

Going Global - Ready or Not

Written by Edward F. Nesta

Does having a website mean you are ready to go global? Are you really positioned to sell your services and products on a global market? Are you ready, or not?

The Internet has opened access to the global markets, and every website that exists is available to a global audience, with the exception of a few closed countries. So, does that mean you are global?

There is more to accessing the global markets than having a presence on the Internet, even though it is the world-wide-web.

There are a few components that should be factored into your operations and marketing plans if you are looking to expand into the global markets. There may not be any borders on the Internet, but there are processes that you need to factor in to your business plan for the retailer, and for the professional service providers.

For retailers who target a specific country or countries:

1. Mirror your website in several languages to address country specific issues. Consider creating special access (ex. Intranet) for existing customers so that you can tailor your message and services.
2. Look at creating domain and sub-domain name(s) that uses the country specific URL extension (ex. Brazil - "br," China - "cn," Canada - "ca"). This will help the website be picked up by country specific search engines.
3. If there is significant volume for a specific country you may consider establishing support resources stationed within the country. Regardless if you connected via the Internet, providing additional country resident support may be a differentiating factor between your product and a competitor's.
4. If you cannot support a resource within a country, make sure you have adequate Internet communications with customers (i.e. feature rich question and answer section on your website, chat sessions (if you can handle the language), or 24-hour or less email turn-around).
5. Make sure you factor in all of the hidden costs associated with shipping products on an international basis, and set up a supply chain to handle the shipments and returns.
6. Learn about country habits with respect to how they pay for products; Which credit cards are best for certain countries?, Do people use credit cards for online transactions?, Do they use kiosks, or wire transfers, and are there other means of restitution to investigate? Become familiar with how much information that you can solicit under a country's privacy regulations, and how much information people are willing to provide.
7. Target key search engines per country and submit your website to them.

For service providers who have worked the global markets, they understand that English is a lingua franca for professionals and the affluent segment in industrialized countries.

1. Investigate building global partnerships to expand your marketing message through other channels (OPM – Other People's Marketing). Look for providers of complementary services and offerings to see if you can exchange access to customers (shared email campaigns or a joint website) as a way to expand access for both companies.
2. Make sure that your website message is clear and concise to avoid confusion by prospective clients where English is not their native language.
3. Use the Internet as a vehicle to provide 24-hours-a-day by 365-days-a-year support. You can create dynamic Q&A sections on your website, respond to email questions within a 24-hour period, or create dynamic support centers to answer questions immediately.
4. Learn about country habits with respect to how they pay for services, which credit cards are best for certain countries and make sure you do your local currency to their currency conversion, and include any extra fees associated with wire transfers, and other means of restitution.

Regardless if you are in retail or providing services, never take a country and the people for granted. Learn about their customs, understand how they work with the Internet, is it best if you gradually work your way into a relationship before starting to talk about services; every country has its own distinct personality. Make sure that you understand privacy regulations with regards to information that you obtain, email blasts that you wish to send out, and general communications.

Just because you have a website you are not global; it takes the same planning, if not more, that you put into starting up your existing company to move beyond your comfort zone of your own country and language. There are significant benefits to expand your business into a global entity, but make sure that you have the resources, time, money, and focus to make it work. You may have been able to survive on-the-fly with regards to building and changing a website, engaging social networks, and working to create a progressive Internet presence, but with regards to going global, the tolerance level by the consumer is much smaller.

I thank you for your continued support of Luxury Experience Company, and as always, your comments are welcome, so please send comments to EFNesta@L-E-Company.com.

© February 2011. Luxury Experience Company. www.L-E-Company.com. All rights reserved.