BENCHMARKING LOCALIZATION, A CONTENT MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Many companies wish to promote their services and products on the global market. Websites are the most direct and less expensive way to get the attention of potential buyers from around the world. Using only English is a good step but very often it is not sufficient, especially if you want to target the end user. That is why we propose researching best practices and best-in-class localized websites that achieved global coverage, i.e. benchmarking localization.

Keywords: website translation, website localization, localization benchmarking, localized website, content marketing, SEO localization

Replicating success often involves finding and going beyond what predecessors in a certain domain achieved. Online businesses follow the same principle of mimicking the accomplishments of similar websites. Google was not the first search engine on the market yet it is the most widely used, surpassing Lycos, Alta Vista, Magellan, Yahoo! and other search engines.

The same goes in the case of website localization. One has to look at websites the achieved measurable success in website localization. Considering that currently the most important web search engine is Google, any website localization content that is, and should always be, search engine optimization (SEO) oriented, should do some research on competitors or multinationals, prior to engaging in developing a multilingual website that is also geo-targeted. Localization is not always implied in the case of websites, as the simple translation simply fulfils its task is obvious in case of websites such as city hall websites, hence, a site may be multilingual but may not need to be localized as its audience is from the same locale. http://www.tirgumures.ro is in three languages, Romanian, Hungarian, and English. Although there is a language difference, there is a common locale to a more or less extent, as the audience is that of the city of Tg. Mures.

But in the case of commercial website localization, there are as many locales as geographical areas you want to target. While two or more different languages may not imply a localization process, the same language used in different parts of the world require localization as there are specific customs, laws, currency, interests, market specifics (for instance price policy) etc. A website for the UK should be different from that for the US or for Australia or Canada. Companies through website localization may show their specific interests for various regions in the world, by adapting their products and services to the specific locals. The more locales targeted the more potential customers for a certain business.

Next, we are going to look at how *benchmarking* is defined. businessdictionary.com defines this term as:

> "A measurement of the quality of an organization's policies, products, programs, strategies, etc., and their comparison with standard measurements or similar measurements of its peers.
> The objectives of benchmarking are (1) to determine what and where improvements are called for, (2) to analyze how other organizations achieve their high performance levels, and (3) to use this information to improve performance"

In the case of website localization, when focused on SEO oriented content, we must look at how content quality can be measured and improved, and how it compares to the industry's best practices; that is routine that has proved over time or in the case of several competitors or related industries as superior in achieving certain results by means of measurable internet traffic, usage of a web service, online sales or visits of a particular article on a webpage vs. a similar article from the same website (internal benchmarking). Benchmarking can be applied both to start-up websites and existing websites. In the case of start-up websites it requires thorough research and planned modularity and adaptation to new industry standards, so that change policies also follow leading practices. In the case of existing websites a more suitable benchmarking definition would be somewhat similar to internal benchmarking mentioned previously but websites taken in general should be always compared with its competitors that perform best in the same field of online activity. This type of benchmarking requires well organized change management.

In the case of website localization the most appropriate benchmarking type is that of best-in-class benchmarking. *Best-in-class benchmarking* is defined as:

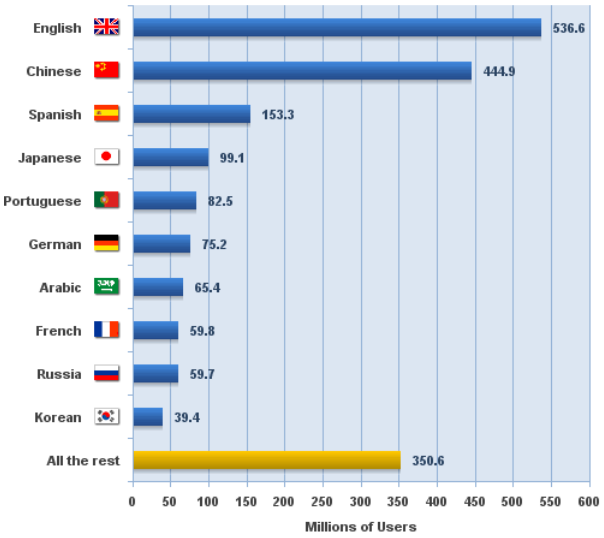
> "The highest current performance level in an industry, used as a standard or benchmark to be equaled or exceeded. Also called best of breed" (http://www.businessdictionary.com)

When it comes to online presence and website localization the simplest and most measurable way to find the leaders in this industry is by reading various statistics provided either by those companies themselves or by third-parties.

One very specific way to determine who the leaders in website localization are is to find the websites with content or services translated and localized in the most languages. However, the number of languages is not necessarily an indicator of quality translation and localization for websites. There are several automatic translation tools. Google Language Tools, Yahoo! Babel Fish, SWeTE, Applied Language, and ultimate website translator are some of the free automatic translation web applications that can automatically translate a website into several languages. Google covers 126 languages, but as with any automatic translation tools, there is lack for quality and localization is accidental or missing completely. Such automatic tools are based on websites crawled by various search engines. Google Translate is not using a rules-based approach but a statistical methodology. Google creates a global corpus containing billions of words from monolingual text in various languages around the world and also human translated text pairs. Using statistics, it generates possible answers,

at times providing variants as well. Usability of automatic translation is based on the number of webpages written in a certain language and indexed by Google's web crawlers. According to w3techs.com, English is the most used language to publish content online with 55.4% of the total WWW content where Russian comes second with only 6.1%. If we compare content to actual number of online users, one can see that Chinese comes second and the difference in number of users is more balanced; so content does not really reflect the number of non-English users. This means that there is plenty of room for website translation and localization.

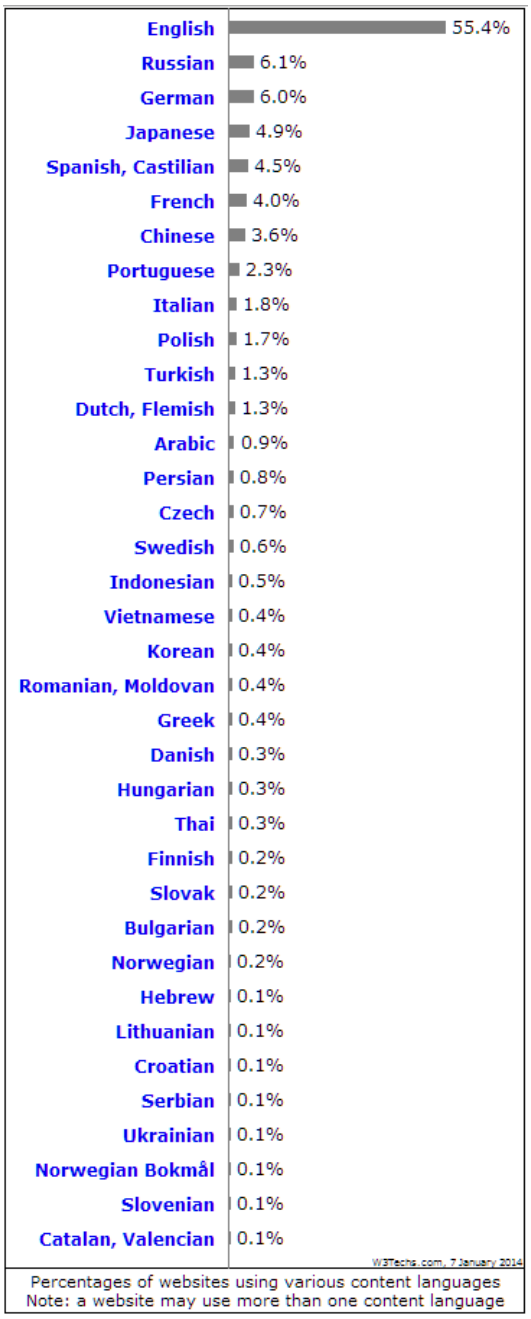
Top Ten Languages in the Internet
2010 - in millions of users



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm
Estimated Internet users are 1,966,514,816 on June 30, 2010
Copyright © 2000 - 2010, Miniwatts Marketing Group

Considering the two graphics, translation, for some of the language pairs, works better than in the case of others. English is often used as an intermediary language when translating from a less important language, in terms of numbers of speaker, to another minor language. However, automatic translation will improve once Google will crawl and analyze even more content.

Internet content by languages



Percentages of websites using various content languages
Note: a website may use more than one content language

Generally speaking, automatic translation quality depends on the corpus available. The larger the indexed text corpus grows the more accurate the translation and its quality. It is also interesting to notice, that a more specific text is often better translated than a general text. Translation quality has also been improved significantly by indexing human translated texts from the EU and the UN.

While automated translations have improved significantly, there is still need to tackle the localization issues. While the general localization issues can be usually solved by using free ready made solutions such as Drupal(drupal.org), Prestashop (prestashop.com) and other similar Content Management Systems, already take care of some more specific issues like setting the currency, the VAT, country areas, languages, counties etc.

Content itself will still require to be localized and be in acordance with the marketing goals of a product or the entire website. Price policy, local context, local glossary, keyword research, local landing pages, cultural awareness, user interface and grapics localization, dubbing video or even recreating it, etc. are just some of the localization issues that have to be solved manually.

Whereas it is recommended to consider EU official translations as a corpus in case of legal terms and other law related texts on your website, the rest of the content must not only be useful but also unique, to bring new information to the reader. This is an important issue, in order to rank well in the search engine result pages. Google penalises duplicate content, so instrumental translation is the most appropriate strategy. An alternative to translation is copywriting in the target language, which, to some extent, is more localized as it is produced by native speakers.

While translation and localization can be achieved using various tools, free or paid, there is still need to look at the best in the industry or even follow the recommandations they offer, that is bemchmarking.

The best way to start the benchmarking for website localization purposes is to select the top global brands. One can have a look at the the general listing or by looking at companies from a certain industrial sector. Interbrand.com offers the list with the top 100 best global companies. (http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2013/top-100-list-view.aspx)

The obvious websites to look at are those of the top global companies. *Apple* is number one for 2013 followed by Google, CocaCola, IBM, and Microsoft. Next, let us compare the first 25 global brands from the perspective of brand value to the Web Globalization Report Card provided by bytelevel.com.

Interbrand's top global brands by brand value

2013 Rank	Brand Name
1	Apple
2	Google
3	Coca-Cola
4	IBM
5	Microsoft
6	GE
7	McDonald's
8	Samsung
9	Intel
10	Toyota
11	Mercedes-Benz
12	BMW
13	Cisco
14	Disney
15	HP
16	Gillette
17	Louis Vuitton
18	Oracle
19	Amazon
20	Honda
21	H&M
22	Pepsi
23	American Express
24	Nike
25	SAP

All of these companies, either from the first top or the second are good examples to follow when it comes to localization. If we compare the two listings and furthe limit the number of websites to included in the benchmariking of locali\zation the obvious brands to be followed when it comes to both financial success and online global presence through globalization and implicitely localization are: Google, Microsoft, Samsung, Cisco, and American Expres.Please note that apart from American Express which offers financial services, the other four activate in the technology sector.

Google is the obvious best-in-class as it offers all its services in 126 languages and it enjoys the largest user base through its multiple applications out of which the most important are: its Search Engine(see image bellow), Gmail, YouTube, and Google Plus

comScore Explicit Core Search Share Report* September 2013 vs. August 2013 Total U.S. – Home & Work Locations Source: comScore qSearch			
Core Search Entity	Explicit Core Search Share (%)		
	Aug-13	Sep-13	Point Change
Total Explicit Core Search	*100.0%*	*100.0%*	*N/A*
Google Sites	66.9%	66.9%	0.0
Microsoft Sites	17.9%	18.0%	0.1
Yahoo! Sites	11.4%	11.3%	-0.1
Ask Network	2.6%	2.5%	-0.1
AOL, Inc.	1.3%	1.3%	0.0

**"Explicit Core Search" excludes contextually driven searches that do not reflect specific user intent to interact with the search results.*

When it comes to how content, services or products are to be provided to potential users, Google does not use the term to localize your content, but touches the very essence of what localization means: unique, exclusive content.

> "Anticipate differences in users' understanding of your topic and offer unique, exclusive content" (Google Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide, p. 14).

A piece of information about a product or a service, even if not entirely new, will still have to reflect the information in the source text while putting into a new, unique context, adapting the information to a locale. For instance, while Yahoo! is mostly used in Romania for its email service, and while there is not a completely localized version for Romanians, they offer news and weather information of interest for Romanians and in Romanian.

Google is also providing google.com/webmasters/tools/ through which webmasters can fine tune their websites to comply with current best practices. Keyword Tool, Google Trends, and Google Analytics are also useful tools for adjusting the layout, structure and content of a website.

Google and all its services is the best-in class for localization benchmarking purposes as it surclasses by far all its competitors and is a valuable model for localization planning as it is both a hands-on example of localization success story in more than 100 languages and through the guides by which they set common sense standards.

Localization benchmarking may include several companies for comparison, but Google with all its wide variety of services is a rather compelling model to be followed for any company that whishes to go global.

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