THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO CREATING A
MULTILINGUAL WEBSITE

AN ACCLARO
EBOOK PUBLICATION

The excitement — and tensions — of international growth

In today's dynamic digital world, your website has a lot of heavy lifting to do. Not only must it be easy to find, it has to entice visitors to stick around once they land there. If your current site offers content in the language of your home market only, you may be limiting your ability to succeed both at home and abroad.

What you may not know is how to do this successfully. Which languages should you target? How can you ensure your carefully crafted brand story stays consistent across cultures and countries? Do you know which content management system is best suited to your needs?

Don't let your lack of in-country experience, new obstacles for your development team and more deadlines to meet stop you from fully realizing the potential of your website to drive growth. Many of the world's leading brands are succeeding with Acclaro's help. Working in over 125 languages with innovative industry tools and automation, we create powerful multilingual websites for companies of all sizes.

> Your multilingual website is a key part of your international growth strategy.
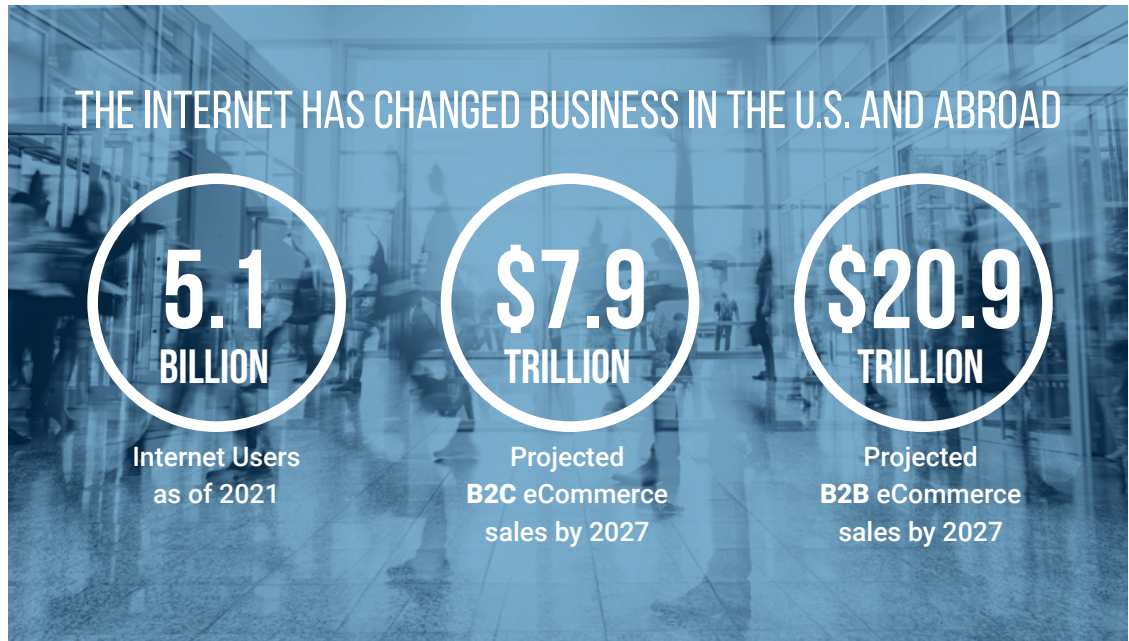
We've packed our decades of knowledge and experience into the following pages to get your wheels turning. Discover some of the most common pitfalls found in multilingual website creation. Learn how to set up your CMS, SEO and URL structure correctly. And finally, launch a website that's well oiled, expertly translated and scalable — for today and the future.

ARE YOU READY?

STEP 1

Time to decide: is a multilingual website right for you?

THE INTERNET HAS CHANGED BUSINESS IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD

5.1 BILLION
Internet Users
as of 2021

$7.9 TRILLION
Projected
B2C eCommerce
sales by 2027

$20.9 TRILLION
Projected
B2B eCommerce
sales by 2027

> Once you know your target audience, speak to them in their native language.

The internet continues to change how we do business — both in the U.S. and abroad.

Since 2005, the number of internet users worldwide **has grown by 4.1 billion**. This global explosion has created an unprecedented sharing of knowledge and transformed our buying habits.

eCommerce sales are projected to hit **$7.9 trillion in 2027** — and this is simply B2C sales.

B2B eCommerce sales are expected to hit **$20.9 trillion** in that same year!

Your customers are no longer restricted by area codes, borders or oceans. In fact, **57%** of online shoppers make purchases from overseas retailers.

Businesses that ignore this growth — often fed by international markets — are only hurting themselves. If you're not considering international growth, you can be sure your competitors are.

STEP 1, CONTINUED

# Time to decide: is a multilingual website right for you?

Do you need to grow sales, enter a global market or gain a competitive edge? Then a multilingual website is a must. Especially if you're struggling to convert traffic outside of your home market.

To attract an audience in a new language market, your website needs to speak their language. And that requires localization. In short, you must speak **like** your audience in order to speak **to** your audience.

Here's proof:[1]

70%
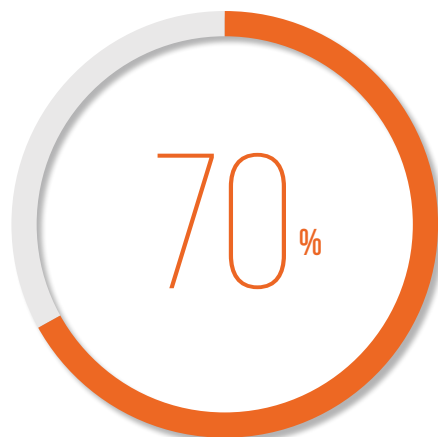
Of internet users prefer navigation and content in their own language

91%
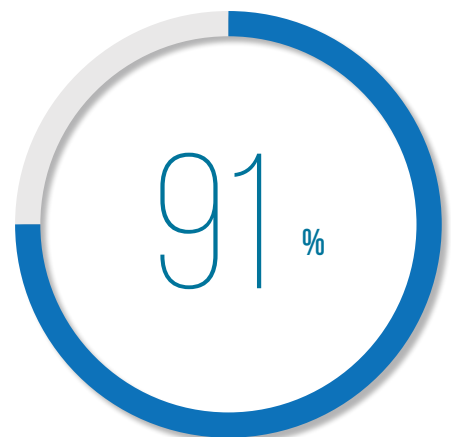
Of internet users are more likely to check out a localized product or service

Success starts with knowing your audience.

Where are your biggest opportunities? How much website traffic is coming from other countries? Is there potential for growth there?

If so, you need a multilingual website that's written specifically for your target audience, in their language.

1: Source: "Project Underwear: A Study of Online Buyer Behavior and How Language Affects User Choice." Nimdzi. 21 June 2020. (Accessed 12 March 2021)

STEP 2

Target wisely: The country vs. the language

To set up your multilingual website, you must choose a site structure that's based on your current data (or projected sales data). If your analytics show substantial traffic coming from a certain country, then clearly that's your target. Especially if you're running an eCommerce site. No big surprise there.

For example, if you're targeting a Spanish-speaking audience in multiple countries, and your sales initiatives do not require a geographic-based factor (say, brick and mortar), then language-based targeting is ideal.

Why? Because everything starts with demand. The way to address this demand generally breaks down into two categories: by country or by language. Below, we outline the two approaches.

Shortcut: Target language first, then transition if demand increases.

STEP 2, CONTINUED

Target wisely: The country vs. the language

Which is more effective?

You can start with a language-targeted approach to your multilingual website and transition to a country-targeted method if demand increases. Here's the breakdown:

	Target by Country	Target by Language
Pros	• Most effective if your traffic and conversion potential is high • Offers unique, effective content for that audience • Search engine rankings will most likely be higher	• Doesn't require its own SEO strategy • Most cost-effective method
Cons	• Requires its own SEO strategy • Costs more money (separate CMS, hosting & tech support)	• Doesn't offer customized messaging or location-based targeting • Could be less effective due to location-based nuances within a language

More companies are choosing the country-targeted approach, especially large eCommerce-based companies, because it offers an audience more customized communications. Which makes local search engines happy. Which makes everyone happy.

STEP 3

Choose your international website structure

OK, you've chosen your targeted approach: country or language. Great start. Now, you need to create the right structure to reach that target. Warning: this is about to get very technical, so bring your coding guru onboard or share this with them.

Country-targeted structures

There are many options for creating your multilingual website's domain structure. But first, some alphabet soup:

- **ccTLD:** country code Top-Level Domain (amazon.de)
- **gTLD:** generic Top-Level Domain (amazon.com)
- **gccTLD:** generic Country Code Top Level Domain (yoursite.co) [for Columbia]
- **ccSLD:** country code Second-Level Domain (prudential.co.uk)
- **Different domain:** (using an entirely different domain name than your current one)

> ccTLDs are your best bet for your website's domain structure.

If you choose to target by country, be sure to use a ccTLD, so the search engines know your site is relevant to that target area's needs (and so do your visitors). If you're targeting Denmark, for example, yourcompany.de will rank higher than yourcompany.co.de. In short, a ccTLD is your best bet for success.

Some companies use country targeting in their subdirectories, and some even use it in their subdomains (not a wise choice).

In fact **58% of Forbes Global 1000 companies** use a separate domain for country-targeted websites.

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STEP 3, CONTINUED

Choose your international website structure

Language-targeted structures

If you choose to target by language, know that you can only target via subdirectories and subdomains. And like country-targeted options, subdomains are not ideal.

Creating **subfolders** is the easiest and most effective way to language-target. Great news if you choose this route: your SEO efforts won't have to be duplicated. Choosing to target by **subdomains** will be helpful for large volumes of pages, yes, but you will have to create separate links and SEO efforts. Also, visitors will know it's not customized to their needs. That said, we have seen examples of successful subdomain targeting used in many countries.

Sub**folder** Examples	Sub**domain** Examples
`YourCompany.com/en`	`De.YourCompany.com`
`YourCompany.com/de/`	`Espanol.YourCompany.com`

How are Forbes Global 1000 companies utilizing language-targeted websites? Subfolders. Followed by… nothing. (Not good. However, this may be suitable for your company, since it offers an opportunity to grow.)

COUNTRY TARGETING

LANGUAGE TARGETING

- Different URL formats: 49.5%
- Country code in subfolder: 22.5%
- ccTLD: 9.5%
- No country ID: 7.8%
- ccSLD: 5.5%
- Country code in subdomain: 3.1%

- Language code in subfolder: 74.2%
- No language ID: 10.8%
- Language code in subdomain: 8.3%
- URL parameters: 4.6%
- Different URL formats: 1.2%
- Lang. name inside domain name: 0.2%

Now that we've addressed the nerdy — though extremely important — back end of your website, let's focus on content. Particularly the content management system.

STEP 4

Pick the right CMS platform for your needs

✔ You're ready to expand globally.

✔ You've chosen your country or language.

✔ You've prepared your website's structure.

❯ Now it's time to think "content."

Think of the hours, days and years your team spent creating, maintaining and refining your brand's story. You stand for something. And even when your company is expanding across seas and borders, your brand needs to maintain its consistency, while also connecting with your new audience.

It's WordPress vs. Craft CMS vs. Drupal vs. AEM. See who wins.

This brings us to selecting a multilingual content management system (CMS) that can make your localization as easy and seamless as possible — whether it's an open source solution or custom. Before we delve into our favorites, know that if you're selling products or services through your website, you may want to consider an eCommerce CMS platform or plugin for the CMSs we're about to discuss. The most popular are Magento, Shopify, BigCommerce and Salesforce Commerce Cloud.

Let's dive into some of the most popular enterprise, translation-ready CMS platforms.

STEP 4, CONTINUED
Pick the right CMS platform for your needs

WORDPRESS

About 40% of the web runs on WordPress for a reason: it's responsive, mobile friendly and fully customizable. And the platform dominates markets like eCommerce. WordPress also offers one of the most widely used multilingual plugins: WPML.

And with the **WordPress Translation Connector**, you can speed up your translation workflows for faster time to market.

craft cms

If WordPress were a Honda, Craft CMS is the Tesla. It's designed for development-oriented companies that want more control and more performance. If you're not well-versed in CMS, Craft CMS can be overwhelming. However, if your company wants a truly custom digital experience for your audience, this is a great solution. Plus, you can use the **Translation Plugin for Craft** to handle all translations.

Drupal™

If you're a Fortune 500 company, you'll likely want to use Drupal. Its security and reliability are unmatched — especially if you're managing large-scale multilingual websites. Drupal is one of our favorite CMS platforms, and one that we can interface with seamlessly. For translation management, simply use the **Drupal TMGMT tool**.

Adobe Experience Manager

Another favorite among global brands, AEM is a comprehensive CMS that simplifies your content and asset management — no matter how complicated. And if you know Adobe, you'll know that personalization and cross-channel migration is a given. To simplify translation management, use the **AEM Translation Connector**.

Warning: AEM is not open source, so you'll need licensing rights.

No matter which CMS platform you choose, make sure that it's internationalized and offers a translation integration, so that your translation team can seamlessly translate the website for faster publishing.

STEP 5

Maintain brand consistency

> With established brand guidelines, a professional translation team can work wonders.

In your native language communications, you have checks and balances — both internal and external.

Think how much time and effort you've put into your company's English-language website. It's always best to take the time you need to create a multilingual website that fits your goals.

Protect your brand with vigilance at every step

Maintaining brand consistency starts with creating a brand **style guide** and **glossary**, so that your internal team, and every external team you partner with, can be on the same page. Make sure every person that touches your brand understands your nuances, taglines, personality, colors and beliefs.

STEP 5, CONTINUED

Maintain brand consistency: Internationalization

The next step is to expertly translate your content. And this starts with understanding internationalization and localization.

1. Internationalization: **Technical development follows the best practices of building a house – the foundation is everything.**

This includes linguistic reference materials that ensure every coder, UI designer and team member is reading from the same page.

Your coders need to be aware of internationalization, which uses coding best practices to allow your website to be translated. This is not the same as localization, which is the actual process of translating. Internationalization is often written as i18n, which provides support for localization features that will be used later.

"We also suggest using UTF-8 encoding for internationalization. It sets the foundation for displaying and processing language data, which makes life easier once localization begins."

Again, lay the foundation.

STEP 5, CONTINUED

Maintain brand consistency: Localization

Once you move into the page design, consider creating simple templates that showcase your brand and work across multiple languages and regions.

Your designers need to call out parts of each page that will maintain their elements regardless of language, while also sectioning off editable parts depending upon the localization needs of each language.

For example the same phrase takes up a different amount of space depending on the language. Transitioning from English to Japanese can reduce your character space by 20%.

2. Localization: Choosing the ideal translation method includes deciding between human translation, hybrid translation, machine translation and mixing where needed. (But always keeping humans closely monitoring all translations.)

Human Translation
Your marketing content should be translated by humans. No machines. No exceptions. Machines are great at translating large amounts of content, but your marketing has nuances that a machine cannot comprehend (at least not yet).

This includes taglines, logos, personality and certain headlines that make your brand what it is today.

Give these assets — which your company has spent thousands, maybe millions, communicating — to professional linguists you can trust.

STEP 5, CONTINUED

Maintain brand consistency: Localization

And just what humans should you choose? Smaller companies may have to use freelancers or crowdsource translators. While these options can be cost-effective and helpful, it's difficult to manage individual translators, languages and consistency among many different translation sources.

If you're targeting one language and have a tight budget, freelancers or crowdsourcing may be good routes to pursue. When you're targeting five languages, on the other hand, control may become a challenge.

Professional translation service providers can offer the manpower, consistency, expertise and timing to make complicated localization efforts as seamless and successful as possible. One experienced, championship-caliber project manager can equal the talents of 10 people.

Do your research, and make sure your service provider has helped companies of your size with in-country, native speakers on their team.

Also, be sure your team works with you to create a glossary of your brand's most common terms and phrases to follow. A glossary can help you avoid countless hours of editing.

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Maintain brand consistency: Localization

Hybrid Translation

Non-creative content such as FAQs, product documentation and technical specifications is well-suited for hybrid translation, where machine translation takes care of the early legwork, and a human translator edits the final product. If conversion is not a goal, then hybrid translation or even machine translation will offer you cost savings that human translation cannot.
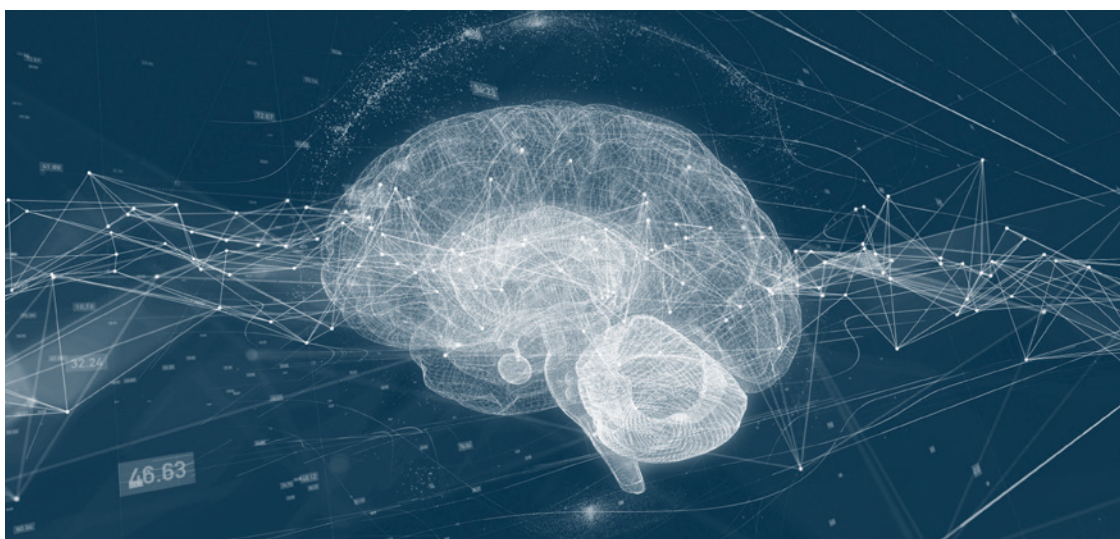
Machine Translation

Machine translation (MT) can be a vital support tool in your localization efforts, but it's best used in tandem with professional translators. Smaller translation teams often cannot offer such efficiencies.

You'll want to make sure your translation provider offers the latest technology and processes for **choosing or customizing an engine**, evaluating performance and applying the right type of post-editing.

Keep in mind that relying solely on MT for your website content is not a best practice. As a general rule, machine translation is best when combined with human post-editing by a professional linguist.

The trick to launching successful multilingual websites is to maximize quality while staying within timelines and on budget. When you include machine translation in your multilingual website strategy, you can get to market quicker, connect with your audience and build brand champions.

STEP 6
Help prospects find you: SEO

> No matter how perfect your multilingual website is, if customers can't find you, your effort is wasted.

If people reach your website and find the answers they need, they'll be happy. Remember, you're here to help people. Don't include keywords and phrases that do not correctly reflect the content of the webpage. You'll lose potential customers. (We'll delve into this in the next chapter.)

For now, let's discuss three main components you can address to help prospects find you:

1. **SEO Structure**

2. **Keywords**

3. **hreflang**

STEP 6, CONTINUED

Help prospects find you: SEO

1. SEO Structure

2. Keywords

Which SEO structure is best for your website? It depends. **ccTLD** (Think, amazon.de) will give you the best conversion rate and help you rank locally; however, they're expensive to maintain. **Subdirectories** (amazon.com.de) provide a weaker signal to search engines, but they're easier to maintain. **Subdomains** (de-de.amazon.com) also provide a weak signal to search engines, while also diluting your domain authority.

Typically, ccTLD is best, especially if your brand is known globally. But if your budget is fairly tight and you want easier maintenance, we suggest a subdirectory URL structure. Server location is not a factor anymore, according to Google, so don't worry about location.

Now, onto keywords. One tip that you must take seriously is to perform keyword research in your local language. Do not translate keywords or they won't work properly. Search how your audience searches. Also, when incorporating keywords into your content, make sure your translation is completed by a professional — ideally an in-country native. Otherwise, yes, we'll say it, it gets lost in translation.

Follow these tactics and you can incorporate the best practices for keywords of any language: use title tags, meta descriptions, internal page links, image ALT tags, etc. You'll also need to build appropriate, local backlinks to your language or regional URLs. Again, follow the usual standards here and imagine that each website is its own.

STEP 6, CONTINUED

Help prospects find you: SEO

> The majority of mistakes found in multilingual websites are tied to *hreflang*.

3. hreflang

Pronounced h-ref-lang, hreflang lets Google (or Bing or DuckDuckGo) know what language-specific page needs to match that page's search. It won't necessarily help your rankings, but it will make your visitors happy. Say you have five About Us pages — one for each language. hreflang tells search engines which Spanish About Us page to reference when a user searches for that page.

Note: hreflang **cannot** be used for country-only targeting or region-specific targeting (such as "eu" or "asia"). Solely language-only targeting can be used with hreflang.

Beware: hreflang is one of the most commonly mishandled multilingual website implementations. In fact, from a test of 20,000 multilingual sites, 75% had mistakes, with the majority being hreflang.

STEP 7

Maximise website engagement

To please users, get them where they need to go as fast as possible. It's why HOV lanes exist. Why grocery stores have the 10 Items or less lane. And why Amazon created a store with no lines. Just grab your goodies, walk out and you'll be billed.

> To create successful UX, think like a user at every step of the sales funnel.

For users visiting your website, there are three main ways to help them get to their appropriate page:

1. **ccTLD (country code Top-Level Domains)**

We've discussed ccTLD in detail for a reason — it's the fastest way to give your user the language that best fits their needs. You've targeted by country or region, so the user (and Google) knows that your specific website (or page) is customized for them.

2. **Geolocation (IP) or Language Negotiation**

Geolocation lets the user's IP address dictate the appropriate language. Similarly, language negotiation lets the user's information dictate the page, but their browser tells the story (specifically in the Accept-Language header).

3. **User Choice**

The user is driving here. You can target by country or language, as there are pros and cons to both.

Country Targeting

Many websites offer a global gateway, which lets the user choose their country. However, only 3% of Forbes 1000 companies utilize this. Most prefer a country trigger or country selector, which we'll discuss below.

We prefer that your country trigger utilize a "globe" icon. It's simple and it communicates to all languages. If you decide to use a country selector, we suggest translating those country names to the visitor's native language.

STEP 7
Maximise website engagement

Language Targeting

Language triggers are used by over half of Fortune 1000 companies, and there are two ideal ways to offer this up. One is to have the language name in the user's local language and invite them to select it. Short code is also popular, saving valuable design space and offering a simple solution.

If your website only has a handful of languages, you can offer a language selector (ideally translated in the visitor's native language) via name or code (En, Fr, etc).

A best practice for country and language selection location is to place it at the "top right" of your website.

More than half of all Fortune 1000 companies use this location, and visitors have become familiar with looking for it there. It's an important issue to address with your web designer early on.

User experience always comes first

As we stand today, your rankings will rise if more people find what they're looking for with speed and efficiency.

Remember: to improve your rankings, make your visitors happy. There are no more shortcuts or tricks to "gaming" the system. Simply make each user experience as customized and helpful as possible, then let your brand's story connect with your audience.

NEXT STEP

Let's go global

> **Seven steps. That's the magic number to create a multilingual website that can drive revenue.**

To create the ideal multilingual site — one that's efficiently built, seamless to use and connects with your target audience — you need the partnership of many teams: marketing, sales, coders, writers, designers and translators. If your company is expanding globally, make sure you have a robust team that can rally behind your efforts.

However, the translation part of the equation is most likely your largest concern. You can turn to freelancers or crowdsourcing options, or you can rely on a professional translation services provider. Acclaro has the expertise and experience to help you create a successful multilingual website.

We've helped Fortune 500 companies expand into hundreds of markets and regions with confidence — thanks to proven processes, in-country translators and experienced localization teams that can become an extension of your team.

To learn more about how Acclaro can help your company expand, contact us today.

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acclaro

Acclaro is a translation service and platform that helps the world's leading brands succeed across cultures. Through a fine-tuned process, top industry talent and leading technologies, we make a long-term investment in our clients' global brands.

Working in over 125 languages and with offices around the globe, Acclaro helps clients open new markets and gain a competitive edge by expertly adapting their brands and products with fast, high-quality translations.

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