

Translate your website to quadruple overseas sales

People are four times more likely to buy from you if your website is available in their language. John Bendel of the Staffordshire-based UK Export Marketing Alliance gives hints and tips to get the best return from this simple - yet vastly underrated - online opportunity.

"The Facts"

- Overseas customers account for more than half of all Internet sales.
- Use of the Internet grew by 209% in 2008 alone.
- People are four times more likely to buy online in their local language.
- Companies with multiple language websites can expect 30% higher sales than those with single-language sites.
- 92% of the world's population don't speak English as their first language

"The Bloopers"

"Ladies may have a fit upstairs."

Tailor's shop, Hong Kong

"We take your bags and send them in all directions."

Airline ticket office, Copenhagen

"The genuine antics in your room come from our family castle."

Bed & breakfast hotel, Paris

Two-thirds of the planet does not speak English as its native language. In business, our nation is increasingly considered to be disrespectful in assuming that our mother tongue is acceptable to all.

Right now is a particularly opportune moment for UK companies to review their business' potential for overseas sales. The £ / € exchange rate of the last year has made UK products and services much more accessible to customers abroad. Internet sales continue to grow, despite the recessionary conditions, because customers can research the best prices and availability. And even if you don't think your business is in international sales, it probably is. It amazes me how many top hotel chains fail to cater for overseas customers browsing their websites!

Five Top Tips

Here are some simple, effective tactics that can make a big difference to your sales in a short time.

1. How many overseas visitors are there on your website? Reporting facilities like Google Analytics can give you a quick answer. If it's more than 30%, take action now.
2. What language do they have most in common?
3. Before you decide which language/s to translate your website into, remember that Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken language (more than double the penetration of English) followed by English and Spanish in almost equal measure, Arabic and Hindi.
4. Before you commission any translation, make sure that the translator's native tongue is the one you're translating *into* (not from). Ideally, a translator should also appreciate the cultural differences between countries to avoid tell-tale bloopers.

5. When you translate a website, translate it all. Part translations can confuse buyers and definitely irritate them because they feel they weren't worth the low cost of translating the whole site.

Tapping into the overseas potential of your business can be a lot easier than you think. As well as being a great tactic for beating the recession, trading overseas diversifies your business and insulates it against the marketing conditions of one country's economy.