



# **Going Global:**

How to improve digital marketing  
performance in any market on the planet

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**Publisher: Independent Publishing Network.**

**Publication date: October 2021**

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**ISBN: 978-1-80068-275-7**

Printed in the United Kingdom

Designed by Gabrielle Smith

# Preface

The last decade or so has seen tremendous economic and political upheaval for UK businesses. From the financial crisis of 2007-2008, to the UK's decision to leave the EU, to the Covid-19 pandemic, large-scale events have created a turbulent environment for businesses. Yet despite – or perhaps because of – this turbulence, there are more opportunities than ever for UK businesses to expand internationally – increasing both their reach and their margins.

This book is intended to be a practical digital marketing guide for UK businesses at a relatively early stage of international expansion. Our thanks to the team at Oban International in Brighton, plus their Local In-Market Experts around the world, whose insights and expertise have contributed to the book.

**- Sarah Jennings & Tom Montague**

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# Introduction

If you are looking to expand your business internationally at a faster rate, then this book is for you.

As the world becomes more connected and technology enables companies to reach international markets faster than ever before, expansion beyond borders is on the radar for ambitious businesses whose goal is rapid growth. In today's global economy, business success depends not just on the rate at which you innovate, but the speed at which you are able to scale.

And in a world of remote workers, digital nomads and virtual everything — including currency — doing business internationally is no longer just for large corporate giants. Businesses of all sizes have access to international markets and their benefits.

International expansion not only allows you to tap into a global marketplace of 7 billion + consumers, but numerous studies show that businesses which operate internationally grow faster and fail less than those which do not.

However, no major business decision is without its hurdles, and global expansion comes with its own unique set of challenges. Scaling across borders can be complicated and expensive, regardless of company size, and the process can divert time and resources away from other opportunities. It can be daunting for businesses to make the leap and go global, but the rewards of getting it right are huge.

## **Who this book is for**

**In this book, we explore the challenges and opportunities of going global from the perspective of the digital marketer. If you own or work for a business with ambitious global expansion plans, and you want to know more about how digital marketing can help you to achieve your goals, then this book is for you.**

### **The book examines:**

- The benefits of going global
- The importance of local in-market expertise and why culture still matters in an era of globalisation
- How to research, select and enter new markets
- The international SEO elements essential for success
- Why you need to localise, not translate, your content, and the challenges in doing so
- The fundamentals of international paid search
- How link-building varies by market, and how working with

influencers varies across cultures

- How social media usage varies by country and what you need to consider for international social media success
- How different cultures convert differently online, and what user experience and conversion techniques you can use across markets
- Payment methods around the world – crucial for international ecommerce
- The fulfilment challenges inherent in international ecommerce and how to overcome them
- How to set global KPIs, how to measure international digital marketing impact and attribution challenges
- Some of the key international digital marketing mistakes to avoid, including some eye-catching brand examples

## About Oban International

Headquartered in Brighton in the UK, Oban International is a digital marketing agency which specialises in international growth. Since 2002, the agency has helped businesses with tough targets identify the biggest international growth opportunities and avoid the costliest mistakes. At the heart of Oban's offering is its LIME network. LIME stands for **Local In-Market Experts** – that is, experts in a range of digital marketing disciplines, based in markets around the world. Oban believes the key to international success is using authentic on-the-ground cultural insights from

people who live in-market to guide both strategy and execution. The agency uses its unique LIME network – made up of over 450 experts in over 80 countries – to provide the in-market insights which often make the difference between success or failure.

The accumulated experience of helping over 250 businesses in multiple sectors – category leaders and challenger brands in finance, B2B, technology, ecommerce, travel, publishing, education, fashion, FMCG, retail and more – expand in over 80 countries around the world has given Oban in-depth understanding of how to improve digital marketing performance in any market on the planet. We have used that understanding to compile this book.

## **There has never been a better time to go global**

Despite the geopolitical and economic turbulence of our current era, there are more opportunities than ever before for companies in every corner of the world to discover new markets where they can expand both reach and profit.

However, expansion comes with significant challenges and risks. Catering to an international customer base, and creating multicultural and multilingual brand awareness across borders, adds a level of complexity to most aspects of doing business. The international digital marketing insights, advice and best practices contained within this book will help you navigate this complexity – and maximise your chances of global success.



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## Why Go International?

By reading this book, you are probably already considering expanding your business internationally or have taken steps to do so. You may be convinced it is the right thing to do. But in case you are unsure, before we go further, it is worth considering the question: why go international? Businesses looking for growth are often faced with two choices:

1. Develop new products or services to gain more traction in your existing home market, or
2. Sell your existing products or services in other markets

Developing innovative new products and services can be an expensive and high-risk strategy. International expansion is not without its risks, but by comparison to the first option, can be an easier path to growth for your business.

Here are ten benefits of expanding your business internationally, beyond the most obvious reward of securing additional revenue:

- 1. Decreased competition:** Your home market might be highly competitive or have reached saturation point. You might find that by branching out overseas, you are able to compete in less saturated markets and gain a greater share of voice for your marketing effort.
- 2. Risk mitigation:** By operating in different markets, you spread risk. For example, economic lows in some markets or regions might be offset by economic highs in others.
- 3. Smoothing seasonal peaks:** Seasonality may vary across regions – most obviously, the seasons are inverse in the southern hemisphere compared to the northern – which means peaks and troughs will be different, extending demand on resources in your business over the year. Similarly, key dates often vary by market and there will be many local market festivals and occasions providing new opportunities.

### **Fastest growing markets in the world (according to Oxford Economics, 2019)**

India

The Philippines

Indonesia

China

Malaysia

Turkey

Thailand

Chile

Poland

South Africa

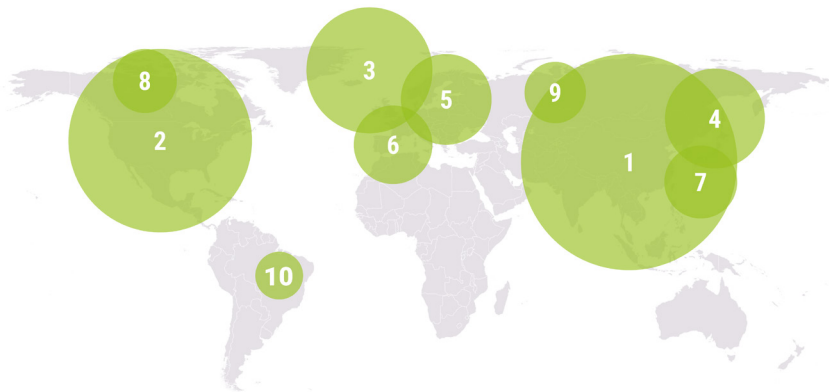
**This ranking is based on a combination of GDP growth, funding availability and workforce growth.**

4. **Enhanced reputation:** Operating internationally will increase your global stature and raise your company profile. Global operations can help build name brand recognition to support future business scenarios, such as contract negotiations, new marketing campaigns and additional expansion.
5. **Opportunities to specialise:** Being exposed to the challenges and opportunities of other markets may lead to product or service innovation, helping you to develop your company niche and evolve your operations.
6. **Benefitting from currency exchange:** You can spread the risk of relying on one currency and take advantage of the relative strength or weakness of the pound to sell to customers from other markets.
7. **Disposal of surplus goods:** There may be an opportunity to sell surplus goods in other markets which you might not have sold in your home market and demand and trends vary around the world.
8. **Access to new talent:** Adding local employees or expertise in new markets brings a new dimension to your company's talent pool. In many cases, international labour can offer business advantage in terms of advanced language skills, diverse educational backgrounds and a variety of perspectives, as well

as local efficiencies.

9. **Competitive advantage:** Depending on your sector and target market, you may obtain first mover advantage which allows you to build strong brand awareness with consumers before your competitors follow.
10. **Larger margins:** The cost of acquiring customers in other markets may be lower. And the greater economies of scale you acquire by scaling internationally can generate cost efficiencies too.

### Ten Largest Ecommerce Markets



- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. China - \$627 bn  | 6. France - \$43 bn      |
| 2. US - \$340 bn     | 7. South Korea - \$37 bn |
| 3. UK - \$99 bn      | 8. Canada - \$30 bn      |
| 4. Japan - \$79 bn   | 9. Russia - \$30 bn      |
| 5. Germany - \$73 bn | 10. Brazil - \$19 bn     |

Source: Shopify Plus, 2021

According to the UK government, around 20% of UK businesses are trading internationally. Although that figure is growing, and, post Brexit, is set to grow substantially as businesses seek new paths to growth, it shows there are still a large number not yet taking advantage of the possibilities for international expansion.

The majority of the world's consumers live outside the UK and 80% of the world's population does not speak English, even as a second language. By restricting yourself to the UK, you are missing out on a vast international opportunity. The good news for British brands is that goods and services originating in Britain are often considered desirable across much of the world. The "Made in Britain" label commands a premium in many markets.

So rather than asking why go global, a better question is why not? Expanding internationally will introduce your company to huge new markets, increase your sales and profits, gain brand recognition, reduce the risk of operating in one market, and could extend your product's life cycle.

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# The Importance of Local In-market Expertise

**T**o succeed in a market, you must understand that market – the way that someone who lives and works there understands it. Some reasons why international expansion can go wrong include:

- Insufficient research into local culture
- Misunderstanding local audience intent and user journeys by market
- Failure to adapt to local market structures and processes
- Not treating local markets as separate campaigns
- Linguistic and cultural mistakes which undermine brand trust and familiarity
- Brand names that do not translate well

The consequences of these mistakes can be expensive. The key to avoiding them is to invest time in understanding each market. Because each market is different, individual market analysis is required.

That said, there are theories which help us to understand cross-cultural differences. One of the most famous of these is Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. Whilst the research for the original theory started in the 1960s, it has been revisited and updated in the years since and is still regarded as influential and relevant.

## **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory**

Despite globalisation, the world is not uniform, and no two markets are identical. Consumer behaviour both on and offline, tone of voice, payment preferences, linguistic style and convention, the symbolism attached to different colours and imagery – all vary across cultures. Many of these differences are subtle and not always obvious.

Hofstede's theory of Cultural Dimensions provides a framework for understanding. Geert Hofstede developed his theory following a worldwide survey of employee values by IBM between 1967 and 1973 completed by 160,000 employees from 72 countries in 20 languages. The original theory proposed four dimensions along which cultural values could be analysed:

- Individualism versus collectivism
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Power distance
- Masculinity versus femininity

Hofstede later added two further dimensions:

- Long term orientation
- Indulgence versus self-restraint

Let's look at each of these in turn.

### **Individualism versus collectivism**

The extent to which members of a society want to be left alone to look after themselves or want to remain in a tight-knit network.

- Individualistic countries place great importance on attaining personal goals
- Collectivistic countries place great importance on the group as a whole

### **Uncertainty avoidance**

The extent to which people in society are not at ease with uncertainty and ambiguity.

- High uncertainty avoidance countries have low tolerance for ambiguity and risks, and attempt to control them through rules and regulations
- Low uncertainty avoidance countries are more open to ambiguity and risks, and have more relaxed rules and regulations

### **Power distance**

The extent to which less powerful members of society expect and accept that the distribution of power is not equal.



- High power distance countries accept inequity and power differences, and have great respect for rank and authority
- Low power distance countries tend to have organisational structures which are flat, and favour decentralised decision-making and collaborative styles of management

### **Masculinity versus femininity**

In this dimension, “masculinity” is defined as a societal preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. By contrast, “femininity” is defined as a preference for co-operation, modesty, caring for the vulnerable and quality of life.

- Masculine countries tend to have distinct gender roles and prize material achievements and wealth-building
- Feminine countries tend to have more fluid gender roles and value quality of life

### **Long-term orientation**

Long-term orientation means a willingness to delay short-term material or social success or even short-term emotional gratification in favour of preparing for the future.

- Long-term orientation involves delaying gratification to achieve long-term success. Countries with this attribute value persistence, perseverance, saving and being able to adapt
- Short-term orientation involves placing a stronger emphasis on living for the present than the future

## **Indulgence versus self-restraint**

This dimension considers the extent and tendency of a society to fulfil its desires. It revolves around how societies can control their impulses.

- Indulgence indicates a country that allows relatively free gratification related to enjoying life and having fun
- Restraint indicates a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it through social norms

Hofstede's theory is also useful for website designers, when tailoring UX for different cultures (which we explore in more detail in Chapter 10).

Whilst there are limitations to Hofstede's model, and some of the terminology may be considered stereotypical, it remains useful in highlighting differences across cultures. International marketers can use Hofstede's theory to inform messaging, creative work, channel selection and more.

It is important to remember that countries which are not geographically close often share cultural similarities, and the converse is also true. This is one of the most important tips for international marketers who must often group markets together, given finite resource. The best groupings are not always geographical.

## **Mini case study: Dell**

Oban was asked by Dell to run a range of bespoke tests with consumers from 8 diverse international markets, to identify their response to various home page layouts.

We clustered consumers by both positive and negative responses to various aspects of the page layouts and design. The key finding was that customers from several markets behaved in similar ways to each other, so we ended up with three broad clusters. Unexpectedly the markets were not those that were geographically close to each other. Instead they were the markets that shared most similarities in their Hofstede profiles. This meant Dell could cluster their website changes into groups of markets, but the clusters were geographically diverse.

Takeout – groups of markets often behave similarly but they may be located in different continents. Consider organising your website marketing maintenance and updates to reflect the aligned clusters rather than necessarily along geographical lines.

## **Why in-market expertise?**

Marketers have various ways of gaining local insights. Desk research, native speakers, expats, students, employees originally from other markets can all offer useful insights but, in our experience, nothing is as accurate or up to the minute as insights from people physically based in the market right now.

Language, behaviour and trends shift quickly as does local context. Research shows that it takes only 18 months for an expat

to start to assimilate and blend their new culture with their old. Native speakers often say that when they return home, family and friends comment on their loss of language skills.

## Local in-market experts - LIMEs

The key to identifying the biggest opportunities and avoiding the costliest mistakes is by ensuring that local in-market expertise is at the heart of your approach.

When Oban was founded in 2002, the internet was in its relative infancy and the focus was often US/UK centric. From the outset, we realised that the internet was global and only brands who truly understood and embraced this would maximise the potential opportunities it presented.

We realised that the best way to navigate cultural differences and understand cultural nuances was by having experts on the ground to guide you, so we established our LIME (Local In-Market Expert) network. Expert by expert, market by market, we built the network. Often this was led by client requirements. Need an expert in Nigeria who can speak Igbo and who understands paid search? A French speaker in Canada with knowledge of UX specifically for financial services? Whatever expertise our clients needed, in whatever language, we would find the right people in the right markets.

Over time, we have handpicked people in markets all over the world. Interviewed them. Tested them. Worked with them. Got to know them. Today, our network numbers over 450 LIMEs working across 80 markets and 70 languages, and it's growing all the time.

Linguistically, how consumers search for a given product, brand or category varies by market. It is never as simple as taking an English keyword list and translating it. Literal translations do not

always make effective keywords as locals could use colloquialisms, abbreviations, acronyms or simply alternative terms to search for the same thing online.

Aside from linguistic nuances, a local cultural expert can also tell you:

- What are consumer preferences in your target market?
- What's the best way to cater to those preferences?
- What digital platforms are most relevant?
- What are the local influences that play out within each market?

Factors such as history, religion, politics, social codes and gender roles will determine what creative work is acceptable in market. Some obvious examples include:

- Models with tattoos may be perceived negatively in some markets
- Women with bare skin on display will be unacceptable in some countries
- Colours symbolise different meanings around the world
- Animals may be considered holy or sacrilegious in some cultures

Where possible, best results come from involving local expertise from the outset, rather than creating campaigns in English with a Western cultural framing and then expecting local experts to adapt them.

Brands can use the social, economic, cultural and linguistic

nuances from local experts to help refine their message, so it connects best with the target audience in each market.

It might be tempting to cut corners and think you are saving time and money by not bothering with local in-market insight. But simply putting your key messages through Google Translate and hoping they will work in your target market is rarely the right way forward. Sending the wrong message to consumers could not only discourage them but actively lead to them boycotting you altogether. Many brands have experienced a steep learning curve, with local campaigns having fallen flat on their faces. (See Chapter 14 for examples.)

### **Mini case study: Tiz**

Not everyone knows that Iran is not an Arabic speaking country, despite its proximity to neighbouring Semitic language speakers.

A brand of razors for men called “Tiz”, the Farsi word for “sharp”, began expanding its marketing campaigns into its neighbour across the Gulf, Qatar. Arabic is spoken in Qatar, not Farsi. Unfortunately for Tiz, Arabic and Farsi aren’t the same languages, they don’t even belong to the same language family. In fact, English is more closely related to Farsi than Arabic is, both belonging to the Indo-European language family.

In Arabic “Tiz” means “buttocks”. The name was promptly changed to “muqdam” or “hero”.

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## **Chapter summary – key points:**

- To succeed in a market, you must understand that market – the way that someone who lives and works in that market understands it.
- Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions provides a framework for understanding differences across cultures.
- How consumers search for a given product, brand or category varies by market. It is never as simple as taking your English keyword list and translating it.
- Local in-market insights are a powerful asset because they help you ensure cultural relevance.
- Using both local data and insights to guide your campaigns will ensure better results.

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# Market Research, Selection & Entry

**H**aving made the decision to expand internationally, the first big question to answer is where to go? You may already have a market or markets in mind, or you may have no idea where to start. A good way to approach this process is by breaking it down into three key areas: let's examine each of these in turn.

## **Step 1: Are you ready to launch into a new market?**

You may not be able to answer some of these questions until you have chosen the market you want to launch into, but you will need to answer them all before launch.

- Does the business have sufficient budget for international expansion?
- Is the rest of the business supportive and willing to play their part?



- Do you have the right team in place to help you expand and if not, how will you get the right support?
- If you don't have a local team in place, what is your plan to acquire local in-market expertise?
- Does your product or service need to be tailored before you can take it internationally?
- Are the logistics in place to support international sales? Can you handle deliveries and returns?
- Are you aware of local product legislation, licensing and tax laws?
- Are you prepared to make a long-term commitment to the new market? International expansion often fails when a client expects immediate sales success or hasn't secured enough budget for the long term.

## **Step 2: Research and select your markets**

If you are not sure where to start, create a long list of potential candidate countries. Questions to consider would be:

- How easy is it to do business in each market? Do you understand the regulatory landscape and what red tape you will need to navigate? Is your product compliant in each market?
- Is there a clear and growing demand for your product and service?
- Do you understand the local culture and local customs, and do

you have input from local in-market experts?

- How do consumers make purchase decisions in each country?
- Do you have a clear understanding of who your competitors will be – both from a brand and a marketing perspective – in your target markets? You may find you compete with brands from other sectors depending on local product or service usage.
- What is the internet penetration in each market?
- How stable is the local economy and is it growing?

You could consider carrying out a PEST analysis for each market to help you understand the market better and then map the implications of that onto a SWOT analysis (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats) to give you an overview of a market’s potential opportunities and challenges.

Political	Economic	Social	Technological
Current legislation	Economic trends	Lifestyle trends	Maturity of technology
Future legislation	Taxation	Demographics	Consumer buying technology
Regulatory bodies	Seasonality	Consumer attitudes	Innovation potential
Government policies	Market/trade cycles	Media views	Technology legislation
Government term	Industry factors	Brand image	Innovation potential
Trading policies	Distribution trends	Consumer purchase behaviour	Tech access, licensing and patents
Funding & grants	Customer drivers	Influencers	IP issues
Pressure groups	Interest rates	Major events	
Wars & conflict	Exchange rates	Ethnic/religious factors	
	International trade	Advertising & PR	
		Ethical issues	

Useful starting points for country comparisons include:

- **The CIA World Factbook:**  
[cia.gov/the-world-factbook](https://cia.gov/the-world-factbook)
- **BBC Country Profiles:**  
[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country\\_profiles/default.stm](https://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country_profiles/default.stm)
- **Transparency International Corruption Index:**  
[transparency.org/en/cpi/2019](https://transparency.org/en/cpi/2019)
- **World Bank ease of doing business rankings:**  
[doingbusiness.org/en/rankings](https://doingbusiness.org/en/rankings)
- **Google Market Finder:**  
[marketfinder.thinkwithgoogle.com](https://marketfinder.thinkwithgoogle.com)

*See the appendix for more links to helpful resources.*

These resources provide useful background, but we would not recommend relying on them in isolation to make your decision about market entry choice.

### **Step 3: Define your market entry strategy**

You need to be able to answer these questions confidently. This book will help you to do that.

- What are your business goals and how will you measure your progress?
- Do you want to go big or go small? A large-scale market entry

will make more impact but will cost more and carry more risk. Alternatively, you could start with a smaller test, gather learnings and scale up from there.

- How will you market and distribute your products?
- How will you localise your offering – product, price, promotion, messaging etc?
- What level of investment will you need to deliver your marketing plan and meet your goals?

### **Different methods of market entry**

- **Online marketplaces** - For those looking to reach international markets digitally, choosing a marketplace such as Amazon, Tmall or Etsy can be an accessible place to start. You can use the learnings you acquire to scale up from there. See Chapter 12 for a list of the top marketplaces around the world.
- **Online marketing** - using a mix of SEO, paid search, online display and social media to create a digital marketing presence in a market. See later chapters in this book.
- **Exporting** – sending your product abroad. You don't have to invest in production facilities in the chosen markets which saves money. However, you have the cost of transportation and, potentially, warehousing.

For digital marketers, the three market entry approaches listed above are the simplest routes to market as you don't need to invest in any infrastructure. In some markets you may require a physical

presence to provide your goods and services – where this is the case, there are a range of options you can choose from:

- **Licensing** – allows another company in your target country to use your IP (intellectual property) or to sell your goods or services. IP is usually intangible – e.g., brand name, trademarks, patents or production techniques.
- **Franchising** – Similar to licensing but working within a templated formula.
- **Joint venture** – where two companies establish a jointly owned business – one is local to the target market.
- **Foreign direct investment** – where you invest directly in facilities in a foreign market. This could be a new venture or a takeover of an existing company.
- **Piggybacking** – Involves two non-competing companies working together to cross-sell the other's ideally complementary products or services in their home countries. Requires a high degree of trust.

### **Don't forget to use what you know already**

In the vast universe of data that can help you figure out which markets are best for you, the most important questions for you to answer are::

1. How big is the opportunity?
2. How easy will it be for your company to do business in that market?

There is a third question, often overlooked, which is:

### 3. Have you already had success in that market?

Analysing your own data will help you answer the last question and determine whether you have a strong product-market fit:

- Are you seeing leads from a particular market, despite not investing heavily – or at all?
- Do you see a shorter sales cycle or a higher win rate in some countries?
- Is the pricing or profit higher in some markets?

Third-party data sources don't know your customer or understand your brand like you do – only you can answer these questions. Marketers should always use their own data to help prioritise global marketing decisions and a good starting point is to look at your website data.

### **How can your current website data guide you?**

A good starting point is to look at where the traffic to your existing website is coming from, as it may be that you are already attracting an international audience without even trying. If so, this will tell you where to focus your international expansion efforts.

- Analyse the current traffic and sales-by-country data in your analytics dashboards.
  - In Google Analytics, view your Locations report (Audience > Geo > Location) for in-depth information about the

location of your visitors.

- Set up segments to break down international traffic by continent, country, region, or city, and to understand customer behaviour.

Use analytics data to create dashboards that show sessions by country, customers by country, and sales by billing country to establish the extent to which you are engaged in cross-border commerce. Comparing side-by-side segments helps inform your decision to expand. Insights like these may emerge:

- If you discover European customers bounce on your checkout page then you might want to consider offering checkout in Euros, showing prices that include duties, or including more appropriate address fields.
- If you discover Australian visitors bounce on your returns page, you might want to add transparency and detail to your returns policy for international purchases.

When you have significant traffic from a particular region or country but – relative to your home country – a low conversion rate, consider creating a localised online store and checkout to boost sales.

Once you have researched and selected your markets, the next element to consider is getting your website right – starting with international domain strategy.

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## **Chapter summary – key points:**

- First, determine if you are ready to enter a new market – do you have the budget? The right team? Agreement from key stakeholders? Access to local in-market expertise?
- Is there clear and growing demand for your product in your target markets?
- Does your product need to be tailored for your target markets?
- Do you understand the regulatory landscape and logistical challenges in your target markets?
- Use your own internal data to guide you: Third-party data sources don't know your customer or understand your brand – only you can answer these types of questions. Marketers can do a better job of using their own data to prioritise their global marketing decisions.
- A good starting point is to look at where the traffic to your existing website is coming from, as it may be that you are already attracting an international audience without even trying. If so, this will tell you where to focus your international expansion efforts.
- There are different methods of market entry. For those looking to reach international markets, choosing a marketplace such as Amazon, Tmall or Etsy can be an accessible place to start.



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# International Domain Strategy

Once you have got your UK-focused website right – technically well structured, easily found via search engines, rich in content which meets audience intent, with a look and feel which reinforces your brand – it is time to do the same for each of your target markets internationally. The aim is to create websites that can be found easily by your target audience in your target markets in their own language on any device.

International websites are about getting known in a new market. If you are a major brand, you may already have some brand awareness. But if you are not and you need to approach new customers, you need to make it easy for them to find you. This is where international SEO comes in. International SEO is the branch of SEO devoted to optimising websites so that your online brand presence is as visible as possible for users in your target markets and languages. A central part of international SEO is domain strategy, which is what this chapter covers.

## Firstly, do you need a site for each country?

If the market is large enough for you to invest in, then potentially yes. A dedicated site for each country could provide a better user experience for local visitors, as well as SEO benefits. However, this may not be a feasible option for you, at least not at the beginning. In that case, you should instead have a site for each language that is spoken in your target countries. This is a good approach if you want to test the waters first before you dive in too deep. You can use hreflang tags to tell Google which language and country each site is created for.

### Hreflang Tags

Hreflang tags are a technical solution for sites that have similar content in multiple languages. The owner of a multilingual site wants search engines to send people to the content in their own language. For example, if a user is German and the page that ranks is English, but there's also a German version, you would want Google to show the German page in the search results for that German user. This is the kind of problem hreflang was designed to solve.

## Choosing the right domain structure

There is no clear right or wrong answer to the question of which domain strategy is right for you. It will depend on your circumstances. Key questions to consider include:

- Which CMS (Content Management System) are you using and

what opportunities and limitations does it provide?

- What domain strategies are your competitors following in your target markets?
- What budgetary constraints are you operating under?
- What words will be used in your domain name i.e., the address of your website? Usually this is your brand name but depending on the domain strategy you follow, check that the way words are combined in your domain does not look odd to an audience who speak a different language. An English example would be Experts Exchange which could look like expert sex change in the domain name.

There are three main options for your domain structure:

- Country code top level domains (ccTLDs)
- Subfolders or directories
- Subdomains

There are pros and cons to each approach, and the right solution will depend on your circumstances. Let's consider each of these in turn.

### **Country-code top level domains (ccTLDs)**

Country-code top level domains are specific to a country – for example:

- Amazon.fr — for France
- Amazon.co.uk — for the UK

- Amazon.de — for Germany

### **Pros:**

- Strongly associated with the country they cover (for example - .fr for France)
- Usually rank better in the target market
- More trusted by website users, leading to a better click-through rate

### **Cons:**

- Additional cost – i.e. if you are present in 20 markets, you need 20 ccTLDs
- Starting from scratch means when you launch into a new market, you don't have a domain history or links to rely on
- Increased work required to roll out SEO improvements across all markets
- Can be harder to measure performance in Google Search Console

### **Sub-folders or sub-directories**

If you require country or language specific content, one of the easiest options is to create localised sub-directories on your own site. These sub-directories can be geotargeted in Google Search Console and can contain country-specific content and language. For example:

- yourbrand.com — root site targeting the USA
- yourbrand.com/uk/ — UK

- [yourbrand.com/de/](#) — Germany
- [yourbrand.fr/ca](#) – targeting French speakers in Canada

### Pros:

- You are only expanding your existing site, so there may be less technical management and overhead – e.g. no extra domain hosting costs
- The sub-directories will inherit authority from the parent domain
- You only have one site to promote, so whilst you will still want country and language specific links, this is simpler and more cost-effective than promoting multiple sites
- Technical SEO improvements performed on one part of the site will benefit all the country folders
- Links between countries are seen by search engines as internal, not external, links. This helps your backlink profile as it will be made up predominantly of links from other sites and not mainly from your own
- Easier to measure performance in Google Search Console

### Cons:

- In the search results, it is not as obvious to users that the country subfolder is specifically for users in that country – that is, [/fr](#) could be a page about your French products rather than a page specifically aimed at French consumers
- There is a risk of internal cannibalisation – different international landing pages can end up competing in search

results, and it can be a challenge to get the right landing page to rank in the relevant country's search

- SEO mistakes made on one part of the site can affect all the country folders

Sub-folders can be an easy way to get started with international SEO, but it is important to be aware of the limitations of this approach. A potential obstacle to watch out for is automatic optimisation settings in your CMS. The last thing you want is your sensitively localised website for the Spanish market to have a default title tag and meta description on every page which is in English. You can avoid this by turning off any automatic optimisation settings.

## **Subdomains**

Subdomains add the country or language content to the beginning of the domain – for example, for France, it would be fr.yourbrand.com. Because some CMS tools default to this option, in the past it has been a popular technique for many international websites.

### Pros:

- Maintains some connection to the current SEO authority of the parent website, so you are not starting from scratch when launching into a new market
- Benefits from some market recognition from users when the country code appears at the front – e.g. us.example.com

- Some CMS tools offer this option as a default setting so can be easy to execute

Con:

- Users are less likely to associate your domain with their country as the language specialisation or country is at the beginning of the domain

### **Oban client example: The international insurance giant**

Oban helped a leading insurance company select the right domain strategy to meet its objectives. The brand sells private medical insurance to a globally mobile audience. Oban suggested using a gTLD as they needed to target prospects all over the world yet had a finite development budget. Having one / en/ English sub-folder for the English language content allowed them to reach expatriates in over 100 countries with a curated handful of pages.

Remember: Google is not the only search engine (though it is dominant). Domain strategy is one aspect of international SEO – other key aspects are content localisation (which we cover in Chapter 6) and international link building (which we cover in Chapter 7).

## Search Engine Market Share Worldwide

August 2020 – July 2021



The top five search engines answer over 98% of global search queries between them.

Source: Statcounter GlobalStats

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### Chapter summary – key points:

- A key aspect of international SEO is domain strategy.
- The first question to decide is whether you need a site for each country.
- There are three main options for your domain strategy:
  - Country code top level domains (ccTLDs)
  - Subfolders or directories
  - Subdomains
- Each option has pros and cons – the right approach will depend on your circumstances and objectives.
- Google is not the only search engine to consider (though it is the most dominant).



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# Content Localisation

**W**hen targeting a global audience, ensuring your messages are tailored to each local market is essential – which means localising your content.

## Why is content localisation important?

Whilst English has always dominated the internet, today only about 55% of the internet is in English and this proportion is falling. More importantly, 75% of people want to buy products in their native language and 59% rarely or never buy from English-only websites<sup>1</sup>. As voice search becomes increasingly important, the shift away from English will accelerate.

People prefer to transact in their own languages where possible. Businesses which do not cater to this consumer preference will

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<sup>1</sup> Core dna, March 2018

miss out on a commercial opportunity. Localising your product and your content will help you to connect with audiences in each market, giving you a competitive edge and establishing your brand internationally.



## How does content localisation differ from translation?

Translation is the process of rendering text from one language to another, so its meaning is equivalent.

By contrast, content localisation is a more comprehensive process which involves taking your existing content and ensuring it is fit for purpose for your target audiences in different countries. This goes well beyond translation because it considers cultural and non-textual components as well as linguistic issues. Localisation ensures that cultural nuances and consumer preferences by market – for example, in lifestyles, values, beliefs, religion, food, purchasing behaviours and more – are reflected in your content.

## **Consider starting small**

Content localisation, done properly, can involve extensive time and resources.

To mitigate risk, consider taking an agile approach to testing new markets. For example, rather than localising everything up-front, you could start with some localised paid search campaigns built on target market keywords that link to your English language site. When you can see demand, this builds the case for localising a landing page, providing key information on shipping and returns and more. In turn, this builds a broader business case for deeper localisation of both your site and other marketing channels.

## **Don't overlook smaller markets**

Some markets have received a lot of attention in recent years, such as Germany, China and the US.

While these large markets are hugely attractive, they are highly competitive and require significant investment to achieve cut-through. In comparison, markets such as the Nordics and South Korea, while smaller, are less competitive but still have sizeable populations of customers who are comfortable with shopping cross-border and have the means to do so.

## **Local keyword research**

Before you start content localisation, a useful starting point is keyword research in each significant language spoken by prospects in your intended markets. Avoid simply translating your English keywords - literal translations are not always relevant and may not be the terms that people are searching for in your target country.

Consumers in different markets may understand and search for your product or service in a different way to English-speaking users. Take the time to understand the relevant words and phrases used by your international audiences to search – including the search volume for those keywords. You also need to know the level of competition for those keywords (which may be used by products and services in different sectors to your own) and your current rankings for each intended market.

## **Be selective about which parts of your website to localise**

Errors in localisation can undermine brand trust and familiarity. Simply translating your UK web content and hoping for the best is likely to result in, at best, limited impact and at worst, can cause offence in your target markets. Neither will all your existing content be relevant for every market.

As discussed in Chapter 4, market research is important. Before

you localise your content, make sure you understand:

- How consumers use your product in your target markets
- How they purchase your product

## Website elements to consider for localisation

### Copy

Ideally, copy should read as though written by a native speaker in the target language. This means using skilled writers who can convey an existing message in a certain style to a defined audience. There are many examples of translations that perfectly reflect the source language and are correct from a linguistic point of view, but sound completely unnatural. For example, consider the following sentence:

*“Learning a second language in a school setting can be likened to gaining familiarity with another country and its culture by looking at pictures in a book or reading descriptions.”*

This is technically correct, but it would be far more natural to write something like:

*“Learning a second language at school is like trying to learn about another country and its culture just by reading and looking at pictures.”*

Remember that different languages have different tones. English (in modern usage anyway) is an informal language. German, French and Japanese are more formal depending on the context.

Using a tone which is inappropriate for your target market could undermine brand trust and therefore conversion. A local in-market expert will be able to advise on the correct tone for your audience.

## **Imagery**

Hero and product images need to be tailored so they are suitable to the relevant country. Photography on your website is a powerful component of good user experience for your customer, as well as a crucial factor in conveying your brand messages.

Choose images that will speak to your international audience:

- Are your images culturally sensitive?
- Are they diverse enough?
- Can your audience identify with them?
- Do they reflect your localised core messages?
- Are they engaging the personas you are trying to target?

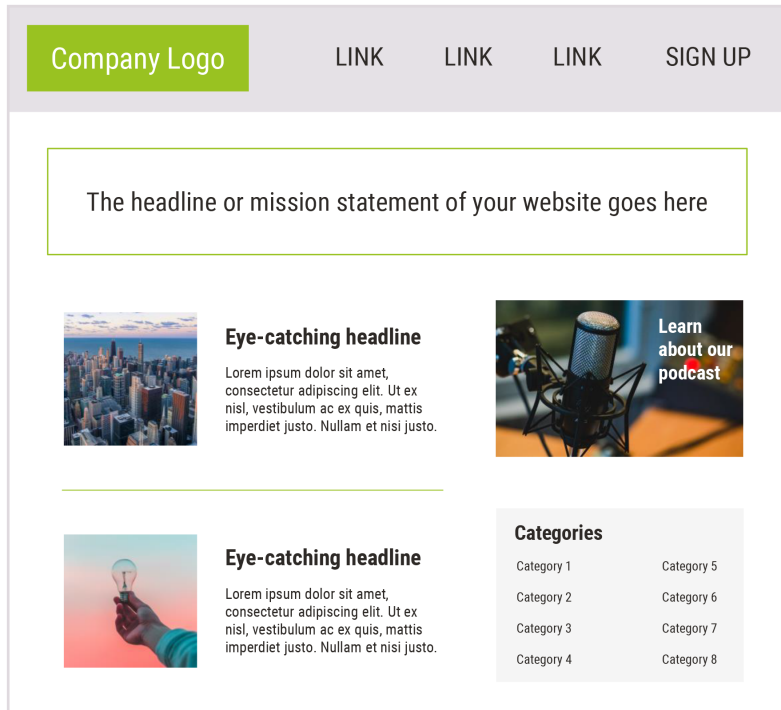
### **Oban reviewed office-based images for a large software provider wanting to use the images across 16 markets.**

Images were rejected in some markets for reasons including:

- Wrong footwear for an office environment
- Feet up on furniture
- Tattoos showing
- Proximity of male and female colleagues gathered round a desk

## Page layouts

In many countries, people read left to right. That is why the layout of many websites is designed in an F pattern.



Although the F pattern of scanning a website has been universally observed, design decisions should bear in mind other reading patterns. For example, in Arab countries, shoppers read right to left, so may scan websites in a mirrored F pattern. Your localisation process will need to address this. You shouldn't simply put the translated content into the same layout because it would not be in line with the cultural code of an Arabic audience.

## Word lengths

You also need to consider word lengths. If you translate English copy into German, the German version will be much longer. This has implications for your layouts. For example, the word for “search” in French takes up 10 characters but in Japanese only 2. In Mandarin or Chinese, even though the translation takes up less space in general, the characters will occupy more space than the individual characters of a standard western alphabet.

Also, some languages do not add contrast in the way English does. For example, Japanese does not have italics.

Example of how word lengths vary by language:

<b>Here, the English copy is 54 words...</b>	<b>The same copy localised into French is 73 words</b>
BBC World Service provides a multi-platform news service in 40+ languages, including BBC News Arabic, reaching an audience of 468 million every week around the world. BBC World Service broadcasts directly to audiences on TV, radio and digital platforms, including mobile and social media, in addition to programming and syndicated content via global partners.	BBC World Service fournit un service multi-plateforme dans 40+ langues, incluant la BBC News Arabic, et touchant une audience de 468 millions de personnes toutes les semaines à travers le monde. BBC World Service diffuse directement auprès de ses audiences à travers des services de télévision, de radio ainsi que des plateformes digitales, incluant les supports mobiles et réseaux sociaux, en plus de la programmation et du contenu syndiqué via des partenaires mondiaux.



Make sure your designers and front-end teams know this from the outset as a localised website may end up being quite different from the original. Word lengths will also have implications for meta data lengths in different markets. Different search engines have different recommended pixel lengths – a local in-market expert will be able to advise.

## Colours

Different colours symbolise different meanings in different countries. Whilst colour can receive less attention than language considerations, it is one of the first things that prospects will notice about your brand. Colours are subconsciously tied to emotions and states of mind, and it is important to understand this when designing your approach in different markets. For example: In the UK, white symbolises cleanliness and elegance. In China, white can represent death and bad luck. Discounts on French websites are usually shown in blue, in US sites in red.

**Coffee Mug**



\$8.50

**\$5.00**

**Mug à café**



€7.00

**€4.00**

## The meaning of colours around the world

	North America	Asia	Middle East	Latin America
Red	Danger Love Passion	Happiness Joy Celebration	Danger Caution Evil	Fire Religion Passion
Yellow	Happiness Warmth Caution	Sacred Royalty Courage	Happiness Strength Mourning	Death Sorrow Mourning
Blue	Trust Authority Masculinity	Immortality Strength Femininity	Protection Holiness Spirituality	Trust Religion Serenity
Green	Nature Lucky Envy	Nature Youth Infidelity	Strength Luck Fertility	Nature Death Danger
Purple	Wealth Royalty Fame	Wealth Nobility Mourning	Wealth Virtue Omen	Death Sorrow Mourning

## **Colours associated with weddings around the world**

In the UK, white is traditionally worn by brides on their wedding day. That is not the case around the world.

In China, brides often wear red dresses as they are considered lucky. White would more typically be worn at funerals, since it symbolises sorrow.

In Japan, brides may wear a white dress at the start of the wedding, to symbolise purity, then later change into a red dress for the rest of the celebration, to symbolise good luck.

In Nigeria, a country with around 250 ethnic groups, wedding traditions vary according to region and religion. But it is typical for Nigerian brides to wear brightly colour dresses and headscarves (called a Gele).

## **Fonts**

Typography can convey different meanings, which is why brands put a lot of thought into which fonts to use. The perceptions of fonts – e.g. whether they are “friendly” or “professional” – can vary by culture (although common typefaces that have had a lot of exposure across the world are more likely to be perceived in the same way across cultures). Special characters are not necessarily fully supported by all fonts so choose carefully.

## **Consistent tone of voice**

One of the difficulties brands run into is that different content can be added to their site in different languages at different times — leading to tonal inconsistencies. Appointing an editor per language

to make sure everything feels as though it is coming from the same brand and one voice is advisable. When creating content, try to avoid slang or idioms - these can cause problems in the localisation process.

### **Brand names**

You might need to translate your brand name. The Big Mac was originally going to be launched as 'Gros Mec' in France until they realised it meant 'Big Pimp'. It now known as a 'Royale' instead.

### **Checkout process**

A one-size-fits-all approach to forms will not work. **For example:**

- In Brazil, customers must enter their CPF tax number
- In some countries it is better to ask for a family name or surname than a last name
- Countries and regions have different formats for addresses, phone numbers and postcodes so form fields need to vary accordingly. For example, in Italy and Mexico, the house number comes after the street name. In Japan, most streets do not have names, so you must include the block number
- A common mistake in global shipping is not to offer enough form fields for international addresses, or not to accept international addresses at the checkout

## Delivery information

Remember to localise information related to delivery, such as confirmation emails, packing slips, and invoices.

Bear in mind that payment preferences vary worldwide — you need to localise those too. See Chapter 11 for more information on international payment methods.

## Sizing

Localisation also means translating dimensions and sizing charts. For example, if you sell women's shoes, then a UK size 8 is a European size 42 and a Japanese size 26.5.

*“Japanese consumers expect detailed product information when it comes to clothing. For example, shoulder seam and sleeve length measurements are standard details for apparel retailers to communicate to customers.”*

- Shin, Japan

Women's Clothing Sizes						
UK	U.S.	Japan	France, Spain & Portugal	Germany & Scandinavia	Italy	Australia & New Zealand
6/8	6	7-9	36	34	40	8
10	8	9-11	38	36	42	10
12	10	11-13	40	38	44	12
14	12	13-15	42	39	46	14
16	14	15-17	44	40	48	16
18	16	17-19	46	42	50	18
20	18	19-21	48	44	52	20

## **Dates and calendars**

In the US, dates are displayed as MM-DD-YYYY whereas in most European countries the day precedes the month. When it comes to calendars, in the US starts the week on Sunday, the UK on Monday and the Maldives on a Friday.

## **Legal issues**

Each country has its own regulations on privacy, terms of service, complaints procedure, customer support, taxes and data protection. (See Chapter 12 for a discussion on global logistics.)

For example, consider a business which trades across Europe and has three German-speaking countries covered: Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Simply translating marketing copy into German is not sufficient. These countries all have different regulations on refunds for online purchases. So, not only do you have to localise your website and make sure that the refund window specified for each country is correct, but you must then make this information easily accessible in each of these countries. The consequences of getting it wrong could be costly from a legal standpoint.

## **Potential content duplication**

Usually once you have localised content, it is unique to each market, even when everyone speaks the same language. Wellington boots in the UK are called gummies in New Zealand and rubber boots or

galoshes in the USA. However, depending on the nature of your business, even after going through a localisation process, you might have very similar content across different country versions that speak the same language. How do you ensure these pages are not seen and penalised by the search engines as duplicate content?

If each country version is correctly geolocated to its relevant market, the content will not be seen as duplicate since it is targeting different audiences. You don't have to put canonical tags on these pages because each one is considered unique since it is targeted at a different location.

### **Canonical tags**

A canonical tag is a snippet of HTML code that defines the main version for duplicate, near duplicate and similar pages. Search engines do not like duplicate content – the canonical tag aims to solve the problem by telling search engines which version of the page they should index and rank.

### **SEO and other page elements**

You need to localise the different SEO page elements of each of your international site versions, using the keywords and phrases that you have identified during the initial research:

- URLs
- Title tags and meta descriptions
- Menu and navigation elements
- Headings

- Images and alt tags
- Main body information
- Reviews
- Prices, phone numbers and addresses

Hosting your site on a local IP is another important signal to search engines that your website targets a specific country.

## **Localisation resourcing and governance**

Getting international content right is a team effort - involving copywriters, proof-readers, localisation specialists, fact checkers and project managers. Writing a website in one language can be a big task. Doing so across multiple languages will take much longer, and one of the biggest challenges that most companies with global websites face – even large corporates – is ensuring sufficient local resources to create multiple language websites – and then keep them up to date.

The key is to plan the task and responsibility allocation between your central and local resources including:

- **Technical resources** – IT and web operations
- **Language resources** – content localisation and optimisation
- **Data analysis** – Reporting on website performance by market and identifying SEO opportunities

If you do not have any offices or representatives in other countries, or no resources available in local offices, consider hiring



an agency which is able to provide local in-market expertise. The advantages of outsourcing localisation include:

1. Access to a larger pool of translation and localisation specialists
2. Reduced risk of cultural mishaps
3. Faster turnarounds – i.e. an agency can dedicate more resource to a project than a company which has only one or two in-house localisation specialists
4. Potential cost savings – by only using resource when you need it, rather than maintaining the overhead of an ongoing internal team

One of the pitfalls with content localisation is inconsistency – that is, different stakeholders creating different content for different channels at different times in different languages. Not only does a lack of consistency damage search engine quality scores, it also can lead to customers dropping out of the conversion funnel.

Without good content governance in place, there is a risk of creating haphazard content that feels inconsistent. So, it is important to ensure well-documented processes and workflows, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

## **Localisation is not a one-off project**

Localisation is an ongoing commitment across digital marketing channels. As customer needs and preferences change, brands must respond quickly. Content needs to be refreshed and market relevant. For international brands, this means having a content strategy for each of your localised sites and viewing this as an ongoing commitment.

In addition to content, which is properly localised for each market, a key component of international SEO success is linking to and from local resources. That is what we cover in the next chapter.

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### **Chapter summary – key points:**

- Localisation is important because consumers prefer to transact in their own language – adapting your content to each market will help you connect with audiences and achieve greater impact.
- Localisation goes well beyond translation because it considers cultural and non-textual components as well as linguistic issues.
- Start small – e.g. with a paid search trial in different languages to test demand and build a business case.
- Don't overlook smaller markets where competition may be

reduced.

- Avoid simply translating your English keyword research as literal translations will not always be relevant and may not be the terms that people are searching for in your target country.
- Be selective about which parts of your website to localise.
- Website elements to consider include copy, imagery, page layouts, colours, fonts, check out process and delivery information, sizing, dates and calendars, plus legal information.
- Good project governance – workflows, processes, roles and responsibilities – are essential given the complexity involved.
- Remember – content localisation is not a one-off process – it is an ongoing effort across channels.

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# International Link Building

**R**elevant links to the localised versions of your site from other local websites will strengthen your search visibility. By ensuring your website is linked to and from a wide variety of different websites, you are signalling to search engines that your website is both important and reliable – which means they are more likely to direct customers to you.

However, gaining good quality links is a challenging task, regardless of the size of your website or company. As a result, it can be overlooked. International link building challenges include:

- Limited resource dedicated to local websites once they are localised and live
- Available resource tends to be focused on optimising existing content
- Limited knowledge or understanding of the best way to build links in different markets with different search engines, languages and cultural factors

- Multiple languages in the same country – and for an added complication, sometimes people search in English, in non-English speaking markets

In this chapter, we explore how to approach international link building, looking at three key areas:

1. Hygiene or more basic activity
2. Content-led activity
3. Working with influencers

## **Hygiene activity**

### **Competitive link analysis**

A good place to start is by checking your local competitors' links. Link research and analysis tools such as Ahrefs or SEMrush should do most of the work for you, even if you have limited local resources. By identifying competitor links which you do not have, you can identify possible link opportunities for your own site.

Perhaps you already have an idea of your top competitors in each market. If you don't, then find out which brands are consistently ranking for your non-brand target keywords in each market and start your research from there. Local in-market experts will be able to help identify your key competitors.

### **Submit your website to local directories**

Directories do not require much language skill and are available in every country, so this is also a useful hygiene activity. You can also check your local competitors in the process.

It is important to submit your website to relevant, targeted local directories. Submitting to irrelevant directories could harm visibility.

### **Get into the local news**

Taking your business international means you must have a product or service which is worth shouting about. Use this to your advantage by publishing facts, results or other findings which are relevant to your target market. If you make it to the local news listing, you will rapidly gain authority.

Consider using a reporter liaison service like Help A Reporter to gain news coverage for your brand. Help A Reporter connects journalists seeking expertise to include in their content with sources who have that expertise.

### **Leverage existing marketing activity for link building**

From your existing marketing activities or events, there will be link opportunities which might currently be overlooked. This is a great way to gain quality links naturally. An obvious example might be a fashion brand which previews collections to media and influencers – not only is this a way to generate coverage but there are also link

opportunities to leverage.

If your existing marketing activity is related to a specific product or a line of business, use this as an opportunity to gain links to the specific product page or business category page.

Sometimes, staff involved in existing marketing activities can be unaware of the SEO value of links. Address this by including link building in your corporate marketing best practice or any guidelines you may have, and by providing SEO training for marketing and PR teams. This way, link generation can be incorporated into each relevant marketing project and not treated as the afterthought.

Link building items to include in your marketing best practice guidelines are:

- Use the URL(s) for the most relevant pages within your website, and not just the home page URL
- If the marketing project or the event is held in multiple countries and languages, use the local website and language URL in materials and require it in event contracts
- If the project or the event is featured on other websites, ask them to link to the most relevant page on your website in the local country

## **User experience**

When building international links to your website, you also need to consider user experience. Imagine a Spanish user, reading a Spanish news site and clicking on a link to a company that only services the UK. This does not create a good user experience.

Remember that “international links” are only international to you. They are local to the market you are targeting.

## **Content-led activity**

Once you have mastered the basics of link-building, you can turn your attention to creating new content which will attract links in your target market.

Focus on creating content which is of interest or use to your target market, rather than for the sole purpose of generating links. To create content which resonates, you will need to understand your audience and the local culture in your target market.

Remember that every country is different no matter how close they are to each other geographically. For example, Poland and Germany are geographical neighbours, but the two countries have completely different digital landscapes including types of media and trust in and attitudes towards the media.

Research your audience to find out their likes and dislikes. What media do they consume and how? Which are the most trusted sites? This is where the value of local in-market expertise will pay dividends.

### **Understand what content types will attract the most links**

Different content types and formats will work best in different countries. This means the way you display content is crucial to the



success of any link campaign.

A tool like Buzzsumo can help. It allows you to input topics and see what content surrounding those topics receives the most shares and links. It also shows you how the content is displayed.

For example, let's assume that you are a travel brand targeting the Italian market:

- The first step is to find out the most popular content surrounding the topic 'vacanza' (this means holiday in Italian).
- Buzzsumo allows you to use an advanced search to show only content around the topic 'vacanza' on Italian sites (.it) in the Italian language.

Carrying out first party research and then presenting the findings is a good way to attract links. For example, one of Oban's client's is a leading insurance company – they carried out research on global mobility which contained original data. The research attracted numerous links because it contained unique research.

## **Guest posting**

Guest posting means publishing an article on someone else's website or blog. It is a great way to connect with new audiences and obtain backlinks to your own site. The aim should be to create good quality editorial content which adds value and is not simply a duplicate of content you have published elsewhere. You should avoid keyword stuffing. There is evidence to suggest that long form content generates more social shares and backlinks than

short form. The site on which you are guest posting will probably have their own guidelines about content formats.

### **Build detailed media lists for outreach**

Make sure you are contacting journalists at relevant publications. Tools such as Ahrefs, SEMrush and Moz allow you to input your competitors' sites and see who is linking to them. Use this data to find relevant journalists at those publications and add them to your media list.

Check other similar brands as well as your immediate competitors. For example, consider a holiday site: checking links from travel insurance brands and airlines would be useful too, as the sites linking to them will also be relevant to your brand.

### **Master your outreach**

Outreach is the process of pitching information about your product or service to journalists, bloggers and influencers, for the purpose of obtaining press coverage, brand mentions or backlinks. It is always best to use native language speakers for outreach. Approaching a journalist by email in a different language to their own could trigger their spam folders and is unlikely to be understood.

Once you have built a media list, you should have a list of contacts you plan to target. A useful tool to achieve this is Buzzstream:

- Buzzstream is an outreach tool that allows you to enter your own contacts and email them whilst tracking open rates and responses.

- The tool also allows you to A/B test your emails. For example, if you have 500 contacts you may want to find out which is your strongest approach by sending copy A to 50 people and copy B to another 50 and then measuring the responses.
- If one group is getting more opens and responses than the other, roll the best performing copy out to the rest of the 500 contacts.

Remember, you need to take a personal approach to outreach, so one template may not be enough. Avoid sending bulk emails. Find the contact and work out the best way to get their attention. This could be a phone call, a tweet or sharing news on a common interest. A personalised approach will always deliver better results than sending mass emails.

### Tip

Reaching out to sites which compile lists – for example “Top Ten [Products Services]” can be a good tactic for gaining coverage and links.

### Monitor your results

To measure progress and refine your strategy, gather data at the end of each outreach campaign including:

- Number of people contacted
- Number of links gained
- Volume of traffic delivered
- Number of assisted conversions, social shares etc

Feed the learnings into your next campaign and ensure each new campaign builds upon the last.

### **Don't buy links**

Getting good, valuable links is not easy. Whilst it is still possible to buy links in certain markets, this approach is not advisable and will cause more problems than it solves – not least because you can be penalised heavily by search engines for doing so. (A penalty pushes your website results down the search rankings and takes a lot of time and effort to recover from.) Using local in-market experts to build good quality links involves more time and effort but is the best option in the long run.

Be wary too of services which promise to deliver large volumes of links at low cost. Often these will be low-quality – i.e. gathered from non-local directories, non-local weblogs, forums, and websites that are not relevant. Not only do these offer little value but in some cases, they can be counterproductive if they result in negative SEO impact.

### **What to do if you receive unwanted links**

If your website has unwanted – known as toxic – backlinks, either because of misguided link building efforts in the past, or because of a targeted spam attack – then it is important to identify these and have a plan for removing them. If you do not remove them, you run the risk of hampering search performance and in a worst-case scenario, receiving a penalty from Google or other search engines.

The difference between a good or bad link is the quality of the website from which it comes. Examples of poor-quality links include those from:

- Sites set up solely for SEO links
- Comments on other sites, often irrelevant to the subject matter and posted by spambots – for example, “great content, check out [XYZ here](#)”
- Sites using over-optimised anchor text – that is, exact match keywords
- Sites where the content does not make sense or has been scraped from elsewhere
- Sites based in other markets with no obvious relevance or connection to your own site – e.g. Russian links to a UK based site

A link audit will enable you to determine whether you have spam backlinks and if so, the severity of the problem. Tools such as Moz or Ahrefs will help you to download backlinks and analyse them for quality. Once you have identified which links you want to remove, you can disavow them within Google Search Console. An SEO specialist will be able to guide you.

## **Working with influencers internationally**

Influencer marketing can be a powerful and often – relative to other

marketing methods - affordable tool when launching your brand into new markets. As consumers have become more distrustful of targeted advertisements, influencers offer an alternative and potentially more personal approach to building connections with new brands and products.

### **What makes a good international influencer?**

When looking for a new influencer to market your brand - especially in an overseas market - don't fixate on their follower numbers. Followers can be bought rather than earned and big isn't always best.

Instead look at their ability to persuade people to behave differently and review engagement levels with their posts. Whether they specialise in a niche or have a wide and varied audience, the most important consideration is the strength of their connection with their followers.

For influencer marketing to be successful, the influencer needs to have credibility, reach and the ability to influence consumer behaviour:

- **Credibility:** The extent to which their audience trusts them.
- **Reach:** How many people can the influencer potentially connect with and influence across platforms. (Micro-influencers have a smaller reach but may have better engagement and high credibility with their audience. So, it is worth considering them as part of your influencer strategy.)
- **Selling skills:** A good influencer can persuade their followers of

the benefits of your product or brand. This could simply mean the ability to model clothing for their Instagram feeds, but it could also be their capacity to review and critique your product during a live video session.

Clearly, to connect with their audience an influencer needs to speak that audience's language – which means German influencers for your German market, Polish influencers for your Polish market and so on. It is rare that a single influencer will connect with audiences across markets (unless they are a global celebrity).

### **How to find an influencer abroad**

The best way to find influencers is to build relationships with them. Start by targeting those who are currently posting or broadcasting about your industry in a way that is relevant to your business and international target market. Perhaps you can arrange to meet them at an event.

There are also free and subscription tools you can use to find influencers, looking at social media, blogs and podcasts, so take some time to look around the market. These include:

- **Awario** – great for finding brand advocates and niche influencers
- **Buzzstream** – relationship-building tool which has influencer search built in
- **Buzzsumo** – which helps to identify content trends as well as influencers

- **Followerwonk** – which focuses primarily on Twitter
- **HypeAuditor** – which focuses mainly on YouTube and Instagram
- **Klear** – find influencers by social media platform
- **Vuelio** – UK database of journalists and bloggers

### **Authenticity is key**

An influencer wants to be recognised as a leader in their field, a popular and credible figure in their chosen niche. Their aim is to gain followers and enhance their credibility. As a brand, if you can find ways to support this, then you will be able to forge a successful partnership.

Influencers also like to be the first to break news in their field of expertise, so if you can offer this to them, then you'll be able to develop a working relationship that is mutually beneficial. But 'relationship' is the key word here. Don't pay for a couple of posts in an ad-hoc fashion.

Building genuine relationships with influencers takes time. Plan to start well in advance of an international launch of how you will engage with influencers.

Of course, an integral part of working with influencers is social media – which is what we explore in the next chapter.

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## Chapter summary – key points:

- Relevant links to the localised versions of your site from other local websites will strengthen your search visibility.
- Tools such as Ahrefs or SEMRush will help you to identify competitor links.
- Submitting your website to relevant, targeted local directories is a simple way to generate links.
- Find ways to get in the local news – a tool like Help A Reporter can help.
- Leverage existing marketing activity for link building.
- A tool like Buzzsumo can help you understand what content types work best in each target market.
- Carrying out first party research and then presenting the findings is a good way to attract links.
- Guest posting is still relevant – the key is to create good quality editorial content which adds value and is not simply a duplicate of content you have published elsewhere.
- For outreach, it is best to use a native speaker in the language in which you plan to reach out. A personal approach is best.
- Never buy links. Audit your backlink profile and disavow any toxic links to safeguard your site's SEO visibility.
- Various tools allow you to search for influencers in each market. Working with influencers varies by market so you need to tailor your approach. Authenticity is key.

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# International Paid Search

**I**nternational paid search offers the ability to enter new markets with relatively low upfront costs. It also enables business to uncover low-competition opportunities to drive high-return growth at pace. However, it is essential for businesses entering a new market to adapt for linguistic, cultural and market-specific challenges, rather than simply translating existing paid search campaigns.

## What is paid search?

Paid search is a sub-set of paid media which covers various forms of paid media advertising, including paid social which we cover in Chapter 9.

Paid search is typically keyword-focused advertising, matching keywords to the prospect's search query. Paid search ads are

mainly the text ads which appear on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) in Google or other search engines which are known as PPC or pay-per-click adverts.

Within paid search, a bid is the maximum amount of money an advertiser is willing to pay for each click on an advertisement. Advertisers do not place bids on ads or ad space; they bid on keywords, and whether their ads show when people search for topics related to those keywords, depends on the advertiser's performance in an auction.

Whilst the fundamentals of what makes a successful paid search account remain the same in any market, an international campaign is not simply an extension of an existing local campaign. Each market will have its own digital landscape, competitor set, language, culture, currency, time zone and demographics. This has implications for everything from account structure and ad copy implementation to ongoing optimisation and reporting. In this chapter, we explore six key areas:

1. Market
2. Audience
3. Language
4. Setting up your account
5. Bidding and ongoing optimisation
6. Reporting

# 1. Market

## Which platforms are most relevant?

The first decision is which paid search platforms are relevant for your target audience in your target markets. Remember, it is not just about Google:

- In China, Baidu dominates the market
- In Russia, the market leader is Yandex
- In Japan, Yahoo! Japan retains a significant market share
- Across Eastern Europe, both Yandex and Google are used
- In certain countries, the paid search auction for Google is hyper-competitive and possibly saturated – and you may find that you get a better return from Microsoft Advertising (which provides pay per click advertising on Bing, AOL and Yahoo! search engines.)

## Search Engine Market Share Worldwide August 2020 – July 2021



Source: Statcounter GlobalStats

Research the relevant platforms in your target markets and then decide and prioritise accordingly. By only focusing on Google, you could be missing out. Branching out to other search engines will help you reach a wider audience. Local search engines can sometimes be less competitive and therefore offer a higher ROI.

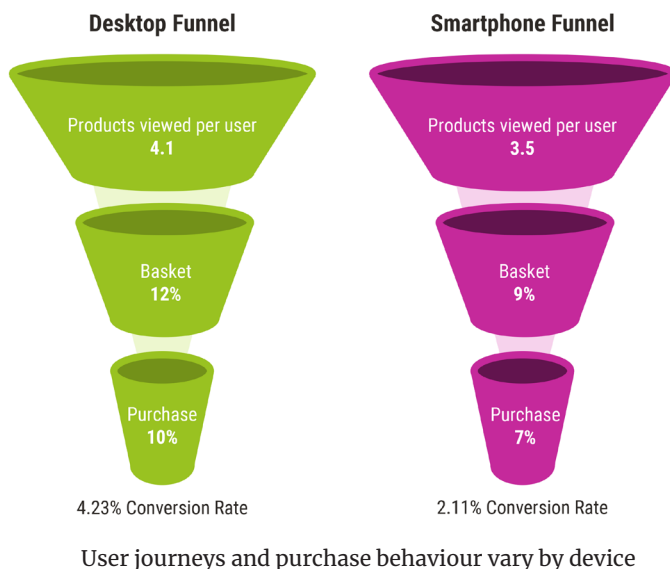
### **Who are your paid search competitors in each market?**

Understanding your paid search competitors in each market is essential. They will vary around the world. In some markets, the paid search landscape might be highly competitive, making the CPC (Cost Per Click) high, whereas in others it might be less competitive.

The paid search platform you are using should be able to provide insights into who your competitors are in each market.

### **Consider device usage in each market**

Device usage can vary considerably by market. This impacts device bid adjustments and device-specific campaign structures and is essential to understanding how your audience searches (since search behaviours and purchase intent vary by device). This information, found in your search query reports, the Keyword Planner, and the related searches on the SERP, is useful for everything from ad copy to keywords.



The rise of voice search on mobile and devices like Google Home or Amazon Echo mean search queries are changing to mimic colloquial speech, and your campaign’s keywords (the keyword itself, the length, and the match type you choose) will need to reflect this.

Customers and prospects typically own multiple devices and don’t use devices in isolation. Customer journeys take place across devices, which means business strategies must do the same. This presents challenges for attribution, which we discuss in Chapter 13.

### Check the availability of Google Shopping in your target markets

Google Shopping is not available in every market, so check availability before formulating your approach. Google allows you

to target most countries with English language product listings and can auto convert your prices (except South Korea). A key consideration is ensuring your products can be shipped to your target market in a reasonable time and that users can easily access shipping cost information.

### **Understand your brand's level of awareness in different countries**

You may have a high level of brand awareness in the UK but in other markets you may be completely new to consumers and therefore need to work harder to distinguish yourself from existing competitors. In the early stages, when your brand awareness is lower compared to your home market, you can expect lower conversion rates, higher cost per acquisition and a lower ROI. Over time, as brand awareness in your new market increases, these metrics will improve.

It is also important to understand how the relevance of your product might vary by market. For example, nicotine pouches are extremely popular in Norway, but not well-known in the UK. An open-air sightseeing bus is a popular concept in Europe and the US, but not a familiar concept in China. How consumers interact with your product will vary by market in terms of search behaviours – it is essential to understand these nuances before devising your paid search approach.

## 2. Audience

Understanding your target audience in each market is key to a successful paid search campaign. It is essential to have a clear understanding of who you are talking to as it can vary substantially by market depending on local customs. For example, in the UK it is normal for expectant parents to buy prams, cots and car seats for their new baby. In China grandparents often buy these larger items for their grandchildren. In Western Europe the cook often leads the decision on a new kitchen or oven and the cook may often be female. In the Middle East, household purchasing decisions tend to be led by men. Consider the working week:

- In Dubai, it is typically Sunday to Thursday
- In the US, it is Monday to Friday
- In Japan, it is not unusual to work late into the night or early hours

Information like this will affect the most profitable days/hours for your B2B campaigns. Some markets have siestas or prayer times that affect ecommerce patterns. Make sure you are aware of the right times of day to reach your audience and set your campaign daypart strategy accordingly.

### **Consider the key dates and milestones for your audience**

Seasonality is different in different markets – most obviously, the seasons are inversed in the northern versus southern hemispheres.



Key holidays, festivals and cultural milestones all vary by market.

*“White Day is a retail milestone in Japan. It is celebrated on 14th March, one month after Valentine’s Day. Traditionally, women give the men in their life a present on Valentine’s Day and White Day is an opportunity for males to give gifts in return. It is called White Day because, originally, the date was promoted by the confectionery industry in Japan, and the intention was that men bought white chocolate or marshmallows as gifts. Since then, the gifts people buy have diversified, but the name has stuck.”*

- Shin, Japan

Knowing this information is important for two reasons:

1. It gives you a way to plan sale events and special offers that resonate with your target audience at the right time
2. You can also shift monthly budgets around to maximise spend or launch tests in the days immediately before and after key dates to elicit the maximum return.

### **Understand how your prospects talk online**

As mobile usage supplants desktops across the globe, search queries are becoming more colloquial. A search query report will help you understand how your audience searches.

### **Be clear about what currency your audience uses**

Unless you offer customers the ability to buy your product using their local currency, bounce rate and conversion rate will suffer. If

you are mentioning price points, currency should reflect the region where the ads are served. The simplest way to do this is to duplicate your existing PPC landing pages and adjust the currencies based on the specific countries you are targeting.

### **Ensure a tailored user experience whichever device is being used**

In a market completely dominated by mobile devices, you would not want to send potential customers to a site not set up for mobile devices as you would immediately lose them. Conversely, in certain markets and sectors, mobile purchases are still not commonplace. In this case, you would make bid adjustments prioritising desktop devices. Again, this requires research.

## **3. Language**

Understanding language is key to understanding your customers and what they want and expect. We think and communicate in our native language and tech giants have understood that for a long time. Voice-enabled assistants have become part of our everyday life (phones, homes, watches, cars, games, instant translation, and more). Businesses aren't just interested in better communication with their audience through these technologies, they are interested in their audience talking to their devices so they can collect linguistic data to build smarter, more engaging products that will drive business growth.

For optimal paid search results, you will need a separate campaign for every dialect that is spoken in your target market. Don't simply take your English keyword list and translate it. Take the time to understand how the audience searches for your product in their market.

*“In French, the verb visiter - to visit - is purely used in a tourism context. That is, it refers to activities like sightseeing when you're on holiday. This contrasts with English, where the term 'visiting' applies to lots of non-tourism situations - for example, you might visit a friend, or pay a visit to your grandma, and so on. Conversely, the word 'tour' is often used in English to refer to tourism - such as a bus or city sightseeing tour. We would never use the word 'tour' in this way in French, since it means going for a walk or loop around town. It doesn't have a tourism connotation at all.”*

**- French LIME, whose insights were instrumental in helping one of Oban's tourism clients localise their keyword strategy for the French market.**

Keyword research should reflect the local culture and audience intent of your target market. It is important to understand which words have the most positive association and are the most clickable in the given context and location. A good way to include what locals look for is to capture their actual search queries and turn those into keywords. Search queries can be captured using most tracking systems and web analytics platforms and added automatically to keep ads on target. Scrutinising your local competitors can also yield useful insights.

People don't trust ads that sound as if they are written by a non-

native speaker. Ideally, your ads will be written by native speakers who have paid search expertise. In addition, the details which signal local understanding such as accents, spelling and whether numbers are separated by commas or full stops can also have an impact on search results.

You can check localisations by benchmarking your ads with competitors to see how the top ranked ads are written. A local in-market expert will be able to guide you on linguistic nuances.

Even if the countries you are targeting do not speak different languages, you may need to use different messaging. In English, for example, there are significant differences in word usage and meaning in the UK, the US, Australia and Canada:

- If you arrange to meet someone on the first floor of a hotel in the UK, they will need to go up one floor from reception. In the US, the first floor is the ground floor or lobby.
- If you join an English motorway you join using the inside lane and then move across to the outside lane near the central reservation to overtake. If you join an American freeway, you join using the outside lane and then move across towards the median so you can overtake using the inside lane.

Don't forget to localise your negative keywords too. In paid search, negative keywords are a type of keyword which prevents your ad being triggered by a certain word or phrase. They help you to focus only on the keywords that matter to your customers and avoid you wasting money if a customer clicks on the ad. An example

would be “Chicago the city” should have a negative keyword of “Chicago the musical”. Often people will have a negative keyword of ‘free’ if what they are offering is paid for.

And remember that for certain B2B business, many business transactions may take place in English even in non-English speaking markets.

*“It is general practice to capitalise the first letter of each word in English paid search campaigns. However, this is a mistake in German, where only nouns are capitalised, and any perceived error diminishes trust in the communication and therefore reduces the response rate. Also, it is not unusual for Germans to search for IT-related products and services using English not German. This is because a lot of IT-related terms originate from English and Germans have got used to using them.”*

**- Ole, Germany**

*“In Italy people often use part Italian and part English search terms. ‘Cheap flights’ directly translates as ‘voli economici’ but ‘voli low cost’ is used far more often.”*

**- Luca, Italy**

## **Ensure you have a fully localised website**

As discussed in Chapter 6, a fully localised website is essential, to avoid customers clicking on an ad and being directed to a website they only partially understand – or worse, don’t understand at all.

Avoid this mistake at all costs. If you want to advertise to the Brazilian market, make sure that you have a Brazilian website –

that is, fully localised in Brazilian Portuguese, with a Brazilian phone number, address and product details. Your customers will only trust you if they can understand you. You can use insights from your paid search campaigns to improve existing website content and create new content.

## **4. Setting up your account**

For effective measurement of ROI for each region or market that you target, you need to keep campaigns meticulously organised. This also helps with setting up highly targeted campaigns.

In paid search, a campaign refers to a capsule for ad groups and is where you set your budget, geo and language targets.

### **Country specific campaigns**

Breaking out separate campaigns by country means that:

- It is easier to track the impact of your campaigns in that specific country.
- Settings are easier to change – for example, you may have an account targeting Canada which has separate campaigns in French and English. Each of these campaigns would need different language and geographic settings.
- If you have dedicated marketing budgets for each country, keeping campaigns separate will enable you to manage a set spend by region.

- For some businesses, dividing campaigns by product or service category while targeting all regions may be a more strategic approach. Geographic bid adjustments enable you to bid a percentage up or down by country (or narrower geographic regions) within the same campaign.
- Product-focused structures are not the opposite of country-focused structures. The two can work together without any problem but to control spend by geo-target, splitting into separate campaigns is advisable.
- Grouping geo-targets may be suitable in low-budget situations or to target low-importance markets. These are often called “rest of the world” clusters and are set up as one campaign to run alongside dedicated campaigns in significant individual countries. However, when grouping countries under a single campaign, a lot of control is lost to the benefit of simpler management. Country-specific performance insights are hard to identify as most data points become aggregated.

### **Language specific campaigns**

In addition to targeting your desired country, you should also set up separate campaigns to reach the speakers of the language you are targeting. Having separate campaigns for different languages is essential and will make it easier to add keywords and ads in that specific language.

Where low competition opportunities exist, you can only exploit that opportunity if your campaigns are split into separate entities

based on language. Otherwise, you would have one keyword bid covering various countries and this won't allow you to reduce a bid based on the knowledge that you can get this click cheaper in a particular market.

Ensure that all elements of your campaign reflect the target user's language. That means writing ad copy in their language, but also making sure that ad extensions are in the correct language as well. For example, an ad with German copy and English sitelinks may make the ad less effective. At the very least, it makes the brand look disorganised.

Similarly, make sure each ad is linking to a landing page in the correct language. Again, don't rely on Google Translate alone. If you are not a native speaker of a language, it is worth the effort and expense to consult with a local in-market expert to ensure that your copy is relevant and accurate. You can easily ruin your brand's reputation in a country with carelessly translated wording. Consistency is key: you want an Italian campaign targeting Italians in Italy to use Italian keywords to trigger Italian ads that lead to an Italian website.

It's useful to note that Google Ads allows for extra characters in ad titles and descriptions that target certain Asian or Eastern European countries. These are called Expanded Text Ads and are helpful for certain languages.

Regardless of the country that you are trying to target, you may also want to keep a campaign targeting English keywords. This means that you would reach English-speaking people living



abroad. This depends on the nature of your business and your online advertising goals.

## **5. Bidding and ongoing optimisation**

Regardless of whether you separate campaigns by country or rely on geographic bid modifiers, bear in mind the factors which can affect bidding across markets:

- The level of competition for certain terms will vary – e.g. in the UK, ten advertisers may be competing for the same term with aggressive bids, whereas in Sweden, there may be only five advertisers with bids at a lower level
- Currency fluctuations can impact bids for each country – e.g. when GBP changes in value, the conversion from the USD will vary, in turn affecting how a bid in USD translates into a bid in GBP
- User intent and volume influence CPCs. High-volume high-intent keywords tend to be more expensive

Don't assume that your ad copy or landing page that did so well in one market will perform as well in a different market. As best practice treat every new market as a new entity. Start testing major differentiators and look at split test results (whether that is landing pages, ad copy, device performance or more) for every market independently. Mirroring efforts in new regions after

previous successes is a sensible launch tactic, but don't be overly tied to those initial strategic decisions. Let the data and results dictate direction.

### **Ad testing**

Character limits are tricky to balance when going from one language to another. Strong communication and coordination between you, your paid search team and local in-market experts is essential during this process. There is simply no avoiding the added time localisation poses, which means tests need to be significant and meaningful.

Responsive search ads (or RSAs) were rolled out by Google in 2018 and provide a more sophisticated alternative to split testing:

- The format allows advertisers to create ads that are combinations of a large pool of headlines (up to 15) and descriptions (up to four).
- Google tests various combinations of the headlines and descriptions against various search queries and user signals (that can't be accessed manually) to optimise creative performance and drive user engagement on the SERP.
- This allows advertisers to enter more auctions as more variety in the copy allows you to be relevant to a wider breadth of search queries and intent levels.

As a result, many advertisers now think in terms of continuous copy optimisation rather than A/B testing.

## **Different time zones**

Keep time zones in mind for setting ad schedules and bid adjustments. If you are targeting a country that has multiple time zones, it is a good idea to create campaigns for each time zone – depending on how organised you want to be. If you are running campaigns in multiple countries don't forget that your ad scheduling is based on the account settings. Make sure to account for these time differences when creating your strategy by time of day.

## **Different currencies**

Be sure to use the local currency when including prices in ad copy and landing pages. Addressing monetary differences is particularly important for brand trust and conversion rates.

When expanding into foreign markets, exchange rates will inevitably come into play. Currency exchange rates fluctuate and small changes across the course of the month will soon add up on large spending accounts. To avoid any confusion around spend or inadvertent overspends, make sure you agree as a team how you are going to handle exchange rates and stay consistent.

Having a common basis for currency is critical for conversion attribution and analysing ROI. Ideally, all currencies will roll up to a master currency that is the most convenient for you. All values should be recalculated daily to avoid false conclusions due to currency fluctuations.

There are tools that enable you to consolidate all currencies

automatically to evaluate ROI market-by-market. Look for the tools that provide the most convenient methods to produce the reports you need.

### **Advertising discounts**

Specific discounts may only be available in specific regions. For instance, a large enterprise business may have separate divisions guiding what offers can be presented where. The same business may offer a 10% discount in the US but have a 20% discount available for the UK. Different pricing schemes may have different appeal across regions as well. Some markets may be highly responsive to discount shopping, while other countries may place a higher emphasis on quality of service.

## **6. Reporting**

Make everyone's life easier with shared reporting methods, campaign structures, and naming conventions. Ensure your team is aligned with this.

### **Monitor your campaign daily**

Both web traffic and bid prices fluctuate daily. It becomes increasingly important to stay on top of what is happening as the campaign unfolds, so you can understand quickly what is and is not working. The faster you can correct flaws, the higher your ROI

becomes.

If resource allows, establishing daily dashboards and having a reporting setup that allows you to identify trends quickly pays dividends.

### **Search query reports**

In addition to the data, there are valuable qualitative insights to be gained via the search query reports. Connecting with the inherent intent behind each search is a much slower process when not completely fluent in the targeted language. Be sure to double-check any major changes with a local in-market expert to ensure no misinterpretation occurs.

### **Geographic and user location reports**

Once you have a decent amount of data to look at, use the geographic and user location reports to track performance at a more granular level.

### **Auction insights**

These are particularly relevant to international campaigns where low-competition opportunities are a key strategic element.

### **Align reporting with internal business practices and business objectives**

Having reports from various markets that do not align can be a real barrier to performance optimisation. Our recommendation is to

agree what you are going to report before a campaign commences and make sure you have full visibility of any discrepancies in the way data is collected or measured by market so you can make alterations before the campaign starts, rather than trying to realign incompatible data at a later stage.

It is essential to have a clear plan to measure progress on your international growth plans (proportion of sales by language/market etc), which we discuss in Chapter 13.

### **Global reports**

If you are using local search engines as well as global ones, make sure that you have integrated reporting to monitor and fine tune your results on a global basis. There are platforms that can provide a consolidated interface to manage campaigns for global and local search engines. It is better to be able to analyse results across search engines and languages dissected as you choose. Enabling data rollups at different levels – locally, regionally and globally can provide the right amount of granularity so account managers at every level can track and fine tune performance.

Make sure your tracking system is flexible enough to give you the data that you need to manage multi-national campaigns effectively.

Always produce reports that will enable you to see consolidated data by different time periods and days of the week to identify patterns that are unique to individual countries.

It is rare that paid search operates as the only active marketing

activity so having a clear approach to top-level multi-channel reporting is key to understanding digital performance. You need a centralised analytics reporting system that puts all channels through the same attribution model and avoids duplication. Google Analytics is the standard. For a broader discussion on measuring digital success, see Chapter 13.

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### **Chapter summary – key points:**

Paid search ads are mainly the text ads which appear on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) in Google or other search engines.

- The first consideration is which paid search platforms are relevant for your target audience in your target markets. Remember, it is not just about Google.
- Understanding your paid search competitors in each market is essential. They will vary around the world.
- In the early stages, when your brand awareness is lower compared to your home market, you can expect lower conversion rates, higher cost per acquisition and a lower ROI. Over time, as brand awareness in your target markets increases, these metrics will improve.
- Consider how your audiences vary by market – linguistic and cultural preferences, key dates in the calendar, structure of

the working week, currency, device usage etc. – and structure your campaign accordingly.

- Carry out local keyword research and make sure your ads sound as though they were written by a native speaker.
- Split campaigns by country and language. Campaign granularity is key to bidding and optimisation success.
- Make everyone's life easier with shared reporting methods, campaign structures, and naming conventions.
- If you are using local search engines as well as global ones, make sure that you have integrated reporting to monitor and fine tune your results globally.



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# International Social Media

**S**ocial media is one of the best ways to embed your brand in each market with top-funnel marketing campaigns to engage with new audiences. A well-executed social media strategy can also help build post-sales brand advocacy and loyalty. Yet social media usage, behaviour and platforms vary significantly around the world, so understanding the international landscape is crucial for successfully building your brand presence in new markets. As every language and region has different tastes, trends and platforms, in the same way you localised your content, you will need to localise your social strategy to be heard above the noise. In this chapter, we explore the key elements you need to consider.

## **Identify which platforms are relevant**

Whilst Facebook is the leading social network in 152 of 167

countries worldwide, you should also consider other regional competitor platforms in your global social media campaigns. There are plenty more platforms to consider beyond Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Some international examples include:

Market	Social media networks
<b>China</b>	<p><b>WeChat</b> – with over 1 billion users, WeChat is a multi-functional platform that combines social media, instant messaging and online payments</p> <p><b>Sina Weibo</b> – microblogging platform</p>
<b>Russia</b>	<p><b>VK</b> is used by 83% of Russians, compared with only 39% who use Facebook. It looks and works similarly to Facebook.</p> <p><b>Odnoklassniki</b> is also like Facebook and used by 55% of Russians. The name translates as “Classmates”</p>
<b>Germany</b>	<p><b>Xing</b> – an alternative to LinkedIn. Most users come from Germany, and the German speaking markets of Austria and Switzerland.</p>
<b>South Korea (and popular around Asia)</b>	<p><b>Line</b> - a globally available messaging social network that enables you to share photos, videos, text messages, audio messages or files. In addition, it allows you to make voice and video calls at any time of the day.</p>
<b>Latin America</b>	<p><b>Taringa!</b> – a social networking site geared toward Hispanic users. Taringa! users create and share thousands of daily posts on general interest topics such as: life hacks, tutorials, recipes, reviews, and art.</p>

Even in markets which you feel you know well; it is easy to overlook some of the alternate platforms:

- Reddit is not discussed as much as Twitter – but has twice as many monthly users as Twitter and Pinterest combined. Reddit is essentially a collection of forums which allows users to upvote content they consider interesting. It is especially useful for socially seeding niche content to specialist audience groups and understanding what is trending.
- Quora is a question-and-answer site – and can be used by brands to build brand and expertise awareness. Marketing expert Neil Patel has answered hundreds of questions on the site, which have been viewed millions of times – helping him to build his profile as a recognised expert. Brands can do the same. There are also paid advertising opportunities, like other online advertising platforms.

## **Understand user behaviour in each market**

Usage patterns vary by market. For example:

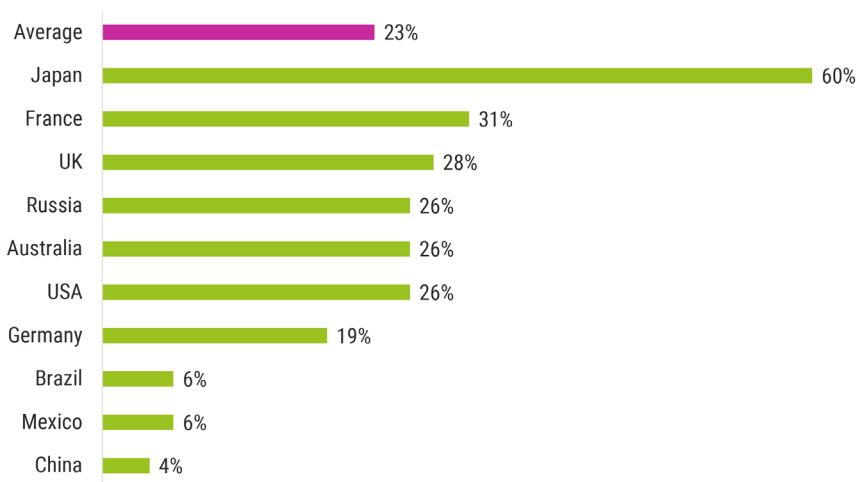
- Chinese social media users are three times more likely than Americans to make purchases based on user-generated content, such as comments – a reflection perhaps, of China being more collectivist than the US
- French users prefer Facebook in the morning but switch to Twitter and Instagram around midday

- There is a general tendency toward private posting in developed markets compared to emerging markets. In emerging markets, people are less protective of their posts

According to usage rates, Mexico, Brazil, and China are the most ‘social’ countries, with a high rate of usage on a wide range of social media platforms.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the Japanese participate in social media the least often.

Incorporating market-specific insights into your social media strategy will boost your visibility and give your content greater impact.

**“I never post anything on social media” - % agreeing in Nov 2018 in each country**



Source: Synthesio, an Ipsos company, 2019

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<sup>2</sup> Synthesio, 2019

*"Japan is the only country in the world where Twitter is more popular than Facebook. (As of 2019, 49% of Japan's internet users were on Twitter, compared to just 34% on Facebook.) It's partly because Twitter allows for more anonymity: there's still a significant chunk of the Japanese population who value privacy and that might explain Twitter's popularity over Facebook: it allows for greater anonymity and users perhaps feel more in control of what they're sharing."*

- Akihiro, Japan

### How many social media accounts does the average person have?



Source: Backlinko, 2020

## Plan your strategy

A key question to determine at the outset is, should you have a social media profile for each market or one centralised global account?

The ability to run multiple profiles will be determined by your budget. A small team with limited resources will find multiple profiles a challenge. But if you have more team members, including local in-market experts, then obviously it will be easier.

You don't need multiple profiles to run a successful global brand. A small team sticking with one profile can try writing target messages by location. On Facebook, by enabling multiple languages, you can publish one post in different languages. This prevents you from having to post the same link three times. Alternatively, you can target your posts to a different audience. In Spanish, you might limit the locations to Spanish-speaking countries.

However, be aware of the limitations of any auto-translate language feature and always use native speakers to check. Auto-translate language features are not the best way to execute an international social media strategy and are no substitute for full campaign localisation by native language speakers in each market.

If you have the resources, think about how you want to divide up your accounts. For example, larger companies like Nike, divide up by country, product, target audience and even campaigns. You can also divide up by language if that is how your company is organised.

Whichever approach you go for, ensuring good governance with clear planning and documentation is essential.

## **Audit existing assets**

Before expanding into new markets on social media, ask a local in-market expert to review your brand's existing assets, such as:

- Company name and logo
- Tagline
- Brand values, guidelines and tone of voice
- Colours

Review your brand vocabulary. Are there any terms you use that could confuse people in other markets? Do you use cultural references that might not work across borders?

Assets which work well in one market may not in another. A local in-market expert will be able to identify any cultural barriers.

## **Edit your strategy**

If you have an existing UK set of social media profiles, you can use these as a starting point for other markets and languages. However, rather than simply replicating them in other markets, you will need to tailor your messages and approach to suit local audiences.

Invest in cultural research prior to launching social media activity internationally. Understanding social media behaviours, expectations, trends, likes and dislikes for users in the country you are targeting helps you create campaigns which resonate and mitigate the risks associated with doing it badly. Social listening is a good way to find out more about your target markets:

- Look at what competitor brands are doing and how their

audience is responding. What can you learn from them?

- There are numerous social listening tools, often aimed at different social media platforms – each have their own strengths and weaknesses. Some of the best known include Buzzsumo, Sprout Social, Hootsuite Insights, Brandwatch and Mention – but do your research to find the right one for your business.

A local in-market expert can guide you on key dates to observe, taboos to avoid, and market approaches to adopt. They can also help you understand local laws. Depending on which country you are operating in, laws may prohibit you from posting certain types of content.

*“You must pick your images carefully in the Middle East. A man staring straight at the camera would not chime well with local culture where it is considered inappropriate for a man to stare at a woman, even via a photograph. People would consider pictures of a cocktail, a bacon sandwich, a woman in shorts, or a family in a hot tub offensive.”*

**- Amir, Dubai**

### **Consumers want to see posts in their native language**

Research varies but it is estimated that around 80% of consumers are more likely to buy a product if it is marketed in their native language. By communicating with your audience in a language they are comfortable with, you are more likely to get engagement.



More than 1 billion of the 1.7 billion users on Facebook speak a language other than English. Facebook carries out billions of its own translations but as stated, the automated service is not entirely to be trusted. A famous example is when Facebook had to apologise to a Palestinian man who was arrested for a post which said “good morning” but its automatic translation services erroneously translated it as “attack them” in Hebrew and “hurt them” in English. The police thought he was planning an attack, but later released him after realising it was a translation error by Facebook.

Avoid mistranslating hashtags, or directly translating them when there is a better or more effective hashtag in the local target language. A local-in market expert can help you avoid linguistic mistakes.

### **Social media governance**

Ensuring effective social media governance is essential, especially if you are running multiple profiles. Questions to consider include:

- How will you structure the team and how will they communicate? What tools will they need?
- How will you keep track of and curate assets from around the world? For example, an asset library? What’s best practice and how will you keep this updated?
- Who will have oversight of the social media team? How will they work with other departments? Who owns the strategy?
- You could consider an enterprise social media tool that blends

with your internal communication and team structure.

For brands with tightly defined brand identities, it can be tempting to try to retain ownership of all social content for all global markets. In this scenario, assets would be localised centrally and then the individual markets would be responsible for posting the translations you provide.

There are drawbacks to this approach – namely, time and money. It also gives you less flexibility to speak to your customers in each market in real time – meaning you lose the connection social media offers.

That does not necessarily mean you should give every market free reign to create their own social content. A mix of both approaches usually offers a happy medium.

Brand-critical content, such as pre-planned ad campaigns or product announcements, can be created and localised from the centre. But to engage your local audience effectively, you will need local in-market experts to create locally relevant content from scratch. You will also need them to localise any non-brand-critical content. To achieve this effectively and consistently, your local community managers need to be familiar with your tone of voice, your product, and local market goals.

If you already have engagement guidelines, check they are relevant for your international markets and adapt them if necessary. Include rules about how and when to respond (with approved terms), and when to escalate. Then, trust your local

social management resources to create real-time content in their language that is relevant to the local conversation and engages customers.

Overall, this kind of ‘global-local’ approach lends greater authenticity to your social media content and more flexibility to your social media strategy. This allows you to be more responsive to the needs of each market. As you comment on market-specific events, customers will feel closer to your brand. At the same time, you will get across your key messaging consistently and on brand.

### **Schedule in local time zones and message locally**

You will need to target your local audience at the right time. If you are operating with a single account, add in local times to your post schedule.

### **Use local news hooks**

The biggest advantage of managing a campaign in the same time zone as your audience is that you can keep track of news as it happens. Any local breaking news has the chance to become global. If you are tracking news as it breaks, your other accounts have more time to get ahead of the news story, or alternatively, pause activity if required.

### **Keep up with key holiday and milestones**

Plan around international key dates and festivals. For example, the Chinese New Year is the biggest event in the Chinese calendar

with a week's national holiday. There are huge opportunities for luxury and travel brands. Christmas is celebrated differently – with Christmas Eve the key day for festivities in some markets and Boxing Day not existing in many others. Oban produces an annual ecommerce and travel calendar highlighting key opportunities for advertisers. It is worth planning all the key dates for different markets in your calendar so you don't miss any significant opportunities.

Holidays are also a major consideration for global brands. For example, wishing a 'Happy Mother's Day!' from your global account might not make sense if the audience is not celebrating it on the same day. A local sporting event might force a reschedule in one account's posts while a large event like the World Cup would impact multiple accounts.

### **Use local in-market expertise to guide your strategy**

Customers have different tastes across markets and your global social media strategy will need to take this into account.

- Beautiful pictures are less likely to win over German customers than quotes, links and data.
- In Japan, YouTube is the most popular social media platform, so video content will likely resonate with your customers.
- Chinese social media users want personalised, immediate communication with brands.
- In the UAE, content is regulated, so you will need to make sure you are respectful of differing cultural values.

Work with a local in-market expert to get the insights you need. Then, let the data guide your global social media strategy.

### **You may not need to localise social content for every market**

Remember: you may not need to localise your social content for certain markets. For example, it is not uncommon for German consumers to follow a brand's English account. Depending on the competitive landscape for your product, you could potentially communicate with your German and other English-proficient audiences directly in English as a first step. As your global social presence matures, however, you will need to localise your social content to build your community.

### **Check in on analytics and strategy**

Your analytics data should inform your strategy, both on an individual account level and a global level. Maybe Snapchat was not as strong as you expected it would be in the UAE. Noting how your audience is engaging with your social accounts will let you make an informed and strategic decisions.

## **Paid social**

With organic reach on social media declining in recent years, paid social is a good way to reach audiences, particularly for content promotion.

## **Audiences**

Define the audience at the outset of any paid social activity:

- What platforms are they using and for what purpose?
- Where are they likely to be when they engage?
- What other media do they consume?

This kind of data will help inform your creative development as well as where and when to target your desired audience. The major social platforms now give you the tools and means to do this through website retargeting and customer/matched/tailored targeting (using data collected from your customers via channels such as email and mobile).

## **Campaign purpose**

Define your campaign objectives – for example, raising brand awareness or driving direct response. This will impact your campaign structure, as well as your creative, in addition to your reporting and measurement approach.

For your campaign to be effective, your ads need to stand out from the rest, with a clearly defined message in the right format and context.

## **Ad formats**

These vary from platform to platform and are occasionally updated if you work with an agency, they should be able to advise on what formats are right for your campaign. Basic ad types include:

Objective	Ad types	Bid type
<b>Reach</b>	Sponsored posts/promoted posts	CPM - Cost per thousand (impressions)
<b>Video views</b>	Sponsored posts/promoted posts	CPM - Cost per thousand (impressions) CPV - Cost per video view
<b>Driving traffic</b>	Link ads	CPC - Cost per click CPM - Cost per thousand (impressions)
<b>Awareness</b>	Sponsored posts/promoted posts, suggested video	CPM
<b>Engagement</b>	Sponsored posts/promoted posts, video views	CPE - Cost per engagement CPV - Cost per video
<b>App downloads</b>	App ads	CPI - Cost per install
<b>Lead generation</b>	Lead gen ads (sign up etc.)	CPA - Cost per acquisition
<b>Store visits</b>	Promoted posts/sponsored posts	CPM - Cost per thousand (impressions)
<b>Sales</b>	Links ads, dynamic product ads	CPA or CPS - Cost per acquisition or Cost per sale

## Targeting

Some of the paid social targeting methods include:

- 1. Demographic:** information such as age or gender.
- 2. Location:** where your customers live.
- 3. Interests:** this can range from hobbies that they have listed to

pages that they've liked or ads they've previously clicked.

4. **Behaviours:** based on the network's data or third-party data – advertisers can target customers on device usage, purchase behaviour and more.
5. **Custom audiences:** you can use network tools to upload your external customer database to find specific customers and target them on the social network of your choice (this will only work if the information you have on them matches the data the network also has, e.g. email address, phone number)
6. **Friend:** customers can be targeted based on their friends' social activity. The aim of this option is to use social proof as leverage – '[your friend] likes this page'. This tends to elicit more action than an entirely cold ad.
7. **Lookalike audiences:** platform tools can allow you to find and target customers like your own, by building a lookalike audience from page likes, customer lists or website visitors.
8. **Remarketing:** some social platforms allow marketers to embed a pixel on their site to monitor visitor behaviour and retarget them – an example of this includes serving dynamic product ads, which are displayed to potential customers after they've viewed a particular product.

## **Bidding strategy**

All ad buying on social media platforms work on an auction model, which means you need a bidding strategy in place.

A bidding strategy helps ensure you don't end up spending too



much – thus decreasing the ROI of your ads – or spending too little – to the detriment of your campaign’s efficacy.

Spend is just one factor that plays a part in the overall success of an ad. For example, alongside the monetary value bid for a ‘required action’ (e.g. website click), Facebook also looks at something called an estimated action rate. This is a representation of how likely Facebook thinks one of its users will take the action outlined in your initial bid – is your ad likely to invoke the desired action and is it relevant to someone’s interests?

Facebook bases the estimate on the historical actions of your desired audience as well as your previous performance data. This ties into another factor to think about when bidding – ad quality and relevance score. This is Facebook’s measure of how they perceive your ad. If your ad receives negative feedback (e.g. people marking it as spam), this will affect your score negatively and consequently, the likelihood of your ad appearing in front of your target audience. On the contrary, if someone takes the action that you’ve intended when you initially bid, this will boost your score positively and improve overall ad efficacy. Other platforms around the world will vary – an agency can guide you on the optimal approach to take.

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## **Chapter summary – key points:**

- Whilst Facebook is the leading social network in 152 of 167

countries, you should also consider other regional competitor platforms in your global social media campaigns. There are plenty more platforms to consider beyond Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

- Social media usage patterns vary by market. Incorporating market-specific insights into your social media strategy will boost your visibility and give your content greater impact.
- A key question to determine at the outset is, should you have a profile for each market or one centralised global account?
- The ability to run multiple profiles will be determined by your budget. A small team with limited resources will find multiple profiles a challenge. But if you have more team members, including local in-market experts, then obviously it will be easier.
- If you have the resources, think about how you want to divide up your accounts. For example, larger companies like Nike divide up by country, product, target audiences and even campaigns. You can also divide up by language if that is how your company is organised.
- You will need to tailor your messages and approach to suit local audiences – key dates, user behaviours, time zones, local news hooks etc – all vary.
- With organic reach on social media declining in recent years, paid social is a good way to reach audiences, particularly for content promotion.

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# Cultural User Experience

**U**ser experience is all about empathy for the user, and understanding cultural differences is central to this. If your website – or product or service – does not adapt to cultural differences, it will not truly meet users' expectations or create business value.

Providing the best possible website experience for users in different markets goes beyond localising the language, switching currencies and updating a few images to represent the local culture. The road to successful cross-cultural design with great UX is more complex.

## **Hofstede's theory of Cultural Dimensions**

In Chapter 3, we spoke about Geert Hofstede's influential theory of Cultural Dimensions. The six dimensions were:

1. Individualism versus collectivism
2. Uncertainty avoidance
3. Power distance index
4. Masculinity versus femininity
5. Long term orientation
6. Indulgence versus self-restraint



Hofstede's theory gives us a framework for understanding how user experiences can be tailored for different cultures. For example:

### **Individualism versus collectivism**

Individualistic societies emphasise individuals' independence, autonomy, personal goals, and freedom of choice. For collectivist cultures, relationships with others, obedience to authority, group goals, community and harmony in relationships are more important.

Websites in individualistic cultures may include:

- More personalisation options
- Imagery focusing on individuals

Websites in collectivistic societies may include:

- Imagery representing groups, particularly families
- Information such as company history (since the focus is on collective achievement)
- A "most popular" category showing what other people have bought

*"Japan is considered collectivist by Western standards, yet somewhat individualistic by Asian standards. It is important to Japanese people to know what other people think, feel and do, and be guided by that. So showing customers what other people have bought or recommended is especially relevant in Japan."*

- Shin, Japan

For example, the American landing page for a search engine is typically minimal and clean with one clear CTA (call-to-action), whereas the Chinese version would have more content—banners, news, and ads that fill the available space. This is not due to stylistic trends but to the vastly different individualism scores of each country. America is a highly individualistic society, and US users typically know what it is they want to search for. In contrast, China is more of a collective society, where citizens prefer to read what others are reading.

### **Uncertainty avoidance**

This dimension refers to the degree of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Cultures with low uncertainty avoidance have fewer rules and are more pragmatic. Cultures with high uncertainty are more emotional and typically have more rules, laws and regulations to protect themselves from risks.

High Uncertainty Avoidance cultures favour clear, no-nonsense UX designs:

- Focus is on clarity and robustness
- Ambiguities are discouraged
- Clear and consistent messaging across all channels
- Practical content with appropriate information and cues which signal credibility

By contrast, low Uncertainty Avoidance cultures favour:

- Multiple options, unique buttons and unconventional layouts

- More general and symbolic messages with less detail
- Abstract imagery
- Small but immediate gratification in every action taken by the user.

In Germany, you are likely to see good examples of high uncertainty avoidant websites, with clear messaging and clean, distinct choices.

### **Power distance**

Power Distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of organisations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. High Power Distance countries are more autocratic and lower Power Distance countries are more democratic. Access to information is restricted to those who are low on the power scale in a culture with high Power Distance.

For websites in higher Power Distance cultures, this may mean that:

- More importance is placed on user roles and permissions
- There are limits on the information that everyone gets to see
- More emphasis on highly structured information and system security
- Imagery might focus on authority figures, or perhaps landmark buildings

In lower Power Distance cultures:

- A more informal flow of information designed to be explored may be appropriate
- Detailed information to allow people to make their own choices and decisions may feature
- Images may portray a diverse array of people – men, women, children

Example: a beverage brand's website in Ireland showing images of diverse people would be a great example of low distance, whereas a government website in Kuwait with highly structured, secure information would symbolise high distance.

### **Masculinity versus femininity**

In this dimension, “masculinity” is defined as a societal preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. By contrast, “femininity” is defined as a preference for co-operation, modesty, caring for the weak and focus on quality of life.

Websites in highly masculine societies might:

- Contain imagery which emphasises competition and success
- Offer users tangible rewards – whether monetary or conceptual
- Emphasise highly technical information

Websites in cultures which value a low level of masculinity might:



- Offer users a chance to donate a nominal sum to charity during checkout
- Contain imagery which favours relationships
- Have multiple options and make connections between elements

An example of masculine culture could be a fast-food brand's Austrian site showing successful achievers proudly. On the other hand, the same fast-food brand's site in Denmark maybe be more feminine with softer hues and an emphasis on social welfare and care.

### **Long term orientation**

This refers to the relative ease with which a culture adopts social and normative changes. It is about how a society looks at its past and keeps traditions alive, as opposed to cultures which are more pragmatic and have behaviours which encourage future rewards.

Website in cultures with high Long-term Orientation may show:

- Images and colours that are related to the culture's past (e.g. the pyramids in Egypt)
- Information for looks far into the future (e.g. plans for the next 10 years)

Websites in countries scoring low in Long-term Orientation might show:

- Expectation of instant fulfilment and short financial gain

## Applying Hofstede's theory

Hofstede's theory provides a preliminary understanding of what to consider when designing for new markets and identifies areas of potential opportunity. It allows you to generate hypotheses and research questions to test. That said, it has some limitations:

- Boundaries of cultures are subjective and do not always map neatly to geographical lines
- The theory views people in a country as a whole, without considering the subcultures and regional differences within it
- Culture evolves over time. Changes are difficult to identify from the framework
- There are drawbacks to designing for the average because every individual is different
- Some of the terminology – particularly ideas around masculinity and femininity – is considered dated by today's standards

Therefore, it is important to incorporate user research methods as well to emphasise individual diversity.

In addition to Hofstede's theory, here are some other cross-cultural UX tips and advice to bear in mind:

### Research local user interface patterns

In certain cultures, specific design patterns are accepted as universal. For example, with the help of Facebook and Gmail User

Interface designs, the hamburger and kebab menus have become the common choice for revealing navigation links and further options.



Hamburger icon and Kebab icon

However, outside of the West, users may be confused by them. The symbols do not universally appear in User Interface designs around the world. Research by Dan Grover, former product manager at Tencent, showed that in the most popular Chinese apps (including WeChat and Weibo) hamburger or kebab symbols do not exist.

Instead, a “discover” button, usually represented by a compass icon, is used for the not-quite-essential extras. This is because Chinese users see apps as an ecosystem rather than a single functioning product. To Chinese users, the action of “discovering” sparks intrigue and curiosity—which is more valuable than a straightforward “here-are-more-options” functionality.

The same thing was true in India when Amazon launched its services there. In late 2018, Amazon could not understand why customers in India were not using the search feature for products to buy on the homepage of the mobile site. It turned out that the magnifying glass icon was not something people associated with

search in India. It made no sense in the Indian context as people thought the icon represented a ping-pong paddle. As a solution, Amazon kept the magnifying glass but added a search field with a Hindi text label to let people know this was where they could initiate a search.

Customers and prospects from different cultures often react to design patterns in unexpected ways, or perhaps are used to alternative ways of conveying meaning or action. Design teams should conduct a competitor and local product analysis to understand the local User Interface patterns in that market.

Referencing user interface patterns rooted in local culture and language is far more effective than introducing a pattern known in the West and expecting users in the East to adapt.

### **Conduct user research**

User research can give you insights which complement quantitative data – such as users’ needs, expectations, and explanation of their behaviours. These are things that you cannot get by looking at conversion rates alone.

The best way to conduct user research is in-person, but sometimes this is not possible with the given time, budget or location. As an alternative, there are plenty of tools to conduct remote user research. Choose a tool which works best for your target audience. For example:

- Netizen Testing based in Singapore, recruits users from Singapore and Southeast Asia

- Userzoom based in the UK has test users in Germany, Spain and other countries
- UXTesting has testers in the US, Canada, Taiwan, and India
- UserTesting and a few others are based in the US

### **Use both quantitative and qualitative data to understand users**

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods can provide insight into local users' behaviour. For example:

- Usability tests
- Interviews
- Analytics data
- Heatmaps
- User session recordings
- Academic research – e.g. credible white papers, user behaviour reports and publications

These research methods will reveal nuances that are not always obvious—and that can improve the user experience and ROI. With data, UX designers can understand how users are using the websites they design, and the impact of their designs – including (for example) where users dropped off and where they clicked.

Testing helps you to understand which elements of your website design are affecting your success. You can run A/B tests on different aspects of your digital marketing campaigns – different messages, imagery, layouts and more – to see to see which elements provide better results.

When you perform an A/B test, you should only choose one element to test. For example, if you are testing a landing page, you might start with the headline. Change the copy for the headline in one test version and keep the other the same. Then, test each one to see which performs the best. If you test multiple changes at once and one page outperforms the other, you won't know why.

### **Don't assume that countries which are near each other, are like each other**

It is easy to assume that two neighbouring countries are culturally similar—and in many ways that is true. But when it comes to cross-cultural user experience design, understanding the differences between cultures (even if they are geographically close) is essential in creating a high performing website.

For example, 'Europe' is often treated by website designers as a single entity when in reality, each country has its own UX preferences and norms. France and the UK are close neighbours – but French websites typically show prominent pricing, large photos and clear calls to action, whereas UK websites tend to be more minimalist. By contrast, India and Mexico are geographically far apart but have surprisingly similar UX preferences.

Rather than focusing on geography, a cultural framework like Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions can be a better way to group countries – e.g. into individualist versus collectivist countries, and so on. Alternatively understanding the difference between high context and low context cultures, and grouping

markets accordingly, is another worthwhile approach.

### **Identify the market's primary devices and connectivity**

If the target audience for a product is wealthy tech employees based in California, it may be reasonable to assume that most users have the latest iPhone—making it easy to design for that device. However, when designing for a new market, it is important to avoid assumptions and start with research.

When entering a new market, make sure you understand the device usage in that market, specifically for your sector and your target audience. For example, some target audiences might not use smart phones, or they may have low connection speeds – which will affect design. Designs need to be formatted for the right screen sizes and load in a way that suits the target market's minimum connection speeds. By identifying a market's primary devices and connectivity stats, a design team can produce an effective design for its intended environment.

### **Localise marketing copy**

Whilst it is free to use Google Translate, as discussed in Chapter 6 and elsewhere, there is a significant difference between translated copy and localised copy. It is always best to use a local in-market expert to understand the linguistic nuances of your target market. Relying on machine translations risks making businesses and products appear careless or even questionable.

Even within languages, there are big differences in how they

are used across markets. There are significant differences in how English is used in the UK compared to other markets where English is widely spoken. For example:

- Britons say ‘sweets’
- Americans say ‘candy’
- Australians say ‘lollies’
- What might be called a “vacation rental” in the US might be called a “holiday let” in the UK
- In the UK and the US, the phrase “buy one get one free” is expressed as BOGOF. In the Philippines, the equivalent expression amongst English speakers is “buy one, take one” so the acronym BOGOF would not make sense

### **ROI of localisation and cross-cultural user experience design**

Localisation and adapting websites and products to a local culture may seem like a lot of effort. But the business value of localisation is surprisingly high.

Agencies report their clients see a 20% increase in conversions when website landing pages and paid ads are localised. That percentage increases to 70% when entire websites are localised.

As global brands like Netflix, Starbucks, and IKEA invest in localisation by employing specialised teams all over the world, there is no doubt that creating a cross-cultural design makes international users more likely to adopt and stay loyal to localised products.

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## Chapter summary – key points:

- Hofstede's theory of Cultural Dimensions is a useful framework for UX designers when tailoring designs for different cultures.
- Research user local interface patterns in your target markets – cultures respond differently to design patterns which will affect your conversion rates.
- User research provides useful insights which complement quantitative data.
- Usability tests, interviews, analytics data, heatmaps, user session recording and academic research – all help you to build up a picture of the optimal UX for your target markets.
- Don't assume that countries which are near each other are like each other – that is not always the case. Conversely, countries which are geographically far apart can exhibit UX similarities.
- Device usage and internet speeds vary by market around the world – your UX needs to reflect the reality in your target markets.
- Localisation and adapting websites and products to a local culture can incur substantial effort. But the return on investment from sensitive localisation is surprisingly high.

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# International Payment Methods

It is easy to assume that credit cards are the main way to accept payment for online purchases – but that is not true. There are numerous payment methods available around the world – it is estimated that, globally, there are about 170 ways to pay online, with different countries and regions having clear preferences. Whilst some payment methods are well known and widely used, mostly it is a jigsaw puzzle of localised payment types – which presents a marketing challenge.

Payment methods are key to international ecommerce success. You need to cater to the payment preferences in your target market. If shoppers in your target markets do not see the local payment option they prefer on your site, you increase the risk of cart abandonment, and you will have lost potential sales. Similarly, if you rely on international customers, allowing them to pay using their preferred method when travelling or shopping across borders, maximises your chance of a sale.

- Advances in technology have made customers open to different payment methods and have also raised their expectations from merchants. Customers expect a glitch-free user-interface that will deliver a smooth, efficient payment process. About two thirds of the world's population can access the internet on their mobile devices, which is driving mobile payments.
- The number of fintech companies continues to rise. They offer new, non-traditional ways to pay including e-wallets, integrated POS systems and in-app payments. There are more and more non-banking players in this space.

In this chapter, we explore the main payment methods and outline where in the world they are popular.

## **Payment methods around the world**

### **Bank transfers**

Bank transfers allow customers to transfer money to a merchant's bank account to complete a purchase. With the rise of online banking, several online bank transfer options are now available. These allow the customer to start the transfer during the payment process in a merchant's site, while automating the payment matching for a merchant. This means that orders are completed faster.

Examples around the world:

- **iDEAL:** By far the most popular online payment method in the Netherlands, iDEAL was formed by a group of Dutch banks to enable bank account-based payments for online transactions.
- **SoFort:** This allows fast and direct money transfers between banks in many European countries. This is one of the most popular ways of transferring money in Germany, and is also used in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.
- **Giropay:** Germany's most-used payment method.
- **eNets:** A popular real-time bank transfer payment in Singapore.

### **Facts:**

- The Bundesbank has issued more physical euro notes than all the other eurozone central banks combined
- The number of card terminals in Germany is proportionally less than other European countries

*"Traditionally, Germans love cash and have an aversion to cards, which can sometimes surprise overseas visitors. Only about 25% of Germans have a credit card, which is far less than surrounding countries. It is partly to do with a cultural aversion to debt, and a preference for tangible payment, plus I suppose our natural thriftiness! It will be interesting to see how the effect of coronavirus affects this preference in the years ahead."*

**- Ole, Germany**

### **Direct debits**

Direct debits are often used for regular payments and allow merchants to collect payments directly from their customers' bank accounts. There are no card networks involved in this form of

payment as all communication happens between banks.

The advantage is that no input is required from the customer to make the payment so there are fewer missed payments and cheaper collection costs. It also suits businesses where the regular amount to be collected varies.

Examples around the world:

- **SEPA:** SEPA stands for Single European Payments Area and is a payment-integration initiative of the European Union. This is a Europe-wide direct debit system and as of 2020, there were 36 members in SEPA – all member states of the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and the UK.
- **Automated Clearing House (ACH):** This is an electronic network for financial transactions in the US. ACH processes large volumes of credit and debit transactions in batches.

### **Local credit card schemes**

Many countries have their own local credit card schemes, which are often an alternative to the main credit card brands.

Examples around the world:

- **Elo:** A domestic card brand in Brazil. The Elo brand supports credit, debit, and prepaid card transactions.
- **CartaSi:** The most frequently used credit card in Italy.
- **Dankort:** The national debit and credit card and preferred means of payment in Denmark.
- **CB or Carte Bancaire (formerly known as Carte Bleue):** The leading debit card payment system in France (also known as

Visa Debit).

- Tarjeta Naranja, Nativa, Tarjeta Shopping, Cabal, Cencosud, Argencard: These are all payment cards local to Argentina.
- UnionPay: Also known as China UnionPay and headquartered in Shanghai. This is the largest card payment system in the world offering online and mobile payments. Some UnionPay credit cards are also affiliated with American Express, MasterCard, or Visa, and so can be used beyond China (as an American Express, MasterCard, or Visa).

## **eWallets**

eWallets are a type of electronic card used for transactions made online through a computer or smartphone. An eWallet needs to be linked with the individual's bank account to make payments.

Examples around the world:

- PayPal: One of the largest internet payment services in the world, PayPal currently operates in over 200 markets and has over 300 million active registered users.
- Google Pay: Formerly known as Android Pay, Google Pay lets people make payments via their mobile phone and works with hundreds of thousands of contactless payment points worldwide.
- Alipay: China's version of the eWallet.
- Apple Pay: Currently the leading eWallet in the US and Canada.
- WePay: US based eWallet providing an integrated and customisable payment solution through its APIs to platform

businesses such as crowdfunding sites, marketplaces and small business software companies.

- Masterpass: Digital wallet by Mastercard.
- Web Money: Primarily used in Russia and Ukraine.
- Skrill: Formerly known as MoneyBookers, popular in Europe.

### **Integrated payment solutions**

Integrated payment solutions are tools that your business can use to integrate accounting, CRM (customer relationship management), and other business applications with payment processing.

Examples around the world:

- Braintree: A division of PayPal which specialises in mobile and web payment systems for ecommerce companies. Provides clients with a merchant account and a payment gateway.
- Adyen: A Dutch payment company that allows businesses to accept e-commerce, mobile, and point-of-sale payments. Adyen has more than 3,500 customers and is listed on the stock exchange Euronext.
- Worldpay: US based payment and processing provider. The company's financial products include credit cards, ATM processing, merchant services, rewards and fraud prevention. Additionally, Worldpay supports financial institutions with pre-paid and gift cards, card personalisation, debit PIN processing and cardholder eServices.
- 2checkout: Online payment platform catering to global payments, digital commerce, subscription billings, partner

sales and risk management and compliance.

- Stripe: US based company which primarily offers payment processing software and application programming interfaces for e-commerce websites and mobile applications. Shopify Payments are partnered with Stripe.
- Paymill: European focused – the leading online payments provider in Germany, Austria and Switzerland

### **Postpay**

Postpay payment options allows customers to pay for a product or service that they purchase online later at an affiliated outlet or store. Due to the delay between the initial transaction and the payment, this payment method is not suitable for all online purchases. However, it does have the benefit of offering a cash-based payment option for your online customers.

Examples around the world:

- Konbini (“convenience store” in Japanese): Enables a customer to order goods and services online, and to pay for them over the counter in a convenience store. Konbini uses a unique reference number to identify the transaction. Customers use this reference to print a voucher which they then settle at the store.
- Boletto Bancário: One of the most prominent payment methods in Brazil. The word ‘boletto’ means ‘ticket’. A customer can print a payment slip and pay at ATMs, branch facilities of any Bank, Post Office, Lottery Agent and some supermarkets.



Alternatively, a customer can pay using a bank transfer from their online bank.

### **Cash on delivery**

Cash on delivery is where shoppers pay for a physical product in person when it is delivered. This is sometimes known as Collect on Delivery to reflect the fact that payments might not be by cash. If the COD buyer fails to make the payment, the product is returned to the seller.

- Cash on delivery still accounts for 60% of payments in India. In India, the system was designed to attract mainly rural consumers who do not have access to digital payment systems — such as online banking and credit cards.
- It is the most dominant payment method in Russia, though its share is declining.
- It is also popular in the Middle East, where it has played a significant role in fuelling ecommerce.

*“At the end of 2016, the Indian government rolled out its policy of demonetisation. This policy demonetised old bank notes and introduced new ones, the intention being to crack down on the amount of counterfeit currency in circulation and to reduce the heavy reliance on cash. There were significant cash shortages in the months which followed, which had the effect of rapidly accelerating electronic payments.”*

**- Amit, India**

## **Pre-paid vouchers**

Prepaid solutions allow customers to make purchases in relative anonymity. While it is like a cash payment for the merchant, the payment is real-time and guaranteed. Prepaid solutions come in the form of a card and/or paper voucher with a unique code. The customer purchases a prepaid card or voucher at a retail outlet or online.

- **Boleto Bancario:** A critical payment type to capture Brazilian shoppers because it accounts for 25% of all online transactions.
- **Paysafe:** A prepaid card used in several European countries.

## **BNPL (Buy Now Pay Later)**

Buy Now, Pay Later, is one of the fastest-growing online payment methods in the world. It allows customers to make online purchases and pay them off over time in instalments. Customers must pay off the principal amount of the purchase plus interest and some BNPL providers perform credit checks. The customer profile varies from market to market so make sure you know your local market profile. Currently, BNPL purchases are focussed on cheaper retail items but there is growing appetite to buy expensive items using this payment method. Examples include:

- **Klarna:** The market leader in Europe, Klarna charges no interest or late fees.
- **Laybuy:** Launched in New Zealand in 2017.
- **ClearPay:** The UK name for Afterpay, a BNPL brand founded in Sydney in 2016.

- PayPal Credit: Formerly known as Bill Me Later, this is the BNPL service from PayPal.
- Hoolah: Singapore-based fintech which allows customers to pay for items in three equal instalments over 3 months with 0% interest.
- Atome: Singapore-based BNPL provider.
- Rely: Another Singapore-based brand.
- Tabby: Dubai-based start-up launched in 2019.
- Postpay: Dubai-based start-up launched in 2020.

## **Credit cards are still relevant**

Card usage varies significantly from one country to the next, with lower usage in Germany, Japan, and Mexico and higher use in Australia, Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the UK.

- Union Pay: A Chinese bank card that dominates China's card market and is the largest card payments system in the world.
- Visa: The largest card brand after Union Pay, Visa holds the primary market share of purchase volume in the Middle East and Africa, Europe, and Latin America.
- Mastercard: The second largest credit card network in the US, Mastercard processes transactions in more than 210 countries.
- American Express: One of the preferred methods of payment in the US, Mexico, Colombia and Chile. Amex is geared towards high-income cardholders and corporates and is active in more

than 130 countries.

- Discover: Along with Diners Club, Discover is one of the most popular payment methods in Brazil.
- Diners Club International: It is accepted in more than 185 countries and is among the preferred methods of payment in Chile, Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina.
- JCB: An international payment brand based in Japan. There are more than 105 million JCB consumers; the card is accepted in 190 countries.

## **Mobile needs to be at the heart of your payments strategy**

As mobile commerce takes a greater share of ecommerce, online retailers need to ensure that their payment methods are also mobile-friendly. One way to do this can be to develop a custom mobile app, which can also serve as an extra distribution channel with a high reach potential. A successful mobile user experience involves a limited amount of scrolling, number of pages and steps while shopping, especially during the payment process.

Online retailers can use payment platforms like Stripe or integrate solutions like Apple Pay, Android Pay or Alipay, to offer one-click buying options and to simplify the process or reduce transaction fees for customers thereby increasing conversions.

Global online merchants should consider localising all the

elements that go into their payment pages, including details such as auto fill forms, appropriate keyboards, branded URLs, the colour of the pages and buttons, including whether the payment button says “pay” or “checkout”.

All these payment methods are meant to achieve one goal: creating a seamless shopping experience that contributes to a successful international expansion strategy.

*“Mobile payments are especially important in China as most shoppers in larger Chinese cities are used to buying on their mobiles and via apps.”*

**- Li, China**

## **Attitudes to fraud vary around the world**

While consumers are increasingly used to online shopping, the fear of fraud still exists for many, especially for overseas purchases. Online retailers need to address this fear and instil a sense of trust in shoppers without damaging the shopping experience. As online shopping is increasing, the risk of online fraud is also growing and affecting consumer behaviour. Recent reports have shown that 62% of consumers who did not buy from international online shops said that they were hindered by the fear of fraud, such as stolen credit card details or misused personal data.

Expectations towards security can be quite different across countries. For example, in the UK, 40% of smartphone users do

not purchase through the device because they do not find it secure. This is less prevalent in Germany and Belgium, where only 25% feel this way. Retailers must clearly understand how customers want to shop online and what type of security they expect.

Online retailers must adapt their anti-fraud strategy to every market based on the risks, the steps in the payment process and the type of payment methods preferred.

### **You can convey trust signals to your audience by:**

- Ensuring content is properly localised – i.e. avoiding mistakes which undermine brand trust and familiarity
- Showing positive reviews and testimonials from real customers
- Showing the logos of any awards or professional memberships
- Having transparent information about returns (if applicable)
- Adhering to local norms and regulations – for example, in Germany, ensuring you have an impressum page (i.e. a page which discloses who the publisher of the website is)

## **Understand payment regulations in your target markets**

Always make sure you know the regulations behind accepting payments and charging customers in your target markets. For example, if customers in Austria do not submit a physical copy of a printed and signed SEPA form authorising you to charge their bank account, then you are not legally allowed to charge them. On the other hand, only a digital SEPA form is required in the Netherlands.

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## **Chapter summary – key points:**

- It is easy to assume that credit cards are the main way to accept payment for online purchases – but that is not true.
- There are numerous payment methods available around the world. It is estimated that globally, that there are about 170 ways to pay online, with different countries and regions having clear preferences.
- Whilst some payment methods are well known and widely used, mostly it is a jigsaw puzzle of localised payment types – which presents a challenge for marketers.
- Offering the right combination of payment options for customers can reduce cart abandonment and lead to higher conversion rates and sales.
- BNPL (Buy Now, Pay Later) is booming globally with lots of new entrants recently launched or on their way.
- Online retailers should also stay up to date with the latest innovations in payment methods as these often provide an improved user experience while reducing costs for online retailers.
- As mobile commerce takes a greater share of ecommerce, online retailers need to ensure that their payment methods are also mobile-friendly.
- Attitudes to fraud vary around the world, with some markets

more risk-averse than others. Sending trust signals like reviews, awards, accreditations etc. will help to reassure customers.

- The regulatory landscape governing payments varies around the world too – a local in-market expert can help you to navigate this.



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# Global Logistics

When expanding into new markets, many ecommerce brands selling products rather than services encounter difficulties in shipping their products across borders. Three key challenges are:

- Managing increased delivery times to the end customer
- Increased shipping costs
- Handling returns

The obvious disadvantage for international retailers is longer distance from the warehouse to the recipient. Local competitors can often offer faster or cheaper shipping conditions, which gives them a competitive advantage. Therefore, to remain competitive, you need a considered strategy for fulfilment and logistics.

Many brands test the waters in target markets by using marketplaces such as Amazon or Etsy or TMall in the first instance. This can be a useful way to assess demand and gather learnings,

which you can use to scale up your presence in your target markets.

In this chapter, we explore the considerations to help you form the right approach.

## Start small with a marketplace

The World's Top Online Marketplaces			
Name	Region/Country	Product Category	Visits per month (2019)
Amazon	Global	General	5.7B
PayPal Mall	Japan	General	2.1B
eBay	Global	General	1.6B
Mercado Libre	South America	General	661.7M
Ali Express	Global	General	639.1M
Rakuten	Global	General	621.5M
Taobao	China	General	545.2M
Walmart.com	US	General	469.0M
JD.com	Global	General	318.2M
Etsy	Global	Arts & crafts, gifts	266.3M
Shopee	Southeast Asia	General	260.3M
Target.com	US	General	258.3M
Flipkart	India	General	242.6M
Best Buy	US, Canada, Mexico	Electronics	229.3M
Allegro	Poland	General	208.6M

Source: Webretailer.com, 2020

Globally, more than 50% of ecommerce sales are made through online marketplaces, contributing more than \$2 trillion to the world economy. And that is forecast to grow dramatically over the next few years, as more companies adopt marketplaces as the best platform to promote online sales.

External marketplaces offer a sales channel where retailers can benefit from the marketing, SEO strategy and payment structure of a more established company. For those looking to reach international markets, choosing a local marketplace can be an accessible place to start. You can use the learnings you acquire to scale up from there.

## **Logistical factors to consider**

The global logistics strategy you adopt will depend on a combination of factors. These include:

- Which markets you are shipping from
- Which markets you are shipping to
- Your average order values
- Company, brand and product margin
- Product size, shape and weight
- Preferences for tracking and insurance
- Carrier preferences
- Customer shipping preferences
- Local market expectations for speed and cost of delivery

- Product costs
- Product restrictions and regulations
- Customs and duties
- Rate of customer returns

## **Understand local customer expectations**

Knowledge of local customer expectations is vital. How quickly do customers anticipate receiving their items once they have placed their order? What experience do you want customers to have when they open the box? How quickly do customers expect to be credited once they have returned goods?

Whilst speed of delivery is increasingly important to consumers, so too is the ability to predict and control their delivery. Consumer expectations on delivery speed, options and experience vary by country (and sometimes within markets – e.g. urban areas versus rural areas). For example:

- According to a study by Metapack<sup>3</sup>, click and collect in-store as an alternative to home delivery is popular with UK (68%), French (51%) and Spanish (51%) shoppers. However, German (32%) and Italian (38%) shoppers are less inclined to visit a store to collect their purchase
- The same study showed that getting online purchases delivered to the customer's workplace was most popular with Italian

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<sup>3</sup> State of Ecommerce Delivery: Consumer Research Report - Metapack, 2016

- (25%) and UK (23%) shoppers but held less appeal for US (19%), French (17%) and Dutch (15%) consumers
- Weekend deliveries hold the most appeal for UK (34%) and US (34%) shoppers but are least popular in France (13%) and Italy (14%). Sunday deliveries find most favour with British (16%) and US (15%) shoppers but are less acceptable to German (3%) and French (5%) online consumers.
  - In the US, customers are very reluctant to pay delivery charges.
  - Japanese customers increasingly expect same day delivery and – as Amazon Prime rolls out – more customers are starting to expect next day delivery for many items.

*"9 out of 10 Americans will abandon a basket if there is no option for free shipping. American shoppers care more about global warming and climate change than the outside world thinks and will look at product labels carefully."*

**- Adam, US**

A local in-market expert can advise you on preferences and expectations in your target markets. You can also carry out customer surveys to gain further insight.

## **Assess legal requirements in your target markets**

The regulatory and legal framework in each market varies. Before deciding your global strategy, you will need to understand

considerations such as:

- What are you allowed to sell where?
- What paperwork you need to provide
- What taxes you or your customers must pay
- What methods there are to minimise tax liability legally
- What product regulations exist – for example, garment labelling requirements
- What is the import/export infrastructure – where can goods cross borders easily
- What digital laws exist – an obvious example being GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) within the EU

Legal and in-market experts will be able to guide you.

## **Assess the type of fulfilment model your business needs**

Are you shipping cross-border or region to region? Are you entering another customs zone? How you ship your products depends upon the country you are exporting to.

You could consider fulfilling your orders yourself or partnering with a third-party fulfilment house. A third-party fulfilment house will:

- Ensure your product is shipped in a timely way
- Know product regulations in different markets

- Have access to a network of reliable carriers
- Understand the import and export regulations of your new market
- Have established delivery and return processes

The benefits of using a third party include:

- Saving on delivery infrastructure costs set up, overhead and staff
- Rapid access to an existing tried and tested delivery infrastructure
- Economies of scale where you benefit from their buying power on packaging and shipping costs
- If you have seasonal or cyclical sales, a third party can enable you to scale your delivery requirements up and down in line with market demand
- Accessing delivery expertise while you test a market, prior to making any significant delivery infrastructure investment.

The disadvantages include:

- Needing to deliver stock ahead of payment and before knowing likely demand
- Additional costs
- Reliance on a third party to provide a service which impacts your reputation

Your fulfilment partner can be based in the same country as you,

or be based abroad, or both. Your choice will largely depend on the goals and expectations from your potential new market.

By outsourcing to a fulfilment centre based in your target market, you can make sure customers receive goods promptly and seamlessly, as any border requirements have already been met. These fulfilment centres will store and deliver your products to your customers on your behalf. In some markets, warehousing costs are cheaper than in the UK (and vice versa) so, depending on your target market, you may be able to reduce storage costs and take advantage of slower, lower-cost shipping rates to deliver directly to the third-party fulfilment centre in the most cost-effective way.

## **The number of SKUs will shape your strategy**

From a logistical perspective, the number of SKUs (Stock Keeping Units), plays an important role for cross-border ecommerce. For example, if you have more than 5,000 SKUs in your range but expect only 1,000 shipments in the destination country, a local warehouse will not be worthwhile for online merchants.

With increasing shipping volumes, and correspondingly greater savings potential in shipping costs, dispatching orders from a fulfilment centre abroad can be more attractive. However, this also depends on the products and the current shipping prices.

One strategy for successfully entering another target market with your online shop is to reduce the number of SKUs. Only those



products with particularly high demand are stored in the fulfilment centre abroad initially and you then expand the product range step by step as demand and loyalty grow.

## **Decide on the number of fulfilment centres**

- The number of your fulfilment centres will depend on where your export market is located, projected customer demand for your products, customer expectations and how much you can afford
- You may want just one, large, centrally based fulfilment centre to manage the delivery of your products or you may choose to have several smaller ones, which could give you greater flexibility.

Ask the fulfilment centre what type of channels it services. Some centres like Amazon just focus on ecommerce. Others may fulfil both retail orders and ecommerce.

Make sure you benefit from the country-specific expertise of any in-market fulfilment service providers you are working with and follow their best practice advice.

## **Analyse the provider delivery strategy to exploit the right opportunities for you**

Make the most of your third-party relationships. They may be able to offer more savings than dealing directly with transportation partners. Ask your fulfilment provider what their transportation strategy is. Many international fulfilment companies are expert in keeping shipping costs down. They do this by using volume deals and government carriers which don't charge customs brokerage fees like private carriers do. They can also use distribution hubs to reduce delivery costs and carry out bulk shipping from your office to their warehouses. A key benefit is lowering the shipping costs your new market customers pay.

Bear in mind the size of your target markets – for example, Russia crosses 11 time zones – what does same day delivery look like in a market that big and what does each time zone expect? Do you want to focus on one time zone or city area only to start with?

Make sure you understand the cost and delivery experience of your chosen transport provider.

## **Analyse your last mile strategy**

You can use a combination of postal and courier options, depending on your product's value, and the speed it needs to be delivered.

Make sure you procure your courier in advance. This is essential

during the last three months of the year, when shipments get congested across the world. This is caused by seasonal gift purchasing, retail end of year promotions, and other industries completing end of year sales. Prepare to increase your delivery lead times during this busy period. Find out what customers expect in your new market. Is it acceptable to deliver parcels to work? Is it acceptable to leave parcels with neighbours? Do people leave parcels in designated 'safe places' and if so, are there any problems you should be aware of?

## **Review your first mile strategy**

You may decide to continue to use your existing first mile strategy, especially if you intend to continue to distribute your products directly, but you should assess if there is a more effective way of managing the product delivery from the manufacturer to the warehousing solution you have chosen if you plan to use a third-party provider. For example, there may be a more suitable manufacturing location and a different transportation hub to ship products to the fulfilment centre you have selected.

## **Simplify returns management**

Returns can be a real headache for online retailers and more so

when returning products across borders. Barclaycard estimates one in four online purchases are returned. This is even higher in some categories such as clothing and shoes, where more than half of online purchases are returned. Retailers often offer free returns, paid for by delivery charges but in markets where customers expect free delivery sellers will have to either increase the price of the goods or absorb the costs. If you decide to increase the cost of goods, be aware that canny international shoppers will shop across international websites to find the cheapest option.

**Leading barriers to ordering abroad for cross-border online shopping worldwide as of May 2018**



Source: Statista

Return shipping plays an important role in online shopping decisions. A study by PayPal showed that 22% of online shoppers pay close attention to the return conditions when purchasing products on the Internet that are delivered from abroad. For this reason, online merchants should ensure that any return shipment

can be made easily by a customer and handled well by the fulfilment partner. The same diligence applied to clear communication, customer convenience and seamless delivery through multiple carriers, must be replicated across the returns process.

*"In Japan, expectations are very high when it comes to garment manufacturing quality. Consumers will return clothing for the smallest flaw in stitching for example. Sellers can reduce returns by ensuring clothing is finished to a high standard, but also by putting plenty of information on the website including garment measurements (we like to know shoulder and sleeve lengths for example), and close ups of the garment details and material used."*

**- Shin, Japan**

## **Multi-lingual customer support**

Visitors want to talk to customer support in their own language and at a convenient local time. If you only offer telephone support in your home market language, you are not catering to customers in international markets. You might also receive customer emails in a language that your customer service team doesn't understand. Either prepare templates to answer common questions or hire native speakers as support advisors. Visitors want both content and support in their native language at a time convenient to them. They are also likely to have different public holidays.

There are various solutions that enable you to set up local

numbers in other countries and redirect calls to your main location. Make sure you can handle enquiries that come in out of hours or on your local public holidays. It may be worth investing in technology such as edesk to help you manage customer queries seamlessly and 24/7.

## Compliance

Your international logistics and fulfilment strategy should involve planning your transportation and compliance strategy together. Your decisions on compliance will affect your transportation strategy, and vice versa. You should also make sure your delivery providers know the full details of the range of products they are shipping. Rules around ingredients, labelling, packaging, paperwork and legislation vary enormously from one market to another. Be sure that you are aware of every cost to avoid any unexpected surprises.

- When an order is made on your website, your fulfilment service provider will either pick up the product from your business or will have it already stored in its warehouse.
- From there, the fulfilment service provider will complete shipping paperwork and will work with the shipping provider to deliver goods to your customers.

You will need to know who is responsible for all the costs and risks associated with a sales contract between you and your potential

market abroad. Knowing the delivery terms in your worldwide sales contracts and understanding the customer experience clearly to make sure it is as you intended will reduce any uncertainties and misunderstandings for both you and your prospective buyers.

### **Incoterms – The International Commercial Terms of trade**

The Incoterms® rules are the essential terms of trade for selling goods internationally. The terms used have very precise meanings for sale of goods across borders and are agreed and applied worldwide. Understanding and using the correct terminology for international trading is key to ensuring smooth cross border ecommerce, importing or exporting. Incoterms are published by the ICC (International Chamber of Commerce), which provides specific up to date guidance for both importing and exporting goods. There are other useful sources such as the Harmonised Tariff Schedule of the United States plus national trade policies, but Incoterms are universally clear and consistent.

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### **Chapter summary – key points:**

- Localised infrastructure must be in place to launch your expansion on the right path.
- Many brands test the waters in target markets by using marketplaces such as Amazon or Etsy or TMall in the first instance.
- Relevant logistics must cover the front and back-office

operations you have in place at your home market office, plus any new physical equipment, facilities, software, service contracts, administrative assistance, and subject-matter expertise required on-site, across expanded locations.

- By spending time planning your fulfilment and logistics strategy, you can make sure your products get into your customers' hands efficiently and cost-effectively, no matter where they are.



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# Measuring Digital Success

Once you have rolled out your international digital marketing campaigns – in completely different languages and cultures – it is time to assess what impact your hard work is having:

- How do you measure the effectiveness of your campaigns in different markets?
- How do you interpret results from a culture you aren't familiar with?
- How do you make well-informed decisions about where to invest to the best return?

Being able to track and prove the impact of your efforts is vital.

- If you do not measure the success of your campaigns over time, then you will not know what is working and what is not.
- Once you can identify which areas are performing well or not performing as well as you hoped, you can work on analysing these aspects of your campaigns and taking steps to build on

them or improve them.

## **What is digital marketing ROI?**

Unless you are strictly an ecommerce website, the calculation of ROI in digital marketing can be challenging. This is especially the case for businesses which specialise in services and products where you are not directly selling products online. Still, it is important to understand how to measure marketing ROI. Digital marketing ROI is the measure of the profit or loss that you generate on your digital marketing campaigns, based on the total amount of marketing money you have invested. A simple way to calculate it is by the formula **(Net Profit / Total Digital Marketing Costs)\*100**.

- A positive return on investment means that your campaigns are bringing in more money than you are spending on them.
- Knowing the ROI of different aspects of your campaigns helps you understand where you should be allocating your marketing budget for best results.
- Google Analytics and other search engine analytics tools provide a broad range of data and are a good place to get started.

## **Set the right goals from the outset**

It is important from the outset to define the strategic goals for your

international marketing campaigns and to understand the correct metrics to measure success or failure.

### **Company-level business objectives**

These should be limited in number (one or two) and may be different from the objectives for a product, brand or geographic region. They help set the context in choosing the right set of marketing KPIs.

### **Start small**

Start by focusing on a small number of KPIs that affect all product brands or geographic regions. Focus initially on just providing visibility for these KPIs; more “reporting” than “analysis”. Think about the business questions these KPIs intend to answer. This exercise will force you to collect quality data to calculate the KPIs correctly and consistently. KPIs should be tied to your company-level business objectives.

### **Set goals and align motivations**

Define goals for the various KPIs you intend to roll out. This may require the creation of cascading goals (e.g. a global corporate goal for a certain KPI which is then broken down to individual regions and/or brands, campaigns, etc).

Determine how/if you want to flag whether a specific organisation is tracking (in terms of pacing) against their goals. For example, if there is a quarterly goal of X, how do you determine if sufficient progress towards the goal has been attained mid-quarter?

Finally, consider also tying budget allocation with KPI goal attainment so everybody's motivations are aligned.

### **Avoid vague and loosely defined goals**

A vague goal might be “increase awareness” or “create more conversions.” Instead, make sure that your goals are specific and measurable, with a clear deadline.

Be careful of vanity metrics. Vanity metrics are metrics that may sound good but do not help you understand your own performance in a way that usefully guides future strategy. In addition, they can often be gamed (for example by buying fake followers, likes or reviews). For example, the number of social media followers you have may sound impressive, but if this following does not translate into sales, the metric does not mean much. It is important to keep track of which strategies are generating sales and revenue.

## **Complex user journeys make the task harder**

Customers experience your brand and your website in numerous ways - they are coming in from various touchpoints, from email, to social media, to paid search and so on. It is unlikely that one single interaction is responsible for capturing them, making it difficult to untangle and measure one marketing channel against another. While there are different strategies and workarounds for attributing marketing ROI, it is easy to get overwhelmed.

## Top Challenges for Proving Marketing ROI



Source: TrackMaven, 2017

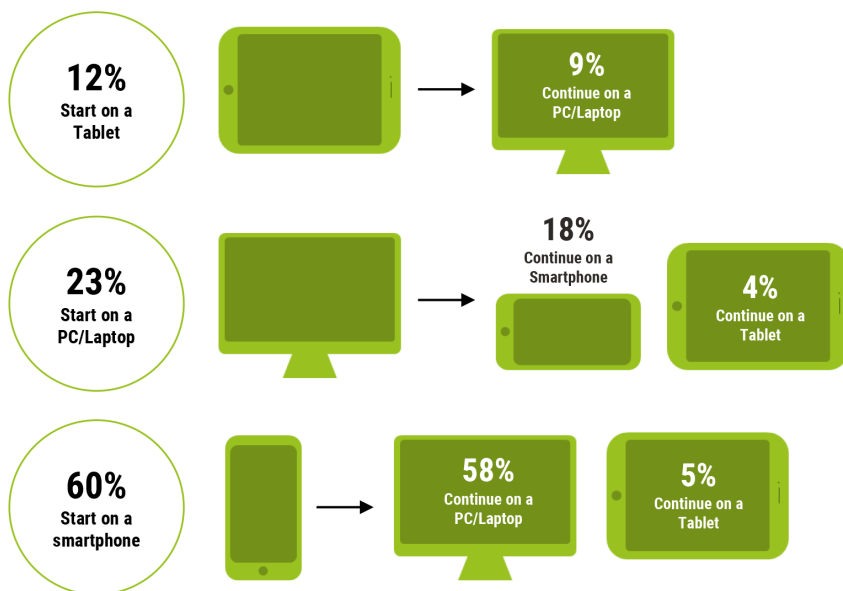
## What is attribution?

In digital marketing, attribution involves analysis of media touchpoints along the path to purchase to determine which channel has influenced the sale and how much credit should be given to each for influencing the conversion. Without attribution, certain channels – for example, social media or paid search – may not be sufficiently credited for their role in the conversion – because even though they may have precipitated the initial visit to a website, the actual sale might have been generated by a subsequent site visit,

perhaps via organic search.

In recent years, as user journeys have become more complex and fragmented across multiple devices, and our ability to identify complex user journeys has improved, accurate attribution has become more of a challenge.

### Example User Journeys for an Ecommerce Brand



The main reason why cross-device attribution is hard to achieve is because there is no accurate way to identify the same user across different devices.

Attribution challenges include:

- Understanding the offline impact to your business driven by

online marketing and advertising

- Attributing accurately the impact of your marketing efforts across multiple devices (mobile, laptop, desktop, television)
- Attributing credit accurately to all marketing channels (social, display, YouTube, referral, email, search etc) that contributed to a particular conversion (or multiple conversions)

Different Attribution Models		
Model	Explanation	When would you use this
<b>Last interaction/ last click</b>	Gives 100% of the credit to the last interaction your business had with a lead before they convert.	If your product has a short buying cycle, or if your sales funnel is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom.
<b>Last non-direct click</b>	100% of the value is still assigned to a single interaction. But with last non-direct click, it eliminates any "direct" interactions that occurred right before the conversion.	This is a useful way to measure marketing success without considering direct traffic.
<b>Last Google Ads click</b>	The last click that was from a Google Ad receives the credit	When you want to understand which Google Ads campaigns are performing best for you.
<b>First interaction/ first click</b>	Gives 100% of the credit to the first interaction your business had with a lead before they convert.	Like last click, this model can be useful if your product has a short buying cycle. Also if your main business goal is bringing in new top of the funnel customers.
<b>Linear attribution model</b>	Credit for a conversion is split equally between all the interactions the customer had with your business.	For a nuanced attribution model that is straightforward and easy to explain to clients, linear attribution might be a good choice to demonstrate how each channel has value.

<b>Time decay model</b>	Similar to linear attribution - the time decay model spreads out the value across multiple events. But unlike linear attribution, this model also takes into consideration when the touchpoint occurred. Interactions that occur closer to the time of purchase have more value attributed to them.	If relationship-building is a big factor in a business' success, using time decay attribution can be a helpful way to conceptualise that. Can be useful for particularly long sales cycles, such as for expensive B2B purchases.
<b>Position based model</b>	Interactions that occur closer to the time of purchase have more value attributed to them. 40% of the credit is given to each of these points, with the remaining 20% spread out between any other interactions that happened in the middle.	This model tells you which channel is best for acquiring customers and which is best for converting them.
<b>Data-driven model</b>	This model allows you to plug in your end goals and then weights each channel in its effectiveness in achieving those goals.	This model requires a certain amount of data to be operable – so not all businesses will see this option available. More suited to higher volume businesses due to data requirements.
<b>Customised model</b>	You can create custom attribution models in Google Analytics. A custom attribution model lets businesses give a custom amount of weight to whatever touchpoints they think are most important.	Businesses that have a long buying cycle and plenty of data on hand are the best candidates for using a custom attribution model.

Google Analytics uses last interaction attribution by default. However, you can compare different attribution models in your account. You can find this tool under “Conversions” > “Attribution” in your account.



## **Think through your business and measurement taxonomy**

It is useful to define the business and marketing taxonomy against which you want to map your performance data. For example:

- Regional / country hierarchies
- Business unit / brand / product hierarchies
- Campaign hierarchies
- Naming conventions
- Currency conversions associated with media spend tracking

These then become the lens through which you collate and analyse data, judge your marketing performance, and then ultimately business results.

## **Implement an effective measurement system**

An effective systems infrastructure centralises the measurement and organisation of raw marketing performance data. As much automation as possible will prevent errors and make sure data is kept up to date. Granular data needs to be collected from all the different systems you use in marketing activities. A scalable database needs to be implemented that is based on a data model that can reflect and adapt with your organisations' needs. An intuitive user interface with a variety of visualizations will give you

the ability to understand what is happening at any time.

## **Understand the stories behind the data**

The data in the reports is only the beginning—the insights that are sometimes hidden in the data tell the fuller story.

When analysing your reports, consider the cultural context of each market. This is where the input of local in-market experts will help. A local in-market expert will help you to pull out the key insights hidden within the data, to help guide your strategy. For example, a spike in traffic might be down to a local festival, low conversion rates in one market might be down to particularly stiff competition, or the fact that you are expensive and in the target market many people shop on price. Examples from Oban clients include:

- Key times of day for media consumption shifted in Egypt. This was down to Ramadan where life can become nocturnal for a few weeks and media consumption and shopping habits change accordingly.
- A recent spike in search traffic in Texas for bottled water was due to unusually cold local weather disrupting local water supplies.
- A dip in ticket sales in Hong Kong was due to local rioting and people avoiding the city centre.

Combining qualitative insights with quantitative data – for example, an in-depth look at a particular market, or a deep-dive competitor review – will help you uncover new opportunities. It is also important to look at the same metrics across international markets to ensure you are comparing apples with apples. Interpreting the reports is usually easier if they are presented visually in a way that allows you to compare one region consistently with another.

## **Month on Month and Year on Year Comparisons**

When comparing ROI data, remember that month-on-month comparisons can be misleading as they do not account for varying numbers of days in the month, seasonal market shifts and so on. Looking at year-on-year comparisons will usually give you a better idea of how digital marketing campaigns are improving over time.

That said, month-on-month comparisons and time series data broken down by month will show you trends that year-on-year will not and will highlight recent opportunities and challenges. Monthly time series can be seasonally adjusted to factor in variables such as seasonality, giving you a more accurate picture of marketing performance.

## Create a marketing measurement template

Once you have selected the digital marketing metrics for your campaign, putting together a marketing measurement template is easy and provides valuable insight. A marketing measurement template might include:

- Your initial goal(s)
- An overview of what happened during the campaign (your marketing metrics will go here)
- Things that worked best, and what you learned from them
- Things that did not work so well, and what you learned from them

	KPI	Detail	Tech	Reporting
Traffic				
Engagement				
Secondary Action				
Primary Action				
Monetization				

An example measurement framework template

## Digital marketing metrics

Here are common metrics to measure your digital marketing performance (and how to calculate them). Most of these metrics are not direct inputs for calculating marketing digital ROI but should help you get a broad sense of whether your digital marketing investments are effective.

Metric	Notes
<b>Unique Monthly Visitors</b>	<p>The number of individual people coming to your site each month. Even if someone visits multiple times they will only be counted once. This is a broad metric and without more information, we don't know how valuable this traffic is.</p> <p>This metric is tracked directly in Google Analytics, so there is no need for calculations. To get more specific, we can segment the traffic by source (paid, organic, social, etc) and then look at value-based metrics based on these segments (more on this later).</p>
<b>Cost Per Lead (CPL)</b>	<p>Cost per lead is usually associated with paid traffic since you do not technically pay for organic traffic. This is calculated directly in Google Ads (and other advertising platforms) and is often also called "cost-per-conversion". It is up to you to make sure that your conversions align with what you consider to be a 'lead'. Over or undercounting can result in skewed cost-per-conversion data if it is not set up properly.</p> <p>On the organic side, you pay for SEO strategy and content marketing. These efforts result in lead generation over time, but it can be difficult to tie these back to a per lead cost.</p>

<p><b>Cost Per Acquisition (CPA or CAC)</b></p>	<p>This metric tells you what you are paying to acquire an actual customer – not just a lead. Paid campaigns can view this virtually in real-time, and while this metric doesn't directly apply to SEO efforts, you will (ideally) be able to blend the two lead sources together to see your actual Customer Acquisition Cost across all your digital efforts.</p> <p>CPA/CAC is calculated by your total digital marketing spend divided by your number of acquired customers.</p>
<p><b>Return on Ad Spend (ROAS)</b></p>	<p>This metric tells you the revenue (instead of profit) earned for your ad spend but does not factor in other costs such as the cost of goods sold. ROAS is a useful metric if you can tie revenue directly to digital marketing efforts. Return-on-ad-spend is useful to a degree, but you need to fully understand your profit margin to know what ROAS multiple you require to be profitable. ROAS is calculated as <math>(\text{Revenue}/\text{Total Ad Spend}) \times 100</math>.</p>
<p><b>Average Order Value (AOV)</b></p>	<p>Not all customers are equally valuable to you. This metric tells you how valuable your paying customers are each time they make a purchase from you. AOV is most useful for ecommerce stores. For ecommerce, we can multiply the AOV by the repeat rate to get an even more valuable metric, Customer Lifetime Value.</p>
<p><b>Customer Lifetime Value (LTV)</b></p>	<p>This metric tells you what you can afford to pay in ad spend to acquire each customer profitably. LTV is important to know because it applies to every kind of business.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecommerce can get an exact calculation for LTV.</li> <li>• Other industries will usually need to use some historic and some predicted data such as churn rates to estimate LTV</li> </ul>

<p><b>Lead-To-Close Ratio (LTCR)</b></p>	<p>This metric tells you if your leads are of high quality, whether your sales are efficient, and helps project your digital marketing ROI.</p> <p>Your Lead-To-Close Ratio is simply your total number of leads divided by how many leads have been converted into sales.</p>
<p><b>Branded Search Lift</b></p>	<p>You can calculate your branded search lift by tracking the number of search queries that include your brand name per month. Over time, as you continue to track this, your branded search lift is simply how many additional monthly searches your brand receives.</p> <p>In most cases, this is not only the result of search marketing, but of all your digital advertising campaigns and helps you understand increase in brand awareness over time.</p>
<p><b>Non-Brand CTR</b></p>	<p>Keywords that do not reference your brand name are non branded keywords. This measure looks at the click through rate from your non branded digital marketing activities to your website. This may be from SEO, content or paid search and can be tracked in Google Search Console.</p> <p>Google and other advertisers reward high CTR ads with priority positioning. In this case, it is tracked in Google Ads and on other publishing platforms.</p> <p>This metric does not tie directly to leads, revenue, or ROI from internet marketing – but in many cases, you will see a positive correlation between them.</p>

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## **Chapter summary – key points:**

- Set the right goals from the outset and understand the correct metrics for each one.
- Complex user journeys make the task of marketing attribution harder. There are different attribution models – the right one will depend on the nature of your business and your specific goals.
- Your business and measurement taxonomy will depend on regional and country hierarchies, brand and product hierarchies, campaign structure and currency conversions associated with media spend tracking.
- By establishing useful metrics, measuring valid, tangible results and interpreting data using cultural expertise, you will be able to make confident, informed decisions about where to allocate budget to help your business grow.



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## Mistakes to Avoid

**M**any businesses have learned the hard way that a marketing approach which worked domestically did not have the same impact when applied to international markets. History is full of examples of brands expanding into new countries without doing adequate research. Marketing messages are missed, images misconstrued, language offensive — and suddenly, entire product or service launches can be overshadowed by a PR mess. In this chapter, we explore some of the international marketing mistakes you need to avoid.

### **Be aware of religious sensitivities**

When reaching out to a culturally diverse audience, it is essential to research the product you are about to promote thoroughly. Make sure that you identify potential pitfalls and try to pre-empt them.

For instance, Ramadan is the holy month for Muslims. In this month, Muslims fast from dawn till dusk. Food consumption hikes in the holy month of Ramadan especially for Muslim families, and therefore brands launch targeted campaigns to drive tactical sales.

Tesco famously fell foul of this. Their store near Whitechapel Mosque in London once marketed bacon-flavoured Pringles in the holy month of Ramadan. A backlash on social media followed, and Tesco quickly removed the promotion and apologised.

## **Be aware of political tensions**

In any marketing campaign which spans borders, it is important to understand the current political climate to avoid stirring any controversy. In 2015, Coca Cola failed to do that when it posted a festive map of Russia that excluded the annexed peninsula of Crimea and several other territories. There was a backlash from angry Russian consumers.

Coca-Cola apologised several days later through its official VKontakte page and included an updated image that reflected several of the missing territories, Russia's western Kaliningrad exclave and the Kurile Islands, as well as Crimea. The update sparked further outrage as Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, previously part of Ukraine, had led to western sanctions against Moscow. The updated image led to a flood of angry Ukrainian social media users expressing their views with the

hashtag #BanCocaCola.

The US embassy in Ukraine condemned the inclusion of Crimea, saying: “Coca-Cola’s actions violate the official US position condemning Russia’s illegal occupation of Crimea, which is and has always been an integral part of Ukraine.” Coca-Cola removed the image altogether and apologised, saying the drinks manufacturer does not “support any political movements”.

## **Know the local laws**

In the world of social media, hiring celebrities to promote products is routine. That’s the point of influencer marketing campaigns. But cultural marketing can go awry if you are not aware of promotional laws in different parts of the world.

In an effort to leverage the widespread soccer culture prevalent in the United Kingdom, Snickers decided to pay Manchester United player Rio Ferdinand, along with four other personalities, to tweet images of themselves eating a Snickers bar with the phrase, “You’re not you when you’re hungry”. In the UK, if a celebrity is paid to endorse a product, that information must be disclosed. The social posts caught the eye of the UK’s Office of Fair Trading, which investigated the matter. One OFT official commented by stating, “Online advertising and marketing practices that do not disclose they include paid-for promotions are deceptive under fair trading laws”. Snickers confirmed that all celebrities were paid for the

promotional tweets.

## **Get your facts right**

Delta Airlines made a factual error when attempting to congratulate the United States on its win over Ghana in the World Cup. The airline tweeted two separate images side-by-side in an attempt to recognise each of the countries: The Statue of Liberty for the United States, and a giraffe for Ghana. This was an oversight by the company as giraffes are not native to Ghana.

It was later discovered by a Twitter user that the image Delta posted was a stock image from the Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, which is over 3,000 miles away from Ghana. Many poked fun at the company for its ignorance.

## **Show cultural sensitivity**

German car giant BMW made the marketing mistake of improperly using the UAE national anthem in a car commercial. The ad portrayed the Al Ain Football Club singing the anthem and then breaking into a run toward several BMW cars when they heard the engines. Although the brand was trying to arouse intense emotion, it evoked rage instead of passion. Emiratis found it incredibly offensive that the car company suggested their cars were more important than the anthem. The company explained its intent was

never to offend and soon replaced the ad.

Another cultural faux pas was committed by luxury brand Dolce & Gabbana. It shared a series of ads on social media in which a Chinese woman attempted to eat Italian food with chopsticks while a male voice gave her directions. The ad was criticised, and Chinese consumers, one of Dolce & Gabbana's largest markets, threatened to boycott the brand entirely. Even the Chinese government weighed in. Remember: in a globalised world, content you produce in one market is visible in others – so view your messaging through that lens.

## **Check linguistic nuances**

Braniff Airlines got into trouble when it promoted its new leather seats in Mexico with the same campaign it used in the United States: “Fly in leather.” While the Spanish translation, “Vuela en cuero,” was appropriate throughout much of Latin America, it had different connotations in Mexico, where the expression also means “Fly naked.” The was far from the message the airline was trying to send.

## **Check cultural nuances**

Sometimes, companies run into problems overseas not just for what they say but how they say it. When Procter & Gamble started selling

its Pampers diapers in Japan, the packaging featured an image of a stork delivering a baby. While the imagery may have worked in the US, it never caught on with Japanese parents. After some research, the company learned that customers were concerned and confused by the image of a stork on the packaging. The tale of a stork delivering a baby to parents is not part of Japanese folklore. There, stories tell of giant floating peaches bringing babies to awaiting parents – so the visual metaphor of a stork made no sense.

### **Localise rather than translate**

American beer maker Coors discovered that slang doesn't always translate well. When launching its "Turn it loose" campaign to Spain, it appears executives forgot to ensure the translation would resonate with consumers. When translated into Spanish, the tagline used an expression that is commonly interpreted as "Suffer from diarrhoea." While the campaign made its mark on Spanish shoppers, it was for all the wrong reasons.

Swedish vacuum maker Electrolux learned a lesson in US English slang when it introduced its products to the States. Intending to highlight its vacuums' high power, the Scandinavian company's ad campaign boasted, "Nothing sucks like an Electrolux." While the slogan might have been grammatically correct, it never took off with US shoppers.

Car giant Ford found that in Belgium, enticing customers with a

dead body in every car is not the best way to make a sale. Hoping to highlight the cars' excellent manufacturing, Ford launched an ad campaign in the European country that executives thought said, "Every car has a high-quality body." However, when translated, the slogan read, "Every car has a high-quality corpse" – not the image they were hoping to evoke.

### **Correct any mistakes fast**

Conducting thorough research into local traditions, associations, values, social hierarchies, holidays, slang, spiritual, political and historical nuances in your target markets will help to avoid cultural faux pas.

However, even after carrying out due diligence to understand your markets and audiences, sometimes mistakes can happen.

Whether you unintentionally create a commercial that is poorly received or a slogan that just does not translate well for an international audience, correct your marketing mistake by addressing it head-on. If your campaign strikes the wrong note, take it down quickly and apologise. Since apologies differ across the world, make sure your public statement is tailored to resonate with the people you are trying to reach. A local agency or consultant can help you handle any bad press and rework your campaign to get back on track.

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## **Chapter summary – key points:**

- Be aware of religious sensitivities
- Be aware of political tensions
- Know the local laws
- Get your facts right
- Show cultural sensitivity and remember that in a global world, ads aimed at one market may well be seen in another
- Check linguistic and cultural nuances
- Localise rather than translate
- Correct any mistakes fast



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# Conclusion

**L**et's review the key principles contained in this book:

## **Have realistic expectations**

Start the process of international expansion with realistic expectations. If your brand or product has been established in the UK for ten years and is doing well, it is likely to take you several years to build up a similar presence in other markets.

In the short term, businesses which expand internationally face additional costs – for example:

- Localising content and marketing materials into multiple languages
- Shipping items long distances and handling returns
- Tailoring your product to suit different markets

Make sure you are prepared for the financial commitment and time it will take for you to see the international returns you are looking for.

## **Start small but think big**

Although it may be tempting to throw everything you have into an overseas expansion, starting small is often a better idea. Beginning with a specific product or region and getting that right before moving into additional markets will help you to avoid errors that could cost time and effort.

That said, don't let your geography limit how big you think, or how far you can expand your reach. Going global can be challenging, but when you take the time to invest in infrastructure and localise your approach, you will be able to recognise and adapt to global complexities from the start—allowing you to tap into vast and varied business opportunities as time goes on. And that puts you in a great position to keep expanding into new markets.

## **Do your due diligence**

Before making major business decisions around global expansion, think through all possible scenarios. Could you spend time in the country you want to break into? An information-gathering trip can

be a great way to help you develop a plan with confidence.

Research and due diligence will help you to understand the customer culture of your overseas operations. For example:

- Market analysis, researching market size and growth potential, consumer bases, consumer attitudes, market channel research, market investment analysis, state of the economy, and more.
- Competitive analysis – how does your competitor set vary by market? How does your business offering and operations compare to competitors in your new target markets? Are your online competitors different to your offline competitors?
- SWOT analysis, lending a numbers-backed look into the actual sales and revenue potential of target markets.
- PEST analysis, looking at the landscape that may affect your business in each target market.

## **Get employees on board**

For successful international expansion, current employees need to be on board. You will need them to help train new employees and build out new processes. Include them in the process by asking about their ideas for communication, customer acquisition, marketing and more. Find out their concerns and how they propose to overcome them. Your people know your business in a way no one else does, so involving them in the process will help get the details right. Ensure you have a baseline identity and a brand vision, which

influences everything your team do, no matter where in the world they are (or who they are targeting).

## **Understand local audience intent**

From a digital perspective, one of the worst mistakes a brand can make is simply taking their English keyword lists and translating them. Successful keywords are not just tied to language but to culture and geography also. The way people think about and search for your product may be dramatically different around the world. If you simply translate an English keyword list, you could be missing fundamental nuances – which could cost you money. For example:

- You can easily translate “summer vacation” into Korean. But Korea doesn’t have summer vacations – so simply translating this concept doesn’t make sense if you want to sell family vacation packages
- One of Oban’s clients is a leading player in the city sightseeing space. They found that their core product – open air city bus tours – did not really exist as a concept in China, which made market entry difficult – as people weren’t searching for it
- There are sub regional preferences for all kinds of terms. The word for “avocado” is “palta” in Peru, “aguacate” in Spain, but “pagua” in Cuba. If you use the wrong term on your Peruvian website, your customers might never find you

That is why keyword translators must also be keyword researchers. They must use their own local cultural knowledge (as well as tools available on the internet) to evaluate the efficacy of all translated keywords.

## **Think in terms of individual countries**

Companies can sometimes view overseas markets in vague regional terms (e.g. “We’re shifting our focus to South America,” or “We’d like to double our growth in Europe”), but this oversimplification can create problems. For example, “Europe” can mean different things to different people —Western Europe, the European Union, the eurozone, and so on.

Customers identify at the national level, and every country has its own local laws, cultural norms, forms of currency and payment, and unique business practices.

It is essential to break up broader geographic regions into individual countries with distinct revenue and lead generation goals—and to conduct local-specific research for each country. Being country-specific from the beginning helps with market prioritisation, staffing plans, and budget allocation—all of which are necessary for helping you achieve your international growth targets.

Local market research should be aimed at understanding the market size, the challenges customers face, the competitors

already present in that market, and where your product can fit in. Many companies fail to think about these basics of product positioning at the country level and overlook considerations like strong local competition.

Businesses should not assume that because something works well on your home turf, it will work well somewhere else. Copying and pasting domestic processes onto international ones and expecting identical results rarely, if ever, works.

## **Local in-market expertise is essential**

The thread which runs throughout all the advice contained within this book is that successful international expansion requires local in-market insight. Without it, it is difficult to navigate the cultural and linguistic challenges and fully exploit the opportunities in each market. A local team or partner can help you understand the local audience, the local competition, how to comply with local regulations and how to communicate your company's unique selling point in a way that is meaningful to the local market. Having the right partners and team in place is essential. Without local in-market expertise, you will be placed at a competitive disadvantage.

It is important for businesses looking for international growth to understand that they will need help. This can be particularly tough for smaller businesses, because they have often been doing everything on their own up to this point.

## **Adapt sales and marketing channels**

Companies (especially Western ones) can sometimes believe they can enter new markets by following the same approach that brought them domestic success. While brand consistency is important, different markets favour different sales and marketing approaches – explained by where they sit in Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions. For example, in countries where relationships have a higher cultural value, such as Japan, selling products and services through local partners, such as resellers or channel partners, achieves faster success than direct sales models. Conversely, SaaS, online, and “touchless” sales models are often popular in markets where the cost of living is higher and automation is prized, such as the Nordic markets.

Similarly, marketers need to vary their channel mix according to the behaviours of each market, and this can vary across countries within the same region. For example, in Brazil, a marketing campaign might find more success with promoted messages on Facebook due to the popularity of this social network there, while in other Latin American countries, Twitter might attract a specific audience more quickly, and therefore be a more effective marketing tool. While some channels work across many markets, you should explore what delivers the best result in each market by conducting detailed market research that relies heavily on local in-market experts.

## **Adapt the product offering**

Companies achieve “product-market fit” one country at a time. Yet all too often, companies try to launch identical products in different markets, ignoring the fact that they are dealing with different customers. For example, a software company won’t succeed abroad if it sells the same product that it sells at home if users in the new market are not as familiar with certain features. Instead, they should start with a more basic version of the product so users can become accustomed to it. Likewise, a more advanced market might require more features than a product currently has available.

Pricing is a similar issue. Because the value proposition varies from one market to the next, pricing will vary. While it is not always essential for companies to change their pricing structure for international markets, many companies find that they are able to grow much more quickly by adjusting pricing at the local level. Marketers need to consider different pricing strategies for markets accordingly.

Payment methods and preferences vary widely from one country to another. Localising these appropriately will help drive sales.

## **Localise don’t translate**

Translation is the process of rendering text from one language



into another so that the meaning is equivalent. Localisation is a more comprehensive process which addresses cultural and non-textual components as well as linguistic issues when adapting a product or service for another country or region. You need to adapt your product and localise your strategy to fit the business climate and culture of each country you enter. Simply relying on translation can lead to missed opportunities or costly mistakes. In a worst-case scenario, it can cause offence leading to reputational harm.

### **Localise all content**

If you target different countries that speak the same language, you might think that you can reuse content across different versions of your website. You shouldn't. It is critical that the content featured in each country is localised, targeting the specific local audience culture and behaviours in each country market. You will still need to localise time, local holidays, seasonality, environment and more. The same language almost always has some different word preferences or alternative terms to describe products or services.

### **Get the right infrastructure in place**

Don't underestimate the importance of infrastructure when you

are planning your international expansion. Business regulations, tax codes, legal standards, and other requirements differ from region-to-region. Iron them out before you make the leap. It will save headaches for you—and your potential customers—as you get the engine going.

You especially need to have the right digital infrastructure in place – and if you don't have it already, then a plan to ensure you do. A small example: think through the consequences of how employees will share data securely and whether the data you are capturing follows the law and best practices in each market. It is essential to have a management team aligned behind an agreed international expansion strategy, and to decide which business decisions will be made on a local level and which will be made centrally.

## **Be willing to change direction**

Once you do expand, be prepared for some bumps in the road. That may mean changing how you operate in some ways. You can't be afraid to pivot. Once you are up and running, give your customers and stakeholders a voice and listen to it carefully. Run tests, and improve your business based on the feedback. With each new country comes new challenges, and businesses must be prepared to adapt.

## **Have the right partners**

Take time to find the best partners to complement your team. The right partners will help you navigate the cultural, linguistic, digital, legal and operational hurdles around the world. There are plenty of UK headquartered businesses which help companies succeed internationally and which can connect you to specialist local in-market expertise.

## **Think long term**

Expanding internationally is not something that you can expect to turn a profit from right away. You must be in it for the long haul. The entire process will take time, so be prepared for it. Different circumstances will be prevalent in different markets and for different companies. In all cases much preparation is the way to success. Is it worth it? Absolutely. With the right strategy and help from locals and professionals, going global could be one of the most profitable moves you have ever made. Otherwise, you may be overlooking increased sales and higher profits.

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**To find out how Oban can help you accelerate your international expansion plans, please get in touch:**

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[obaninternational.com/blog](http://obaninternational.com/blog)

## Appendix

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# Useful Links & Resources

### For market research

#### **[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country\\_profiles](https://www.bbc.com/news/1/hi/country_profiles)**

BBC News country profiles – in-depth reports and profiles on every country in the world. Useful for an overview of the political, economic, geographical, social and historical aspects of each country. Also important information on population, currency, life expectancy and major languages spoken in each country.

#### **[cia.gov/the-world-factbook](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook)**

The CIA World Factbook – Similar to the BBC News country profiles. This information comes from one of the world's most powerful intelligence agencies and is up to date.

#### **[internetworldstats.com](https://www.internetworldstats.com)**

Internet World Stats – Provides data about internet usage by

country. Useful for any company planning to enter a market by e-commerce to get a sense of the size of the market.

### **[trade.gov/about-us](https://www.trade.gov/about-us)**

The International Trade Administration is an agency of the US Department of Commerce. Their website is useful for market research since it provides a large volume of trade statistics and information, such as the top exports and imports by country. It also provides licensing information, industry analyses, competitiveness information and much more.

### **[intracen.org](https://www.intracen.org)**

This site is a fantastic resource for international market research, providing a wide variety of useful research tools.

### **[hofstede-insights.com](https://www.hofstede-insights.com)**

A wealth of insights based on Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions. Includes a useful country comparison tool which allows you to compare markets.

### **[marketfinder.thinkwithgoogle.com](https://marketfinder.thinkwithgoogle.com)**

Google Market Finder provides ideas and information on new potential markets for expansion.

## **For international marketing**

### **[obaninternational.com/blog](http://obaninternational.com/blog)**

Oban International's blog is a regularly updated and authoritative source of international marketing news and opinion.

### **[marketinginsidergroup.com/blog](http://marketinginsidergroup.com/blog)**

A blog written by Michael Brenner, with a particular slant to B2B.

## **For SEO**

### **[webmasters.googleblog.com](http://webmasters.googleblog.com)**

Get news straight from Google at the Webmaster Central blog. Google shares updates about crawling, indexing and ranking on this blog.

### **[searchengineland.com](http://searchengineland.com)**

Search Engine Land provides daily breaking news and coverage of all aspects of the search industry.

### **[seroundtable.com](http://seroundtable.com)**

Search Engine Roundtable provides daily reportage and opinion on the latest industry news, events and discussions.

### **moz.com/blog**

The Moz blog features tips and advice on the topics of SEO, social media and content. Also the home of Whiteboard Friday, where an expert breaks down a large topic via a whiteboard.

### **ahrefs.com**

A useful SEO and keyword research tool. You can use it to see what your competitors are ranking for, how much organic traffic they're getting, and see what content of theirs is performing the best.

You can also compare domains to see content gaps and track specific keywords over time, while they've also added keyword data for sites like YouTube, Baidu, and Amazon.

### **semrush.com**

Analysis shows a range of metrics around keywords, paid search, and rankings. You can search 10 URLs for free which will show limited results. To see all the data you need to upgrade to a paid subscription.

## **For content and social media**

### **brandwatch.com/products/consumer-research**

With detailed searches, categorisation, rules, alerts, and over 85 million sites monitored, you can refine the platform to match your requirements, including your competitor's social media output.



You can create searches to track all mentions of your competitors across the web, staying up to date with their content and news stories. Tracking your industry allows you to view changing share of voice, monitor sentiment around each brand and keep tabs on your competitor's content.

### **buzzsumo.com**

The free tools allow you to search for content by keyword or entering a competitor's URL. You can then refine the search by published date, content type, and shares across social sites. It also has a trending section for different industries. More data and tools are available in the paid account.

### **helpareporter.com**

Reporter liaison service which is useful for gaining news coverage for your brand. Help A Reporter connects journalists seeking expertise to include in their content with sources who have that expertise.

## **For paid media**

### **ispionage.com**

The tool identifies your top PPC competitors, reveals their monthly budget and Google Ads strategy. You can pay to access seven years' worth of PPC and SEO keyword data.

### **whatrunswere.com**

See where your competitors are advertising and what their ads look like, and how effective these adverts are. You can also pay to access campaign data from 150,000 top performing display publishers.

## **Web traffic tools**

### **trends.google.com**

Google Trends shows popular searches and enables you to review keyword trends by market.

### **alexa.com**

Founded 20 years ago and owned by Amazon, Alexa ranks sites based on their traffic volume. Alexa also provides metrics such as daily pageviews per visitor, bounce rate, time spent on site and demographics.

### **answerthepublic.com**

Free and paid for version of autocompleted search queries gathered from a variety of search engines worldwide. This website focuses on what people are searching for, rather than the answers they are provided with. It also allows you to monitor search trends.