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Insights on China

Discover several best practices for achieving online success within the Chinese market.

Introduction

Due mostly to its strict Internet regulations and cultural nuances, China remains a complicated market to successfully serve online. It's a challenge for most Western companies to understand the market's special technical requirements, and unique regulations for website development, SEO and digital marketing.

The effort is almost certainly worth it. Those who learn how China differs from the rest of the world can leverage that knowledge—and apply the right website translation methodologies—to improve organic search engine traffic, website usability and customer conversion rates.

Here are several best practices that businesses should use as they explore ways to achieve online success in China.

URL Structures for China

Top Level Domains

Best Practice: Use “.com”—but register for “.cn” and “.com.cn” to redirect

Unlike other countries where country code top-level domains (ccTLDs) reign supreme, *.com* is commonly seen on Chinese websites. Consumers in China regard sites with *.com*

addresses with more authority, mostly because *.com* is closely associated with Western brands. For Chinese consumers, domains such as *.cn* or *.com.cn* are associated with local businesses and have less prestige.

Popular Chinese websites such as Baidu, Tmall, and Dangdang all use *.com* as their top-level domains.

For companies looking to serve China online, **using a subdomain and/or a subdirectory URL structure** to organize translated content enables easy cookie sharing across various websites. This enables your company and any subsidiaries or local businesses (such as distributors) to share useful information about user preferences and purchasing patterns. This can help inform local product inventories, focus on resonant products for promotion and more.



It's still important to obtain ccTLDs (.cn or .com.cn) as a defensive measure to protect your brand from competitors or domain squatters. Create a 301 redirect from the ccTLD to your main .com domain to signify to search engines that both domains are valid for the local market—and that the global domain offers the same relevant content as the ccTLD.

Chinese Is Used Throughout Asia

Chinese is spoken and published in many Asian countries and regions, including mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Simplified Chinese writing script is used in mainland China, Malaysia and Singapore. The Traditional Chinese script is used in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Understanding the language preferences and dialects for each market is essential to successfully reaching—and engaging—your target customers.

Specific Recommendations

MotionPoint recommends using these URL structures to effectively reach customers in the Chinese market:

SUBDOMAIN

- ✓ **Universal Domain:** www.[domain].com — *[domain] is your brand*
- ✓ **Universal Language:** [subdomain].domain.com — *[subdomain] is the ISO language code*
- ✓ **Chinese Language:** zh.[domain].com — *where [zh] is the macro ISO language code for Chinese*
- ✓ **Simplified Chinese:** zh-hans.[domain].com
- ✓ **Traditional Chinese:** zh-hant.[domain].com

SUBDOMAIN + SUBDIRECTORY

- ✓ **China Specific Content:** zh.[domain].com/cn — *where [cn] is the ISO country code for China*

When targeting users based in China, you can either serve them with websites hosted outside of the country, or inside the country. If you choose to do so from inside China, you'll want to understand several key laws regarding content and its distribution within the country.



Content Laws and Internet Content Provider Certification

Every website or domain hosted inside China is required to register with China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). The basic registration required is called an *ICP Beian* and is relatively easy to obtain.

If you want to accommodate transactions on your website, you'll also need to obtain an ICP License, which is significantly more difficult.

This intent of this registration is to prevent content that the government considers:

- ▶ Politically subversive
- ▶ Adult in nature
- ▶ Facilitates gambling

A domain that is found to be hosting this illegal content will be either shut down or made inaccessible through DNS manipulation or other means.

"The Great Firewall of China," as it's often called, blocks website content. **It does not reduce the loading speed of websites.** If your Chinese site is performing at slow speeds, this is *not* because of its content. (You'll learn why later in this document.)

The key requirements for the ICP Beian are:

- 1 Have a legal entity inside China that owns the domain (the entity can be a subsidiary or overseas owner)
- 2 Have an origin site hosted inside China
- 3 Have a domain name registered with a Chinese registrar

The ICP Beian certification number is required to be placed on the bottom of a website's home page.

For more information, you can contact the proper agency:

Phone number (Chinese only): 010-66411166

Website: www.miibeian.gov.cn

Or contact your CDN company to submit an application for an ICP license

After the ICP license application is submitted to the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, it typically takes between 40 to 60 business days to receive confirmation of the certification.

Keep in mind that having an ICP certification does not guarantee that your online content will be delivered to end users. You must still make sure your website has the proper infrastructure, which may (or may not) include a CDN.

If you are unable or unwilling to obtain a ICP certification, your company can still provide a great online user experience to Chinese customers. However, you must make sure to localize your website.

You'll also want to ensure fast load times and site availability. Many companies accomplish this by using a CDN.

CDN Providers

CDNs are networks of distributed servers that efficiently deliver web content to users, based both on the users' geographic location and on the location of the webpage and content-delivery origin server. In other words, CDNs cache the elements of a website at a server that is geographically near its target users, which increases the website's speed and availability.

Due to of a lack of cooperation between China's three large ISPs (China Telecom, China Unicom and China Mobile) and the vastness of the country, a CDN is required to create a low latency, high availability bridge between your content and Chinese audiences.

Benefits of CDNs

- ✓ Delivers content from servers based geographically near the end user
- ✓ Boosts web application performance and availability
- ✓ Facilitates faster downloads

While MotionPoint recommends using a CDN to host a Chinese website, we've identified some common mistakes that companies make when they engage CDNs:

1 They use the same CDN to distribute their Chinese sites as they use for other international markets.

According to Chinese law, foreign CDN companies can't set up infrastructures within China. They can only collaborate with local CDN companies and provide technical support.

MotionPoint's test results reveal that websites using Chinese or Asia-based CDN solutions responded 77% faster than websites using some non-Asia based CDN companies.

2 **They believe using a CDN reduces the risk of being blocked by the Great Firewall.** This isn't true. For instance, in November 2014, China blocked thousands of Verizon Communications' EdgeCast CDN-powered websites.

The takeaway: Most popular international CDNs cannot deliver the speed or availability that most Chinese end users demand. You must carefully choose a CDN partner when crafting a strategy for entering China.

Prominent CDN Providers in China

ChinaNetCenter and ChinaCache are the two largest China-based CDN companies. They possess more than 80% of market share. CDNetworks, which is originally a Korea-based company, is also highly regarded for reducing site load times and increasing site availability.

Depending on each site or application's requirements, CDNs are typically easy to install and simple to deploy.

Social Media

With nearly 600 million people active on social media in China, the country's top 10 social media sites boast a staggering 3.2 billion individual accounts. Ninety-one percent of Chinese citizens have social media accounts, surpassing the U.S.'s 67%.

Data also show that the largest section of China's social media users—a full 30%—are between the ages of 26 and 30. This group presents a perfect target for growing companies.

What are those top 10 sites about? Here's how we categorize them:

“TWITTER-LIKE”—In second and third place are the Twitter clones, Tencent Weibo and Sina Weibo. The latter network receives most of the media attention, both in China and around the world.

“FACEBOOK-Y”—Four Chinese sites are similar to Facebook. Tencent's QZone, Tencent's Pengyou, Renren and Kaixin are all focused around a mix of social profiles, albums, buddies and social gaming. Interestingly, they don't get as much hype, and feel rather like the past generation of Chinese social media sites.

“WHATSAPP-ISH”—The much-talked-about WeChat is similar to WhatsApp, and is one of many Asian-made messaging apps. Line and KakaoTalk are additional apps that are battling for a place on the smartphones of young Chinese and Southeast Asian web users.

Why is it important to localize social media for Chinese sites?

Chinese sites that use technologies such as blocked Google APIs or icons for non-localized social media platforms can encounter significant performance issues. These problems can impact local search-engine rankings, and reduce website load times.

Localization is important for video hosting, social media, API and tracking to ensure optimal web performance.

Social Media Rank (2019):

[This blog post](#) shows the top five most commonly used social platforms in China for 2019.

How can a company best leverage China’s top social media platforms?

Of China’s top five social platforms, three are worth leveraging to quickly engage Chinese customers. The most common to drive traffic is Sina Weibo. Social media pioneers have seen great results using WeChat, too. And Youku, similar to YouTube, is the preferred platform for video hosting.

MotionPoint has helped many customers implement Chinese social media “share” buttons on their localized websites. Customers can also tap into their existing *translation memory*—a database of their translations—to localize social media feeds and more, at no additional cost.

Hosting Videos

Since YouTube is blocked in China, it is crucial to either host your video on a fast-loading Chinese video-hosting website, such as Youku or Sohu, or self-host the videos and have them served through your CDN partner.

MotionPoint can help with hosting and also translate videos—including subtitling, lip-syncing and voiceovers.

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