









**GETTING CLIENTS  
OVERSEAS,  
ORGANICALLY:  
How to Set Up Local,  
International & Global  
SEO**





# SILVIA CARTER

## GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY: How to Set Up Local, International & Global SEO



[The Digital Exporter Series](#) consists of seven independent books with more than 100 international case studies, each sharing the best tools, actionable solutions, and step-by-step explanations on how to sell online across channels and borders.

- Book 1 – [STARTING THE GLOBAL DIGITAL JOURNEY: How to create the best international web strategy.](#)
- Book 2 – [GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY: How to set up local, international & global SEO.](#)
- Book 3 – [GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, BY ADVERTISING: SEA, SMA and other acquisition channels.](#)
- Book 4 – [SELLING ONLINE INTERNATIONALLY: How to set up & manage a cross-border e-commerce.](#)
- Book 5 – [SELLING ONLINE INTERNATIONALLY: How to sell on local & international marketplaces.](#)
- Book 6 – [DEVELOPING A STRONG INTERNATIONAL BRAND: Multilingual social media & social selling.](#)
- Book 7 – [DEVELOPING A STRONG INTERNATIONAL BRAND: Multilingual inbound marketing & marketing automation.](#)

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# Thanks

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Cover photo by [Jezael Melgoza](#) on Unsplash.



# The Author

Silvia Carter has been active in international multichannel sales for more than 20 years. She has developed her career in cross-border trade and global digital marketing for both consumer products and B2B sectors.

As an entrepreneur with a dual expertise in export development and online sales, she founded and manages ToWebOrNotToWeb, a service provider specialized in multichannel export growth to help businesses increase sales and brand awareness in several countries, online and beyond.

In her work as an author, Silvia contributed to *Le marketing des start-ups* by Véronique Hermann-Flory (Eyrolles, 2017) and is a co-author with Jean-Éric Pelet of *User Experience in Web 2.0 Technologies and Its Impact on Universities and Businesses* (IGI Global, 2020). She is also the author of *Développer son business à l'international grâce au webmarketing* (Eyrolles, 2019), which inspired The Digital Exporter Series.

Silvia holds an Executive MBA from HEC Paris, where she is the pro-bono chair of the Alumni Advanced Technologies Club, and a degree in web development and digital strategy from the Digital Campus Paris. She also teaches courses in the field of global web marketing at the EMLV Business School and at ISCOM in Paris. Silvia decided to start teaching, in addition to her other professional activities, to share her expertise and develop new professions in digital export management.



# Introduction

Marco Polo, Amerigo Vespucci and Christopher Columbus are just a few examples, among so many others, of international Italian spirits .... It is a fact that Italians are particularly 'international'. But I have had to learn how to become so: when I was young, I was marked by a total phobia of German and a deep allergy to other languages, all combined with a real aversion for any foreign cultural universe. Too complicated! Why bother when I had everything I needed near my home in Italy and in Italian?

Until the day when my home filled up with travelers: almost everyone around me spent time traveling, for work, study, holidays. So much so that remaining Italo-Italian became a handicap. So, there I was, launched for an Erasmus year at Trinity College in Dublin with an English vocabulary of ten words! Since then, my international journey has also become part of my work. First as an international marketing manager, then as an export and international sales director. As an expatriate in France, I started dealing with all the internet-related issues on the international scale. That was in the late 2000s when the internet was not as 'easy' as it is now. The level of confusion was the normal thing almost everywhere. Fed up with that confusion, I wanted to understand how the internet worked technically and to learn the best practices. That is why I decided to take a master's degree in web marketing in 2012 and, after that, to create ToWebOrNotToWeb. Today, I help companies sell internationally online on the several digital channels that the internet offers.

Nowadays more and more affordable and simple digital tools are available for entering foreign markets in a way that would have been unthinkable ten years ago. The recent 'Future of Business Survey' carried out by Facebook, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank about companies active on the internet, shows that two out of three exporting companies achieve more than half of their international turnover through the web and that 45% of them achieve even more than 75% of their

international turnover. The OECD also argues that, since these online tools are available to any type of business around the world, even microenterprises can now achieve significant business overseas<sup>1</sup>.

That was the situation before the Covid-19 crisis. The coronavirus brought lockdowns, social distancing and an unprecedented drop in traditional business. That forced people to enter a new digital age where the web, the social networks and all the other digital applications are the key tools they can use to have an almost normal life. Digital technologies are therefore essential, now more than ever, to preserve a business as well as to develop it in new markets. Companies that are behind with these digital technologies will risk losing their business at home and abroad. And many of them are still struggling to understand how to use these digital technologies on the international scale. Consider the case of a French business that wants to develop its online sales in Germany. It can choose among different options for the website domain to use, such as www.example.de, or www.example.com/de, or de.example.com, or www.example.fr/de, or fr.example.com/de. However, each one of these options will reach a different number of people depending on the different digital technologies applied to the website, as you can see in the following table.

Domain type & SEO techniques	The target that search engines understand	Segment	Number of people that the website can reach
www.example.de	Country = Germany	German people in Germany	79,127,551
www.example.com/de + geolocalisation & hreflang	Country = Germany Language = German	German people in Germany	79,127,551
www.example.com/de + hreflang	Language = German	German-speaking people around the world	92,304,792
de.example.com + geolocalisation & hreflang	Country = Germany Language = German	German people in Germany	79,127,551
www.example.fr/de	Country = France Language = German	German people in France	130,000*
fr.example.com/de	Country = France Language = German	German people in France	130,000*

*Why digital technologies are important<sup>2</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2017* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017), [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/entrepreneurship-at-a-glance\\_22266941](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/entrepreneurship-at-a-glance_22266941).

<sup>2</sup> The sources of the numbers followed by \* are  
<https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats18.htm#german> &  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communaut%C3%A9\\_allemande\\_en\\_France](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communaut%C3%A9_allemande_en_France).

Helping those companies is critical and it is the purpose of these books. The Digital Exporter Series brings immediate actionable solutions on how to grow a B2B, B2C and C2C online business and on how to do that internationally. It consists of seven books, each on a different topic, with more than 100 case studies that describe step-by-step all the web tools and techniques for cross-border digital business.

The idea for The Digital Exporter Series came from my French book, *Développer son business à l'international grâce au webmarketing*, which was published by Eyrolles in France at the end of 2019. I wrote that book mainly for French-speaking digital exporters. Although inspired by it, this new series is very different from the French book. It is not just a simple translation from French into English: it is a full adaptation to the digital environments around the world. And, for that reason, The Digital Exporter Series, instead of being one book, is seven independent books, each on a different topic.

[The Digital Exporter Series](#) is for all entrepreneurs that want to start or accelerate their cross-border online business in the most effective way at the lowest risk during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond.

That's also what motivates me in my professional life: contributing to value creation around the world by increasing the number of companies selling online beyond their national borders with the innovative digital tools that are available today. Because, for everyone and everywhere, growing export sales is much easier nowadays, thanks to digital tools used the right way. So, for all entrepreneurs around the world, I have a piece of advice: don't miss the train!

P.S.: I am always fascinated by the experiences of international business expansion and would love to read yours if you want to share them with me here: [silvia.carter@towebornottoweb.com](mailto:silvia.carter@towebornottoweb.com).



# Disclaimer

It took me several months to research and write The Digital Exporter Series, even a bit longer than originally planned.

During the same time, the internet and the web ecosystems did not stop. That might have produced some discrepancies between what I wrote and what you can find on the web.

While I will do my best to update the content of The Digital Exporter Series as regularly as possible, I am not able to keep it perfectly updated all the time.

If you find something that should be changed or added or if you cannot find something specific in The Digital Exporter Series, contact me at [silvia.carter@towebornottoweb.com](mailto:silvia.carter@towebornottoweb.com), and I'll be happy to help you out.

All the companies that I have mentioned as examples or as tools or for other reasons relevant to the purpose of The Digital Exporter Series are totally independent from my work. They do not have any direct or indirect interest in The Digital Exporter Series, nor do I in their business.

The Digital Exporter Series is intended for educational and informational purposes. All photos, images and screenshots, if not created by me, have either been purchased, used with permission, credited and linked back to their original sources or believed to be in the public domain. All are used to comment on, give example of, and explain the subject matter of The Digital Exporter Series. I consider that this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material within the meaning of 17 U.S.C. §107. All rights and credit go directly to its rightful owners; no copyright infringement is intended.

The Digital Exporter Series does not contain legal advice. Legal information is provided for general educational and informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional legal advice. Your

use of, or reliance on, any information contained in The Digital Exporter Series is solely at your own risk. Accordingly, before you take any action based on such information, I encourage you to consult with a qualified lawyer in the relevant jurisdiction.

# **SILVIA CARTER**

## **GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY: How to Set Up Local, International & Global SEO**

Once you have your target foreign markets and your multichannel strategy, it is time to start your international online sales.

And to do that your e-commerce must be found by your foreign prospects on the local search engines they use in their country: you need specific Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to make sure your website is loved by search engines around the world!

### **Book 2**





# CHAPTER 1

## GOOGLE, CHROME, EDGE, BING, OPERA... HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY AROUND

“

*What do you do when you want to go on the internet? You open a browser. And what do you do when you want to find information? You also open a browser! But then you launch a search engine page on the browser.*

*Although we use the same medium, a browser and a search engine are two different things. Understanding the difference between them is essential to perform well online internationally.*

# **BROWSERS AND SEARCH ENGINES: A TALE OF TWO CONCEPTS**

Google, Bing, Yahoo!, Baidu ... but also Chrome, Edge, Firefox, Yandex... What are the differences between them, and why are they important for export?

Many people all over the world confuse browsers and search engines, as can be seen in this video: <https://youtu.be/o4MwTvytUQ>

Every internet user uses them, but in a different way depending on the country, language and age. Understanding how they work is essential for the success of your digital export project.

## **WHAT IS A BROWSER?**

Browsers are software that allow you to explore the web. There are a lot of different browsers, almost one for each operating system (Windows, Mac OS, iOS, Android, Linux, etc.). But the main function of all these browsers is always the same: to display the information contained on the URL of websites.

Most browsers include:

- A display area, which can have several tabs.
- A menu with navigation functions: refresh, previous page, history, parameters, etc.
- A field containing the URL of the visited website.

Browsers are evolving a lot to keep up with all the other web innovations, or, more exactly, with innovations in the programming languages that make up the web and devices: ad blockers, OS compatibilities, zooming, voice-control, new security systems, etc.

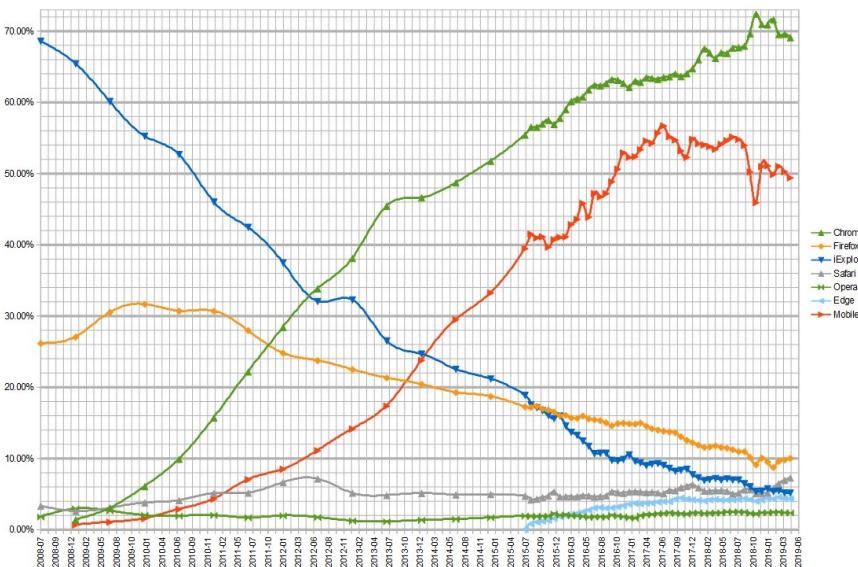


Figure 1: the usage share of the top web browsers in the world<sup>3</sup>.



### TIP

Depending on which technology the browser is based on, your website can be displayed very differently, whether on Chrome, Firefox, Yandex, etc. So, you need to know in advance which browser is most used by the people in your target export market to ensure that your website is displayed correctly.

## WHAT IS A SEARCH ENGINE?

To simplify, we can say that search engines are websites, and, like websites, search engines are displayed in browsers. But their content is made up mainly of keyword queries and search results. In reality, a

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BrowserUsageShare.png>, author Efa, file under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>.

search engine is much more sophisticated: it is based on algorithms and robots intended to search its archive of web pages, the Search Index (or SI)<sup>4</sup>, to find the most appropriate information to provide as an answer to a specific request of an internet user.

The operation has four stages:

- 1) **Indexing:** first, the search engine's algorithms and crawlers scan the web by visiting any web pages that are visitable to collect as much information as possible. They archive all this information in their Search Index. And they update the SI every time changes occur between one visit and the next. The robots will move from one website to another by following the hyperlinks between web pages. This indexing work is quite tedious for crawlers, which is why websites must be adapted to facilitate their job: this is the goal of SEO, as we will see in the next pages.
- 2) **Ranking:** after having collected the information on all the web pages, the search engine's algorithms analyze it. They look at many factors, such as the keywords of the query, the web page speed, the location, the freshness of the content, the semantic tags, etc. Based on this analysis, the algorithms rank all the web pages by relevance and quality. Then, additional ranking activities might occur through live tests performed by thousands of external raters around the world, as Google does<sup>5</sup>, to meet higher ranking relevance and quality.
- 3) **Query:** this is based on the request consisting of keywords or keyword phrases made by internet users on the search engine. The search engine's algorithm uses these keywords or keyword phrases to match the request with the best information in its Search Index.
- 4) **Results:** these are the best matches to the Search Index returned by the algorithm based on the keywords used by an internet user. The criteria used by search engine algorithms to formulate their SERP<sup>6</sup> are many and differ from one engine to another. This is why you can

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<sup>4</sup> The SI is like a library, but fully digital and its size is bigger than all the world's libraries put together.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.google.com/search/howsearchworks/algorithms/>.

<sup>6</sup> Search Engine Results Page,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search\\_engine\\_results\\_page](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_results_page).

get different results for the same keywords using Google or Yahoo!, for example.

The screenshot shows a Google search results page for the query "vinilos de palabra para pared". The results are in Spanish and include:

- Anuncios**:
  - Sticker mural citation L'amo... EUR 12.55 Lettres adhésiv... De Google
  - 2020 Nouvelle Mode Wall... EUR 2.00 Wish De Google
  - S'il vous plaît retirez vos... EUR 9.40 Etsy De Google
  - Sticker mural citation Amour... EUR 8.55 Lettres adhésiv... De Google
  - Sticker mural texte fitness... EUR 12.25 tenstickers.fr De Google
- www.tenvinilo.mx > Vinilos decorativos**:
  - Frases en vinilo y frases para pared - TenVinilo**  
Textos, citas, palabras, refranes, reflexiones... frases para pared. Nada más original para personalizar tu hogar con letras vinilo ¡Envío a domicilio!
  - Vinilos decorativos de ... Vinilos decorativos de frases ... Recetas**
- www.tenvinilo.mx > Vinilos decorativos**:
  - Catálogo de vinil para pared para decorar - TenVinilo**  
Viniles para pared ideales para cualquier estancia del hogar. Vinilos decorativos para pared de todo tipo de temas ¡Decora ahora tu vida como deseas!
- hogar.mercadolibre.com.mx > ... > Vinilos Decorativos**:
  - Vinilos Decorativos Frases | MercadoLibre.com.mx**  
Viniles Decorativos Para Paredes Frases Letras En Esta Casa. \$499. en 12x. \$41.58 ... Vinil Decorativo Para Pared Frases Letras El Éxito Es La... \$499. en 12x.
- Imágenes de vinilos de palabra para pared**:
  - filters: cocina, frases motivadoras, vinilo adhesivo, frases célebres, pegatina
  - examples: SUENA, REGLAS DE CASA, diciembre festi, Fam

Figure 2: an example of a Spanish SERP on google.com.mx.

Although almost all search engines<sup>7</sup> work through these four stages, you need to understand the big difference between these two types of search engines:

- **Boundless search engines:** search engines of this type search the entire web and provide URL links in the SERPs that cause internet users to leave the search engine and land on the website linked to the URL they have clicked on in the SERP. Examples of this type are Google, Yahoo!, Bing, Yandex (the Russian search engine), Baidu (the Chinese search engine), Qwant, DuckDuckGo, etc.
- **Bounded search engines:** when you search something on search engines of this type, they look for information to answer your query only inside their own platform, and their answers never redirect you outside of their website. This is the case of Amazon, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.



### TIP

*In recent years, the use of bounded search engines, such as Amazon, Facebook, etc., has become so widespread in the world that today they are serious competitors of boundless search engines like Google, Bing, Yandex, etc. This is why, for the SEO of your international website, especially if it is a cross-border e-commerce, you must work on both types of search engines, boundless and bounded, if you want your products or services easily and quickly found in your target foreign country.*

One last point: often, browsers offer to install their favorite search engine, and, conversely, search engines offer to install their favorite browser, in both cases highlighting supposedly better performance. This is the case, for example, with Google and Chrome: if you use Google on another browser, let's say Edge, Google will show you a pop-up inviting you to switch to Chrome explaining that it is the recommended browser for Google. Do you need to switch? You are free to choose the combination of browser and search engine that you want, since using

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_search\\_engines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_search_engines).

the ‘recommended’ combination will not make much difference in terms of the search result quality.



Figure 3: Google pop-up on Edge recommending switching to Chrome.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Once you have selected the target export market, you must optimize your business for the web in that country. This requires two essential things:

- Offer a positive experience on your website to your foreign prospective clients: that requires optimization of your website's display and navigation on the browser that your prospective clients use in their country.
- Let your website be easily and quickly found by your foreign prospective clients: that requires you to adapt the SEO of your website for the search engines that your foreign prospects use in their country.



## CHAPTER 2

# PANDA, PENGUIN, COLIBRI, RANKBRAIN ... THE EVOLUTION OF GOOGLE'S ALGORITHM

“

*'Google just confirmed a core algorithm update': that is a title you've probably seen many times. The exact number of Google's updates is hard to determine, but it seems that Google changes its algorithm several times a day, including Saturdays and Sundays.*

*Although most of these updates are undetectable by internet users, it is useful for you to know the major evolutions of the algorithm to understand the value of the SEO actions for your digital export project.*

# ONE, TWO, ..., N ALGORITHMS

Everybody with some web interest dreams of finding the secret of how Google works and how to use its algorithms to make a website first in a SERP!



Google SearchLiaison

@searchliaison

...

The July 2021 Core Update, previously announced, is now rolling out:

[twitter.com/searchliaison/...](https://twitter.com/searchliaison/)

These typically take 1-2 weeks to finish. Our guidance about such updates is here:

[webmasters.googleblog.com/2019/08/core-u...](https://webmasters.googleblog.com/2019/08/core-u...)

Here's more on how we improve search through updates:

Google SearchLiaison @searchliaison · Jun 2

Just as computers & smartphones are regularly updated, the same thing happens with Google Search. In fact, Google Search is updated thousands of times per year with changes meant to improve the experience and the quality of results. More about the process: [blog.google/products/sear...](https://blog.google/products/sear...)

6:00 PM · Jul 1, 2021 · Twitter Web App

608 Retweets 420 Quote Tweets 918 Likes

Figure 4: Google's announcement of a core algorithm update on Twitter, one of its favorite channels for such communications.

We can go on dreaming, since this secret is very well protected in the safe of Google and Alphabet, its parent company. However, some algorithms, or parts of algorithms, are regularly updated and communicated by Google to help analyze the impact and adjust website SEO parameters.

But what is an algorithm?

Wikipedia gives this definition: 'In mathematics and computer science, an algorithm is a finite sequence of well-defined, computer-

implementable instructions, typically to solve a class of problems or to perform a computation. Algorithms are always unambiguous and are used as specifications for performing calculations, data processing, automated reasoning, and other tasks<sup>8</sup>. For a search engine, the algorithm is the set of calculations used to resolve internet users' queries and provide relevant results.

Google's algorithms are the results of the PageRank invention by Larry Page and Sergey Brin, its founders<sup>9</sup>.

## The PageRank Citation Ranking: Bringing Order to the Web

January 29, 1998

### Abstract

The importance of a Web page is an inherently subjective matter, which depends on the readers interests, knowledge and attitudes. But there is still much that can be said objectively about the relative importance of Web pages. This paper describes PageRank, a method for rating Web pages objectively and mechanically, effectively measuring the human interest and attention devoted to them.

We compare PageRank to an idealized random Web surfer. We show how to efficiently compute PageRank for large numbers of pages. And, we show how to apply PageRank to search and to user navigation.

*Figure 5: The PageRank Citation Ranking<sup>10</sup>.*

The PageRank was a success because it gave quicker and more relevant results, based on the analysis of the authority of websites, while other search engines limited themselves to counting the keywords used in the web pages<sup>11</sup>.

Today, Google no longer communicates on PageRank, having prioritized the combination of site popularity and authority with

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<sup>8</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithm>, text available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google\\_Search](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Search).

<sup>10</sup> This paper was released by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in 1998 to explain their system for ranking the web's information, Google basis,

<http://ilpubs.stanford.edu:8090/422/1/1999-66.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google\\_Search](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Search).

semantics and other technical elements. Since its launch in 1997, Google has operated not with a single algorithm but with a constellation of algorithms that are supposed to improve search results. And since the internet is constantly and frequently evolving, so do algorithms. The exact number is unknown, but it seems that Google changed its algorithms 3,234 times in 2018<sup>12</sup>.

In this link you will find 175 pages with Google's guidelines for its raters, the people helping Google's algorithm ranking. It is a good explanation, updated in October 2020, if you want to understand how to adapt your websites to Google's algorithm:

<https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/guidelines.raterhub.com/en/searchqualityevaluatorguidelines.pdf>

## HISTORY OF MAJOR GOOGLE ALGORITHM CHANGES

While often the changes are minor and unnoticeable, in other cases Google rolls out major updates to its algorithms that heavily impact how websites perform in the SERP. Knowing the details of these updates allows you to have a better understanding the ups and downs of your website's performance.

It would take too long to list the full history of all Google algorithms updates and changes and their impact on the SEO. You can get an almost complete list on the website of Moz, one of the key SEO players in the world<sup>13</sup>, which goes back to 2000, shortly after Google started operations.

Let's here just summarize the main algorithm changes that impacted international SEO:

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<sup>12</sup> According to Moz, <https://moz.com/blog/how-often-does-google-update-its-algorithm>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://moz.com/google-algorithm-change>.

- **Florida:** deployed in 2003 and considered the first real Google update, it penalizes sites with an overload of keywords, a very fashionable practice at that time to raise the ranking of web pages in the SERPs.
- **Nofollow** and local SEO: in 2005 Google's algorithm recognized the 'nofollow' HTML tags for hypertext links that should not be indexed by referral robots. That same year, with the release of Google Maps and its merger with Google Local, geolocation criteria were added into Google's core algorithm. The impact is significant for all local activities: shops, hotels, artisans, restaurants, etc. An impact that increased even more in 2014 with Pigeon (see below) and Google My Business.
- **Social signals:** as of 2010 Google, and other search engines, confirm having integrated social networks in their SEO settings.
- **Caffeine and Freshness:** deployed in 2010 and 2011, these changes integrated time-sensitive elements making it possible to improve the indexation of web pages that are updated more often and that are more recent.
- **Panda:** launched in 2011, this was a major algorithm update, and it had a hard impact on websites all over the world (up to 12%). With Panda, Google started taking quality and quantity of content into account to fight plagiarism, link abuse, over-advertising and a number of other issues. Panda is constantly updated to allow penalized websites to regain a good ranking after correcting their problems or to penalize those that have not consistently followed Google's instructions. The quality of the content is a priority SEO factor, and since 2016 Panda has been integrated into Google's main algorithm.
- **Penguin:** introduced in 2012, it penalizes web pages that do not follow Google's guidelines on the use of backlinks. It is very feared by webmasters and its updates have often been criticized in SEO communities. Websites penalized by Penguin had to clean all their links, and only if that was done correctly could they hope to get back to a good ranking in a future algorithm update. A delicate and long

cleaning job. In 2016, like Panda, Penguin was added to Google's core algorithm, so it works all the time. Therefore, the quality of backlinks must be constantly monitored to avoid Google penalties. But this addition to the core algorithm is also good news, because, in the event of a penalty, you no longer have to wait for an algorithm update to be able to recover a good ranking.

- **EMD, Exact Match Domain:** rolled out in 2012, it improves the ranking by preventing poor quality web pages from appearing in the first results simply because their URL contains exactly the words searched by internet users. For example, before this algorithm, a domain name like 'www.best-cheap-indian-restaurant.com' had a good chance of being in the SERP first positions whenever someone searched for the keywords 'cheap Indian restaurant', even if the website did not sell any Indian food! With EMD, the URL is important for the SEO only if the content of the page is consistent with the words used in its URL.
- **Top Heavy:** launched in 2012, it devalues websites that abuse advertising and have too much ad-space above the fold.
- **Pirate:** Also rolled out in 2012, it removes web pages from the SERPs that have received copyright-infringement complaints via Google's DMCA system.
- **Hummingbird:** deployed in 2013, it allows Google robots to understand the intentions of internet users via conversational searches, which means queries using a sentence or a question instead of one or a few keywords. Hummingbird is one of Google's most important algorithms because it has improved searches while opening the door to artificial intelligence and voice assistants.
- **Payday:** introduced in 2013, it improves the quality of SERPs by removing results assimilated to monetary spam, such as casinos and online games, adult sites, credit offers, unknown lotteries, etc.
- **Pigeon:** deployed in 2014 in the United States and one year later internationally, it reinforces the geolocation criteria integrated in 2005. Pigeon promotes local results and increases visibility thanks to Google My Business and Google Maps. It has a huge impact on all

local businesses, from restaurants to doctors, from corporate headquarters to law firms.

- **HTTPS:** also created in 2014, it started out small but increased every year up to 2017 when it was fully implemented. This algorithm change boosts websites that use encryption and secured forms.
- **Mobile-Friendly and Mobile-First:** launched in 2015 and 2018 respectively, they favor websites adapted to mobile navigation. Also known as 'Mobilegeddon', Mobile-Friendly had a big impact on SEO internationally. And as smartphones continued to boom in the following years, Google rolled out the Mobile-First Index in 2018 boosting the ranking of mobile-first websites, to the detriment of desktop-only versions.
- **Phantom or Quality:** in May 2015, many webmasters worried about big changes in the SERPs, but Google denied having made an update. The webmasters, convinced that in fact there had been one, named it 'Phantom'. And Google confirmed it a few weeks later. Renamed 'Quality', this update concerned the quality of web page content, but Google never clarified how it was different from Panda. There are, therefore, several versions of the Phantom algorithm (1, 2 or 3), but their specificities remain unclear except that they penalize pages with low-quality content.
- **RankBrain:** Launched in 2015, it relies on artificial intelligence and machine learning to understand abstract queries and similar queries formulated differently. Google has claimed that RankBrain is among the top three SEO factors, the other two being content quality and backlinks.
- **Mobile Speed Update:** desktop loading speed has been part of the algorithm since 2010, but it was in January 2018 that Google announced PageSpeed for mobile. For the moment, only very slow mobile websites are penalized since the content quality criteria is more important for the SEO.



## TIP

*This synthesis only concerns Google, but there are also 8-SP1, AGS, Reykjavik, Kaliningrad, TIC, and all the other algorithms of Yandex as well as roughly the same quantity for any search engine.*

*The evolutions of the algorithms are, therefore, numerous and constant. You need to follow those of the most used search engines in your target country to make sure your SEO is always adapted to them.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Google's algorithms and their updates are very numerous and constant.*
- *Studying all of them would take a considerable amount of time. However, a clear vision of algorithm changes with the most important impacts on SEO is essential for a good performance of your website in foreign countries.*

# CHAPTER 3

## WHY IS SEO IMPORTANT FOR DIGITAL EXPORT SALES?

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*Creating a nice-looking multilingual website is easy, but making it effective for international sales, so that it will convince foreigners to do business with you, is more difficult. And to convince them, your website must first be found, the quicker the better!*

*That is what international SEO does: it helps people from abroad find your website easily in the search engine they use in their country, whether local (google.es in Spain, google.co.uk in UK, etc.) or global (google.com, yahoo.com, bing.com, etc.). Let's see how it works.*

# HOW SEO HELPS EXPORT

Search engine optimization, or SEO, refers to all the natural or organic (i.e., free) techniques applied to a website to improve its performance and its ranking in the Search Index. Thus, when SEO is well deployed, the website can gain one of the first positions in a SERP without paying for advertising campaigns (such as Google Ads<sup>14</sup>).

As we have seen, the SERP contains the results that internet users obtain after entering the keywords associated with their needs in a search engine like Google. On the international scale, internet users can choose among several types of search engines, for example, national (google.es in Spain, google.de in Germany, google.co.uk in the United Kingdom, or Baidu in China, Yandex in Russia, etc.) or international (google.com, yahoo.com, bing.com, etc.).

As crawling bots analyze the website parameters following the instructions of their own specific algorithm, results from one search engine to another can vary widely. Therefore, you need to know which search engines your foreign prospective clients use most in their country before deploying the SEO on your website.

Although this search engine optimization works the same way almost all over the world, companies often struggle to understand its importance for export because they simply do not do it in their home country. This is the case for a website that has a lot of visitors drawn by its strong brand popularity.

But this privileged situation may not exist in a new foreign market where the brand does not have the same fame. In such a context, if this website does not have international SEO and is not optimized for local search engines, it will be invisible and useless for the acquisition of prospective clients in this market.

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<sup>14</sup> Google Ads is the new name for Google AdWords since July 24, 2018:  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AdWords>.



## TIP

*To understand the importance of international SEO for a website, you can compare it to participating in a trade show. Any business can rent a booth. However, if you do not send invitations to your local and international prospects, if you do not communicate on the specialized media of your sector, if you get a booth that is difficult to access, if you do not prepare translated catalogs, and so forth, your booth not only risks being deserted, but the few participants will have a bad experience and will not be tempted to come back to you.*

*Your website is, therefore, like your booth at a trade fair: you need SEO to have qualified visitors, to give them a positive experience, and to make them want to come back as soon as possible.*

## DOES EVERYBODY USE GOOGLE?

You cannot dissociate SEO from the search engine. And Google immediately comes to mind whenever someone talks about a search engine. The global leader with a market share exceeding 90% in 2020<sup>15</sup>, Google dominates in Europe, North and South America, and Africa.

Nevertheless, it has significant competitors in several countries.

This is the case in China, where Google failed to enter because of the power of Baidu and the other local actors, in Russia with Yandex in first position, and in South Korea with Naver.

Although you can find different search engines in a single country, most search engines operate in several countries, and in general they work the same way at either the international or national level: the criteria to please the algorithms, the general settings, and the update compliances are pretty much always the same.

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<sup>15</sup> StatCounter: <https://gs.statcounter.com/search-engine-market-share>.

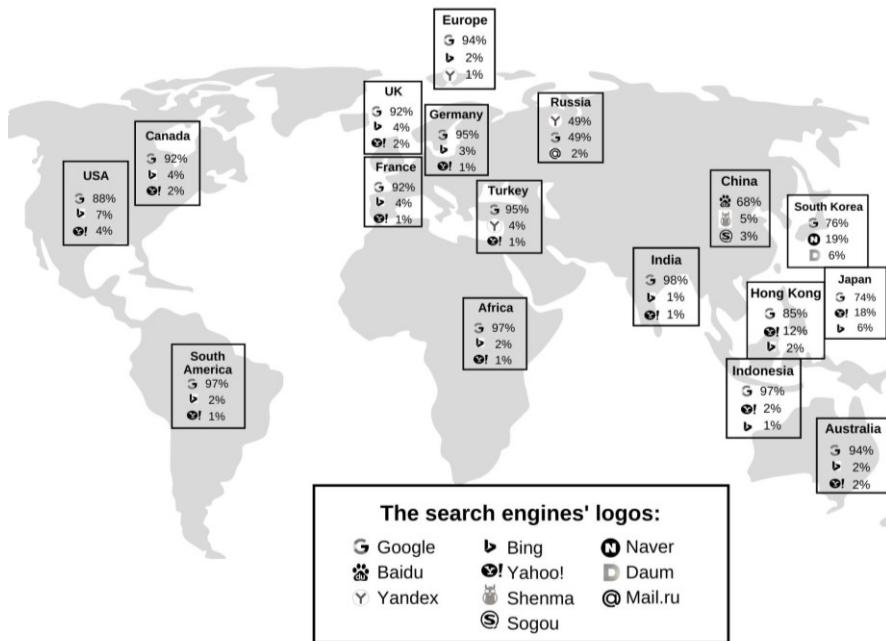


Figure 6: the market shares of the top three search engines around the world by country/continent (July 2021).

## THE LANGUAGES OF SEARCH ENGINES

Google and most of the other search engines are localized. What does that mean? It means that they have domain names and languages that are specific for each country: for example, google.es is dedicated to people searching in Spanish in Spain, google.de or de.yahoo.com to people searching in German in Germany, google.com.au for people searching in English in Australia, etc.

The SEO for your website must therefore be adapted to the local search engine and to the language used in your target foreign country.

There are almost as many localized search engines as there are languages on the internet. Optimizing a website for all these search

engines and in all their languages is a huge technical challenge and a major investment for any business. However, an English-only website is not a solution either, because only 25% of internet users are native English speakers and because an English-only website cannot rank well in the local search engines, since the crawlers of these local search engines speak only the local language, not English!

They cannot understand the keywords correctly, and, therefore, place these websites in lower positions or in irrelevant SERPs.

The solution is to proceed gradually.

You need to prioritize the most strategic countries for your digital export project and then deploy specific SEO according to this priority list. And that deployment should apply not only to your website but also to all your other digital assets: blog, social media, guides, etc.

TOP TEN LANGUAGES ON THE INTERNET	(A) World population for this language (2020 estimate)	(B) Internet users by language	Internet users by language on world total (B/4,585M)
English	1 531 179 460	1 186 451 052	<b>25,9%</b>
Chinese	1 477 137 209	888 453 068	<b>19,4%</b>
Spanish	516 655 099	363 684 593	<b>7,9%</b>
Arabic	447 572 891	237 418 349	<b>5,2%</b>
Portuguese	290 939 425	171 750 818	<b>3,7%</b>
Indonesian / Malaysian	306 327 093	198 029 815	<b>4,3%</b>
French	431 503 032	151 733 611	<b>3,3%</b>
Japanese	126 476 461	118 626 672	<b>2,6%</b>
Russian	145 934 462	116 353 942	<b>2,5%</b>
German	98 654 451	92 525 427	<b>2,0%</b>
<b>TOP 10 LANGUAGES</b>	<b>5 273 725 132</b>	<b>3 525 027 347</b>	<b>76,9%</b>
Rest of the languages	2 522 890 578	1 060 551 371	<b>23,1%</b>
<b>WORLD TOTAL</b>	<b>7 796 615 710</b>	<b>4 585 578 718</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Figure 7: the ten most spoken languages on the internet in the world<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> As of 31 March 2020, source: Internet World Stats

<https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>. The most recent internet usage information comes from data published by Nielsen Online, International



## TIP

*Do not forget that it takes time before you can see the positive results of SEO, either national or international. You will rarely see them before four to six months! Take this time-frame into account for:*

- *Your planning: if your export development objectives are short term, you should consider other international web-marketing levers rather than SEO to achieve your objectives faster.*
- *Your target countries: since the SEO budget is inversely proportional to the number of these target countries, the more you have, the smaller your budget per country, resulting in fewer resources per country and therefore more time to get positive results.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *SEO is essential to allow a website to rank correctly in local and international search engines and to be in the first few places of their SERPs, which is the only way for the website to be found on the internet in a foreign country.*
- *For SEO to be effective internationally, it must be adapted to the search engines and languages that your prospective clients use most in their country.*

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Telecommunications Union, GfK, and other reliable sources. Population estimates are based mainly on figures from the United Nations Population Division and local official sources.

# CHAPTER 4

## LOCALIZED SEO VS. INTERNATIONAL SEO

“

*The secret to success with international SEO is based on knowing how to adapt the level of SEO localization to foreign potential clients.*

*In some cases, they need to have the impression that the website and its contents were created specifically for them.*

*In other cases, they do not, since more generic content simply adapted to their language suits them perfectly.*

# SEO ISSUES FOR EXPORT SALES

A website's international SEO is an issue for many businesses around the world.

The main challenge is to adapt SEO according to two key aspects in parallel:

- The web search methods used by prospective clients abroad: what search engines, keywords and language do they use in their country?
- How search engines work: what are the parameters that a website must have to be well appreciated by the algorithms and the crawling robots of key search engines in the target countries?

You need to answer these questions to establish the SEO localization level for your digital export project.

As we will see in the next pages, this localization level is linked to the objectives you want to achieve for your business in the foreign country.

- If you target one or more specific countries with geo-localized content, or with an offer that is specific to a small area, you must adapt and localize your SEO for each country.
- If you are not targeting specific countries but rather people speaking the same language in several countries, you do not need to localize the SEO. International SEO will be sufficient.



## CASE STUDY

*1001HOBBIES* is a French e-commerce selling model kits of airplanes, vehicles, boats, cars, etc. The company offers its products internationally through seven country-specific domains<sup>17</sup>: *1001hobbies.fr*, *1001hobbies.com*, *1001hobbies.co.uk*, *1001hobbies.de*, *1001hobbies.es*, *1001hobbies.it* and *1001hobbies.nl*. This domain structure has seven specific SEO settings: one for France, one for the USA, one for the UK, one for Germany, one for Spain, one for Italy and one for the Netherlands.

One of its competitors, the Scottish [www.wonderlandmodels.com](http://www.wonderlandmodels.com), has taken a totally different approach with a single generic domain<sup>18</sup> and the integration of a Google Translate widget that automatically translates the website into 110 languages! While foreign internet users can easily understand the content in their language, this approach is not optimized for SEO. Indeed, SEO on this website is unique because there is only one domain name, *wonderlandmodels.com*, and only one written language, English. So, even though the Google Translate widget can turn English into German on the fly, the written texts in the code of the website remain in English: the crawling bots of *google.de* do not understand English and they cannot, therefore, rank it well in their SERP. And that is the same for the other 108 languages of the Google Translate widget. Whenever the translation is on the fly and not written in the code of a website, it is impossible for the website to rank in the SERP's first few positions. Only the written language, for Wonderland Models English, can allow a website to rank well in those search engines that use that same language, like *google.co.uk* or *google.com* for Wonderland Models.

Why then translate the content of a website into more than 100 languages? This is a very pertinent question since internet users in all the countries where these languages are spoken will not be able to find websites like *wonderlandmodels.com* in their local search engine. This approach can become interesting only if it is combined with advertising campaigns, like Google Ads, with substantial budgets to beat local competitors and, eventually, get into the SERP's first few positions.

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<sup>17</sup> The ccTLD, country-code Top-Level Domain.

<sup>18</sup> The gTLD, generic Top-Level Domain.

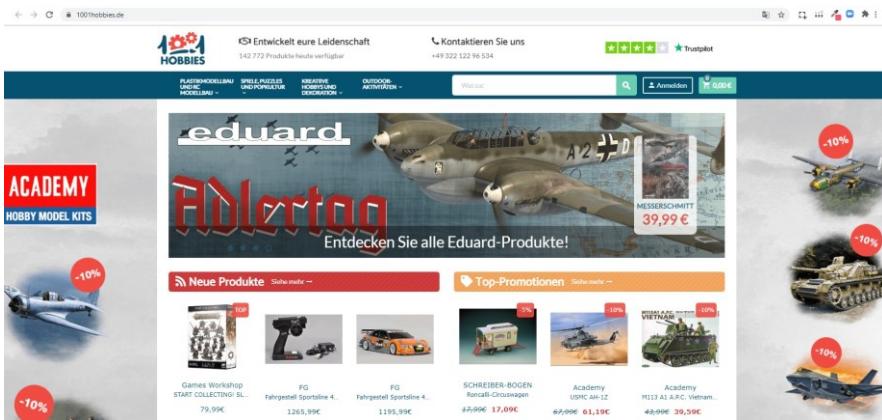


Figure 8: the German website of 1001HOBBIES on the ccTLD 1001hobbies.de.

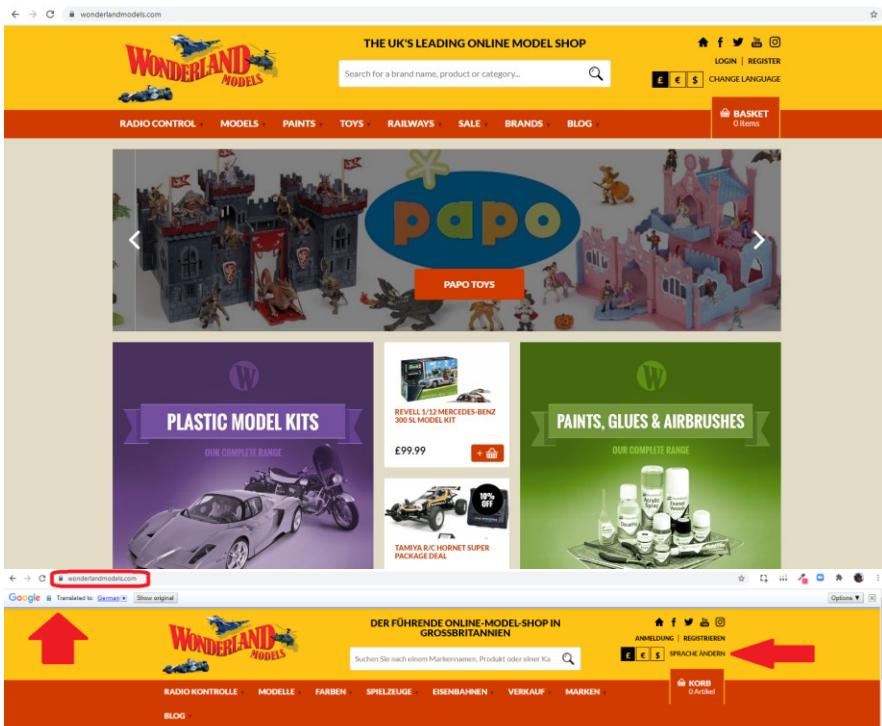


Figure 9: the English website of Wonderland Models on the gTLD wonderlandmodels.com and the Google Translate widget to turn it into German.

# **THE FEATURES YOU NEED TO CONSIDER**

There are several aspects that you need to consider determining whether your website requires localized or international SEO:

- The keywords used in queries by your foreign prospective clients: if they are specific to a single country, or if they are different from one country to another, localized SEO will be more effective; if they are identical in the same language in several countries, international SEO will be more suitable.

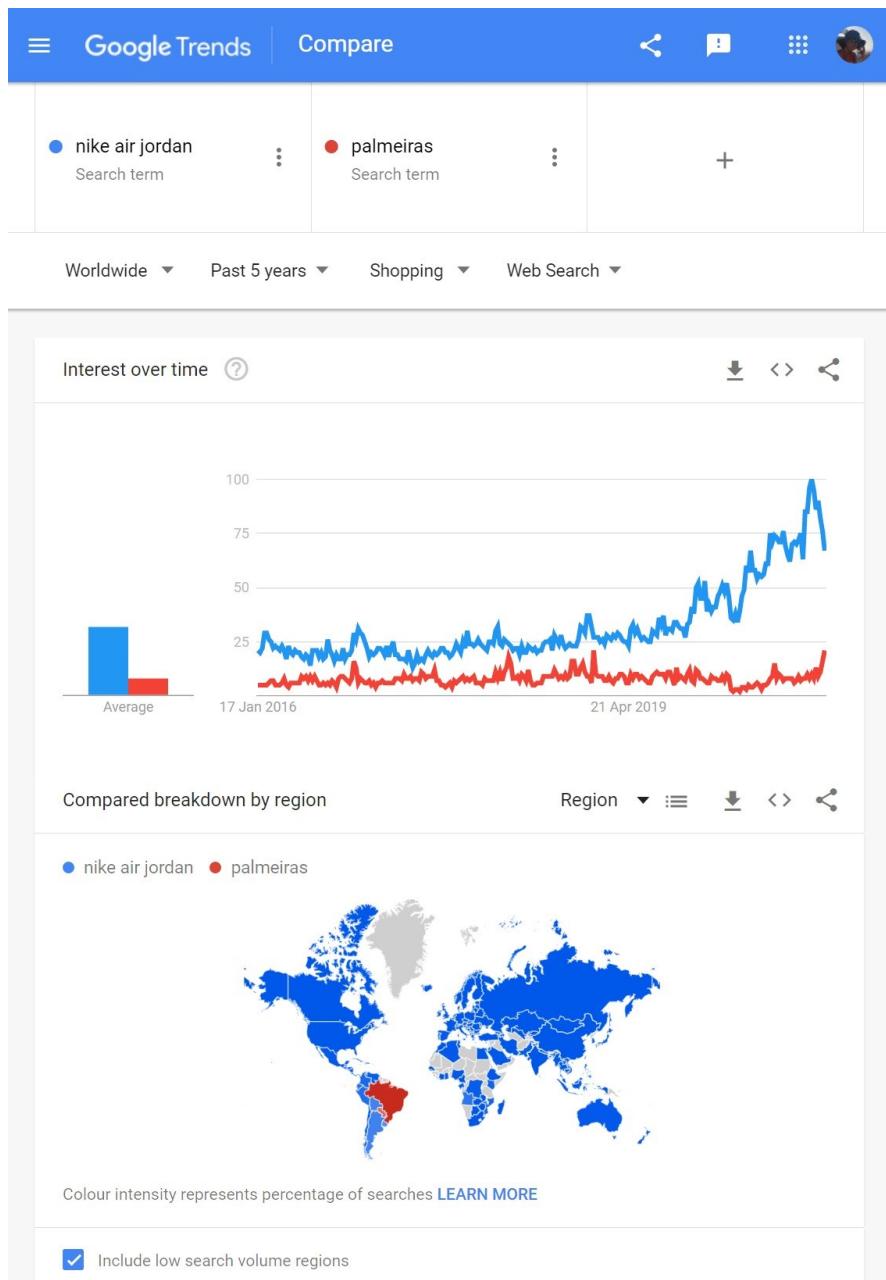


Figure 10: comparing the keywords 'Nike Air Jordan' and the Brazilian football

*club 'Palmeiras' on Google Trends as an example of international and localized SEO.*

- Seasonality, celebrations, and evergreen events: if these are essential elements for your business and if they differ from one country to another, localized SEO will be more appropriate.
- The website business model: if your products or services are different from one country to another, localized SEO is better; on the other hand, if they are identical for any country, international SEO is more suitable.
- Search engines and social media: if they are specific to the target countries, for example in China with Baidu, Youku, Weibo, WeChat, etc., localized SEO is much more effective than international SEO.

## SOME OPERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

The most substantial difference between localized SEO and international SEO is that for the former, the SEO criteria must be set up and adapted for each individual target country, while, for the latter, the SEO criteria are set up for each language, thereby allowing you to cover several countries.

Another difference concerns inbound referral links. If your website is targeting a specific country, these links must be localized too, and, unlike international SEO, quantity is also favored with quality. Local links from blogs, resellers, social media, other potential partners, etc. can all help your website increase its authority and credibility with the local search engines and with your local prospective clients.

In this case, the opinions and comments of internet users are crucial, as is Google My Business: the combination of these two brings out an optimized profile on Google Maps and creates synergies with your localized SEO. Similar mechanisms can be found on Apple Maps or Yelp.

In contrast, for international SEO, a large number of inbound links is less critical: they are still important, but here it is the quality of the links

that counts, not the quantity. A referral inbound link from an influential international company's website will be much more effective for SEO than a lot of non-influential links.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *SEO for export sales must consider two specific factors that impact an international website:*
  - 1) *The number of countries and languages in which it is developed.*
  - 2) *The number and functioning of the search engines used in the targeted foreign countries.*
- *Once these factors have been determined, SEO can be deployed using two alternative approaches:*
  - 1) *Localized SEO for websites that are targeting specific countries with local business.*
  - 2) *International SEO for websites that are targeting specific languages without country limitations.*

# CHAPTER 5

## DOMAIN NAMES FOR EXPORT

“

*When you embark on your digital export journey, one of your first decisions is the choice of an international website domain name.*

*This choice can have a significant impact on the success of your website and of its SEO performance in the targeted export markets. Let's look at how you can positively influence the performance of your international website by choosing the right domain names.*

# GOING BEYOND .CO.UK, .DE, .IT, OR .COM

The domain name system, or DNS, was designed to make the web more accessible by replacing the numbers of IP addresses with strings of characters separated by dots and thus creating domain names that are easier to use and remember.

In an international business environment, it is important for you to know that today, although most domain names are written in the Latin alphabet, a new encoding system, the Punycode<sup>19</sup>, allows browsers to recognize characters other than in the ASCII standard.

With this system, accented letters, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese or other non-Latin-alphabet words, and even emojis can be included in a domain name. Whenever Punycode is applied, the domain name is referred to as an internationalized domain name, or IDN.

Domain names are made up of three parts:

1) The **top-level domain**, or TLD, which is the right-most part after the dot. Top-level domains are managed by the ICANN<sup>20</sup>, under the supervision of IANA<sup>21</sup>, and, basically, they can be of two types:

- **gTLDs**, generic top-level domains: in the 1980s, seven gTLDs were created, .com, .edu, .gov, .int, .mil, .net, and .org, three of which (.com, .net and .org) without restriction as to use and the other four with limited-use restrictions. They were made up of three letters,

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<sup>19</sup> An encoding syntax that converts non-ASCII words in ASCII ones:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punycode>. Unfortunately, Punycode had some phishing issues and therefore its use is highly controlled for now.

<sup>20</sup> Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers.

<sup>21</sup> Internet Assigned Numbers Authority, that is also maintaining a list of the top-level domains which, as of June 2020, contains 1,584 TLDs, including 55 revoked, 8 retired, and 11 tests.

but since 2000 new forms have been and are still being added<sup>22</sup>, such as:

- Sectorial: .biz, .bio, .book, .wine, etc.
- Geographical: .paris, .berlin, .london, etc.
- IDN non-country specific: 在线 in simplified Chinese for online, or شبكة in Arabic for network, or .онлайн in Cyrillic for online, etc.
- The ‘brand’, or dotBRAND: .google, .apple, .gucci, .amex, .hermes, .toyota, .lego, .visa, .hsbc, etc. and also combined with an IDN such as .삼성 for .samsung in Korean, .グーグル for .google in Japanese, etc.<sup>23</sup>

▪ **ccTLDs**, country-code top-level domains: there were 255 in 2017, purely made up of two-Latin-character codes, and 316 in 2020, with the addition of IDNs. They identify a specific country, such as:

- .fr for France,
- .co.uk for the UK,
- .de for Germany,
- .co.jp for Japan,
- .mx or .com.mx for Mexico,
- .cn or .com.cn for China,
- .бг, the Cyrillic IDN ccTLD, or .bg for Bulgaria,
- .рф, the Cyrillic IDN ccTLD, or .ru for the Russian Federation,
- .中国, the simplified Chinese IDN ccTLD, or .cn for China,
- .ভারত, the Bengali IDN ccTLD, or .in for India,
- .المغرب, the Arabic IDN ccTLD, or .ma for Morocco.

Each ccTLD is associated with a specific country, and it is managed by a national organization in charge of deciding the requirements for obtaining it<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> An almost fully updated list can be found on the ICANN website <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/program-status/delegated-strings>.

<sup>23</sup> The advantages of this approach concern the brand image: by replacing the .com by the .brand as the gTLD at the global level the domain name could enhance the actions of the international and local SEO via the country variations such as www.france.brand or www.usa.brand and so forth. It is not yet proven that this way is more effective, but it remains a solution if ccTLDs are not available.

<sup>24</sup> For example, in France, the AFNIC, manages the .fr, in Germany, the DENIC manages the .de, etc.

Despite that, certain ccTLDs became gTLDs and lost their localization power with search engines because of too many non-country-related uses. This is the case for example with .it or .io<sup>25</sup>.

стопкоронавирус.рф ▾ Translate this page

## Стопкоронавирус.рф

Jan 17, 2020 — На нашем сайте можно узнать подробную информацию про Коронавирус

COVID-19: симптомы Коронавируса, меры профилактики, как ...

Оперативные данные · Новости · Вакцина · Часто задаваемые вопросы

Figure 11: an example of a Russian website with a .рф IDN ccTLD in Cyrillic.

2) The **second-level domain**, which is the part after the first dot. This is the name that you buy and register on a web hosting, which should be linked to your company name or brand. There are lots of affordable and reliable web hosts that can cost as little as 1 to 10 USD a month. Less than a cup of tea, but a very important investment for your digital export success.

3) Each second-level domain can include a **third-level domain**, such as the ‘www’ or other short strings of characters that can give a geographical (for example, sp. or spain.) or sectorial (for example, shop. or bike. or shoes.) connotation to the website. As you will see in the next pages, this short string of characters, which can also be an IDN, is also referred to as a ‘sub-domain’.



### TIP

*Google considers TLDs that are not targeting a specific geography, or that the ICANN did not confirm as ccTLDs, as gTLDs, and those that do as ccTLDs, which are only operational at the country level.*

Wikipedia provides a comprehensive list of the internet gTLDs as well as ccTLDs and IDNs here:

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Internet\\_top-level\\_domains](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domains)

<sup>25</sup> Here is a tentative list of other national top-level domains that are managed by Google as generic: .ad, .as, .bz, .cc, .cd, .co, .dj, .fm, .Io, .la, .me, .ms, .nu, .sc, .sr, .su, .tv, .tk, .ws. Unfortunately, Google does not provide an exhaustive list of these exceptions.

# **YOUR BRAND OR YOUR KEYWORDS?**

What is better for growing digital export sales: having your brand or your keywords in your domain name? Well, there is no single right answer but several good ones!

In the past, SEO experts favored domain names made up of the keywords that were relevant to the website's business and objectives, arguing that this technique was favored by search engines' algorithms and would help the ranking in the SERPs.

However, since 2012 with Google's EDM, Exact Match Domain, algorithm update, the presence of keywords in the domain name is less and less likely to help the website's SEO.

This does not mean that you should abandon this technique altogether.

In fact, for your online sales on an international scale, owning a domain name with clear keywords in it allows you to:

- Improve the click-through rate in the SERPs because the links are more comprehensible to the foreign internet users, who will, therefore, be more likely to click.
- Generate more backlinks because your clear domain name will attract many opportunities for consistent and SEO-friendly link exchanges.

However, the choice of the brand in a domain name can also help with selling online overseas. In particular, it helps you build your brand awareness abroad and strengthen the relationship with your foreign clients. Indeed, it is much harder to remember a brand through a generic keyword than through the brand name itself.

To make the right choice between keywords and brand for your international domain name, you must consider how your foreign prospective customers will find you on the internet and how they will remember you. Whether on search engines or via social media, your domain name is the first point of connection with your online foreign prospects.



## TIP

*To choose your domain name for your digital export project:*

- *List some possible domain names that are consistent with your business, containing either clear keywords or your brand or combining both.*
- *Shortlist those that are the easiest to memorize and to pronounce internationally.*
- *Prioritize those that have the lowest cost for online advertising in your target foreign market.*
- *Select the shortest and most relevant domain name.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

*To set an effective international domain name that is consistent with your digital export objectives, you must:*

- *Choose the type of domain name: a gTLD if you want to have a generic domain name or a ccTLD if you want your domain name to target a specific country.*
- *Choose a domain name for your digital export project that favors your brand or your international keywords, or both.*

# CHAPTER 6

## THE TYPES OF WEBSITES AND DOMAIN STRUCTURES FOR EXPORT SALES

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*To expand your business online internationally, you can use different types of websites and domain structures.*

*You need to understand the difference between them before choosing the one combination that can optimize the performance of your website and of your business in your target export markets.*

# THE THREE TYPES OF WEBSITES FOR EXPORT SALES

There are three types of websites that you can use for your digital export development:

- 1) Monolingual single-country websites whose content is specific to internet users speaking the same language and living in the same country. For example, an e-commerce in Spanish with a version website.es for Spain, one website.ar for Argentina, and another one website.mx for Mexico.
- 2) Multilingual single-country websites whose content is provided in several languages to the internet users living in the same country. For example, a website for Switzerland that is in German, French and Italian.
- 3) Multilingual multi-country websites whose content is presented in several languages for internet users living in different countries. For example, a football blog in Latin America provided in Spanish and Portuguese for readers in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, etc.

For you to choose between these three types of websites, you must think about your business and how each one of these three types is adapted to your products or services, to your prospective clients, and to your digital export strategy. Your choice is extremely essential since it will impact the domain structure and the SEO strategy of your website.



## TIP

*Very often the internationalization of a website is developed from a national website. That's why, before starting that process, you must check and fix all the technical problems in your national website: bad graphics resolutions, UX obstacles, dysfunctional plugins, troubling URL, and the like, everything must be fixed before starting your digital export project! That is the only way you can avoid their being multiplied in each international website version and then becoming impossible to manage and creating even greater issues in the future.*

*So, make sure your national website is technically as perfect as possible before investing money in its internationalization.*

# THE THREE DOMAIN STRUCTURES FOR EXPORT SALES

There are three main domain structures that you can use in association with the type of your international website:

- 1) The **multi-domain structure** composed of several top-level domains, a specific one for each country, the **ccTLDs**<sup>26</sup>:
  - www.website.fr
  - www.website.de
  - www.website.ca
  - www.website.ar
  - etc.
- 2) The **single domain structure** with a unique **gTLD**<sup>27</sup> associated with several **sub-directories**, each one dedicated to either a specific language or a specific country or a specific combination of language and country:
  - www.website.com/fr
  - www.website.com/de
  - www.website.com/ca-fr
  - www.website.com/ca-en
  - etc.
- 3) The **single domain structure** with a unique **gTLD** associated with several **sub-domains**, in which the www is replaced by another short string of characters that can be related to either a specific country or a specific language or a specific combination of country and language:
  - fr.website.com
  - de.website.com
  - ca-fr.website.com
  - ca-en.website.com
  - etc.

---

<sup>26</sup> Country-code top-level domain.

<sup>27</sup> Generic top-level domain.

(1) ccTLD	(2) gTLD + sub-directories	(3) Sub-domains + gTLD
www.klm.de www.klm.nl www.klm.no etc.	www.uber.com/fr/fr/ www.uber.com/it/en/ www.uber.com/de/de/ etc.	ch.oui.sncf/de/ es.oui.sncf/es/ en.oui.sncf/en/ etc.
www.sephora.de www.sephora.hk www.sephora.cn etc.	www.campanile.com/zh-cn/ www.campanile.com/de-de/ www.campanile.com/nl-nl/ etc.	fr.hotels.com ca.hotels.com da.hotels.com etc.
www.carrefour.fr www.carrefour.pl www.carrefour.es etc.	www.net-a-porter.com/fr-be/ www.net-a-porter.com/en-co/ www.net-a-porter.com/de-dk/ etc.	ru.benetton.com gb.benetton.com mx. benetton.com etc.

Figure 12: some examples of global brands and their domain structures.

As in the previous paragraph, for the choice of your domain structure you must think about your business and how each one of these three domain structures is adapted to your products or services, to your prospective clients, and to your digital export strategy.

And on top of that, you must make sure that the domain structure you pick is compatible with the type of website you choose.

For example, the multi-domain structure composed of several ccTLDs is not effective for multilingual websites, for which domain structures with a gTLD plus either sub-directories or sub-domains are more effective.

The combination of the type of your international website and your domain structure is very important because it directly impacts your SEO strategy and therefore the performance of your export sales.



## CASE STUDY

*A comparative study can help you in these two choices:*

- *First select the most relevant keywords for your business in the target foreign country.*
- *Launch a query in the search engine, location, and language of the same country.*
- *Analyze the first ten or so websites in the results list. You can obtain useful information on the types of websites and on the domain structures used by the best-ranked websites on those keywords in your target country.*
- *If you notice that most of these websites have a ccTLD domain structure, you should seriously consider that strategy for yourself too. In fact, if you choose a gTLD domain structure instead, you may end up with a website that is less effective than those of your competitors because a gTLD has lower localization power than a ccTLD.*

One final consideration about domain structures: they do not concern websites only. Search engines are concerned too since they are like websites.

Therefore, you can easily see the differences between search engines whose international domain structure strategy can vary enormously.

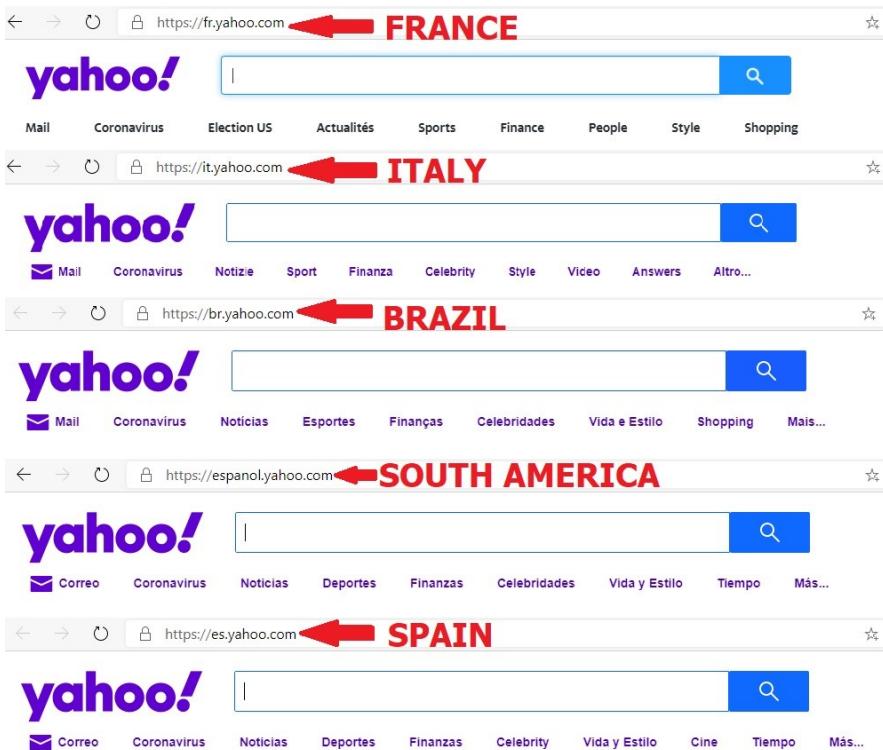


Figure 13: the domain structure strategy of Yahoo!



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

*There are three types of international websites:*

- *Monolingual single-country websites.*
- *Multilingual single-country websites.*
- *Multilingual multi-country websites.*

*They are associated with three types of domain structures:*

- *Several ccTLDs, one per foreign country.*
- *A single gTLD with several sub-directories, one per country or one per language or one per combination of country and language.*
- *A single gTLD with several sub-domains, one per country or one per language or one per combination of country and language.*

*The combination of the type of international website and the domain structure has a direct impact on SEO: this choice must, therefore, be considered very carefully to optimize the performance of your website and of your digital export sales.*



# CHAPTER 7

## WEBSITE TARGETING ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCALE

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*One of the key factors for your digital export success is how your website communicates about your business internationally: either you want it to communicate in exactly the same way all over the world, or you want it to communicate in different adapted ways in each country. That is what website targeting does.*

*And, based on that, the web-marketing techniques you must implement differ. Here is how.*

# WEBSITE TARGETING: WHAT IS IT?

When you invested in the development of your website, you didn't do it for artistic purposes. You did it for business purposes, meaning that your website must achieve some specific business objectives. And these objectives are achieved only if your website can deliver the right message to the right people in the right place at the right time.

That is what website targeting is about: deploying specific techniques to make sure your website can deliver the message you want to the people you want in the place you want at the time you want.

So, identifying the target of your international website is the foundation of your digital export strategy. This requires you to understand who your foreign prospective clients are and which of their problems your products or services solve. That's essential for knowing where to focus your marketing efforts.

For a traditional monolingual and mono-country website, identifying its target means answering questions like:

- Who are your potential clients?
- What do they do on the internet?
- Where do they shop online and offline?
- How do they communicate?
- What are their demographics, i.e., gender, age, job, hobbies, living downtown or in the suburbs, homeowner, or renter, etc.?
- What is their personality like, i.e., extrovert, family-oriented, lifestyle, etc.?

This list of questions is also relevant for your digital export project. But you must add a key dimension to your website targeting: the international dimension!

This international targeting can be of two types: on the one hand, targeting by language, and on the other hand, targeting by country.

# COUNTRY TARGETING OR LANGUAGE TARGETING?

To answer this question, you must decide whether it is a geographical area or a specific language that is the most important factor for your online business to connect with your foreign prospective clients.

Not deciding that is like leaving your website to target any country and any language in the world at the same time: targeting everyone or targeting too few people is like not targeting at all.

Additionally, you must make this decision, between a geographical area or a specific language, in the very first phases of your digital export project: making this decision late, or, worse, not making any decision at all, affects almost all other SEO factors, which will impact your export sales performance as a result.

In a digital export project, both geographical and linguistic targeting aim to do the same thing: turn foreign internet users that visit your website into customers, be they people or companies.

But they do it in a different way:

- **Targeting by country:** the foreign internet users that you want to turn into customers are all located in a specific country.

This approach is suitable when geolocated factors are decisive for your business, for example for a chain of restaurants or hairdressers, a click-&-collect e-commerce, etc. Considering the three types of websites in the previous chapter, targeting by country is particularly suitable for websites of the first two types.

- **Targeting by language:** the foreign internet users that you want to turn into customers all speak a specific language and are located anywhere in the world.

This approach is suitable for websites that do not fit into the previous case, for example a software as a service (SaaS) business, a luxury brand of perfume, etc. Considering the three types of websites in the previous chapter, targeting by language is particularly suitable for websites of the second type and sometimes the third type<sup>28</sup>.

When you are choosing between these two approaches you must also consider these other strategic parameters:

- The type of your international website.
- Your domain structure.
- The search engines in your target foreign country.
- Your local or international SEO strategy.



### TIP

*The choice of these parameters can have significant technical effects not only on SEO but also on your CMS<sup>29</sup> and on your website UX. Thinking about this at the very beginning of your digital export project will improve your productivity, budget, and time.*

## THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL TARGETING

Businesses very often mismanage the targeting of their international website, and that is ... good news! Yes, because if you do manage it right, you have an additional competitive advantage over your competitors on the international scale!

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<sup>28</sup> Google calls them 'multiregional targeting' and 'multilingual targeting' in its online support: <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/182192>. The same concepts also apply to other search engines although named differently.

<sup>29</sup> A CMS is a Content Management System, such as WordPress, Shopify, etc.

Let's consider the case of a French business that wants to develop its online sales in Germany. It can choose among different options for the website domain to use such as www.example.de, or www.example.com/de, or de.example.com, or www.example.fr/de, or fr.example.com/de. However, each one of these options will reach a different number of people, depending on the different international targeting applied to the website, as you can see in the next table.

Domain type & webmarketing techniques	The target that search engines understand	Segment	Number of internet users that the website can reach
www.example.de	Country = Germany	German people in Germany	79,127,551
www.example.com/de + geolocalisation & hreflang	Country = Germany Language = German	German people in Germany	79,127,551
www.example.com/de + hreflang	Language = German	German-speaking people around the world	92,304,792
de.example.com + geolocalisation & hreflang	Country = Germany Language = German	German people in Germany	79,127,551
www.example.fr/de	Country = France Language = German	German people in France	130,000*
fr.example.com/de	Country = France Language = German	German people in France	130,000*

Figure 14: why international targeting is important<sup>30</sup>.

But, to get that additional competitive advantage, as explained in the previous pages, you must decide on the international targeting of your website at the very beginning of your digital export project together with the four strategic parameters: the type of international website, its domain structure, the search engines used in the foreign country, and the local vs. international SEO strategy.

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<sup>30</sup> The sources of the numbers followed by \* are  
<https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats18.htm#german> &  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communaut%C3%A9\\_allemande\\_en\\_France](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communaut%C3%A9_allemande_en_France).



## CASE STUDY

*What is the ideal solution when choosing a website's international targeting and its domain structure for a business?*

*There is, unfortunately, no ideal solution that works for everyone. It is indeed a very personal decision that has to be based on the specific conditions of each business.*

*Let's have a look at the example of Apple compared to Coca-Cola. On the one hand, Apple has deployed an identical template around the world.*

*This technique offers a significant advantage by allowing its subsidiaries to focus on content without having to manage the entire website (graphics styles, UX, functionalities, etc.).*

*Despite this advantage, the identical-template technique is far from being the universal solution for large international corporations. Coca-Cola, with more than 120 websites around the world, gives you an example of the opposite approach with a different website in each country and a very high level of localization: each country has an independent website with a domain structure mixing ccTLDs, gTLDs with sub-domains, and gTLDs with sub-directories.*

*Why such different approaches? It is often linked to the history of the company and its domain names around the world: a company with several decades of business, or even more than a century, like Coca-Cola, probably started its web development in the 2000s or earlier, when international targeting techniques were not yet as clear and advanced as they are today.*

*Domain structures mixing ccTLDs, sub-domains, and sub-directories are a frequent phenomenon among historical consumer brands.*

*Their issue has been that they developed their digital strategy around the world with their foreign distributors or other local business partners. As their distribution strategy changed over time to adapt to business evolutions abroad, the brands had to split from their local partners, and with that they also had to split from the local domain names whenever they were owned by these local partners, a very common bad practice back at the beginning of the internet.*

*As a result, the brands could no longer use the ccTLDs with their name in some countries and had to use less optimized international domain structures.*



Figure 15: comparing the domain names of Coca-Cola Colombia, Poland, Bolivia, Japan, Germany, Italy, USA, and Hong Kong.



### TIP

*Do not follow the example of Coca-Cola, or that of other global companies, thinking that, if they do not apply the right international targeting for their website, it means it is not important. It is true that, when a brand is particularly famous at the global level, international targeting for its website is irrelevant.*

*But, for smaller brands that are even less known in foreign countries, international targeting for their websites makes a huge difference for their business.*

## CCTLD VS. GTLD

For your digital export project, there are several factors you must consider when deciding the best international targeting for your website, such as:

- The authority of your national website if it is a gTLD.
- The attractiveness of your brand in your country and its potential in foreign countries.
- The availability of a ccTLD for your target foreign market, if you think targeting by country is what you need for your website.
- The availability of a gTLD under your brand or your business name, if your national website is not using a gTLD, and if you think targeting by language is what you need for your website.
- Your business model, whether B2B, B2C, or B2B2C, etc.
- The behaviors of your foreign prospective clients online.

The choice of the domain structure is critical for an effective international website. Not only must you choose this structure at the very beginning of your digital export project, but also, once you've made your choice, you must keep it consistent as your business enters new markets.

This is the best way for good SEO and to reduce the risk of expensive corrections.

URL structure	Example	Pros	Cons
ccTLD ++ Localization -- Cost	website.de/Produkte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Clear and strong targeting signals</li> <li>•Server IP location not relevant</li> <li>•Easy separation of websites</li> <li>•Better backlinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Expensive to create and manage: 1 site per 1 country</li> <li>•ccTLD can be unavailable</li> <li>•ccTLD ownership can need special conditions</li> <li>•No authority, no linkjuice</li> </ul>
gTLD + Sub-directories ++ Cost + Localization	website.com/de/Produkte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Easy to create &amp; manage, same host</li> <li>•Benefit from gTLD authority</li> <li>•Can use Search Console and Webmaster Tools geotargeting</li> <li>•Can separate IP server locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Difficult for users to recognize the origin from the URL alone</li> </ul>
Sub-domains + gTLD ++ Cost -- Localization	de.website.com/Produkte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Easy to deploy, same host</li> <li>•Relatively inexpensive</li> <li>•Can use Search Console and Webmaster Tools geotargeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Difficult for users to recognize the origin from the URL alone</li> <li>•Harder to get backlinking</li> <li>•Single server location</li> <li>•Expensive to manage</li> <li>•No authority</li> </ul>
URL parameters	www.website.com/Produkte?lang=de	<b>NOT RECOMMENDED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Users might not recognize the origin from the URL alone</li> <li>•Impossible to use Search Console or Webmaster Tools</li> </ul>

*Figure 16: the advantages and drawbacks of the international targeting techniques.*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are three main types of domain structures for an international website:

- 1) With several ccTLDs, one for each foreign country, particularly recommended for targeting by country.
- 2) With one gTLD followed by subdirectories, recommended for targeting by country, by language or by both.
- 3) With one gTLD preceded by subdomains, recommended for targeting by country, by language or by both.

Whichever one you decide to use for your digital export project, you must remember that it is not your website that has to adapt to SEO: it is the other way around. You must adapt your SEO to the domain structure and the targeting strategy that you have chosen.

The SEO will be different for each of these three domain structures and for each type of targeting<sup>31</sup>. That is the reason why they must be defined at the beginning and remain consistent throughout the life of the project. If you initially chose a domain with a ccTLD, for example website.fr, you will struggle to target people in Canada or Belgium speaking French, or other languages, from the same ccTLD.

On the other hand, by adding a ccTLD for Canada, one for Belgium, etc., your targeting will be more effective while maintaining a structure consistent with the SEO work already done on website.fr.



### CASE STUDY

*To further highlight their web targeting strategy by country and push their localized approach, Amazon and Expedia not only use ccTLD as a domain structure but have integrated the domain names into their logos to strengthen the proximity and trust with their customers.*

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<sup>31</sup> Sometimes the same export market can have several search engines, for example Russia where Yandex and Google are used almost equally. In this case, you will have to work on the SEO parameters for both engines. This affects only a few countries, the vast majority having only one predominant search engine.



Figure 17: some examples of localized Amazon and Expedia logos.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

For your digital export project, you have two website targeting options:

- Targeting by country, the best method if geolocated factors are key for your business. Or,
- Targeting by language, a method suitable for the other cases.

The choice between these two targeting options is linked to the type of international site, its domain structure, the search engines used by your foreign prospective clients, and the local vs. international SEO strategy.

# CHAPTER 8

## THE TECHNIQUES TO TARGET BY COUNTRY

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*If your business needs a website to target a particular country, you must deploy specific techniques on it. Without them your website cannot be found easily by your foreign prospective clients in the search engines they use locally.*

*And, even if some of them succeed in finding your website, it cannot convey the relevant message it needs to persuade them to stay and buy.*

*Basically, your website will not help your export sales! Let's see how to avoid that.*

# TARGETING BY COUNTRY WITH CCTLDs

ccTLDs are the domains that carry the strongest signals telling search engines what country the website targets. It is unambiguous that the .fr tells google.fr, or other search engines, and internet users that the website is meant for people in France, that the .ru is for people in Russia, and so forth.

A second advantage of a website using the ccTLD is that it can be easily associated with Google My Business, which is another very strong signal to indicate the website target country to search engines.

The use of ccTLDs is, therefore, the best choice as part of a strategy that is targeting by country. However, in some cases this can be complicated or even impossible, because:

- Several ccTLDs have lost their country power, becoming like a generic top-level domain (gTLD) after they have been used too often for other reasons than for country targeting. That is the case for .it for Italy or .io for the British Indian Ocean. If you want to target a country with one of these lower-power ccTLDs, the solution is to declare that in the Google Search Console or in the Webmaster Tools of other search engines, a declaration that is not required for regular-power ccTLDs.
- The ccTLD is not available: either it is already online for another business in the country concerned, or it belongs to someone else even if it is not online. The second case would seem less extreme than the first since you can contact the owner to try to retrieve the ccTLD. Either way, a quick fix is not easy.
- The ccTLD domain can only be registered in the foreign country by a company registered in that same country, for example in China.



## TIP

*E-commerce websites frequently use ccTLDs because they have content that is very specific for each country: currencies, contract terms, deliveries, payment systems, etc.*

<a href="http://www.leslipfrancais.de">www.leslipfrancais.de</a>
<a href="http://www.leslipfrancais.fr">www.leslipfrancais.fr</a>
<a href="http://www.leslipfrancais.co.uk">www.leslipfrancais.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.manomano.fr">www.manomano.fr</a>
<a href="http://www.manomano.it">www.manomano.it</a>
<a href="http://www.manomano.es">www.manomano.es</a>
<a href="http://www.blablacar.ru">www.blablacar.ru</a>
<a href="http://www.blablacar.com.br">www.blablacar.com.br</a>
<a href="http://www.blablacar.nl">www.blablacar.nl</a>

Figure 18: some examples of targeting by country with ccTLDs.

When you need your website to target by country but the ccTLDs are unavailable for the foreign countries you want, you have two options:

- adapt the name, or
- use another domain structure with additional techniques, which you will see in the next paragraph.

## TARGETING BY COUNTRY WITH A GTLD AND SUB-DIRECTORIES

A website targeting by country with a domain structure based on a gTLD with sub-directories looks, for example, like this:

- [www.website.com/fr](http://www.website.com/fr) for France
- [www.website.com/de](http://www.website.com/de) for Germany
- [www.website.com/ru](http://www.website.com/ru) for Russia
- etc.

Unlike ccTLDs, which are specific to each country, here the gTLD does not change: it is unique and always the same for all countries. Only the sub-directories change in accordance with each target foreign country.

<a href="http://www.zara.com/fr">www.zara.com/fr</a>
<a href="http://www.zara.com/ru">www.zara.com/ru</a>
<a href="http://www.zara.com/br">www.zara.com/br</a>
<a href="http://www.apple.com/au">www.apple.com/au</a>
<a href="http://www.apple.com/si">www.apple.com/si</a>
<a href="http://www.apple.com/co">www.apple.com/co</a>
<a href="http://www.hm.com/za">www.hm.com/za</a>
<a href="http://www.hm.com/pe">www.hm.com/pe</a>
<a href="http://www.hm.com/uv">www.hm.com/uv</a>

*Figure 19: some examples of targeting by country with gTLDs and sub-directories.*

## SOME OTHER TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE TARGETING BY COUNTRY

### Key country signals that Google collects on websites

Google analyzes several elements on an international website to determine which countries it is targeting. If this website's settings are incomplete, incorrect or, worse, inaccessible, Google will struggle to index it correctly and rank it well in the SERPs of the countries concerned.

The main elements that Google analyzes are the following, by order of importance:

- The ccTLD: Google, and internet users, see this type of domain as the strongest signal for the location of the website. Since it is specific to a single country, people and crawlers understand that the website's business only concerns that country.
- The gTLD with its geolocation settings: gTLDs send a weaker location signal to Google compared to ccTLDs. To overcome this difference, the solution is to declare the target country in the Google Search Console (see the third Case Study in the next chapter for details on Google Search Console settings) and in the Webmaster Tools of other search engines. This setting is pointless for ccTLD

websites because the declaration of the targeted country is already done via the type of domain.

- The information on the website: the business address and telephone number, the currency (especially for e-commerce sites), Google My Business (if available), etc.
- The server's address, i.e., the IP address of the website: search engines think that the servers are located near the users and deduce that the IP address corresponds to the country that the website is targeting. However, this is not always the case, because a website can be hosted on international servers or on a CDN<sup>32</sup>; therefore, the IP address can be important for targeting by country, but Google doesn't consider it a strong signal.
- The settings of the 'hreflang' annotations for each URL of a different country (the details will be addressed later in this book).
- Backlinking, especially local links landing on the website and their authority.



### **TIP**

*These elements are important not only for Google but also for almost any other search engines. Make sure you correctly configure your Google Search Console as well as the Webmaster Tools of all the other search engines used by your prospective clients in their country.*

## **Content Delivery Network for a gTLD targeting by country**

Whether at the local or at the international level, the website's load speed is one of the most important things that impact its SEO performance and its position in the SERP. But for an international website the challenge is even bigger: the load speed is a signal for Google and for other search engines about the country that the website is targeting.

By improving this load speed, CDNs help strengthen the website's signals of its country targeting to the search engines, and therefore improve the performance of your digital export business. But what is exactly a CDN? And how does it work?

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<sup>32</sup> Content Delivery Network, see next paragraph.

A CDN, or Content Delivery Network, is a network of servers that can be located anywhere in the world. As soon as you use a CDN, your website is automatically duplicated in the cache of each server in that network.

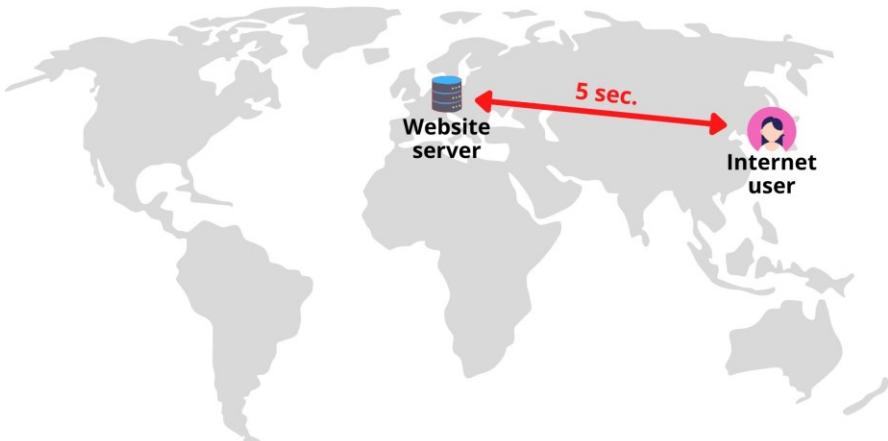
The network will then manage this content, delivering it to foreign internet users from the server that is nearest to them. By reducing the distance between the internet users and the servers, the CDN can improve the load speed of your website, and it will do so wherever its servers are located around the world.

Without a CDN, internet users in Japan wishing to buy on a German website hosted in Germany will have a significant wait time because the web pages will have to travel quite a distance before they are delivered to Japan, much more than the wait time on a website from a competitor hosted in Japan.

That long wait time will make people leave the German website after a few seconds, increasing its bounce rate and reducing its number of page views, which have a very negative impact on SEO performance.

Therefore, the longer your website's international waiting time, the more your digital export business will be penalized not only for the country targeting signals and SEO, but also for your sales in that foreign country.

## Without a CDN



## With a CDN

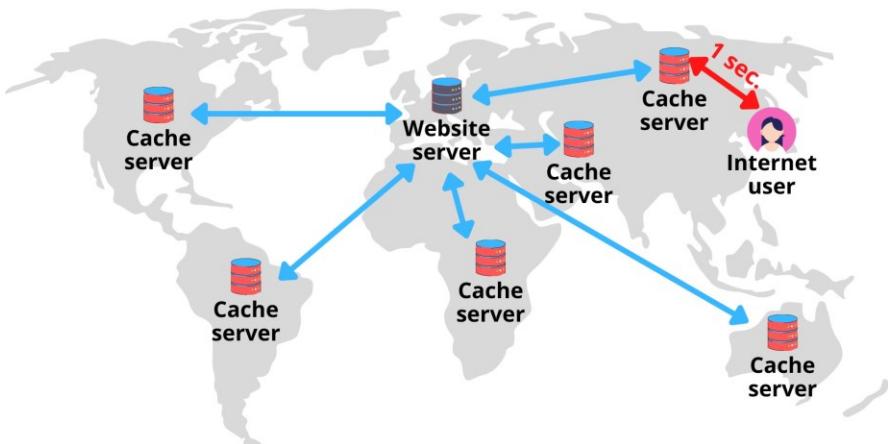


Figure 20: the difference between a website without CDN and one with CDN.



### TIP

If you decide to use a CDN for your digital export project, check where the servers of your possible provider are located around the world before validating your choice. It is the only way to make sure that the CDN provider you choose has servers in the foreign countries you need for your business.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- If your international website targets specific foreign countries, the domain structures by ccTLD or by gTLD with sub-directories are the best options for optimizing its performance.
- In the case of a domain structure with a gTLD with sub-directories, you also need to set up the Google Search Console, and the Webmaster Tools of other search engines, to achieve as strong a country targeting signal as you would with a ccTLD.

# CHAPTER 9

## THE TECHNIQUES TO TARGET BY LANGUAGE

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*If your business needs a website to target a particular language, you must deploy specific techniques on it that are different from those in the previous chapter.*

*As before, these techniques help your foreign prospective clients find your website easily in the search engines they use in their language, which is the same one that can be used in several countries.*

*And they also help your website convey the right message to persuade these people to stay and buy. Let's see how to do that.*

# TARGETING BY LANGUAGE WITH CCTLDs

Deploying a ccTLD domain structure for a website that needs to target by language is definitely not a good idea. By using a ccTLD, your website tells Google and other search engines that it is meant for a specific country, which is not what you should want when your website can sell to people that speak the same language in many different countries.

If you were using a ccTLD domain structure to target, for example, French-speaking people around the world, you would need to use a domain such as [www.website.fr](http://www.website.fr) for people in France, another domain [www.website.be](http://www.website.be) for French-speaking people in Belgium, another [www.website.ch](http://www.website.ch) for French-speaking people in Switzerland, and so forth for all the other countries where French-speaking people live. That would require a huge amount of extra work and money compared to the other two options for targeting by language, which will simply need a single domain like [www.website.com/fr](http://www.website.com/fr) or [fr.website.com](http://fr.website.com).

Unfortunately, you can still find a lot of websites that use a ccTLD to target by language internationally. They often add sub-directories to the country-code domain, usually one per language, thinking that is what to do. Well, it is not!



## CASE STUDY

*Let's take the example of a Spanish website that has a ccTLD domain [www.website.es](http://www.website.es) and uses [www.website.es/en](http://www.website.es/en) for English-speaking people and [www.website.es/pt](http://www.website.es/pt) for Portuguese-speaking people, be they in the UK, Portugal, or anywhere else around the world. The SEO performance of such a website will be poor.*

*Search engines' crawling bots expect a website on an .es ccTLD to have its content in Spanish. Instead, they have it in English, in Portuguese, and also in Spanish on [www.website.es](http://www.website.es). Having these three languages on the same .es domain will confuse the crawlers: they will not understand how to index the website. As a result, the search engine algorithm will rank it low in the SERPs or, worse, in the wrong SERPs, i.e., those whose queries concern keywords that have nothing to do with the business related to the website.*



## TIP

*If your home website is on a ccTLD, and your digital export project does not require targeting by country, do not be afraid of getting a gTLD for your international development. That does not prevent you from keeping the ccTLD for your home country. The best practice in that case is to redirect it to the right sub-directory or sub-domain of the gTLD for better consistency and performance.*

# TARGETING BY LANGUAGE WITH A GTLD AND SUB-DIRECTORIES

If your business needs a website that targets by language, a gTLD with sub-directories is the best domain structure. Besides ease of implementation, the great advantage of this structure is to have a single domain and a single hosting provider because the gTLD does not change.

What changes are the sub-directories that are specific to each one of the target languages. This structure with a gTLD and sub-directories also makes it easy to target by language while targeting by country: that is possible when the sub-directories use the language codes and the country codes at the same time, as in these examples.

<a href="http://www.kikocosmetics.com/fr-fr">www.kikocosmetics.com/fr-fr</a>
<a href="http://www.kikocosmetics.com/fr-be">www.kikocosmetics.com/fr-be</a>
<a href="http://www.kikocosmetics.com/fr-ch/">www.kikocosmetics.com/fr-ch/</a>
<a href="http://www.maisondumonde.com/DE/de">www.maisondumonde.com/DE/de</a>
<a href="http://www.maisondumonde.com/CH/de">www.maisondumonde.com/CH/de</a>
<a href="http://www.maisondumonde.com/AT/de">www.maisondumonde.com/AT/de</a>
<a href="http://www.ikea.com/be/fr">www.ikea.com/be/fr</a>
<a href="http://www.ikea.com/at/de">www.ikea.com/at/de</a>
<a href="http://www.ikea.com/ca/en">www.ikea.com/ca/en</a>

*Figure 21: some examples of targeting by language with gTLDs and sub-directories.*



## CASE STUDY

The website of 10-vins, a French wine-related business, is in French and English with a gTLD and two sub-directories: [www.10-vins.com/fr](http://www.10-vins.com/fr) for French-speaking people and [www.10-vins.com/en](http://www.10-vins.com/en) for English-speaking people.

The gTLD with the French brand name is very smart because the domain name contains both the French keyword vins (meaning 'wines') and a built-in play on words due to the French pronunciation of the brand name, which sounds exactly like the French word meaning 'divine'. However, it can only work in France and other French-speaking countries! It cannot work in the UK, or any other English-speaking country, because vins is not a word in English, and, therefore, loses its keyword power in that language, and because the ordinary English pronunciation of the brand name does not sound like 'divine'.

To achieve the same benefits in other countries, the domain name should be localized in each country, and not just translated: '10-wines' does not contain the same clever play on words as the French 10-vins! One solution is to keep that gTLD to target French-speaking people around the world and add another one using a domain name with more impactful words to target English-speaking people around the world.

Choosing an effective and meaningful international domain name is essential to the success of your digital export project, and the sooner you do it, the better.

## TARGETING BY LANGUAGE WITH A GTLD AND SUB-DOMAINS

You have a second option if you need your website to target by language: the domain structure with a gTLD preceded by sub-domains. In addition to the advantages offered by the previous domain structure, this one allows you to have several server locations.

<a href="http://ch.oui.sncf/en/">ch.oui.sncf/en/</a>
<a href="http://es.oui.sncf/es">es.oui.sncf/es</a>
<a href="http://en.oui.sncf/en">en.oui.sncf/en</a>
<a href="http://fr.hotels.com">fr.hotels.com</a>
<a href="http://ca.hotels.com">ca.hotels.com</a>
<a href="http://da.hotels.com">da.hotels.com</a>
<a href="http://ru.benetton.com">ru.benetton.com</a>
<a href="http://gb.benetton.com">gb.benetton.com</a>
<a href="http://mx.benetton.com">mx.benetton.com</a>

Figure 22: some examples of targeting by language with gTLDs and sub-domains.

## SOME OTHER TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE TARGETING BY LANGUAGE

### Key language signals that Google collects on websites

Google's algorithms, like most of the other search engines' algorithms around the world, determine the language of a website simply by looking at the linguistic elements that are visible on the pages of the website.

It is therefore important for you to keep a good level of clarity for the content of your website. In particular, Google recommends:

- Having only one language per page with a separate URL for each language.
- Not using cookies or internet users' browser settings to translate the content automatically on the fly. Google does not see text that is not written.
- Not automatically redirecting internet users to a language version of the website. That prevents Google crawlers and internet users from seeing all the language versions that are available on your website.
- Having a language selector to hyperlink all the language versions of your website together.

- Correctly declaring the target language in the Google Search Console (see the next Case Study for details) and in the Webmaster Tools of other relevant search engines.
- Setting the 'hreflang' annotations for each URL of a different language (the details will be addressed later in this book).
- Not using 'lang' attributes in the URL to indicate the language of the page.

If you are not able to follow the above recommendations, Google might not find and index all the language versions of your website.



### **TIP**

*These recommendations from Google are very often also valid for other search engines. If you follow them, your website will, therefore, not do badly with its ranking in other search engines around the world.*

If some pages of your international website do not allow you to have a single language, for example when the content is user-generated and the users provide content in several languages, it is recommended to apply the 'noindex' tag at the beginning of the code of the relevant pages to tell the search engines' crawlers not to index them.

This prevents the search engines' algorithms from thinking that your website provides poor quality content and from penalizing it in the SERPs<sup>33</sup>.

### **Settings in the Google Search Console and in the Webmaster Tools of other search engines**

As we saw in the previous chapter, if your international website has a domain structure based on a gTLD with sub-directories and it has to target by country, you need to use Google Search Console and the Webmaster Tools of other search engines to declare the target country.

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<sup>33</sup> The 'robots.txt' file is often used for the same purpose, but it is not effective if other indexed external links point to the web page concerned.

The same declarations are required if your website is targeting by language.

This setting is fundamental because the information on the website can confuse search engines' algorithms.



## CASE STUDY

*Let's consider the example of a French website targeting French-speaking people in France, Canada, Belgium and Switzerland. In this case, you can associate the gTLD with sub-domains or sub-directories for the same language and the different countries.*

*These are the steps you need to follow to declare languages and countries in Google Search Console. The steps for such declarations in the Webmaster Tools of other search engines are very similar:*

- First make sure you're on the old version of Google Search Console! Indeed, Google recently launched a complete renovation of the Search Console, but it has not yet integrated all the functions. Google itself recommends using the old version of the Search Console for the configuration of international targeting. To access the old version, go to the vertical menu on the left, click on 'Legacy tools and reports', then click on 'International targeting'. That will open the old version of the Search Console.
- Once you are in the old version of the Search Console, head to 'Traffic' in the menu on the left and then to 'international targeting'. Then, in the 'Country' tab select the country concerned by the language of your site or select 'Unlisted' if the language of your site does not target any specific country.



Search Console

[Use new Search Console](#)

International Targeting

Language

Country

Target users in: Unlisted ▾

[Save](#)

[Cancel](#)

Figure 23: the settings in Google Search Console for country and language targeting.



## TIP

*This setting is important not only for Google but also for most other search engines. So, be sure to set it up in Google Search Console and in all the Webmaster Tools of the other search engines that are relevant for the language, and country, of your digital export project.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- If your international website targets specific languages, the domain structures by gTLD with sub-directories or sub-domains are the best options for optimizing its performance.
- In both cases, it is also very important that you set up the Google Search Console, the Webmaster Tools of other relevant search engines, and all the other key elements to send stronger and clearer targeting signals to the search engines' crawlers.

# CHAPTER 10

## SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT SEO FOR TARGETING BY COUNTRY OR BY LANGUAGE

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*There are some other SEO considerations that can help you optimize the performance of your international website, according to whether it targets specific countries or specific languages or both.*

*In addition to the domain structure, in the next pages you will find some other SEO factors and elements that you can use to enhance the targeting of your international website.*

# SEO FOR A WEBSITE TARGETING BY COUNTRY

One of the first elements that helps the SEO of an international website that targets by country is the rationale of its domain structure. As you have seen, a website targeting by country can use any of the three domain structures.

However, to get the best results out of your SEO actions, consider that:

- Only ccTLD domain structures make it possible to optimize country targeting and localized SEO: as you saw in the previous pages, domains in .fr, .de, .co.uk, .ru, etc., send very strong and clear signals to search engines on the country that they target. This type of domain is also a good solution for a website to rank better on certain search engines such as Baidu or Yandex.
- The gTLD domain structures with sub-directories can also be a good solution especially if the gTLD has strong authority: the sub-directories will indeed be able to benefit from the same authority of the gTLD and this will help the SEO of the international website sub-directories in the target search engines. But beware: this also works in the opposite direction. If the gTLD has been penalized by Google because of some technical issues, the penalty will also be passed on to the sub-directories.
- Country targeting with a domain structure based on a gTLD preceded by sub-domains seems to be the least effective. First because this structure does not allow your website to benefit from the authority of the gTLD, and second because sub-domains have all the constraints of ccTLD management without having the targeting strength.

Beyond the domain structure, other factors can improve the SEO of a website that is targeting by country, such as:

- Hosting in the relevant foreign country: this can considerably speed up the loading time of the web pages, especially if the country your website is targeting is very far away. An alternative is to set up a CDN, as explained in an earlier chapter.

- Local inbound links: getting relevant backlinks from the country that your website is targeting is also highly valued by search engines' algorithms.
- Specifically-adapted content for local users not only in terms of keywords but also for units of measure, currency, holidays, evergreen content, Google My Business, etc.
- Google My Business: this is a very effective tool for boosting the SEO of a website that is targeting by country. It allows you to create an independent web page describing your company and to interact with internet users nearby by phone, email, or chat. This company page can contain several types of information: description of the business, opening hours, office addresses, product or service information, pictures, specifications, etc. All this content is editable for updates at any time. They are then automatically spread not only on Google's SERPs but also on Google Maps. With Google My Business, you also have the option of creating a simplified website that automatically includes the information from your Google My Business page.



### **TIP**

*To be able to set up Google My Business, all you need is a local physical business address, which for your home country is your head office address. For your target foreign countries, you have three options:*

- *If you have subsidiaries or offices in those countries, you can use their addresses to create a Google My Business page in each of these countries.*
- *If you do not have any subsidiaries or offices abroad, you can use the address of a local partner, such as an official agent, or a domiciliation in a chamber of commerce or in a business center.*
- *If the two previous cases do not apply to you, instead of creating a company page in each of your target foreign countries, you can create a place of business and link it to your home country page.*

*In all cases, a real address is required: Google will ask you for it to send you a validation letter, without which your Google My Business page will not be published.*

# **SEO FOR A WEBSITE TARGETING BY LANGUAGE**

If your international website does not target by country but by language, the SEO must be done at a more global level to get all the search engines of the same language around the world to rank it well.

For that, the most suitable domain structures are those with gTLDs that are either:

- Followed by sub-directories: as we have seen, this practice is the best one when the gTLD has a strong authority because the sub-directories will also benefit from it, and this will facilitate the international search engines' crawlers to index it well; or
- Preceded by sub-domains: the SEO performance of targeting by language with this domain structure seems to be like that of the previous one. However, in this case, the gTLD authority is not clearly transferred to the sub-domains, and the level of management and costs is higher.

Beyond the domain structure, other factors can bolster the SEO of a website targeting by language. Among them:

- Monolingual content visible on the website's pages dedicated to the target language.
- Specific sub-domains or sub-directories for each target language.
- No machine translations.
- The configuration of Google Search Console, as explained in the previous chapter.



## TIP

*Do not be fooled by the international targeting of your website. Although some of the recommendations in this book may make it seem like a huge amount of extra work, it is simply a question of common sense. For effective international targeting, all you need to do is tune in to all the elements of your multi-channel export strategy, such as:*

- Your business, your business model and your export objectives.
- Your target foreign markets and your prospective clients in those markets.
- Your type of international website.
- Your domain names and your international domain structure.
- Your SEO by country or by language.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Whatever your website targeting strategy, with a domain structure focused on either each foreign country, or foreign language, the international SEO parameters will have to be adapted.
- Thanks to this adaptation, you will increase the chances for your international website to rank in the first few positions of the SERP of the foreign search engines used by your prospective clients in their country.



# CHAPTER 11

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: ON- PAGE SEO

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*If you want to increase your website visibility to your prospective clients and increase its traffic coming from international search engines, you need to make sure that the SEO is properly configured according to your targeting strategy.*

*Because, even if you have the most beautiful website in the world, without suitable international SEO nobody will find it, and nobody will see it overseas.*

# HOW TO IMPROVE ON-PAGE SEO FOR INTERNATIONAL SALES

On-page SEO includes all the technical and editorial optimizations applied to the pages of the international website.

These optimizations have a direct impact on the ranking of your website in the search engines used in your target export markets.

International on-page SEO includes elements such as:

- International keywords: these are the words or combinations of words (the long tail, which will be discussed in more detail later in this book) that foreign internet users write in search engines to find information and that must be written on the website so that the same search engines will find it.

To increase the chances for a website to be found in these searches by foreign internet users, the keywords written on the website must be:

- The same as those used by the prospective clients in their country, in their language, and in their search engine. Merely translating keywords from the original website is not enough: a more specific adaptation to the local context is often necessary.
- The most searched and the least likely to compete with similar websites in the foreign country. A combination of keywords can be more effective than individual keywords, in terms of both prospects' qualification and the advertising costs.
- The position of keywords and their consistency on the website in:
  - The 'meta' tags: title (between 50 and 60 characters so that it is also visible on mobile) and description (between 120 characters on mobile and 150 for desktop with one or two keywords).
  - The H1, H2 and H3 tags (no more than 80 characters).
  - The URL of the pages (ideally three or four words in total, without articles).

- The text, without 'keyword stuffing' or, in other words, without abusing them, which might incur penalties from Google or other search engines.
- Bold text.
- The ALT text of the images.
- Blog articles (if the website has a blog).
- Domain structure and URLs.
- Semantic tags.
- The absence of duplicate content (the techniques to be implemented on the website to avoid duplicate content will be explained in a later chapter).
- External and internal hyperlinks.
- Frequent publishing of articles of between 350 and 450 words on the blog (if the site has a blog).
- The hosting location.
- The mobile and tablet compatibility of the website.
- Website loading times.
- The robots.txt file.
- The sitemap.
- Optimized images, consistent with the content, and containing keywords in the Alt tag.



### **TIP**

*Often, companies think of their export expansion in terms of region: 'We are going to enter Asia' or 'Europe is our priority', etc.*

*To develop your digital export project, you have to avoid this regional approach and break down your international strategy for each country that you target abroad.*

# **MAKING SURE YOUR WEBSITE IS ACCESSIBLE TO GOOGLE'S FOREIGN BOTS**

If international on-page SEO is not performed correctly, your website may not be accessible to the indexing bots and, therefore, not visible in foreign SERPs.

Here is how to see whether your international website is accessible and indexed by Google in your target foreign markets:

- Open the relevant search engine for your digital export project. For example, if your website targets Spain, open [www.google.es](http://www.google.es).
- In the Search settings, select the country and the language that interest you, in this example Spain and Spanish.
- In the search field, enter your domain preceded by the word 'site:', for example 'site:[www.mysiteweb.com/es](http://www.mysiteweb.com/es)' or 'site:[mysiteweb.com/es](http://www.mysiteweb.com/es)'.
- At the top, before the list of results, you will see a number indicating the exact number of pages on your site that are indexed by [google.es](http://google.es). Then, in the list of results you will see all your indexed pages as well as their 'meta' tags.
- If none of your pages are showing, your site is not indexed by [google.es](http://google.es). If your international website is new, having no indexed pages is normal: it takes between one and three months for it to be crawled by search engines' bots. If this is not your case, then check that the robots.txt file at the root of your server does not contain the `<disallow: />` tag or that the `<head>` of your site does not contain the line `<meta name="robots" content="noindex">` (sometimes included by default on some CMS like WordPress).



## CASE STUDY

*Some Baidu bots:*

- *Baiduspider: the basic indexing robot.*
- *Baiduspider-image: the robot that checks images.*
- *Baiduspider-mobile: the mobile web crawler.*
- *Baiduspider-video: the video crawler.*
- *Baiduspider-news: the news crawler.*
- *Etc.*

*For example, to block Baidu's crawling of the /social networks/ folder as well as videos on your website, you must include these lines of code in the robots.txt file:*

*User-agent: Baiduspider  
Disallow: /social-networks/*

*User-agent: Baiduspider-video  
Disallow: /*

# MAKING SURE YOUR WEBSITE IS ACCESSIBLE TO YANDEX, BAIDU, AND OTHER SEARCH ENGINES' BOTS

If your digital export business targets countries that are not concerned by Google but rather by Yandex, Baidu or even Bing and Yahoo!, you will need to ensure that your website is clearly visible in, and well indexed by, these search engines.

How to do it? It is no more complicated than the steps we just saw for the on-page SEO for Google. This is because the 'site:' operator works equally well in the query fields of other search engines as well as the robots.txt file, which can also be used to prevent robots from indexing certain parts of the website, or all of it, by specifying their names, as we saw in the previous Case Study.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although international on-page SEO is quite technical and requires a variety of knowledge, the elements to deploy are very similar to those used for domestic on-page SEO: keywords, meta tags, H tags, semantic tags, no duplicate content, etc.
- A linguistic and geographical adaptation of the on-page parameters of your domestic SEO will help you in the configuration of your international on-page SEO.

# CHAPTER 12

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: OFF- PAGE SEO

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*Once the indexing robots have crawled the on-page elements, they will analyze those that are outside the page. These elements are mainly the links pointing to web pages coming from external websites. That is why this technique is called ‘off-page’: it aims at improving the SEO of the website without changing anything on it. It consists of working on the quantity and quality of the external links, sometime referred to as ‘backlinking’.*

*For a digital export project, that must be related to the target foreign country. Here are some explanations on what you can do for your international website.*

# **HOW TO IMPROVE OFF-PAGE SEO FOR INTERNATIONAL SALES**

Off-page SEO refers to web-marketing techniques aimed at improving the position of a website in the SERP without any direct action on the website itself. They do that by increasing the traffic to the website by directing internet users to it from other websites via external links that point to it.

This is why the expressions ‘off-page SEO’ and ‘backlinking’ are used interchangeably. Whether it is a link from a third-party website, a social network, a blog article, or a specific landing page, etc., the key element that counts is always the same: the external link pointing to your website.

Almost all search engines appreciate them, but they pay closer and closer attention to their quality and relevance: Google, Yandex, etc., in their index penalize websites that use spam links, links from businesses that have nothing to do with the website, or links from countries other than those related to the website.

## **INTERNATIONAL ‘LINK JUICE’**

In SEO, ‘link juice’, or ‘SEO juice’, is the value, or ‘juice’, that can be transmitted from one website to another via a hyperlink. Search engines interpret this link as a vote of confidence, and they attribute a better ranking to the website receiving it, as long as the juice exchanged is of good quality.

This technique is also important and relevant on the international scale.

Backlinks and link juice are strictly linked to hypertext links<sup>34</sup>.

There are three types of links:

- Inbound links: these are the hyperlinks that are landing on one of your web pages and coming from an independent website.
- Outgoing links: these are the hyperlinks that are on your website redirecting internet users to an outside site or page.
- Internal links: these are the hyperlinks between the web pages of your website.

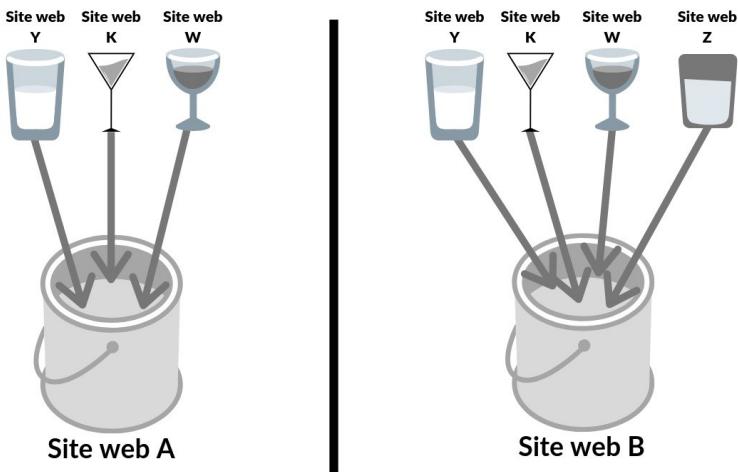
These three types of links are useful for the SEO, but the first type is the most important for a digital export project.

To understand how the power of the link juice works, let's consider two websites, A and B, that are identical for all SEO parameters, except the backlinks: the website A receives one and the website B none. Site A will then have a better ranking in the SERPs as far as that link is consistent with its business.

But then, if website B also starts receiving an external link, what will happen? For an equal number of links, the ranking in the SERPs will be determined by the quality of the juice that A and B receive, in other words, the quality of the website sending the hyperlink and the consistency of its content with the content of the receiving website. And in the same way, for the same quality of backlinks, the positioning in the SERP will be determined by the quantity of links received.

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<sup>34</sup> Or hyperlinks, web links, or simply links: they are used to go from one document to another. In the web, clicking on them allows you to go to another web page on the same website, an 'internal hyperlink', or to a web page on another website, an 'external hyperlink'. It has an activatable source, the origin, generally an element such as words or images, and a destination, the target. Most of the hypertext links on the web are one-way. This makes it possible to generate hyperlinks directing to any accessible internet resources (words, sounds, videos, etc.) without coordination with the person responsible for the target, who has little or no control over the origin of the hyperlink pointing to his web page. The defect in this non-coordination is that a change on the target risks rendering the hyperlink obsolete without the knowledge of the person responsible for the origin. The most visible problem appears when the target document is deleted: the link is then broken and shows a 404 error (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperlink><https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperlink>).



*Figure 24: a simplified illustration of the 'Link Juice'.*

The key aspects of backlinking for an international website are:

- The integration of links from your home website into its international versions must be done respecting the country and language each one is targeting.
- This integration must also respect the consistency of content and business between the inbound links and the international versions of the websites.
- The text used in the hyperlink of the external website must be relevant to the content of your international website and use the same keywords in the same language.
- You must regularly check your international inbound links used on third-party websites towards yours, as they may break or disappear. Several tools are available, such as Majestic, Ahrefs, Moz, SEMrush, RankSignals (totally free), etc.

# **GETTING BACKLINKS IN YOUR EXPORT MARKETS**

The techniques for getting inbound links for your international website are similar to those used for your home website, and they can be direct or indirect:

- Direct techniques: these are links from your own publications mentioning your website in articles on your blog, on third-party blogs, on your social networks, etc.
- Indirect techniques: these involve obtaining backlinks from your external visitors when they use the contents of your website on their websites, on their social media, on their blogs, etc.

In either case, the value of the juice depends on the authority of the website, on the consistency of its content with your content, and on the relevance of the keywords in the hyperlink. The more qualitative a web page is considered by the indexing robots, the stronger the link juice it will have to transmit. Also, the fewer outbound links leave this website, the less its juice will be diluted and the more powerful it will, therefore, be.

The most effective levers you can use to develop international backlinks are the following:

- 1) Guest blogs: for example, you can approach other bloggers that are popular in the foreign country and invite them either to write a post for your blog or to share one of their already existing posts on your blog in exchange for their having a link redirecting to your post on their website.
- 2) Exchange of links with your local partners: your subsidiaries, customers, distributors, service providers, suppliers, etc., with whom you work in the foreign country, as long as their websites are consistent with your business and are of high quality.
- 3) Sharing documents like white papers, guides, etc.: the important thing here is that the content must suit the foreign country and contain consistent clickable links towards your website.

- 4) PR in the foreign market: it will allow you to obtain interviews and articles that also contain links towards your website. An article on the BBC UK website, for example, provides a quality link as well as raising visibility and brand awareness for your website.

To set up this international backlinking, you will need to:

- Select the websites that are most relevant for your export development.
- Contact the managers of these websites.
- Convince them to include something in their website, i.e., a blog post, with one or more links towards your website.
- Work on the relationships with them to obtain the integration of other links or updates.

Beyond off-page SEO, there is another rather strategic reason to invest in backlinking: it can help to further the development of your business in the target foreign country.

Contacting managers of third-party websites, whether they are customers, prospects, service providers, influencers or others, is a chance to forge new relationships, contributing to local networking, creating new opportunities and strengthening proximity with your target foreign market.



### **TIP**

*To convince third-party websites internationally to integrate your links, offering a link exchange can be a good solution, especially if real consistency and obvious synergies exist between the websites.*

*This is when you will appreciate the multilingual on-page SEO work you have done on your website. Local third-party website managers would not be interested in such an exchange if your website were not in their language and able to provide good link juice to them.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

*International off-page SEO mainly concerns backlinking techniques to be deployed with foreign websites.*

*For this backlinking to be effective, you have to take into consideration not only the quantity of links but also the quality, which is expressed in terms of 'SEO juice', the link juice.*

*As several options are available, you need to give preference to:*

- *Websites that are qualitative and consistent with your business in the foreign country.*
- *Quality rather than quantity.*
- *Relevant keywords respecting the foreign language of both the source and the target websites.*



# CHAPTER 13

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: SOME DOS & DON'TS

“

*While SEO takes skill, time, and regular monitoring, it is not as complicated as some people claim. It can quickly become your best ally, allowing you to attract qualified traffic and, therefore, potential customers.*

*As long as you avoid mistakes.*

*Here are some recommendations and points to avoid for your international SEO.*

# THE DOS & DON'TS OF INTERNATIONAL SEO

The on-page and off-page techniques of international SEO require some effort to achieve positive results, but it can jeopardize your digital export development if you do not do that.

Today, achieving good visibility on the web internationally is a considerable competitive advantage, and, by applying the right methods, it is an objective within the reach of any exporting company.

The previous chapters showed you some of these good methods. Here are the key things that can prevent your international website from achieving good SEO results abroad and should be avoided:

- Mixing several languages in the same URL, for example by writing in French and English on the same web page: as we saw, this disturbs indexing robots<sup>35</sup> and also makes internet users leave the page as soon as they see text in languages other their own, which increases the bounce rate and penalizes SEO.
- Automatically providing content in a language determined by the IP address or the language of the internet user's browser: this technique makes the website use the same URL for any language by simply translating the content 'on the fly'.

As we saw, local search engines cannot detect the translations on the fly, especially if the URLs are not associated with a specific language or country. The consequence will be in the SERPs, where the site can be displayed in one or more inappropriate languages, for example in German or Dutch on google.es: few Spanish people will want to click on these links.

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<sup>35</sup> As explained, since search engine robots are monolingual (i.e., those from google.fr speak French, those from google.de speak German, and so on), they will have trouble understanding text that is not in their language and will, therefore, badly index the site. The result is that they will display pages in the wrong language on the SERP, or, worse, they will not display any pages.

- Managing languages with parameters in URLs, e.g., `www.site.com?lang=fr`: this was a technique used in the past, but it is now officially penalized by Google.
- Incorrectly using ‘canonical’ tags for translated web pages when using ‘`hreflang`’ declarations.

The canonical `<link rel="canonical">` tags are lines of HTML<sup>36</sup> code used to tell indexing bots which page is to be favored among pages of the same content but on different URLs that may receive duplicate content penalties.

This situation can occur, for example, when you have a website and a mobile version. However, to declare the geographic or linguistic targeting of an international website, you need to integrate the ‘`hreflang`’ tags and not the ‘canonical’ ones<sup>37</sup>.

- Creating links between pages of different languages.

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<sup>36</sup> These tags must be placed in the `<head>` area of the HTML code.

<sup>37</sup> A canonical tag looks like this: `<link rel="canonical" href="https://www.towebornottoweb.com" />`

When this tag is placed in the `<head>` area of a web page it tells search engines that <https://www.towebornottoweb.com> represents the priority page. Such canonical tags help prevent issues related to duplicate content but do not tell search engines anything about language or country targeting.



## Select your country or region

Select your delivery location and your language so that you can see the available product selection.

NORTH AMERICA		SOUTH AMERICA	EUROPE	ASIA PACIFIC	MIDDLE EAST
	Belgique / Français		España / Español		Italia / Italiano
	België / Nederlands		Spain / English		Italy / English
	Belgium / English		+ Finland / English		Latvija / Latviešu
	Česká republika / Čeština		Suomi / Suomi		Latvia / English
	Czech Republic / English		France métropolitaine / Français		Lietuva / Lietuvių kal.
	Danmark / Dansk		France Metropolitan / English		Lithuania / English
	Denmark / English		Greece / English		Luxembourg / Français
	Germany german		Hungary / English		Luxembourg / German
	Eesti / Eesti		Hungaryország / Hungarian		Luxembourg / English
	Estonia / English		Ireland / English		România / România
					Nederland / Nederlands
					United Kingdom / English
					Россия / Pycckий
					Switzerland / English
					Slovenija / English
					Slovensko / Slovenčina
					Polka / Polski
					Austria / German
					Norge / Norsk bokmål
					Swiss German
					Suisse / Français
					Sverige / Svenska

Figure 25: the language selector on Lego's website.

# ARE AUTOMATIC TRANSLATIONS BAD?

As I have just explained, redirecting internet users automatically to on-the-fly translations is not among the best practices of international SEO. But, if you really need to, due to budgetary or time constraints, here is the methodology to exploit machine translations while minimizing SEO penalties:

- Structure your site with URLs separated by language, whether with subdomains, subdirectories or ccTLDs.
- Translate your pages with either human translators or a machine translation service of your choice: for example, Google Translate or DeepL.com.
- Copy the translations to the pages of your site in the same language.
- Identify the language of your internet users via their browser or PC settings. Before redirecting them to the pages of your site in the corresponding language, ask them to confirm that this is what they want: for example, Amazon asks whether you want to use amazon.de or amazon.it if you are trying to connect to the German marketplace and it has detected that your browser is in Italian.

Avoid redirecting to the language associated to their IP address because that can be less precise especially when people are travelling.

- Offer your internet users the ability to change the language settings in a specific menu. The Lego site is a good example: you are automatically redirected to your language, but you can change this in the footer with the language and country menu.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *SEO is an essential web-marketing lever for building a digital presence, standing out from competitors and winning new export customers.*
- *There are hundreds of SEO techniques. The 'on-page' and 'off-page' techniques can concretely improve the performance of your international site and do not present any major complexity. On the other hand, if they are poorly deployed or used in combination with other penalizing techniques, the results of your international SEO will not be satisfactory.*

# CHAPTER 14

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: EFFECTIVE KEYWORDS

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*Using relevant keywords in a website is the basis for effective SEO whether in your home market or for export. And for the latter, you must go beyond the simple translation of those used for your domestic website.*

*It is essential to take into account the local aspects of new markets to identify the most relevant keywords in each target country.*

# KEYWORDS AND THE LONG-TAIL FOR EXPORT

Keywords are used to link internet searches to specific content on a website via search engines. Using the right keywords in a site's content and in other SEO elements increases the chances that the website will appear in the top search results and ahead of competitors. For this to work overseas as well, you need to use keywords on your international website that are relevant in each export market.

When an internet user uses a search engine, it is to meet a specific need: find a street, a price, the weather forecast, a hairdresser, etc. As soon as he finds the most relevant link in the results page, he will click to open the page, check the content and take the action that meets his need if he's convinced by that content.

Displaying this relevant link is, therefore, the secret for a site to have a good click-through rate (CTR)<sup>38</sup>, that is to say the clicks of visitors coming from search engines. It is the keywords and their consistency with internet users' searches that determine the relevance of the link and make people want to click to open the website.

This dynamic can be found in any language and in any search engine, whether it be the classic search engines (google.co.uk, google.de, yahoo.com, yandex.ru, etc.) or search engines used by other international platforms, such as Amazon (Amazon.com, Amazon.fr, etc.), eBay, Facebook, etc.

But keyword relevance is not enough. For greater efficiency, it should be combined with the 'long tail', a technique based on combinations of keywords. These combinations are sought less frequently but by more

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<sup>38</sup> CTR is calculated by dividing the number of clicks on a link by the number of views and multiplying by 100. For example, a link that has been displayed, and therefore seen, 400 times and has been clicked five times will have a CTR of  $1.25\% = (5/400) \times 100$ . If the link is never displayed, and therefore never seen, the CTR will not be calculable. In general, the CTR value varies between 0.04% and 7%, with a rate around 2% being the most frequent.

qualified internet users with a very high need. Unlike searches with one or two keywords, these long-tail searches, with at least three keywords, offer more chances of converting clicks from internet users.

## FINDING EFFECTIVE KEYWORDS FOR EXPORT MARKETS

Keywords and long tail are, therefore, decisive for SEO and for international SEO. You have to be able to use them properly everywhere, in your home market and overseas. But for the export markets, the keywords and long tail are not identical to those used in your home market and literal translations rarely work well.

Here are the main steps for finding the most relevant keywords for your international website:

- Qualify your prospects in each export market and understand the keywords they use to search for things related to your business on Google or other search engines.
- Research the most used keywords and combinations of keywords in the language of those markets.
- Analyze the search volumes for each keyword with Google Keyword Planner and Google Trends (see next paragraph for more details).
- Analyze the bid value of each keyword with Google Ads.
- Repeat these two steps for each combination of long-tail keywords.
- Analyze the keywords and long-tail combinations used by competitors in these markets.
- Use the keywords and their combinations in the content and in the ‘on-page’ SEO parameters of the appropriate language version of your site.
- Avoid keyword stuffing in every page of the international site (see Google instructions at <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66358?hl=en>).
- Set up a dashboard to monitor the performance of keywords and long-tail by export market.

If for your export website other search engines are relevant, for example Bing, Yahoo!, Yandex, Baidu, etc., you can deploy the same methodology by replacing Google's tools with those specific to the search engine that interests you.



## CASE STUDY

*Consider the keywords and the long-tail relevance of aicok, a small kitchen appliances manufacturer wishing to export specific blenders to Italy.*

*Instead of using the single keyword 'frullatore', the company uses several associated keywords such as 'frullatore tritatutto acciaio inox bianco': this combination of long-tail words will only attract prospects that are specifically looking for this type of mixer.*

*On the contrary, just using 'frullatore' would attract people looking for information on all kinds of mixers.*

*Relevant, long-tail keywords help attract more qualified prospects.*



## TIP

*Use native specialists to validate the keywords and long-tail for the export markets you are targeting. This is not a recurring job, but it is essential for the efficiency of your international site.*

# SOME FREE OR PAID TOOLS

## Google Keyword Planner (GKP)

Included in Google Ads, Google Keyword Planner is one of the first free tools that you can use to identify keywords and long-tail internationally. To use GKP, you will need a Google Ads account even if you do not plan to run any advertising campaigns.

## Google Trends (GT)

Google Trends is another free tool from Google: once the keywords, including long-tail, and location are entered, GT will show their current

and past trends. GT provides the level of web interest over time for each keyword or long tail in the selected area. The ‘time’ dimension of this tool is interesting because it makes it possible to verify the more or less seasonality of keywords or their combinations in export markets.

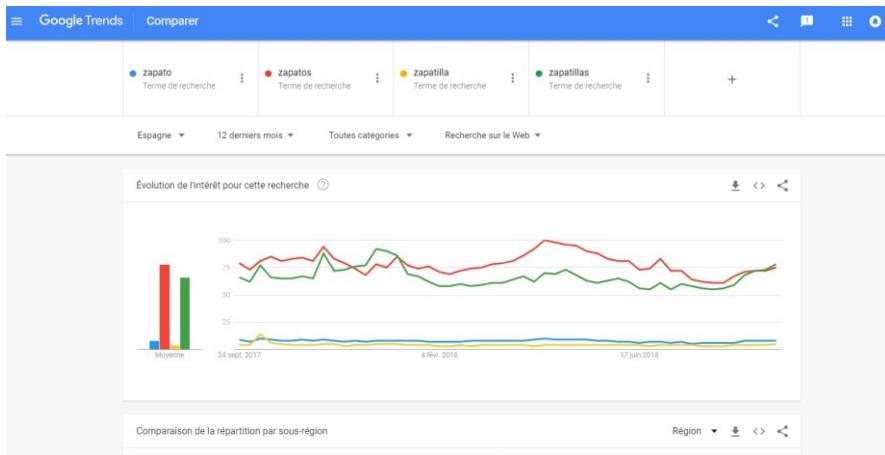


Figure 26: GT showing the search trends for words associated with ‘zapato’.

If you hesitate between several foreign keywords, for example for a blog post between ‘zapatos’ or ‘zapatillas’ in Spanish, simply compare them in Google trends by entering the place, in this case Spain, to determine which one is the most wanted and then use it in your content.

### **And many other paid tools**

There are many paid tools available to analyze and generate keywords and long-tail for export markets. The most common are MOZ Keyword Explorer<sup>39</sup>, SEMrush<sup>40</sup>, Ahref<sup>41</sup>, etc., which are priced between €49 and €599 per month depending on your business needs.

<sup>39</sup> <https://moz.com/tools/keyword-difficulty>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.semrush.com/analytics/keywordoverview/>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://ahrefs.com/keywords-explorer>.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

*Using effective international keywords is very important for the SEO of a multilingual website.*

- *The purpose of keywords is not to gain the top position in SERPs but to be found by qualified international prospects and generate export sales.*
- *To get there, it is not enough to translate the keywords of your domestic site. You need to identify which ones are most wanted, analyze their performance individually or in long-tail, and deploy them correctly in the content and SEO settings of your international site.*

# CHAPTER 15

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: SEMANTIC WEB AND STRUCTURED DATA

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*According to W3C, ‘Semantic Web provides a common framework that allows data to be shared and reused across application, enterprise, and community boundaries’. Its goal is to create an intelligent web that allows both humans and machines to interpret content.*

*Here are some explanations on the semantic web, the structured data that derives from it, and the advantages for international websites.*

# THE SEMANTIC WEB AND ITS STRUCTURED DATA

Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the web and director of W3C<sup>42</sup>, coined the name ‘semantic web’.

According to the W3C, semantic web ‘provides a common framework that allows data to be shared and reused across application, enterprise, and community boundaries’<sup>43</sup>. It is a system for processing, classifying, schematizing, and, therefore, ‘structuring’ all the data on the web so that they can be used directly and indirectly by machines and humans to help internet users create new resources or to access already available resources more easily.

This data structuring is done using a Resource Description Framework (RDF), a set of data formats and standardized exchange protocols that helps automate the management of information.

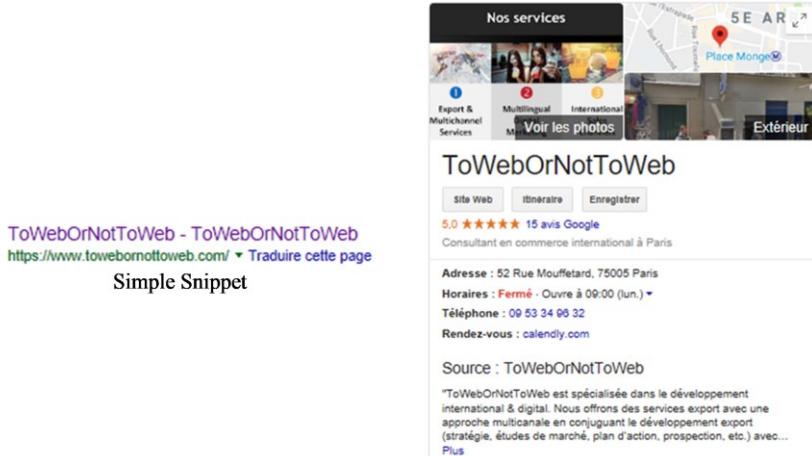
It probably sounds more complex than it is, and it may be easier to understand through a visual example: snippets. Snippets are the search results you see in a SERP on Google or on other search engines.

By adding extra semantic, or structured, data in the HTML code of a website, simple snippets become Rich Snippets as in the following picture.

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<sup>42</sup> World Wide Web Consortium.

<sup>43</sup> [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic\\_Web](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_Web).



*Figure 27: examples of a simple snippet and a rich snippet.*

Below are some of the most widely used formats internationally.

## Schema.org

In 2011, Google, Bing and Yahoo!, joined by Yandex a few months later, launched the initiative to consolidate all of the structured tags on a single site. Schema.org was born! Intended especially for developers, it provides all the information that is useful for the deployment of structured data.

In practice, Schema.org is a micro-data-based RDF format providing many vocabularies suitable for many situations, whether for designer shoes, hotel rooms, concert tickets, etc.

The big advantage for an export website is that Google, Bing, Yahoo! and Yandex support Schema.org: it means that, if you add Schema.org structured data in your international website, these search engines will improve the display of your snippets in their SERPs around the world.

In general, the Schema.org markup does not directly impact SEO. But indirectly it does because it helps Google and the other search engines better understand your site and thus display it in a rich snippet that will

appear in the first SERP results with the information you entered in the Schema.org tags. This rich snippet, therefore, increases the site's visibility and its click-through rate (up to 30%), reduces the bounce rate, and ultimately indirectly improves SEO.



### TIP

*It is important to make sure that the structured data is implemented correctly on the international website in each language version. Google offers a test tool free of charge. It is called 'Structured Data Testing Tool': <https://search.google.com/structured-data/testing-tool>.*

*This tool checks for code errors but not for omissions or category errors from Schema.org. For example, if the information regarding the brand, color, or price in the 'product' properties of a perfume on an e-commerce website has not been filled in, this tool will not mention any error. So, make sure to implement all the relevant types of structured data on your website as well as their correct language versions.*

## Open Graph

As for Schema.org, Open Graph is a structured data system whose microdata are defined in specific tags supported by search engines and other applications, to make the content clearer and more attractive for internet users.

In particular, this protocol makes it possible to share content from a web page on social networks in an enriched way, as for rich snippets.

Unlike Schema.org, which is the standard for Google, Bing, Yahoo! and Yandex, Open Graph is the standard created by Facebook and is also accepted by other social networks such as Twitter. Find all the tags and explanations for deploying Open Graph here: <http://ogp.me/>.

So, should you use Schema.org or Open Graph? It's not one or the other: it's both. The two systems are complementary and are increasingly used together on the web.

As with Schema.org, it is difficult to know exactly what the direct impact is on SEO and how Facebook's algorithm reacts to Open Graph tags. When you use them, the links you share on social networks will be more captivating with the right images, the right videos, the right titles, etc.,

that is to say all the information you have previously defined in the Open Graph tags of your website. These are all elements that increase visibility and click-through rate, reduce the bounce rate and, therefore, indirectly improve SEO.

### **Twitter Cards**

Although Twitter accepts Open Graph microdata, it has also developed its own standard with Twitter Cards.

This system allows tweets to be enriched using structured data from the website. When an internet user twits the link to one of your web pages, the published tweet will automatically be enriched with multimedia information (video, photo, title, description, etc.) that you have previously structured on your website.

As for Schema.org and Open Graph, the advantage of Twitter Cards is to increase the visibility of your business in your target foreign markets by enriching the content of tweets, whether yours, those of your followers or even those of anyone on Twitter that wants to share your content with their network.

These tweets will be more engaging and display exactly what you have chosen.

Of the several Card formats offered by Twitter, the visual ones are particularly effective in an international context, since they allow you to display photos and links, thus reducing possible translation problems. In addition, all Card formats allow sharing without character limitation, and people will be able to retweet using the maximum text allowed by Twitter for comments.

You will find all the details on the deployment and tags of Twitter Cards on this page:

<https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/tweets/optimize-with-cards/overview/abouts-cards>

The screenshot shows a Twitter Player Card. At the top left is a profile picture of Jonathan Cipriano. Next to it is his name, "Jonathan Cipriano", and his handle, "@joncipriano". To the right is a small blue Twitter logo. Below this, the text reads: "The dusk and dawn light in @DeathValleyNPS is amazing. I visit almost every year for #photography." A video thumbnail is shown, featuring a landscape of mountains under a cloudy sky with a play button icon. To the right of the thumbnail, the text "Death Valley Wilderness: Wilderness Light" is followed by a description: "Follow the course of light through the Death Valley Wilderness and observe the obvious and subtle ...". Below this is a link "♂ youtube.com". At the bottom left of the card is the timestamp "6:49 PM · Feb 22, 2016". On the far right is a small info icon. Below the card, there are standard Twitter interaction icons: a heart for 37 likes, a reply icon, a retweet icon, and a "Share this Tweet" link.

Figure 28: example of a Twitter Player Card embedded under the text of a Tweet.



### TIP

If you are already using the Open Graph protocol, you can easily deploy Twitter Cards as well without problems of markup duplication. And if you don't, when Twitter bots come looking for Cards on your website, they will directly use the Open Graph tags if they don't find any Twitter tags.

## Google Knowledge Graph

This is Google's system that displays a block of information on the right side of SERPs.

Since there is no official documentation from Google on how the Knowledge Graph works, to obtain this block you must implement structured data on your website in combination with content on Google My Business, YouTube, Wikipedia, etc.: Google retrieves the information from these types of sources but doesn't provide a clear list or explanations.

## AMP (accelerated mobile page)

With this structured data markup, internet users can load web pages more quickly on mobile. Since Google favors speed, and the AMP

format, which Google initiated, AMP pages tend to have better positions in the SERPs.



### TIP

*Beyond all the available systems, why are the semantic web and structured data important for a digital export project? Because they help display your international website content on other platforms the way you want. By setting up structured data on your website, you can optimize the way your content is shared internationally and, therefore, increase the traffic to your website, which ultimately will have a positive impact on the SEO and consequently get better positions in the SERPs.*

## HOW TO INTEGRATE THEM INTO AN INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE

You have three options for embedding structured data markup on your international website:

- 1) **Manual integration:** this option requires a good command of web-development techniques, because it consists of manually adding structured data into the source code of your website. Without having this technical knowledge, you could do a lot of damage to your website!
- 2) **Google's tool<sup>44</sup> for creating structured data markup:** with this tool you can easily create Schema.org tags. But despite this ease, their integration into a website remains complex. Indeed, if the site is developed without a CMS, the code of each page must be replaced by the one generated with the Google tool.

And, if the site uses a CMS (for example WordPress), it is even more complex, because with a CMS you can only access the body of the pages, while the headers are in another file. However, it is in this file that we must insert the code generated with the Google tool. As in

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.google.com/webmasters/markup-helper/>.

the previous case, therefore, it is essential to have a very good command of web-development techniques so as not to break your website.

- 3) **Plugins for WordPress and other CMS:** there are several plugins that you can use, for example, for WordPress, SEO Structured Data Schema, or Yoast, or Schema App Structured Data, etc.

Some of these extensions make it possible to generate structured data markup on the entire site and without the need for technical skills; they are the best option out of the three if you do not have a web developer in your team.



### TIP

*According to Schema.org, 1% of websites used it in 2013. Today, almost half of websites apply semantic web techniques, which is why its implementation can give your website a competitive advantage in terms of visibility and performance in the export markets you target.*



### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- To help the SEO of your international website in the long term, the semantic web and structured data are effective techniques to take into account.
- Several formats are available internationally: Schema.org, Open Graph, Twitter Cards, etc.
- By using them on a multilingual site, you can provide structured information to indexing robots, which will display them in a more impactful way in their SERPs and in other web applications.
- This enriched display, whose position is prioritized in the SERPs, increases the click-through rate, decreases the bounce rate and indirectly improves international SEO.

# CHAPTER 16

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: THE ‘HREFLANG’ AND ‘META’ TAGS

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*Multilingual websites often have duplicate-content issues, a factor penalized by search engines and making international SEO efforts less effective.*

*Specific ‘hreflang’ and ‘meta’ tags are the solutions to be implemented to avoid these problems.*

# THE PROBLEMS OF DUPLICATE CONTENT IN INTERNATIONAL WEBSITES

Multilingual websites run a higher risk of search engine penalties than monolingual websites.

Why? Because texts can be considered 'duplicate content'. If the content is identical or almost identical in each language version of the website and the translation is the only differentiator from one page to another, search engine robots will struggle to distinguish each version.

This problem is common in the following cases:

- For international websites with content in the same language but targeting different countries, for example a website in four different versions, all in English, one for the United States, one for the United Kingdom, one for Australia and one for English-speaking Canada.
- For websites whose content is generated by users and whose translations concern only the header and the footer: the dynamic main texts are only provided in one language and are translated 'on the fly'.
- For websites whose content is fully translated into multiple languages.

This problem, therefore, concerns almost all international sites.

It is with 'hreflang' markup that we can explain to search engine robots the architecture of the website with the links between all multilingual versions and avoid the problem of duplicate content.

# THE ‘HREFLANG’ TAG: HOW DOES IT WORK?

‘Hreflang’ tags inform the robots of Google and other search engines<sup>45</sup> that the content of the page is available in several languages on several URLs. This makes it easier for them to understand the architecture of the international website and to display the correct URL with the correct language in the SERPs.

Do you need to use ‘hreflang’ markup if you have declared geo-targeting in the Google Search Console and in the Webmaster Tools of other search engines? Yes, mainly for these two reasons:

- 1) Tools such as Google’s Search Console or the Webmaster Tools of other search engines make it possible to declare the specific country targeted by the website. But if the website targets several specific countries in the same language, nothing should be declared, and the robots will have difficulty determining the targets of the website without the ‘hreflang’ tags.
- 2) The settings in the Google Search Console and in the Webmaster Tools are not sufficient to avoid the ‘duplicate content’ problems that the different language versions of the website can create.

## **Properly deploying ‘hreflang’ tags**

When setting up ‘hreflang’ markup, you need to pay attention to the two-way declarations: each web page must be linked to all its translated versions and vice-versa.

Without this reciprocal linking, the ‘hreflang’ tags will not work, and the risk of ‘duplicate content’ will remain unchanged.

For example, for a website with a version for French-speaking users regardless of their country on a URL ending in .com/fr, a second version exclusively for French-speaking users in Canada on a URL ending in .com/fr-ca and a third version for English-speaking users from the

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<sup>45</sup> Yandex, for example, also supports it.

rest of the world on a URL ending in .com, here are the declarations to add on each page of the three versions:

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://www.site.com/fr" hreflang="fr" />
<link rel="alternate" href="http://www.site.com/fr-ca" hreflang="fr-ca" />
<link rel="alternate" href="http://www.site.com" hreflang="en" />
```

Each page must, therefore, self-declare and declare all pages with the same content in the other language versions to comply with this rule of two-way declarations.

That means that the page www.site.com/fr must declare the three lines above, just like the page www.site.com/fr-ca and the page www.site.com. If any of these statements is forgotten or mistakenly written, bidirectionality and 'hreflang' markup will not work.

```
58 <link rel="alternate" hreflang="fr-BE" href="https://www.fr.fnac.be/" />
59 <link rel="alternate" hreflang="nl-BE" href="https://www.nl.fnac.be/" />
60 <link rel="alternate" hreflang="pt-BR" href="https://www.fnac.com.br/" />
61 <link rel="alternate" hreflang="pt" href="https://www.fnac.pt/" />
62 <link rel="alternate" hreflang="es" href="https://www.fnac.es/" />
63 <link rel="alternate" hreflang="fr-MA" href="http://www.fnacmaroc.ma/" />
64 <link rel="alternate" hreflang="fr-CH" href="https://www.fnac.ch/" />
```

Figure 29: the 'hreflang' declarations on fnac.com.

## How to declare 'hreflang' tags

There are several methods of indicating 'hreflang'.

One of the most common is through HTML tags, as in the example above. In this case, here are the important points:

- The set of elements `<link rel="alternate" href="URL of the page" hreflang="code of the language" />` must be created for each language version of the web page.
- This set of elements must then be copied into the `<head>` block of each version of the site. Warning: it must really be copied identically in each version of the site to comply with the bidirectionality rule.
- If using a CMS, make sure that it correctly declares the 'hreflang' tags on each page. Some CMS by default copy the URL of the home page in the 'hreflang' declarations, which amounts to telling indexing robots that the alternative version of each page of the website is the home page instead of the translated page.
- The language code must be indicated in ISO 639-1 format. You can add the country code, which must be in ISO 3166-1 Alpha 2 format.

The latter remains optional. Be careful to comply with these language and country codes. Errors are frequent, for example using the code 'at' for Austrian, which does not exist as a language, or the code 'uk' for English, while the correct code for this language is 'en'.

- If the website has a 'default' version, i.e., the one to which internet users of languages not declared in the 'hreflang' tags are directed, the best practice is to create a tag <link rel="alternate" href="URL of the page" hreflang="x-default" /> and add it to the same set copied in the <head> of each version of the website. Warning: errors with 'x-default' are also frequent. The most typical case is when it is used on a home page that has many translated versions requiring 'hreflang' tags.
- Avoid copying the 'hreflang' tags in the pages blocked from robots by 'no-index': in these pages the robots will not see anything, preventing bidirectionality and the 'hreflang' tag from working correctly.

For more details, Google provides all the instructions here:

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/189077>



### KEY TAKEAWAYS

*By implementing 'hreflang' tags and other 'meta' tags, you can improve the SEO of your international website while avoiding penalties associated with duplicate content problems.*

*These problems are quite common in multilingual sites that use identical content in each translated version of the website, which disrupts the work of indexing robots and penalizes international SEO.*



# CHAPTER 17

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: THE IMPACT OF THE SMARTPHONE

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*Today, half of global search engine queries are made through mobile devices and almost all in the most connected countries. Major players such as Google have understood this and are now prioritizing websites optimized for these types of screens.*

*There are different techniques you can use to optimize your website for mobile screens, but some are better than others for international websites. Let's see which ones.*

# **THE SMARTPHONE ABOVE ALL, EVERWHERE**

The trend is the same all over the world: we are more and more connected and more and more on mobile phones<sup>46</sup>.

Globally, an average of 56% of web content is delivered to mobiles and tablets<sup>47</sup>, although differences between countries are still evident, as shown in the following table. If your website is already online and if you have installed Analytics, you can easily find the number of your users on mobile and on desktop.

Search engines want to provide internet users with the best results whatever device they use. Since mobile phones are increasingly used for internet around the world, you should make sure your website is suitable for smartphones of any size in your target foreign market.

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<sup>46</sup> Not only is more than half of the world's population today equipped with a smartphone, but the habits of internet users are changing significantly. The smartphone is no longer used just to make phone calls; it has become GPS, video player, Walkman, radio, mirror, sports coach ... allowing even office functions with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.

<sup>47</sup> <http://gs.statcounter.com/platform-market-share/desktop-mobile-tablet>.

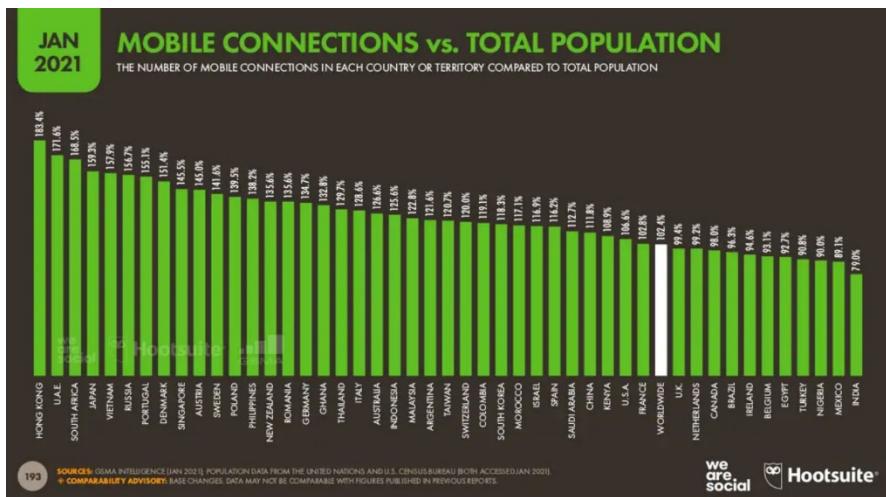


Figure 30: mobile connections vs. total population (Jan. 2021, by country)<sup>48</sup>.

## 'MOBILE FIRST' OR 'INTERNATIONAL FIRST'?

Mobile has become so critical these days that it is better to think mobile over desktop to improve the user experience. But choosing how to make an international 'mobile first' requires more consideration.

The most common ways to deliver your website on mobile are the following:

- 1) Creating an independent mobile website, for example the AMP version of your desktop website.
- 2) Developing a mobile application to download from an app store.
- 3) Turning your desktop website into a 'responsive' website.

The last option is the most suitable and the easiest to set up for an international website. In fact, in recent years, 'responsive' pages have

<sup>48</sup> <https://wearesocial.com/digital-2021>

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/430830/share-of-mobile-internet-traffic-countries/>.

become the standard for almost all web developers as well as for turnkey website-creation platforms. Responsive websites' design automatically adapts to any screen size and format, from smartphones to desktops and tablets.

The website domain name remains the same while internet users can have an optimal browsing experience, accessing content whatever the size of the screen they use. That is a considerable advantage for your international website, because, whenever you update something on it, you do that only once multiplied by the number of languages you use instead of doing it for several website versions (mobile, desktop, tablet, app, ...), again multiplied by the number of languages you use.

To test how your website look on a mobile screen, you can first view it directly on your smartphone to get an overview of the browsing experience.

However, with so many different screen sizes in the market, how do you test for the relevant mobiles used in your target foreign countries? Here is where some free online tools come in handy to simulate your website on the different mobile devices that are used in the foreign countries you target.

For example, the LambdaTest responsive emulator <https://www.lambdatest.com/responsive-test-online>, or <http://mattkersley.com/responsive/>, or Google's mobile test tool <https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>. Very easy to use, by entering the URL address, they allow you to test any webpage browsing on different mobile devices, including the latest iPhones.

## **AN INTERNATIONAL 'MOBILE FRIENDLY' DEVELOPMENT**

Google being the most used search engine in the world, it is essential to apply and respect its SEO criteria. Until recently, Google had two

indexes, one for mobile and one for desktop. Now, it prioritizes mobile version websites in its results, even if the internet user is on a desktop. That's why it's common to speak of 'mobile friendly' or 'mobile first' websites.

For mobile SEO, you must in particular:

- Provide compatible content on all devices: your content must be able to adapt to any screen sizes and equipment so as not to exclude any users when they access your website.
- Ensure an optimized user experience (UX): you need to think of all navigation modes, whether with a mouse or with a finger, and offer ergonomics adapted to the equipment used.
- Avoid having a separate URL for mobile and desktop: it is better for your SEO to have all your content on a single URL address to avoid redirections, which can cause technical problems and slow down your website<sup>49</sup>.
- Keep the same level of information on mobile as on desktop: preferably use at least a font size of 14 px with short paragraphs and no more than 50 to 60 characters per line.
- Check that your mobile version is accessible for Googlebot: you can use the robot.txt test tool via Google Search Console.
- Ensure a fast download time on mobile: as Google takes this into account, you need to measure the speed of your site on mobile (you can use another free tool from Google <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/feature/testmysite>).
- Check images: they can slow down your mobile website if uploaded with too high a resolution for the markets you are targeting.

As mentioned, Google is promoting the implementation of lighter version of mobile websites designed to load instantly via its AMP standard (Accelerated Mobile Pages). The SEO of your website will be positively impacted as the user experience is improved through a faster

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<sup>49</sup> If the website has a different version for desktop and one for mobile, there will be a redirect to it when the user is detected to be on a mobile or a tablet. Therefore, a redirect adds additional loading time. In addition, the mobile/tablet may not be recognized by the website and may not correctly redirect to the correct website version. That's why a single 'responsive' website is better because the same website adapts to all screen sizes.

loading time. However, be sure to study the potential benefit of this implementation, because to date the AMP may limit functionality on your pages and impose restrictions on your CSS.



### **TIP**

*The points to validate when formulating the mobile strategy for your digital export project are as follows:*

- 1) What is the smartphone penetration in your target export markets? What is the quality of the 3G or 4G networks? The speed of your website abroad is fundamental. As a general rule, if your website is optimized for 3G networks, it should display correctly almost anywhere in the world.*
- 2) What are the prices and pricing conditions for mobile plans in your export markets? As mobile plans vary according to megabyte consumption, foreign users can be resistant to very graphic websites.*

For the mobile versions of your website, you also need to tell the search engine robots that the mobile pages are translated into other languages: this is done via the 'hreflang' declarations of the same type we saw for the desktop website. If you choose the third option above and your website is 'responsive', the implementation will be the same and will be done only once.

Otherwise, you will need to re-implement the 'hreflang' statements in the <head> of each page of your mobile website.



### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

*For 'mobile first' and 'international first', the responsive website is the best option for optimizing ergonomics, UX, and foreign targeting for all types of smartphones, display speed, and so on.*

# CHAPTER 18

## BOOST SEO INTERNATIONALLY: MIGRATIONS AND REDIRECTIONS

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*Site migrations and redirections are necessary when changing certain essential elements of a website that can have a significant impact on crawlers and SERP position.*

*Here are the points to consider for your international website.*

# DOMAIN MIGRATION

A website and domain migration in the international context can occur in several cases, for example:

- Changing the domain structure from a ccTLD to a gTLD with subdomains or subdirectories.
- Changing the company's brand in the URL to suit export markets.
- The integration of new languages.
- Using a new hosting or a new server or both.
- Merging, deleting, or adding pages on the site.
- Changing from HTTP protocol to HTTPS.
- Implementing a CMS like WordPress or Prestashop, for example.
- Integrating new features like AMP for the mobile version, for example.

Such changes can disrupt the analysis of crawlers, which may penalize the website in the SERPs. If you are in one of these cases, take the next pages into consideration to avoid damaging the SEO work already done on your website.

## MIGRATING A LOCAL WEBSITE TO AN INTERNATIONAL ONE

Take the example of the implementation of a new international domain structure in gTLD with subdirectories per country ([www.website.com/fr](http://www.website.com/fr), [www.website.com/de](http://www.website.com/de), etc.) intended to replace the current structure on a ccTLD, which is not optimized for other foreign countries.

The right migration methodology to follow is one that will allow you to keep the results already obtained with SEO for the ccTLD site as well as its authority and to transfer them to the new gTLD website and to its subdirectories.

Here are the main steps and some tips to follow:

- 1) Validate the objectives of the migration from the ccTLD to the gTLD structure with subdirectories as well as the time needed to complete it.
- 2) Make sure that all the elements of the new international gTLD website are ready: UX, functionalities, URL, menus, CSS, mobile settings (responsive, AMP, etc.), e-commerce settings, etc.
- 3) Validate the SEO parameters of the new international gTLD website: metadata, semantic web and structured data, 'canonical' and 'hreflang' tags, backlinking, sitemap, index/noindex/follow/nofollow declarations, etc.
- 4) List all the URLs of the pages of the current ccTLD site and compare them with those of the new gTLD site.
- 5) Prepare the ccTLD to redirect to the gTLD: this is the critical step of the migration, because, if the redirections are done incorrectly, there is a risk of losing the SEO work done on the ccTLD and of negatively affecting the SEO of the new gTLD website. It is with the right redirections that the search engine robots are told how the content of the ccTLD site has been moved and how the new pages of the gTLD site relate to the old ones.

Thanks to this, the bots can understand the authority of the ccTLD and the positive effects of its SEO to redirect them to the new gTLD site, which can thus be indexed more quickly. What happens if there are no redirections or if they are not performed correctly? Internet users and indexing robots will land on '404 Not Found' pages or on pages with irrelevant content, which increases the bounce rate and penalizes the SEO of the new gTLD website. There are two types of redirections that are useful in the case of a ccTLD migration to an international gTLD:

- Permanent 301 redirections: to be used for all ccTLD URLs moved to new gTLD URLs. These are the ones that redirect the SEO signals from the old ccTLD pages to the new gTLD pages<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> 301 redirections are also to be used to pass a website from the http to the https protocol: any request for a URL on <http://www.website.com> must be redirected in 301 to the equivalent URL on <https://www.website.com>.

- Temporary 302 redirections: to be used for short-term needs. The robots are not motivated to index 302 pages, but, if the redirection remains in place too long, they will treat them as 301 redirections. 302 redirections are those to be used, for example, to redirect to the version of the website in a specific language or for a specific country.
- 6) Retrieve the 'meta' data from the pages of the ccTLD website: for the same purpose of facilitating the retrieval of the ccTLD website's SEO results, the 'meta titles' and 'meta descriptions' of the ccTLD pages must be used on those of the new gTLD website.
- 7) Prepare the new robots.txt file and make sure that the indexing robots have no concerns with accessing it in the new gTLD website. If the robots.txt file is not accessible, the robots will not be able to crawl the new gTLD website with the risk that over time it will be deindexed. So, the robots.txt file must not:
- prevent the indexing robots of the search engines of your export markets from accessing and crawling the pages of your new international gTLD website that are intended for those countries.
  - block JavaScript or CSS resources that local search engines need to make page content readable.
- 8) Correctly reference the sitemap for each relevant export market of the new gTLD website and possibly prepare two separate sitemaps, one for the new gTLD website and the other for the old ccTLD. The robots will thus have a precise diagram of the new pages to index, with their targeting by country or language or both, and their link with the pages of the previous website.
- 9) As soon as the new gTLD website is online, immediately verify that:
- The robots.txt file allows indexing robots to crawl all the new pages. To check this, you can use the 'Fetch as Google' function, which allows you to see how Google bots view the pages of a website on desktop and mobile.
  - The main pages of the new website have good server responses in the export markets you are targeting.

- The performance of the new website on desktop and mobile is positive according to Google indicators, which you can test with the free tool  
<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>.
- The download speed of the new website on desktop and mobile is fast in the targeted export markets. You can test it with Pingdom, which allows you to check the site according to the geographical position of internet users: <https://tools.pingdom.com>.
- The 301 redirects of the old pages correctly refer to the new ones.
- Temporary noindex/nofollow and ‘canonical’ tags work correctly.
- Google Analytics update is in place.
- Google Search Console settings are correct, in particular: the sitemap; location by country or ‘non-location’; international targeting; ‘hreflang’.



### TIP

*Schedule the migration at a time that does not interfere with the website business in your domestic and export markets, allowing for buffer time to resolve any technical upload issues.*

*During the migration it is likely that the website will be inaccessible: you must minimize this offline time and set up ‘503 service unavailable’ responses to inform the indexing robots that the website is under work and to come back later. If 503 messages are not put up while the website is unreachable, the bots will negatively affect its SEO, and it will take time to restore it.*



### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- As part of a digital export project, upgrading a domestic website to an international version is an essential but delicate step.
- You have to make sure that all the best techniques are in place so that this migration does not disrupt or destroy the SEO work already done on the original website and redirects all the benefits to the new site.



# CHAPTER 19

## SEO BEYOND GOOGLE: BAIDU, YANDEX, NAVER, BING/YAHOO!

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*Although for most of the world's population life without Google is unimaginable, there are countries where this search engine is not used at all or only marginally. This is the case in China, where Baidu holds almost 74% of the market in 2021, followed by Sogou, another local player holding almost 20%, and leaving Google less than 2.5% of the market share<sup>51</sup>. It is also the case in Russia, where Yandex controls almost 54% of the local search engine market.*

*If any of these countries are relevant for your digital export project, check the best SEO practices in the following pages.*

# EXPORTING TO CHINA WITH BAIDU<sup>52</sup>

In China, ‘Baidu is your best friend’, not Google. The undisputed leader in China, Baidu also has a multichannel strategy similar to its international competitors by offering several services: food delivery for online purchases with Baidu Star.Ele, the former Waimai, forums and microblogs with Baidu Tieba, its Wikipedia version with Baidu Baike, its TripAdvisor version with Baidu Lvyou, etc. Almost half of the results on its SERPs are devoted to these applications. A website SEO for Baidu but unrelated to these other applications will struggle to earn top positions in Baidu’s SERPs.

Baidu is the world's most unpredictable and censoring search engine, because of China's Great Firewall, the internet protection system operated by the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China<sup>53</sup>. The power of this system in China is such that Google has failed to develop there, although it has managed to establish itself in other Chinese-speaking regions, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In addition to the technical performance constraints of a foreign website, which needs the closest possible servers to ensure fast loading speed, the Chinese Cybersecurity Law<sup>54</sup>, which came into force in 2017<sup>55</sup>, requires the personal data of Chinese users to be stored on local servers. Since the Chinese government’s definition of personal data is vague, almost any type of website is affected.

The implication for a foreign website is that it must comply with several legislative and technical measures, including obtaining an Internet Content Provider (ICP) number. The provincial authorities provide this number exclusively to Chinese companies. If you have a legal structure

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<sup>51</sup> <https://gs.statcounter.com/search-engine-market-share/all/china>.

<sup>52</sup> Literally means ‘a hundred times’, or ‘countless times’

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baidu>.

<sup>53</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Firewall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Firewall).

<sup>54</sup>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybersecurity\\_Law\\_of\\_the\\_People%27s\\_Republic\\_of\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybersecurity_Law_of_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China).

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/31/chinas-new-cybersecurity-law-takes-effect-today.html>

in China, most web hosts will be able to obtain the ICP for you: just give them the necessary documents in Chinese<sup>56</sup>.

If you do not have a legal structure in China, using one based in Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore can be an effective alternative: in addition to administrative simplicity, these three locations offer easier communication thanks to the use of English.

Another alternative is to be hosted on Alibaba Cloud, which, thanks to a special agreement between Alibaba and the Chinese government, allows the use of servers in Europe with an ultra-fast fiber cloud CDN connecting Frankfurt with China.

But, at this stage, there are still some risks that this alternative will be challenged under the Chinese Cybersecurity Law and the new Data Security Law, which enters into force on 1 September 2021<sup>57</sup>.



Figure 31: search engine market shares in China (July 2021).



### TIP

*The administrative and legal issues for a website in China are very complex and constantly evolving. Be sure to check these points beforehand with experts and favor those that have Chinese resources in China for possible operational support.*

<sup>56</sup> The mandatory documents are: copy of your Chinese Business License, domain name certificate, identity document with photo of the legal representative, who must be a Chinese citizen, the application form for an ICP, which must contain the name and address of the Chinese company, the name of the investors, the type of company, the contact details of the legal representative (identity document, mobile and landline telephone, email) and information about the site (name domain, type of site, etc.).

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/a-close-reading-of-chinas-data-security-law-in-effect-sept-1-2021/>.

## **Important SEO points for Baidu**

Once you have found the solution for your ICP, your domiciliation, your servers and someone to help you adapt your website to Chinese internet users, you will be able to start working on SEO for Baidu. Baidu has tools similar to those of Google:

- Baidu Webmaster Tools, replacing Google Search Console.
- Baidu Phoenix Nest, replacing Google Ads and Keyword Planner.
- Baidu Index, replacing Google Trends.

Here are the criteria Baidu values the most:

- Domains and URL structures:
  - Local ccTLDs in '.cn' or '.com.cn.'
  - Short domain names.
  - Domain names in Pinyin, that is to say the system of romanization of Mandarin Chinese, which is the most widespread today and promoted by the People's Republic of China<sup>58</sup>.
- 'On-page' SEO:
  - All <meta> tags: titles, descriptions, keywords, H1, H2, H3...
  - Unique and qualitative content that is regularly refreshed: duplicate content must be avoided.
  - Content-rich home pages: the content on the home pages have more SEO strength than the content on the rest of the website.
  - Compliance with the rules ... of censorship! Content that is perfectly written in Chinese but criticizes the Chinese government will not help you.
- 'Off-page' SEO: quality backlinks, local, especially non-Western, from Baidu applications. Links to Facebook, YouTube, and other censored western platforms will not help you.
- Languages:

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<sup>58</sup> [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanyu\\_pinyin](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanyu_pinyin).

- Chinese and simplified Chinese characters, although Latin characters are tolerated.
- The absence of automatic translations: Baidu's algorithm only speaks Chinese, and, if your website is in French or in English translated into Chinese on the fly, Baidu will not be able to index it, and it will not turn it up in its SERPs.
- UX and mobile:
  - UX must be adapted to Chinese users: a different textual layout and much denser than sites in Latin characters.
  - The fast load speed<sup>59</sup> of the website is also an important factor for Baidu.
  - Baidu's algorithm recognizes mobile performance: websites that are not compatible are, therefore, penalized.
- Google's and other banned applications:
  - Since Google is banned from China, all its applications integrated into a website are also banned, with the result that the website will not appear in Baidu's SERPs. YouTube videos, Google Maps, etc., should, therefore, be removed from the website and preferably replaced by their Chinese versions.
  - A similar welcome is reserved for websites using applications like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. It is important for a website intended for China to replace content from these platforms with their Chinese counterparts, otherwise you will not see your website in Baidu's SERPs.
- The Baidu VCard: this is a system similar to the 'verified' used by Twitter or Facebook, but here it is subject to a fee. For roughly \$100 per year, this subscription earns the trust of Baidu, which will display a V of 1 to 3 next to your URL in its SERPs, with 3 being the highest level. The VCard does not

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<sup>59</sup> Hosting in China is, therefore, necessary not only for 'Great Firewall' issues but also to reduce the download speed. If this is not feasible, a content delivery network (CDN) may be a good solution, as long as the selected host has the licenses to operate in China.

ensure a better position in the SERPs, but it helps you gain more clicks, because Chinese internet users trust it.



Figure 32: two examples of Baidu's VCard.



### TIP

As communications pass between client software and server software, the distance between the two can impact your website's download speed and, therefore, your website performance overseas. Make sure the international latency of your website, i.e., the time your foreign internet users take to download your web pages, is not too high. Over latency is one of the first reasons for a high bounce rate which is bad for SEO.

## EXPORTING TO RUSSIA WITH YANDEX

Yandex<sup>60</sup>, considered by some to be spam automatically installed on a PC when downloading other software or web applications, is the most used search engine by Russian speakers and the leader in Russia.

Created in Moscow in 1997 by Arkady Volozh, Yandex is the only one to have beaten Google in Russia in the past with a control strategy similar to that of Baidu, although with less censoring, and an approach of replicating the products of its direct competitor: today Yandex, like

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<sup>60</sup> In Russian, Яндекс.

Google, also offers a browser, tools for analytics<sup>61</sup>, keywords<sup>62</sup>, webmaster tools<sup>63</sup>, e-mail, machine translation<sup>64</sup>, voice assistance<sup>65</sup>, online payments, maps, etc.

In addition to Russia, Yandex is leader in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Turkey and it is the search engine used by Mozilla Firefox and Microsoft Edge in all these countries.

Understanding how to optimize a website for Yandex can, therefore, help its performance in a large geographical area.



Figure 33: search engine market shares in Russian Federation (July 2021).

### Important SEO points for Yandex

Here are the criteria that Yandex values the most:

- Domains and URL structures:
  - Local ccTLDs in .ru.
  - Like Baidu, short URLs.
  - Domain names in Russian or transliterated into Russian.
  - The location of servers on Russian territory if the foreign website saves and manages personal data of Russian citizens<sup>66</sup>.
- Languages:
  - Texts in Cyrillic rather than Latin characters.

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<sup>61</sup> Metrica and AppMetrica for mobile applications.

<sup>62</sup> Wordstat.

<sup>63</sup> Yandex Webmaster.

<sup>64</sup> Yandex.Translate.

<sup>65</sup> Alice or Алиса.

<sup>66</sup> At the end of 2016, Russia blocked LinkedIn for violating this local data storage requirements.

- Non-automatic translations.

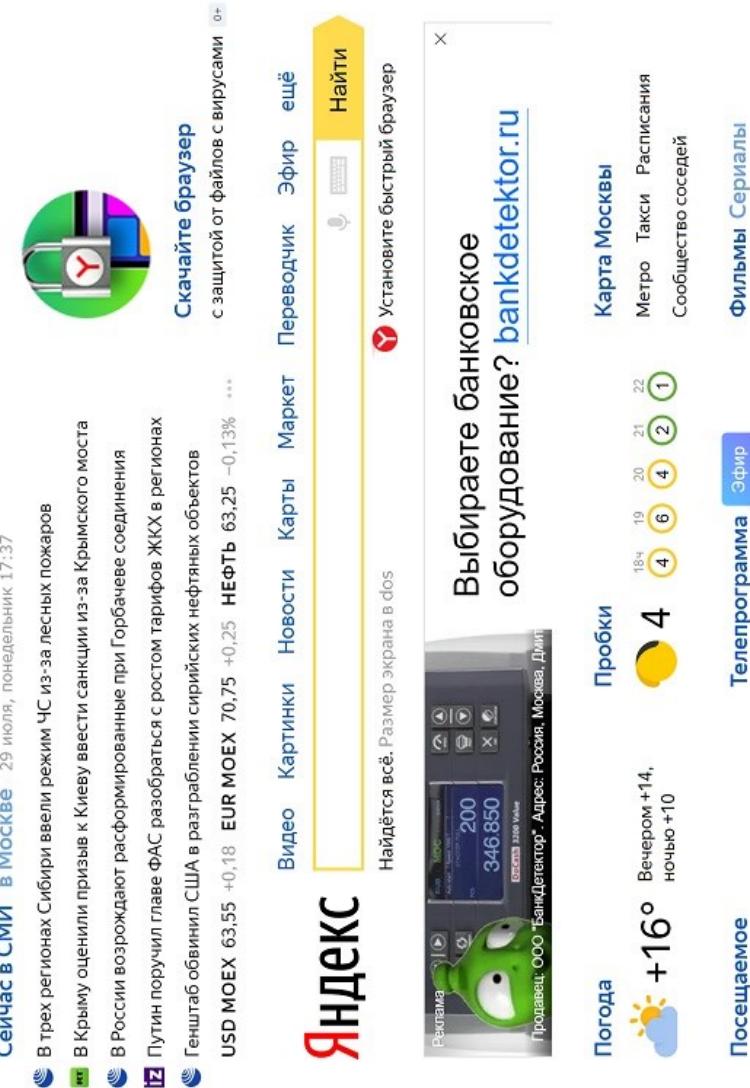


Figure 34: Yandex homepage.

- 'On-page' SEO:

- Relevant and good quality content with pragmatic texts, question/answer type.
  - Metadata in <head>: title, description, keywords and sitemap.
  - No keyword stuffing: exceeding 5% to 7% of keywords risks having a negative impact on the website's SEO.
  - Keywords in URLs.
  - No pop-ups.
- 'Off-page' SEO:
    - Since 2015, Yandex penalizes websites with poor quality links.
    - Local backlinking is appreciated but without exaggerating the quantity.
  - UX and mobile:
    - Yandex robots are slower than Google's. Download speed and ease of navigation are, therefore, more critical for the SEO on Yandex.
    - Good performance and compatibility with mobile.
  - Other applications:
    - Unlike Baidu, Yandex does not ban western applications from Google, Facebook, etc., although for best results you should use local networks such as Vkontakte (VK), Odnoklassniki (OK), etc.
    - As with Google Shopping, Yandex's algorithm favors sites that are also on Yandex Market, its marketplace.
  - Geolocation: since the results are geolocalized, it is important to configure your export target correctly in Yandex Webmaster Tools according to these two types of searches:
    - Geo-dependent: the internet user searches for results near his home, for example a shop, a restaurant, a concert, etc. The competition for the website in the SERPs is at the local level, attached to the region of the internet use. To have several regions you need to have several business locations, like for Google My Business, or several websites (URL or subdomain). That is about 30% of searches on Yandex.
    - Geo-independent: location is irrelevant to the internet user, for example recipes, downloading a video or a song, etc. The competition in this case is at the national level throughout Russia. That is roughly 70% of searches on Yandex.

# EXPORTING TO SOUTH KOREA WITH NAVER

Naver is not just a search engine; it is also a browser. With 42 million enrolled users, it is the default browser for almost all computers and smartphones in South Korea, and automatically Google is a challenger in this market.



Figure 35: search engine market shares in South Korea (July 2021).

The search experience on Naver is very different: for the same keywords, with Naver you get two to three times more results than with Google, both organic and paid.

Naver's SERPs are the longest in the world, packed with additional services and information as you can see in the following figure. This is probably one of the reasons South Koreans do not seem to like Google so much.

As with other search engines, Naver also offers its Webmaster Tools, the equivalent of Google Search Console, its Search Ad platform, the equivalent of Google Ads, its Keyword Planner, etc.

## Important SEO points for Naver

Here are the criteria Naver values the most:

- Domains and URL structures:
  - Either ccTLDs or gTLDs: unlike the previous cases, both these two types of domains are equally good for Naver SEO.
  - No constraints on the length of URLs.
  - Korean domain names.

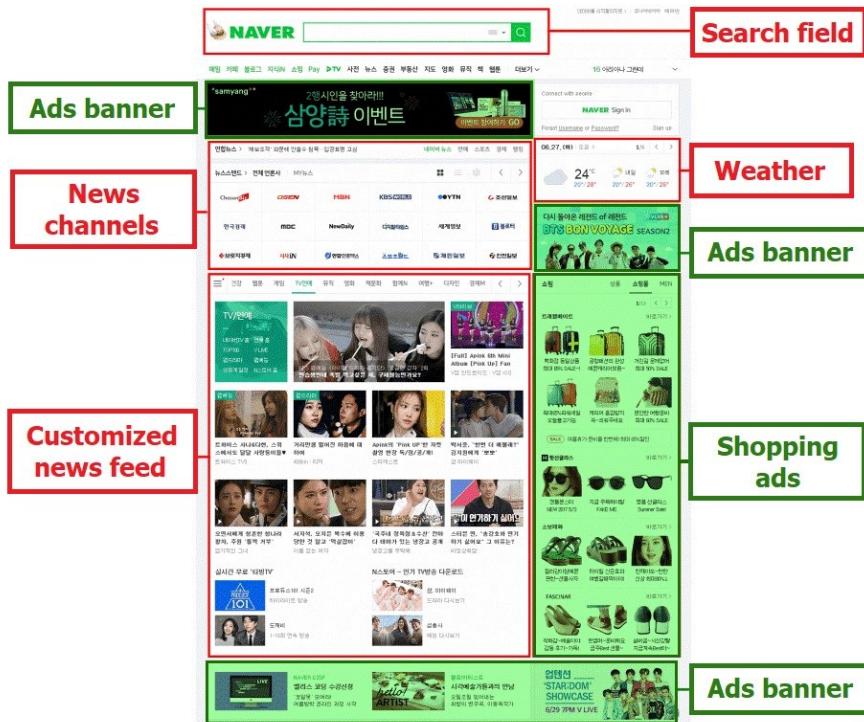


Figure 36: Naver homepage.

- Languages:
  - Korean is fundamental because Naver's algorithm and robots only use this language. The results are more relevant also on Google.
  - English or other languages as well as untranslated texts, bad translations or on-the-fly translations should be avoided.
- 'On-page' SEO:
  - Relevant and qualitative content with no 'duplicate content.'
  - The metadata in <head>: title, description, keywords, H1, H2, H3...
  - The XML sitemap.
- 'Off-page' SEO:
  - Backlinks with high authority.

- Links with social networks, preferably local but also international, which are not banned.
- UX and mobile:
  - Compatible websites for mobiles and smartphones.
  - Fast websites for mobile searches.
- Other applications:
  - Like Yandex, Naver does not block Google, Facebook or other applications.
  - Local social networks are a key factor for Naver's algorithms and websites linked to local networks like Line or KakaoTalk<sup>67</sup> will obtain better results in the SERPs.
  - Naver's SERPs are crammed with information from other complementary applications, almost all owned by Naver, such as Naver Encyclopedia<sup>68</sup>, Naver Posts, Blogs, Naver Shopping, Café<sup>69</sup>, Q&A<sup>70</sup>, etc. Organic results are few and pushed to the bottom of the first page or even to the second page. SEO must, therefore, be accompanied by actions on these other applications, sometimes requiring payment of a fee, such as publication on blogs or the creation of micro-shops on Naver Shopping, etc. And each of these additional actions will need specific SEO, for example:
    - For Naver Café, qualitative content, number of visits and engagement, status.
    - For Naver Blog, qualitative content, frequency of publication, status.
    - For Naver Q&A: qualitative content, number of questions answered, regularity of answers, number of votes, popularity of the person answering on social networks.

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<sup>67</sup> Like WhatsApp and Messenger.

<sup>68</sup> Like Wikipedia.

<sup>69</sup> Creating an account allows you to have a blog which regular posts will help SEO.

<sup>70</sup> The equivalent of Yahoo! Answers, also very effective for boosting a website in Naver's SERPs.

# EXPORTING WITH BING AND YAHOO!

Since Bing is the search engine of Yahoo!, we must consider the sum of the two to better understand their importance.

Indeed, Bing and Yahoo! together can account for up to 35% of the search engine market share depending on browser and country. United Kingdom, United States and Japan are the countries where Bing and Yahoo! still play a significant role.



Figure 37: search engine market shares in Japan (July 2021).

Beyond the market share, it is also interesting to note that the conversion rate on Bing and Yahoo! is often higher than on Google. This phenomenon is probably linked to users who are older and therefore have more time and money to spend on the internet.

Another positive point is that the SEO of Bing and Yahoo! is very similar to Google's, so the heavy lifting is already done. And like other search engines, Bing and Yahoo! also offer free tools such as Webmaster Tools.

## **Important SEO points for Bing and Yahoo!**

Bing and Yahoo! take into account almost all of Google's SEO criteria, so if Google's SEO is done right, most of Bing and Yahoo! SEO is already done.

Apart that, here are the other criteria that Bing and Yahoo! appreciate the most:

- Domains and authority of the site:
  - Older domains.
  - Reputation-based domains e.g., .gov, .edu, .org, etc.

- ‘On-page’ SEO:
  - Keywords, especially in ‘long tail’ in titles, H1, H2, H3, URL, etc.: this is a delicate criterion, because Google with its Penguin may penalize you for keywords stuffing.
  - The keywords in the ‘meta keywords’ tag: this is the right solution to avoid the previous problem as Google ignores this tag. Adding this tag is also recommended for making sure that Bing’s robots see the keywords, because their crawl is limited to the first 100,000 lines of HTML code.
- ‘Off-page’ SEO:
  - Backlinks: quality as well as quantity are important.
  - The quality of the links for Bing is not the same as for Google: the latter mainly looks at the authority of the site, while Bing prefers the seniority and the type of domain in .gov, .edu, .org, etc.
- Multimedia: any visual and audio content, even Flash, is important.
- Crawling: Bing’s robots, unlike Google’s, which crawl every indexable page on a website, only crawl the main pages and they do it less frequently. The use of Bing Webmaster Tools and the sitemap is, therefore, fundamental to facilitate their crawling.

In the tables below, you will find a comparison of the main SEO criteria for Google, Baidu, Yandex, Bing and Yahoo!‘s robots, according to their importance from 1 to 4, 4 being the most critical.

The interest of these tables is to visualize the specificities of search engines better to identify similarities quickly and facilitate the international SEO of your website.

<b>Local Top-Level Domain</b>	<b>3</b>	- ccTLD or gTLD with country and language directories - No regional domains, e.g.,eu,.asia	<b>3</b> - Main keyword in the domain - As short as possible	- ccTLD or gTLD with country and language directories - No regional domains, e.g.,eu,.asia	<b>2</b> - Slightly better rankings with ccTLD .ru
<b>Keyword Domain</b>	<b>1</b>	- Main keyword asap - One specific keyword	<b>2</b> - Main keyword in the domain - As short as possible	- Main keyword in the domain - As short as possible	<b>1</b> - Main pinyin Keyword in domain - Easy to remember - As short as possible
<b>Keyword in URL Path</b>	<b>3</b>	- Main keyword asap - One specific keyword	<b>3</b> - Main keyword asap - One specific keyword	- Main keyword asap - One specific keyword	<b>1</b> - Main pinyin Keyword in URL - Easy to remember - As short as possible
<b>Length of URL</b>	<b>2</b>	- As short as possible - No filling words - No repeated terms	<b>2</b> - As short as possible - No filling words - No repeated terms	- As short as possible	<b>2</b> - URL directory depth as short as possible
<b>Language in URL</b>		- Local language - Transliteration of Non-Latin characters - Encoding or substitution of special characters	<b>3</b> - Local language - Transliteration of Non-Latin characters - Encoding or substitution of special characters	- Local language - Transliteration of Non-Latin characters - Encoding or substitution of special characters	<b>2</b> - Usage of English or Pinyin is better
<b>Hosting</b>	<b>2</b>	- Local IPs - Worldwide Content Delivery Network	<b>2</b> - Worldwide Content Delivery Network	- Local IPs - Worldwide Content Delivery Network	<b>4</b> - Use Local IP

					
<b>Hreflang</b>	<b>4</b>	- Correct usage of country and language codes in ISO format - Only connect corresponding pages individually	- Does not recognize this format - Requires a meta language tag in header or body of the page	- Correct usage of country and language codes in ISO format - Only connect corresponding pages individually	- Does not recognize this format: - Requires a meta language tag in header or body in each page
<b>Meta &amp; X-Robots</b>	<b>4</b>	- Crawler regulation on page level - Relevant attributes: Noindex, Nofollow	- Crawler regulation on page level - Relevant attributes: Noindex, Nofollow	- Not common on Russian sites - Best practise is robots.txt for all indexation directives	- Crawler regulation on page level - Relevant attributes: Noindex, Nofollow
<b>Canonical</b>	<b>3</b>	- Define one unique URL version - To avoid Duplicate Content	- Define one unique URL version - To avoid Duplicate Content	- Define one unique URL version - To avoid Duplicate Content	- Define one unique URL version - To avoid Duplicate Content
<b>Error Pages</b>	<b>3</b>	- For all non-existing resources - Correct 4xx status code	- For all non-existing resources - Correct 4xx status code	- Correct 4xx status code	- For all non-existing resources - Correct 4xx status code
<b>sitemap.xml</b>	<b>2</b>	- Gather all search-engine-relevant canonicalized URLs - Placed in the root - Upload to Google Search Console	- Gather all search-engine-relevant canonicalized URLs - Placed in the root - Only URL location needed - Upload to Bing Webmaster Tools	- Gather all search-engine-relevant canonicalized URLs - Placed in the root - Upload to Yandex Webmaster Tools	- Gather all search-engine-relevant canonicalized URLs - Placed in the root - Upload to Baidu Webmaster Tools
<b>Loading Time</b>	<b>4</b>	- Reduce number of requests - Minimize file sizes - Optimize server setup	- Reduce number of requests - Minimize file sizes - Optimize server setup	- Minimize file sizes - Optimize server setup	- Reduce number of requests - Minimize file sizes - Optimize server setup

	Google	bing	YAHOO!	Yandex	Baidu 百度
<b>Mobile-Friendly</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide mobile-friendly usability and use app indexing</li> <li>- Consider all user-relevant devices</li> <li>- Responsive design recommended</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide mobile-friendly usability</li> <li>- Consider all user-relevant devices</li> <li>- Responsive design recommended</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive</li> <li>- Main keyword at the beginning;</li> <li>- brand at the end</li> <li>- No keyword stuffing</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive</li> <li>- Main keyword at the beginning;</li> <li>- brand at the end</li> <li>- No keyword stuffing</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mobile-friendly recommended in general</li> <li>- Mobile doctype for mobile subdomain pages</li> <li>- Crosslink between mobile and desktop version</li> </ul> <b>3</b>
<b>Title Tags</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive</li> <li>- Main keyword at the beginning;</li> <li>- brand at the end</li> <li>- No keyword stuffing</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive</li> <li>- Main keyword at the beginning;</li> <li>- brand at the end</li> <li>- No keyword stuffing</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive</li> <li>- Main keyword at the beginning;</li> <li>- brand at the end</li> <li>- No keyword stuffing</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive</li> <li>- Main keyword at the beginning;</li> <li>- brand at the end</li> <li>- No keyword stuffing</li> </ul> <b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use mobile settings in Baidu Webmaster Tools</li> <li>- Use text instead of flash, images, Javascript for important content or links</li> <li>- Independent mobile site recommended</li> </ul> <b>4</b>
<b>Description Tags</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive, full sentences</li> <li>- With top keywords and semantic</li> <li>- Call-to-Action</li> </ul> <b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive, full sentences</li> <li>- With top keywords and semantic</li> <li>- Call-to-Action</li> </ul> <b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive, full sentences</li> <li>- With top keywords and semantic</li> <li>- Call-to-Action</li> </ul> <b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive, full sentences</li> <li>- With top keywords and semantic</li> <li>- Call-to-Action</li> </ul> <b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique, short, descriptive, full sentences</li> <li>- With top keywords and semantic</li> <li>- Call-to-Action</li> </ul> <b>3</b>
<b>Meta Keyword Tags</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not relevant at all</li> <li>- Usage not recommended</li> </ul> <b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not relevant at all</li> <li>- Usage not recommended</li> </ul> <b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not relevant at all</li> <li>- Usage not recommended</li> </ul> <b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relevant keywords</li> <li>- No keyword stuffing</li> <li>- Add 3-5 keywords per page</li> </ul> <b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use mobile settings in Baidu Webmaster Tools</li> <li>- Use text instead of flash, images, Javascript for important content or links</li> <li>- Independent mobile site recommended</li> </ul> <b>4</b>

					
<b>Unique Content</b>	<b>4</b>	- Unique; no Duplicate Content - Relevant topic, Local language	<b>4</b>	- Unique; no Duplicate Content - Relevant topic, Local language	<b>4</b>
<b>Relevant Terms</b>	<b>4</b>	- User focus - Define and include relevant terms in content	<b>4</b>	- User focus - Define and include relevant terms in content	<b>2</b>
<b>H-Tags</b>	<b>3</b>	- Only for structuring and subdividing of main content - Follow h-tag hierarchy - One h1/page with main keyword	<b>2</b>	- Only for structuring and subdividing of main content - Follow h-tag hierarchy - One h1/page with main keyword	<b>3</b>
<b>Images Integration</b>	<b>3</b>	- Use content-related images - Add main keyword in file name - Clear and descriptive alt attribute	<b>3</b>	- Use content-related images - Add main keyword in file name - Clear and descriptive alt attribute	<b>3</b>
<b>Videos Integration</b>	<b>2</b>	- Avoid Javascript and/or Flash - Prefer HTML5 embedding in order to support multiple devices	<b>2</b>	- Avoid JavaScript and/or Flash - Prefer HTML5 embedding in order to support multiple devices	<b>1</b>
<b>Internal Links (IL) per Page</b>	<b>4</b>	- Key pages must have as many IL as possible - IL are hierarchy hints for crawlers	<b>3</b>	- Key pages must have as many IL as possible - IL are hierarchy hints for crawlers	<b>4</b>
					- Unique, relevant; no Duplicate Content - Relevant topic, Local language - Avoid too many ad pop-ups
					- User focus - Define and include relevant terms in content
					- Only for structuring and subdividing of main content - Follow h-tag hierarchy - One h1/page with main keyword
					- Use content-related images - Add main keyword in file name - Clear and descriptive alt attribute
					- XML Feeds or OpenGraph/ Schema.org/ RSS for additional video info transfering - Structured data for description
					- Avoid JavaScript and/or Flash for video embedding - Prefer HTML5 embedding in order to support multiple devices
					- Key pages must have as many IL as possible - IL are hierarchy hints for crawlers
					- Unique, no Duplicate Content - Relevant topic, Local language - Avoid too many ad pop-ups
					- User focus - Define and include relevant terms in content
					- Only for structuring and subdividing of main content - Follow h-tag hierarchy - One h1/page with main keyword
					- Use content-related images - Add main keyword in file name - Clear and descriptive alt attribute
					- XML Feeds or OpenGraph/ Schema.org/ RSS for additional video info transfering - Structured data for description
					- Avoid JavaScript and/or Flash for video embedding - Prefer HTML5 embedding in order to support multiple devices
					- Key pages must have as many IL as possible - IL are hierarchy hints for crawlers
					- Unique, relevant; no Duplicate Content - Relevant topic, Local language - Avoid too many ad pop-ups

	Google	bing	YAHOO!	Yandex	Baidu
External Links (EL) per Page	4	3	4	4	4
Social Media	3	4	2	1	1
CTR	4	3	3	4	4
Bounce Rate	3	2	2	3	3
Search effectiveness	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

**External Links (EL) per Page**

- Avoid backlinks from bad sources
- Reject links that can be harmful, e.g. from directories, gambling, ...

**Social Media**

- Positive effect on reach and targeting
- Indirect ranking factor

**CTR**

- Optimize the click-through rate by adjusting the meta data
- High CTRs can improve rankings
- High CTRs are good KPI for brands

**Bounce Rate**

- Monitor the bounce rate
- Increase relevancy
- Add value to the content

**Search effectiveness**

- Based mainly on Meta tags, UX & content quality
- 35% in the U.S.

**Google**

- Avoid backlinks from bad sources
- Reject links that can be harmful, e.g. from directories, gambling, ...

**bing**

- Avoid backlinks from bad sources
- Reject links that can be harmful, e.g. from directories, gambling, ...

**YAHOO!**

- Positive effect on reach and targeting, especially with local SM targeting
- Indirect ranking factor

**Yandex**

- Positive effect on reach and targeting, especially with local SM targeting
- Not relevant unless local SM

**Baidu**

- Avoid backlinks from bad sources
- Links from large websites, Government, school and old websites are recommended



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Google remains the world champion in search engine market share.*
- *This does not mean that Google is the only one that matters for a digital export project: Baidu, Yandex, Naver, Bing and Yahoo! cannot be overlooked in some countries.*

# **CONCLUSIONS**

*Here we are at the end of this book.*

*But don't close it right away, because I still have a few things to tell you about the necessary costs and organization.*

*Then, it will be up to you to get started on your digital export action or, if you have already started, to pick up the pace!*



# CHAPTER 20

## A FEW FINAL TIPS: COSTS, ORGANIZATION, AND ... TIME!

“

*How much does international web marketing cost? What type of organization should you have for the deployment of a digital export strategy? How long does it take to get results?*

*Here is my latest practical advice to help you answer these operational questions.*

# HOW MUCH DOES DIGITAL COST INTERNATIONALLY?

In principle, you can do almost anything on the internet for 'free'. But today, in terms of efficacy, free on the internet is not the same as it was a few years ago, and the first example is Facebook.

Today, Facebook is no longer free for companies as it was before: for a few years, its algorithm has increasingly limited the pages' organic reach. As a result, standard publications are visible only to a few fans. If you want more, you have to switch to sponsored posts or advertising. The problem is the same for other social networks as well as for SEO, blogs, etc. Content is free when produced in-house by you or your teams, but:

- The time spent on the production of this content has a cost called a 'salary'.
- Visibility, a determining factor for performance, has a price that must now be added to your budget.

## **Build an international web-marketing budget**

The share of web marketing in companies' marketing budgets is constantly increasing compared to traditional marketing, which is constantly decreasing<sup>71</sup>.

Often these budgets are provisioned and allocated as a percentage of the company's turnover in the concerned territory. But what should you do when you start in a new export market where you have little or no turnover? Are you going without a budget? Not at all!

In this case, you need to be inspired by the web-marketing budget of another comparable country or of another business unit similar to the activity concerned, or the head office should determine the initial

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<sup>71</sup> Jennifer Veenstra, 'The CMO Survey: Marketing Budget Gets Big Boost', Deloitte, 26 April 2021, <https://deloitte.wsj.com/articles/the-cmo-survey-marketing-budget-gets-big-boost-01619463730>.

funding, which will be provisioned beforehand and reimbursed with a more or less extended schedule or co-financed by public aid.

As in the T.O.S.CA method, there are similar elements to consider when building an international web-marketing budget, whether for a new market or for an already existing one:

- Target: foreign countries and foreign languages.
- Objectives: increase sales, brand awareness, ...
- Segments: consumers, professionals, age, level of education, etc.
- Channels and Call-to-Action: website, e-commerce, marketplaces, distributors, ...
- Paying levers: Google Ads, Display, influencers, ...
- Types of content: video, text, photo, tone style, frequency of publication, etc.
- Period to be covered: three years, five years, ...



### **TIP**

*When building your budget, do not forget to include your objectives, whether quantitative or qualitative. Without them, you will have trouble calculating the ROI of your investment.*

## **INTERNATIONAL WEB-MARKETING COSTS**

In practice, international web marketing uses several skills, each with a specific cost. For a company with ad hoc needs, such as the internationalization of its website or e-commerce, the integration of marketplaces abroad, the development of SEO for export, etc., the best solution is to call on external service providers offering linguistic and technical skills that are suited to its project.

In this context, here are some examples of the average rates of freelancers in Europe (for information purposes only).

- Web designer/graphic designer: between €150 and €300 per day.
- Web developers: between €300 and €700 per day depending on the development language and expertise.
- Artistic director: about €800 per day.
- SEO consultant: between €300 and €800 per day depending on level of experience and issues addressed.
- International SEO consultant: between €500 and €900 per day depending on level of experience, issues addressed and geographic scope.
- SEA consultant: between €400 and €800 per day depending on level of experience, budget, type and quantity of campaigns.
- International SEA consultant: between €700 and €1,000 per day depending on level of experience, geographic scope, budget, type and quantity of campaigns.
- Analytics consultant: between €300 and €500 per report depending on experience.
- International analytics consultant: between €700 and €1,000 per report depending on experience and geographic scope.
- Web-marketing strategy consultant: between €500 and €1,000 per day depending on experience.
- International web-marketing strategy consultant: between €700 and €1,500 per day depending on experience and geographic scope.

In an international approach, you can also work with local providers or freelancers based in the foreign country you are targeting, or even elsewhere. Prices can vary as much as 100% for identical services. To give you an idea: if we set the United States at 100, France would be at 80, the countries of North Africa and Eastern Europe at 70, and India almost at 50.



## CASE STUDY

Since many factors condition budgets, formulas vary on a case-by-case basis, and it is impossible to generalize. To give you some guidance on how to build a budget, here are some calculations as examples.

*Example 1—Banner for a hotel in the Alps in Austria, to be displayed on affiliate program websites.*

*Target: sporty couples with young children based in France, Germany, and Italy. Budget: €3,000 over four months.*

*Results:*

- Impressions of the campaign on affiliate sites: more than five million times.
- Banner clicks: approximately 5,000 clicks, with a CTR of 0.1%.
- Bookings: 50, conversion rate 1%, cost per acquisition €60.
- Simplified ROI: turnover of €10,000 for the 50 reservations;  $ROI = (\text{turnover} - \text{budget})/\text{budget}$  = 233%.

*Example 2—Google Ads campaign to download a white paper for SaaS in the legal sector.*

*Target: SMEs in the UK. Budget: €1,000 over 14 days.*

*Results:*

- 12,000 impressions.
- More than 287 clicks, with a CTR of 2.87%.
- 19 downloads of the white paper.
- Conversion rate of 6%, cost per conversion of €52.60.
- Simplified ROI: turnover of €1,500;  $ROI = (\text{turnover} - \text{budget})/\text{budget}$  = 50%.

*These calculations relate to simplified ROIs. To obtain the net ROI, you also need to deduct the variable costs associated with the project, such as any costs of creating the banner, translating, and producing the white paper in English, adapting the website, etc.*

# THE IMPACT OF CTR IN AN INTERNATIONAL WEB-MARKETING BUDGET

The budget to invest in international web marketing is also linked to the CTR<sup>72</sup>, which is a concept used around the world to express the percentage of internet users that have clicked on a link, whether organic or paid.

How does CTR impact your budget? If your CTR on organic and free web-marketing levers (for example, the SEO on your website for a foreign country) is very low compared to the industry average, paid levers will probably be more effective: as is often the case in a new market, where a brand is still little known, it can take time to reach the strategic target only through SEO. On the contrary, paid levers can achieve these goals much faster, but the costs increase to pay for SEA, SMA campaigns, etc.

Otherwise, if your CTR is already at a good level or even higher than the industry average, you can move forward with organic web-marketing actions in your target foreign country, which will be more economical than in the previous case.

To know whether your CTR is good or bad, you must, therefore, compare it with the average for your business sector in the export market that you are targeting. To give you an idea, here are some sector averages in the U.S.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> <https://support.google.com/googleads/answer/2615875>.

<sup>73</sup> Mark Irvine, Google Ads Benchmarks for YOUR Industry [Updated!], WordStream, 24 September 2021, <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2016/02/29/google-adwords-industry-benchmarks>.

Industry	Average CTR (Search)	Average CTR (GDN)
Advocacy	4.41%	0.59%
Auto	4.00%	0.60%
B2B	2.41%	0.46%
Consumer Services	2.41%	0.51%
Dating & Personals	6.05%	0.72%
E-Commerce	2.69%	0.51%
Education	3.78%	0.53%
Employment Services	2.42%	0.59%
Finance & Insurance	2.91%	0.52%
Health & Medical	3.27%	0.59%
Home Goods	2.44%	0.49%
Industrial Services	2.61%	0.50%
Legal	2.93%	0.59%
Real Estate	3.71%	1.08%
Technology	2.09%	0.39%
Travel & Hospitality	4.68%	0.47%

*An example of the average CTR by sector in the U.S.*

Each lever has its average sectorial CTR, which may be higher or lower than the others. In general, the CTR in Display is lower than in Search: all sectors combined, Display CTR is 0.46% while Search CTR is 3.17%.



### TIP

*Do not compare the CTR of one lever with that of another. This can lead you to decide, 'I just do Search because the CTR is higher'. In reality, it is the synergy between the different levers that will improve the performance of web marketing and thus the ROI of your budget, both at home and abroad.*

*The rise in CTR rates is proof of this: if CTR were the only factor in performance, Display budgets would have been stopped for years.*

# HOW TO GET ORGANIZED FOR INTERNATIONAL WEB MARKETING

Although web marketing is well anchored in corporate strategy, it is common to hear clichés about international practice, such as:

- My intern, who spent his holidays in Spain, will manage my cross-border e-commerce.
- My English girlfriend's neighbor's son is going to develop my bilingual website for free.
- We don't need to translate the website into German because everyone in Germany speaks English.
- We have created a page in English on Facebook because we were told that was the right thing to do, but frankly it is useless and in addition it is empty because no one here is comfortable writing in English.

Unfortunately, these examples are not uncommon in companies, especially in those that have not taken the time to formulate their multichannel export strategy.

In fact, digital export and international web marketing include several distinct activities and skills: SEO, SEA, newsletters, social media, e-commerce, marketplaces, influencers, marketing automation, etc., each of which must be adapted to the target export markets. Your company must not only find solutions to manage all these skills in several countries at the same time, but also ensure the integration of all these skills as well as new techniques to come.

But in addition to this complexity of technical skills and geography, digital export also imposes a shift from the offer, or the company, to the demand, or customer. With an organization focused on the offer, the company risks having the problem of 'silos' where each function works on a single axis of the customer journey by country and separately from other functions. Whether at home or abroad, you need to ensure the convergence of all actions carried out in the direction of prospective customers to provide as coherent and effective a customer journey as possible.

Organizing digital export and international web marketing is, therefore, complicated, but you can act in three areas to make it easier:

- *Bring them closer to the company's strategy.* Digital export and international web marketing must be as well-suited as possible to the short-, medium- and long-term objectives of the company and must be able to deploy the most effective levers. At the same time, the company must provide the necessary resources to align its web marketing with the objectives of its export strategy and motivate all its teams, internal and external, to work towards the same objectives.
- *Acquire an in-depth understanding of each step of the export customer journey and learn to use them correctly.* This will allow you to understand precisely not only the strengths and weaknesses of your company in this journey, but also the new skills necessary to address those weaknesses.
- *Adopt the agile organizational approach.* Since digital export requires several types of expertise in technical, graphic, commercial, managerial fields, etc., hiring several people for each area of expertise requires a substantial budget. The agile approach needs an open vision toward alternative solutions, an ability to share new ways of working, and a willingness to adopt new concepts quickly. Your organization can adopt this approach and respond more effectively to the ambitions of your digital export project.

### **Centralized or decentralized management**

To organize the deployment of your digital export sales, you must first consider the two options for centralization or decentralization, depending on the size of your business and on your target countries:

- Decentralized deployment via subsidiaries or local partners. Some of the advantages of this model are:
  - Local management of budgets.
  - More specific positioning and content in the countries.
  - Closer organization of local events.
- Centralized deployment from your headquarters. Some of the advantages of this model are:
  - Better control of brand image.
  - Economies of scale in production and publication of content.
  - International monitoring of KPIs.

Centralized deployment is usually more suitable if your business is in an international start-up phase and does not yet have local structures.

### **Internalizing, externalizing or both?**

Often international web marketing is under the responsibility of the company's marketing manager, who is in charge of everything: traditional marketing with trade fairs, communication, packaging, catalogs, etc., and web marketing with SEO, newsletters, blog, social networks, etc. But a single person rarely has expertise in all areas of traditional and digital marketing as well as in all export markets the company targets.

On the other hand, the profile of a generalist marketing manager can be a good solution. He will have sufficient skills to negotiate and manage the service providers specialized in the fields of international web marketing that you need for your digital export project. As a company employee, he can directly take charge of some of these levers, the most critical, which will then remain internalized. He can outsource the others to selected service providers, and then gradually internalize them: recruiting a web-marketing team is a significantly expensive investment, and you will be more in favor of it once you know what ROI you are able to achieve.

So, in a start-up phase, as for ad hoc needs on specific issues, for example the internationalization of your website in German or the implementation of an advertising campaign on Yandex, working with specialized service providers is the best choice.

### **Things to pay attention to when outsourcing**

As we have seen, there are significant price differences depending on the skills of the service provider in question. But beyond the price, there are other things to pay attention to when negotiating with future international web-marketing providers. Here are a few:

- The specifications of the international web project: clearly define who does what between you and your service provider and when.
- Ownership of accounts: make sure that you keep ownership of Google accounts, such as Google Ads, and that they are properly linked to your name with full access to data and administrator rights to change login and password until the end of the contract.

- Ownership of product content: when providing international content creation services published on your website or social media, make sure that this content becomes your property.
- The duration of contracts: avoid commitments over several years without any possibility of emergency exit.
- The difficulty of paying for results or performance: being enormously dependent on Google's algorithms and their untimely changes, service providers cannot make 100% of their remuneration conditional on results. Success fees or bonuses for exceeding objectives are more appropriate and appreciated.
- Reporting of results and monitoring of actions: mention them in the quotes so that you can always know what has been done when and when to measure the results.

## HOW LONG TO WAIT FOR RESULTS

The press and specialized media repeat it often: internationalizing a business is not just about selling a product or service abroad; it is rather a long process requiring a lot of thought and preparation. But what's the right balance so that 'a lot of thought' doesn't get in the way of action?

### **Premature internationalization or no internationalization?**

Premature internationalization certainly carries risks, but 'no internationalization' is not a solution either.



## CASE STUDY

*The marketing director of a French manufacturer of bicycle accessories wanted to expand its online business to other countries. The company already had a good number of domestic customers, but it had not yet developed its own e-commerce. The marketing director then decided to integrate the e-commerce functionalities on the website, which he had translated into English, German, Spanish and Italian, and to list around 20 products on Amazon's European marketplaces in the hope that this would increase sales in Europe.*

*After a few weeks, the first orders arrived, mainly from the United Kingdom. The items were dispatched immediately. All UK customers tried to contact the company after receiving their package, but failed, and finally decided to return the items. The marketing director, surprised by this result, contacted them by email to find out why: the customers explained that the instructions they received were not in English, that they had tried to call the company, and no one answered, and that, unable to understand how to install and use the products, they simply returned them.*

In this case study, we cannot criticize the marketing director for having started exporting without being sufficiently prepared. His initiative has enabled the company to create value<sup>74</sup> and to create the basis for new sources of growth. In addition, his approach is compatible with a gradual export development strategy, and the company can adapt its investment according to the degree of success of the actions deployed.

A multilingual website is, therefore, not enough to make your business international, but it is one of the first ingredients necessary to become profitable and sustainable. Think of the investment you have made to promote your business in your home country, on the internet and beyond: the website but also SEO, newsletters, marketplaces, social networks, trade shows, packaging, interviews, advertisements, etc. How much time and resources have you devoted to it and continue to devote to it on a daily basis? Would it not be normal to think that so much time and resources should also be dedicated to your target foreign market?

### **The secret to good results is time**

Export and digital separately are two processes that take time to achieve positive results in the target countries. Although the

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<sup>74</sup> An international website can increase the value of a business, especially an e-commerce website.

combination of the two makes it possible to accelerate international development, a multi-channel export strategy always takes time, and the ROI is long-term, generally over three to five years.

This is why intermediate stages with objectives in the short and medium term are also necessary to increase and measure the performance of the deployment over time. These stages must be described in a roadmap for five years, or even beyond. Even if reality invalidates part of this roadmap, it will serve to inspire the launch, to monitor the development, and to formulate hypotheses on what export sales could be achieved in the short, medium, and long term with their budgetary impact.

Regarding this last point, here are three concrete examples:

- For short-term goals, such as prospecting during an international trade fair abroad, investing in SEO or social media will not be effective, because they will not have the time to produce concrete results. Other levers, such as lead generation or advertising campaigns, will be capable of achieving this performance in the desired time frame.
- For medium-term goals, such as increasing sales on Zalando in Europe by 30% in one year, simply referencing the products translated into each language will be useful but not sufficient. Boosting products with promotions or advertising on Zalando and on partner sites may produce more satisfactory results within the desired time frame.
- For long-term goals, such as developing brand awareness in a new country over three years, organic levers are strategic and suitable for building this reputation on solid qualitative bases and supporting its growth over time.

Depending on the time available to achieve the objectives, the levers used will, therefore, have a higher or lower cost, which will impact your budget.

But even with a clear roadmap, many companies throw in the towel for the first year for lack of positive results. Avoid this mistake and don't give up. To extend your perseverance intelligently, here are some tips:

- Place digital export as a priority ambition in the company's strategy by not allowing it to be perceived as a simple search for commercial

opportunities. Involve as many employees as possible by making them feel that they are part of this ambition.

- Be realistic. The average time to complete an export business, all channels combined, is two years, depending on the sector. Moreover, completion does not mean profitability, because profitability generally needs one to two extra years.
- To maintain the course on your international development, subtract everything that is not in your core business and that others can do better than you. But beware of providers who promise impressive results overnight. Whether online or offline, if you want to achieve good, profitable, and lasting positive results, you have to invest in quality work, and that doesn't happen in days.
- Anticipate your funding needs to ensure that your cash flow can follow the project over the long term. Several mechanisms such as government grants or aids from chambers of commerce, etc., make it possible to finance the development of digital export.
- Regularly analyze your performance. Yes, the progress can be disappointing. But check it regularly and make sure that the best tools and practices are correctly implemented. That will allow you to intervene as quickly as possible if something goes too slowly compared to your roadmap.

So, how long will it take to get results? Neither digital nor export is a precise science; they are rather continuous projects. For the first, on average 95% of new websites can take more than a year to arrive at the first results of SERP. For the second, it can take between six months and a year, after validation of the strategy, to obtain the first customer. These times are mere estimates, and the actual time you need may vary depending on several factors, including your sector, the export market, your budget, your objectives, etc.

# **HOW DIGITAL DARWINISM CAN STRENGTHEN EXPORT**

The internationalization of a company should be considered a journey and not a destination. Each foreign country is not just a new market; it also involves the discovery of new habits, new cultures, new opportunities. Certain countries will have specific needs for which the company will have to find specific solutions. It is the wealth of solutions that the company will be able to deploy in its new markets that will make its export journey efficient.

Until the early 2000s, export development for an SME mainly involved finding and managing distributors or importers in other countries. English was the only language used for business, often sufficient in that context.

But, in recent years, the opportunities for internationalization have evolved. Internet, e-commerce, marketplaces, and other digital tools have joined distributors and importers, multiplying the channels that help reach foreign customers, directly and indirectly. How will this evolve in the coming years? With the speed of breakthrough innovations, we can expect huge developments in several areas affecting export sales thanks to the internet.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Digital export is like conquering a summit: there is the excitement of the challenge, the pleasure of advancement, the ecstasy of the outcome. These stages are renewed at each conquered summit, but the chances of success will be greater after each successive conquest. It would be a shame to stop at the first summit, and for your digital exports it would be a shame to stop at the first country.

If you want to read more about how to sell online across channels internationally, don't forget the rest of The Digital Exporter Series, where you can find more than 100 case studies presenting the best tools, actionable solutions, and step-by-step explanations. Here is the list of books in [The Digital Exporter Series](#):

- Book 1 – [STARTING THE GLOBAL DIGITAL JOURNEY: How to create the best international web strategy](#).
- Book 2 – [GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY: How to set up local, international & global SEO](#).
- Book 3 – [GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, BY ADVERTISING: SEA, SMA and other acquisition channels](#).
- Book 4 – [SELLING ONLINE INTERNATIONALLY: How to set up & manage a cross-border e-commerce](#).
- Book 5 – [SELLING ONLINE INTERNATIONALLY: How to sell on local & international marketplaces](#).
- Book 6 – [DEVELOPING A STRONG INTERNATIONAL BRAND: Multilingual social media & social selling](#).
- Book 7 – [DEVELOPING A STRONG INTERNATIONAL BRAND: Multilingual inbound marketing & marketing automation](#).

I hope that this book has given you useful advice, and I wish you success in reaching as many digital export summits as possible!

## SOME PRACTICAL DATA

- Trade Map ([www.trademap.org](http://www.trademap.org)): covering 220 countries and territories and 5,300 products of the harmonized system, a system adopted in 1983 by the World Customs Organization, it provides plenty of indicators on exports.
- OECD.Stat (<https://stats.oecd.org>) is a platform that provides access to statistical databases for OECD countries.
- Ecommerce Europe (<https://ecommerce-europe.eu/>) is an association representing more than 100,000 companies selling goods and services online to consumers in Europe.
- DHL, 'The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Spice Trade: A Guide the Cross-Border E-Commerce Opportunity'

([https://www.dhl.com/content/dam/downloads/g0/press/publication/g0\\_dhl\\_express\\_cross\\_border\\_ecommerce\\_21st\\_century\\_spiece\\_trade.pdf](https://www.dhl.com/content/dam/downloads/g0/press/publication/g0_dhl_express_cross_border_ecommerce_21st_century_spiece_trade.pdf)).

- European Commission, 'Buying goods online coming from a non-European Union country'  
([https://ec.europa.eu/taxation\\_customs/individuals/buying-goods-services-online-personal-use/buying-goods/buying-goods-online-coming-from-a-non-eu-union-country\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/individuals/buying-goods-services-online-personal-use/buying-goods/buying-goods-online-coming-from-a-non-eu-union-country_en)).
- United Nations (<https://unstats.un.org/home/>), statistical data globally and by country.
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Factbook — Explore All Countries  
(<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/>).
- W3C Internationalization (I18n) Activity:  
<https://www.w3.org/blog/international/>.

## TOOLS TO ANALYZE THE SEO PERFORMANCE ACCORDING TO THE GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF INTERNET USERS

Screaming Frog SEO Spider: <https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/>.

Deep Crawl: <https://www.deepcrawl.com/>.

OnCrawl: <https://www.oncrawl.com/>.

Woorank: <https://www.woorank.com>.

SEMrush: <https://www.semrush.com/>.

Pingdom: <https://tools.pingdom.com>.

WebPageTest: [www.webpagetest.org](http://www.webpagetest.org).

GTmetrix: <https://gtmetrix.com>.

MOZ: <https://moz.com/free-seo-tools>

Ubersuggest: <https://neilpatel.com/ubersuggest/>

SERP Robot: <https://www.serprobot.com/serp-check.php>. It allows you to analyze your position in the SERPs of your target export countries according to your keywords as well as to see what the competing sites are and to analyze their SEO strategy on the same country to improve your local referencing.

## CHROME EXTENSIONS TO ANALYZE SEO PERFORMANCE

User-Agent Switcher:

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/user-agent-switcher-for-c/djf1hoibgkdhkhcedjiklpkjnoahfmg>.

SEO Quake:

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/seoquake/akdgnmcogleenhbclghghlkkdndkjdc>. Once installed on your browser it allows you to analyze the SEO of a website for Google and other search engines.

## GOOGLE'S TOOLS

For website speed on a desktop or mobile browser:

<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>;

For general website performance:

<https://developers.google.com/web/tools/lighthouse#devtools>.

## TOOLS TO ANALYZE STRUCTURED DATA

Google's tools:

- <https://search.google.com/structureddata/testingtool>;

- <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/structured-data-testing-t/kfdjeigpgagildmolfanniafmplnpl?hl=en>.

Bing:

<https://www.bing.com/webmasters/help/url-inspection-55a30305>.

Yandex: <https://webmaster.yandex.com/tools/microtest/>.

## TOOLS TO CHECK MOBILE PERFORMANCE

<https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>

<https://search.google.com/test/amp>

<https://validator.ampproject.org>

## TOOLS TO CHECK BACKLINKS PERFORMANCE

Ahrefs: <https://ahrefs.com/>. A paid tool with seven free days, it allows you to analyze a website by comparing it to competing websites in terms of backlinks, keywords, and content for the country of your choice.

## FREE TOOL TO FIND OUT WHICH TOOLS YOUR COMPETITORS USE

BuiltWith: <https://builtwith.com/>

# GOOGLE SEARCH OPERATORS

Beyond the essential operators, such as the double quotation marks around text to search for an exact expression, 'OR' or 'I' to search for 'either this or that', 'AND' to search for 'this and that', '-' to search for 'without this', and '\*' to generalize the search, there are many other operators that are very useful for international sales:

'site:website.com': it provides all the indexed URL pages on website.com. Useful to compare the size of a competing website in a foreign country.

'site:\*.website.com -www': it provides all the subdomains of website.com, for example fr.website.com, it.website.com, etc.

'site:website.com/\*': it provides all the subdirectories of website.com, for example website.com/fr, website.com/it, etc.

'site:website.com 'a piece of text copied from a web page of your website': It provides all the URLs with the same text. Useful for detecting duplicate content on your multilingual site.

'related:website.com': it provides sites similar to website.com. Useful to identify competitors in a foreign market.

'intitle:product': it provides web pages containing the word 'product' in their tag <title>. Useful in an international benchmark approach to measure the intensity of use of a keyword, for example.

'allintitle:color brand product': like the previous case, but it provides web pages containing several words in their tag <title>. For example, with 'allintitle:Blue Rab down jacket' you will have all the pages containing these four words in their <title>. This example uses color-brand-product, but any other combination of words can be used. Always useful in an international benchmark to measure how much the relevant keyword combination is used.

'inurl:product' and 'intext:product': they provide web pages containing the word 'product' in the URL or in the text, respectively. Useful in an international benchmark to measure the use of a keyword.

'allinurl:color brand product' and 'allintext:color brand product': like the previous case, but it provides web pages containing several words in the URL or in the text respectively. For example, with 'allinurl:Blue Rab down jacket' you will have all the pages containing these four words in the URL. This example uses color-brand-product, but you can use any other word combination.

Always useful in an international benchmark to measure how many websites use the combination of keywords in the URL or in the text, respectively.

'link:website.com': it provides the pages with links to website.com. Although deprecated by Google in 2017, it can still give interesting results. Probably less complete than before 2017, these results can be used to identify the backlinks of your foreign competitors;

'allinurl:brand product color -site:website.\*': it provides web pages containing several words in the URL, excluding the pages of the website domain as well as its subdirectories. For example, with 'allinurl:Rab down jacket blue -site:rab.\*' you will have all the pages containing these four words in the URL beyond the URLs of the Rab websites. Useful for identifying websites that mention your brand and product to offer partnerships or backlinking. If in the same request, you add 'site:.ccTLD,' for example 'allinurl:down jacket Rab blue -site:rab.\* site:.co.uk', you will only get results specific to the UK market. The same for other foreign countries that you target by translating words into the language used on ccTLD sites.

'allintitle:review (competitor1 OR competitor2 OR competitor3) site:.ccTLD': it provides the URL pages containing the word 'review' associated with at least one of the three competing brands in the country of the ccTLD. For example, with 'allintitle:review (patagonia OR moncler OR columbia) site:.co.uk', you will have the list of all the sites with published comments on the brands Patagonia, Moncler or Columbia in the United Kingdom. The same works for any country, by changing the word 'review' and the ccTLD according to the foreign country that interests you. Useful to develop your PR internationally by identifying websites, bloggers or journalists interested in your field of business.

Operator combinations in Google searches are plentiful. You will find more information on:

- <https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/2466433?hl=en>
- [https://www.google.com/advanced\\_search](https://www.google.com/advanced_search)



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