

Chapter XI

Culturally Customizing International Web Sites

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ABSTRACT

As global e-commerce is expanding and the global online marketplace is becoming more lucrative for marketers, there is a surge in proliferation of international Web sites. However, most marketers equate their ability to tap the global online market by simply creating multilingual international Web sites. This chapter shows that effective international Web presence is not just about translating a Web site into local language. A truly localized Web site is one that is linguistically, technically and most importantly culturally customized to locale-specific requirements. This chapter provides insights into the importance and impact of Web site cultural customization on consumer perceptions of international Web sites.

11.1. INTRODUCTION

Global e-commerce is expanding rapidly and based on industry estimates several trillion dollars are being exchanged annually over the Web. The global online popula-

tion is also increasing substantially. Jupiter Research (2008) estimates that by 2012 there will be 1.8 billion internet users world wide. The highest growth in internet usage is anticipated in countries like China, India, Russia and Brazil. According to Internet World Stats as of 2008, North America only accounts for 17.5 percent of global Internet users. Asia now has the largest number of internet users, accounting for almost 37 percent of the global online population, followed by Europe with 27 percent (Internet World Stats, 2008). Another interesting trend in global internet usage is that almost seventy percent of these users are now non-English speaking (Internet World Stats, 2008). Thus, besides English other languages like Chinese, Spanish, Japanese and French have significant online usage. In terms of e-commerce the U.S. may not be the predominant online market in future years to come. According to an e-marketer report, while U.S. retail commerce has grown 14.3 percent from 2007 to 2008, the sales growth is estimated to decline in the coming years (Grau, 2008a). By 2010 U.S. retail e-commerce will be about \$182.5 billion (Grau, 2008a). On the other hand, European B2C e-commerce is expected to reach almost \$234 billion by 2010 (Grau, 2006). According to e-marketer estimates by 2010 the British market share will fall to 44.5% as France and Germany ramp up their online sales. Asia will also see significant growth in B2C e-commerce with a 23.3 percent annual growth rate and eventually reaching almost \$168.7 billion in 2011 (Grau, 2008b). Japan and South Korea currently lead the B2C e-commerce sales in Asia but by 2011 they will be overtaken by China and India (Grau, 2008b). From these numbers it is clear that e-commerce is now a truly global phenomenon.

To take advantage of the full potential of global e-commerce, companies need to tap diverse global markets and consider expanding online not only in developed countries but also the emerging economies of China, Brazil, India and others. A recent survey of multinationals by Petro, Muddyman, Prichard, Schweigerdt, and Singh (2007) found that, in terms of international expansion online, 71 percent of companies see Web site localization a crucial driver for successful expansion. The same study also reports that almost 70 percent of company executives see localization of Web sites crucial to acquiring international customers and even a larger percentage (76 percent) see localization important to achieving international customer satisfaction. Thus, to tap global online markets companies need to create localized international Web sites for specific locales and country markets. Some of the challenges to creating truly localized sites include:

1. Translating international sites into multiple languages and in some cases a single country may require multilingual content. For example, Canada companies will not only need to have an English site but also a French site to cater to the large French speaking population. In the U.S. several companies are now targeting Hispanics online by providing Web sites in Spanish. Similarly, in

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