevance.
- For example, if you are searching while in Canada, on google.ca, Google calculates that domains with .ca might be a better result for you than domains with .com. The logic is based on the fact that physical business locations in Canada are closer to your location than those in the United States (not always the case, of course, but it's the general rule that Google follows). The top three rankings for "travel" on Google.ca are Expedia.ca, Expedia.com, and Yahoo Canada Travel.

Content

RECOMMENDATION:

- You should localize content for each country that the website targets.

RATIONALE:

- Search engines want to deliver the most relevant results that they can, and their method of determining relevancy extends beyond just the “basics” of how many pages you have indexed and how many (and what quality) of backlinks you have indexed. Content is also a key factor.

Translation

RECOMMENDATION:

- Do not use a translation tool, such as Google Translate, to do a word-for-word translation of existing website content. Use a human translator.
- You need to speak to your target audience in their own language, meaning in the way they are used to speaking and reading. A language is more than words and sentences with specific meanings. Each language has unique idioms, expressions, slang, and cultural preferences regarding how to address the recipients of communications.
- You should avoid a tone that is overly familiar or overly formal. And you need to consider cultural and linguistic preferences when translating. For example, one of the Spanish words for “retire,” for example, is specific to military officers and a formal ceremony—not everyday consumers. The word “shop” is more frequently used than “store” in many European countries. Tourists go on “holiday,” rather than “vacation.”
- The English names for countless scientific, technical and medical items would be unfamiliar to many worldwide audiences. Even in English, there are language subtleties to consider: for example, drivers in England haul cargo in “lorries,” not trucks.

RATIONALE:

- By using the local language of your target audience, your site is more likely to appear in search results. And when they appear as links, the results will be more attractive to the audience.

Links

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Get inbound links from international domains. Link your site to international domains. Submit to site directories within your target geographic region.

International Keyword Research

RECOMMENDATION:

- When researching keywords, look at traffic to the specific countries you are interested in, rather than relying on U.S. or global traffic statistics.

RATIONALE:

- It doesn't make sense to get your international keyword suggestions and counts from keyword tools only showing U.S. results.

Keywords using Country Name

RECOMMENDATION:

- Add the targeted country name to keywords on a landing page. For example, hydraulic pumps UK.

RATIONALE:

- By combining keywords with countries on relevant landing pages, you will improve your rankings for those terms.

Consider Local Search Engines

RECOMMENDATION:

- Use the search engine your target audience uses.

RATIONALE:

- Google doesn't rule the entire world of search. While it's the #1 engine internationally, local engines such as Voila in France, Ansearch in Australia, or Yandex in Russia are very popular. If you're targeting a certain local audience, it pays to understand the algorithms of other engines besides Google.

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