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Crawl, Walk, Run

—
A three-step approach to successfully expand your brand into new global online markets.

Introduction

Companies eager to serve new global markets online will often rush into expansion projects **without considering the complexity and costs.**

For the uninitiated, launching multilingual websites and attracting the right global customers looks easy. Companies that already have strong brand awareness and authority in their home markets usually believe conquering new markets won't take much effort at all.

But it's not quite that simple.

Establishing an online presence for your brand in new global markets takes time and patience. For many companies, going all-in on localizing their websites may not be the best first step.

Why? Creating a world-class localized online experience can require a significant investment of in-house resources, and it demands specialized skills and knowledge. Without a deep understanding of the local cultures, languages and audiences, early efforts in-market can be sluggish or

unsuccessful. **Many companies abandon these projects before they've had time to mature.**

Before companies invest time and money into complex localized websites, it makes sense to thoroughly research your target markets and **take inventory of what local audiences need and want from a company in your industry.**

However, a methodical "Crawl, Walk, Run" approach to global online expansion can lay the right groundwork for any organization seeking long-term international success.

STEP 1: CRAWL Identify Ideal New Markets

A solid first step in identifying the right expansion-worthy markets for your online business is to **examine your company's existing website data.**

Do you have traffic coming in from international markets? If so, note the countries, and drill into metrics such as conversion rates, average order values (if appropriate) or time on critical parts of the site. Strong engagement from specific regions can provide hints about which markets make the most sense to serve first, online.



And don't forget the power of third-party data. If you're an e-retailer, a resource like AT Kearney's *Ecommerce Retail Index* can help you better understand the macroeconomic landscape in the global markets you may be considering, and how they stack up against others.

Your in-market vendors and partners may also have valuable proprietary data and intelligence to share about their experiences in your target markets. They may help you spot trends you hadn't previously considered.

When you've zeroed in on a market or two that feel right—and experts recommend focusing on just a couple at a time—you'll want to put a few of your critical in-market business practices to the test, such as:



Additional clues for identifying new markets

Inbound traffic and on-site activity from global visitors may signal that these users may be underserved by businesses in their local markets.

For example: If research indicates that customers from Mexico have double the average order value and a higher conversion percentage, it may be worth looking into the long-term benefits of serving the Mexican market.

Also consider serving smaller global markets as opposed to larger, more saturated ones. Smaller markets are often underserved by your global competitors, and there's typically less in-country competition than in larger markets.

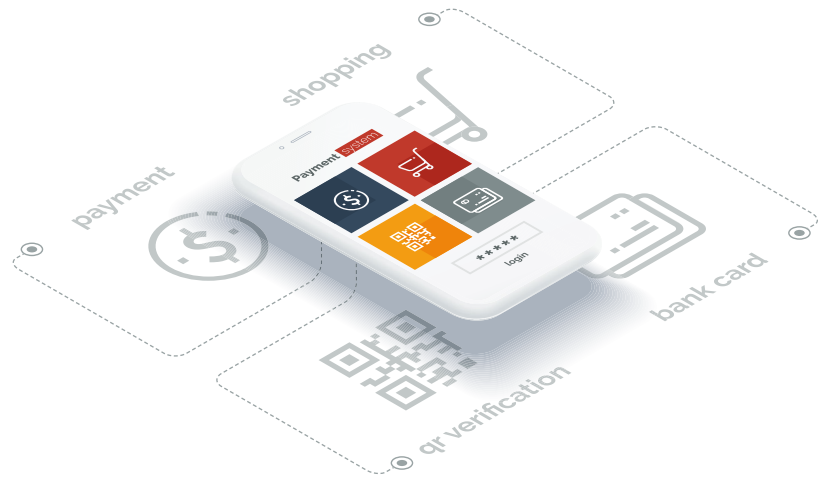
Smaller markets can also serve as testing grounds for trying out new global strategies—such as shipping logistics, return handling or social media campaigns—on a smaller scale before committing to larger investments.

Localized Customer Support and Communication

Can you communicate quickly and authentically in the languages of the target country or region? Your customers will expect the same level of service that your home market receives, so you'll want provide the appropriate level of in-language online support.

Email confirmations, forms and customer communication should be available in your customers' preferred languages.

Local culture can also impact how you communicate. For example, customers in many Asian markets prefer to provide minimal personal details when conducting business online, so you may need to adjust order forms or contact forms for those markets.



If you have transactional elements on your site, can you easily and seamlessly fulfill orders in these markets using your existing shipping options, or do you need help from region-specific partners? You'll also need to be sure that your online forms are localized to fit the country's standards, like address formats or currency options.

Thoughtful Research Pays Off

Taking the time to thoroughly research and understand different markets—and their potential for your business—is always time well spent. You can:

- ✓ Spot opportunities to tap previously underserved markets
- ✓ Confirm that your potential market can generate the right demand for your offerings
- ✓ Test your company's ability to serve them well



STEP 2: WALK

Localize Your Website

Once you've homed in on the right markets for your online business, it's time to consider how your company will literally speak their languages. It's critical to provide online content in the languages your customers prefer, and website translation requires the right approach for world-class, efficient execution.

Providing this localized content establishes a trustworthy reputation within your global markets. International customers want to conduct business in the languages that are familiar to them. They prefer working with companies that understand the nuances of their culture and market, too.

Provide an Elegant Localized Experience

Consider the importance of localizing your site's navigation and customer experience. Will your customers use a drop-down menu to select their preferred language on your site, or would you get better conversions and on-site performance with technology that automatically detects their location and language preferences?



Finding the Right Solution

Work with a translation partner that can help you evaluate the scope of your translation needs.

For instance, some website content—such as simple product descriptions—can be handled quickly and affordably with automated machine translation software. However, brand-sensitive content—such as highly-trafficked webpages and marketing materials—should require human translation.

Look for translation experts that lean on tech-driven efficiencies that create long-term value, such as *translation memory* databases for frequently repeated content, or optimizing translated content for regional and local search engines.

Many sites see a revenue uptick with an elegant and automatic language redirection.

Ensure a Frictionless Conversion Path

Localizing transactional elements is also essential. Payment options and preferences can differ dramatically from country to country. While the U.S. loves PayPal and credit cards, some markets prefer bank transfers, e-wallets, or even cash.

Limiting on-site payment options can create friction and abandoned shopping carts in global markets, but offering the preferred payment options in local currencies can increase conversions.

Taking Next Steps

Be thoughtful about how your localized site serves global customers in their preferred languages, and you'll be well on your way to capitalizing on new market opportunities. But there's one more step you can take to maximize your potential in global markets—and it's the step most companies never pursue.

STEP 3: RUN

Immersion and Optimization

While basic translation of your website content is a critical step to globalizing your online business, it's worth going the extra mile to fully optimize your in-language experience.

Localized On-Site Search

Consider enabling customers to search your site in their own languages, and finding the products and information they need. Localized on-site search functionality can reduce bounce rates and increase conversions—and even lead customers to other related offerings on your site that can increase average order values.

Unique, Customized Content

Think about ways to customize your localized site's promotions, sales or campaigns to line up with a market's unique holidays or other regional events. You should also notice periods where sales tend to *slow down* so you can be respectful of traditions and tailor promotions or campaigns accordingly.

International SEO

Your translated site can also benefit from international search engine optimization to help make sure you get found in search by new customers unfamiliar with your brand.

SEO keywords matter just as much for your localized international websites as they do for your origin site. Translated keywords help increase the likelihood of your translated sites showing up in local search results.

Global Sitemap

A great translation partner can help you look at advanced SEO opportunities for your site as well as other optimization opportunities. For example, through implementation of *hreflang* tagging, your localized website's URLs can be organized and automatically associated with a URL from your origin website.

By informing Google of this association, your localized website provides a signal to the search engine that a better user experience exists for customers who speak a certain language, live in a particular location, or both.

Omnichannel Translation

If your brand has a social media presence or runs email marketing promotions, translating that content for each market can customer build trust, too.

Crafting digital advertising campaigns that bring prospective customers back to localized sites and creating customized content that's tailored just for them often improves click-through rates, conversions and order values.

Conclusion

The global online marketplace is fast-paced, exciting and filled with business opportunities—but those very characteristics can tempt many companies into making hasty, and ultimately costly, entries into global online markets.

For smart organizations, making the effort to understand the nuances and preferences of global markets is an important step. It helps inform the choices on which regions to target, and offers key insights into how to localize and optimize a website to best serve those customers.

The “Crawl, Walk, Run” approach to taking your online business global can help you make smart and cost-effective decisions today, and also ensure that your business can continue to capture the opportunities in global markets long into the future.

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MotionPoint Corporation

info@motionpoint.com

www.motionpoint.com