

A guide to successfully planning and managing **international digital marketing campaigns**



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Executive summary

As experts in global trade online, Search Laboratory has been actively interested in the changing perception of UK businesses to overseas trade and their approaches to entering new global markets over the last ten years.

In 2012, we conducted research into how business leaders and decision makers prioritise their expansion budgets and asked what they felt were the main barriers to successful new market entry. We paid particular attention to localisation and promotion, and studied closely the view on how important it was to speak to your in-country audiences in their own language.

In 2015, as the UK continues to demonstrate economic stability and even growth (following what was a pretty bleak period of double-dip recession for most businesses), we decided to re-evaluate the question-set and see how attitudes to online trade have changed in the last three years.

This whitepaper, in addition to presenting our findings from our latest research study, aims to provide you with a set of comprehensive, strategic and actionable insights that will allow you to smoothly enter new markets, and optimise your existing international campaigns to achieve maximum return.

About the author

Ian Harris, Founder & CEO - Search Laboratory



Ian Harris has twenty years' website internationalisation and digital marketing experience. Previously CTO for one of the world's largest web localisation companies, Ian has helped companies such as British Airways, IBM and HSBC tap into new overseas markets online. Ian regularly speaks on the topic of Internationalisation, including recently speaking at/on behalf of: UKTI, The Digital Marketing Forum, Marketing Week Live, ClickZ, Econsultancy and Drapers.

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About Search Laboratory

With offices in Leeds, London and New York, Search Laboratory is an award-winning, global digital marketing agency offering: search engine optimisation (SEO), content marketing, social media, biddable media (inc. PPC) and programmatic campaigns, as well as analytics and conversion rate optimisation (CRO) services.

Founded in 2005 in order to provide a more auditable, ethical and statistical approach to PPC and SEO, and to fill the gap in the market for a proper, linguistically faithful approach to multilingual campaign management, Search Laboratory is today widely recognised in its field for its industry know-how and global digital marketing expertise.

International is truly at the heart of everything we do. We take a customer-centric ethos to campaign planning and deliver tangible, revenue-driven results that are based on scientific rigour, creativity and a deep understanding of languages and customer buying habits.

Working with over 150 clients, and in any language, we manage multilingual and English campaigns for brand name clients from a broad range of sectors including retail, fashion, technology, B2B, professional services, finance and travel.

For more information on any of the themes explored within this paper, or to discuss your current digital marketing capabilities, please get in touch!

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Introduction

In 2012, Search Laboratory commissioned an independent survey of UK businesses to discover their outlook on the global opportunity and identify their focus areas for improving revenue from new international markets. This year, in 2015, Search Laboratory has revisited the research to discover what key considerations businesses now make before going global, how the strengthening economic market has impacted their decisions, and to identify if their approach to internationalisation has changed over the last three years.

Given the recent financial situation, having recently recovered from a double-dip recession, **83%** of the businesses viewed overseas expansion as a new revenue stream. However, **62%** believe they are missing out on key opportunities in global markets.

Significantly, compared to 2012 there was an increase of **130%** in the number of businesses who see online as an important channel for overseas expansion. This is further emphasised by the finding that since 2011 **45%** of businesses have increased their global trade online.

This whitepaper explores some of the key findings of the survey, and also gives insight into creating and maintaining international digital marketing campaigns, and how localisation is a key element of this. Data is informed by a UK-wide independent research study conducted by The Leadership Factor which investigated prevailing attitudes amongst 500 senior decision makers within 'large organisations', defined as companies with 50+ employees or more, spread across the UK.

Going global

The opportunities that going global and entering either one or various new markets can present makes expanding overseas highly appealing – especially with 2014 being a growth milestone for all things digital, and digital messages in 2015 predicted to reach over 50% of the world's population due to the increase in internet penetration. Now is the perfect time to take a closer look at your global opportunities.

The image on page 6 showcases the opportunities predicted for markets across the globe in 2015.

Businesses that go global and subsequently harness international online sales successfully usually display two powerful attributes:

- They are easy for customers to find online across all markets and territories.
- They provide an impeccable online customer experience, regardless of the customer's geographic location.

New market entrants need to master these requirements to stand a chance of attracting and converting significant international business. Likewise, existing entrants in an international market need to keep up-to-date with these requirements in order to maintain and improve on their position in the market.

For most domestic businesses, meeting these challenges involves remodelling their online presence to suit the shopping habits and language preferences of foreign customers. This must also be coupled with the adoption of a tailored digital marketing strategy designed to help increase local visibility for potential customers searching online.

Predicted opportunities for markets across the globe in 2015:



An organisation's prominence on the search engine results pages (SERPs) as viewed by potential customers is crucial to its chances of being discovered in new geographic markets and is the first step toward attracting new customers. There are a variety of techniques that digital marketers employ in their attempts to achieve priority rankings on relevant SERPs and thereby gain most prominent visibility in the market.

Invariably, the starting point lays with identifying the search terms that target customers enter into the likes of Google in order to retrieve information relating to a business, product or service.

A major requirement for attracting global custom is adopting a strategy purposely adapted to the market's dominating search engine(s) and tailored towards the user's specific needs.

While it is important to be aware of and plan search engine specifications into any digital strategy, there nevertheless needs to be the understanding that the customer/user's experience comes first.

Put the customer experience at the heart of everything that is done online.

In practice this is far from straightforward but, as a guiding principle, this is the best foundation on which to start.

Google's (as well as most other search engines') indexing policies revolve around the notion that it should strive to make the internet a better place for everyone – meaning an environment that is fast and easy to navigate and a place where it is easy for a user to retrieve the most relevant content for them.

Combining easy to find, relevant information with a straightforward and user-friendly website will ultimately lead to satisfied customers who, having had a good experience, will revisit the site in future.

For UK companies doing business abroad, this means developing an understanding of native spoken language, geography and culture, and subsequently building this understanding into every step of its online engagement with international customers. This cultural sensitivity should play its role from the moment a customer initiates a search, all the way through the buying cycle, and up to the point when the customer chooses to disengage with the brand.

Therefore, as a first step, domestic companies should explore how the "language of their business" is employed online by foreign market customers and use this data to develop an engagement strategy tailored to each individual market.

Google

bing

NAVER

Яндекс

Baidu 百度

YAHOO!

Getting started in a new market

The killer question – Which local domain?

Choosing the most suitable domain for your overseas expansion is a vital first step on the path to international success online. However, many struggle with this decision and find understanding the subtle differences and the impact a domain has on businesses processes confusing.

From the businesses asked in Search Laboratory's 2015 survey, 87% of businesses believe it is important to have a local website domain (.fr/.de)

This reflects the fact that the majority of European markets have and are generally more successful with a country coded top level domain (ccTLD). By using the country coded domain you're not only ensuring that your website is most suitable for the search engines, but also establishing trust with the user. Someone looking to purchase from you feels greater trust for a brand that's well established in their market. Signalling this through a ccTLD compared to a generic .com site is common practice and is an important indication to customers for businesses to display when expanding overseas.

Domain choices are, however, not a one-size-fits-all markets situation. There are several choices, each of which have pros and cons that businesses should consider before selecting the one to employ:

1. ccTLD (country code top-level domain), e.g. example.fr

As mentioned before, the strongest pro of a ccTLD choice is the trust signals it gives out to a user. It also gives more control over the geo-targeting opportunities of a website. A weakness of a ccTLD is that the preliminary authority of the site will be low, thereby presenting the need to build your website's authority from the ground up. Not everyone has the time or resources to do this. Furthermore, consideration must be given to the management of this separate website. However, once authority is gained the long-term impact of a ccTLD site is superior to other choices.

2. Sub-folder, e.g. example.com/fr

The strongest pro of a sub-folder is that the new market site benefits from the high authority of the domestic website. It is generally viewed with a medium trust rate, but its greatest strength is the costs which can be saved with this choice.

3. Sub-domain, e.g. fr.example.com

Cost and management are the main pros of a sub-domain, as the overall cost of implementing a new sub-domain is low and the website can be managed through the domestic site.

If you do opt for a generic domain, e.g. a ".com" or ".net", you can utilise settings in your Google Webmaster Tools dashboard that will help search engines identify your target territories. For example, if using either a sub-domain or sub-folder structure (or even if simply targeting one territory only e.g. UK or US with a ".com"), you should login and associate your domains or sub-folders with your specific target markets.

As all domain choices have different pros and cons, the ultimate decision of which one to choose depends on your goals in the market, the resources you have available and your long-term plan.

Domain choice needs to be tailored to your business model, and a specialist SEO agency can guide you through this decision.



http://www

Domain choices – Further considerations

When it comes to choosing the best domain for your website, best practices are also affected by the trends and development in that market. For example, in the Latin American countries significant change is happening with the Mexico domain changing from its formal best practice guide of acquiring a “.com/mx” to just “.mx”. When researching domains in Mexico, the majority of localised sites will still have the “.com/mx” domain, as the “.mx” has only recently become available, and it is yet to be seen if this ccTLD gains the trust and ranking opportunities of the former “.com/mx” option.

Additionally, a new “.lat” domain for all Latin American countries was launched in spring 2015. As this domain incorporates several very different countries both by language and culture (the significance of cultural differences are explored further in the whitepaper), it will be interesting from a digital trend point of view to see if the “.lat” domain will prove to be more user-friendly and accessible than the current mix of generic “.com” domains and limited ccTLDs within the different Latin American countries.

When selecting a domain option, it's recommended to consider the following six factors and how they impact your overall plans in the market:

1. Authority

Building authority from the ground-up or using your domestic site's existing authority.

2. Trust

The trust signals the market you are expanding into requires, and how you can match the majority or ultimately all of these signals.

3. Cost

The budget you have available for this choice.

4. Geo-targeting

The granular level at which you wish to geo-target. Even top level geo-targeting is recommended over no geo-targeting at all.

5. Short-term impact

Does the choice of domain have an instant impact? Does this impact last in the market? And does this match what you wish to achieve in the market?

6. Long-term impact

Is the choice of domain better suited for a longer campaign in the market? Is long-term part of your business plan?

Speaking your customer's language

The “language of your business”, as mentioned in the section “Going Global”, is vital not only for search engine rankings and paid search quality scores, but also in order to gain visibility, establish trust and to be able to compete with the local businesses, who are already at an advantage due to being native speakers.

In Search Laboratory's survey, businesses were asked to highlight their greatest concerns when expanding globally. They cited the following key concerns:

1. Establishing trust
2. Gaining visibility
3. Competing against local businesses

All of the above are linked to how you position yourself in the market. The first aspect of positioning oneself in a new market, and which sets the tone for any following positioning activity, is the language your business uses to engage with customers.

Authenticity is vital when engaging with your audience no matter which country they are in, and missing out on adapting to a fundamental element, such as language, can have repercussions when it comes to trust. It can also hinder visibility and any potential revenue opportunities.

Nevertheless, it was discovered that 1 in 3 businesses still trade online with an English-only website, and 40% of the businesses didn't think that communicating with customers in their native language was important.

These findings are quite significant compared to the survey of 2012, and illustrates an 18% decrease in the opinion that native language is classed as “very important” when engaging with new overseas customers.

This is very surprising when both customers and search engines are expecting more localisation and user-friendly sites than ever before.

Not having a website or service in the respective market's language is cause for concern for businesses that wish to gain the most out of their global investments.

For some markets, an English-only website can lead to a swift end to your expansion. According to figures from China's biggest search engine, Baidu, English landing pages have an 85% drop-off rate. With such a high drop-off it is therefore highly advised to match the language of your audience in this market.

Translation

Translation is needed as a first step of localisation, although translation alone will not ensure you global success online.

Native speakers are naturally equipped with a unique range of vocabulary and knowledge of how their local language is spoken in a way translators are not. It is therefore critical to engage mother-tongue linguists to creatively and effectively explore the full variety of potential search terms that could yield results in a search or digital marketing campaign.

Today's automated translation tools are simply not up to the challenge of optimising your website for new markets. Non-native speaking human translators also fail to capture important local phrases which are key to your success, due to how they have been trained to translate from one language to another. Even if someone who is bilingual and can transfer your optimised English campaign into a different language, it doesn't necessarily mean they have the skillset required to ensure that the translated campaign will still be optimised when translated into their second language.

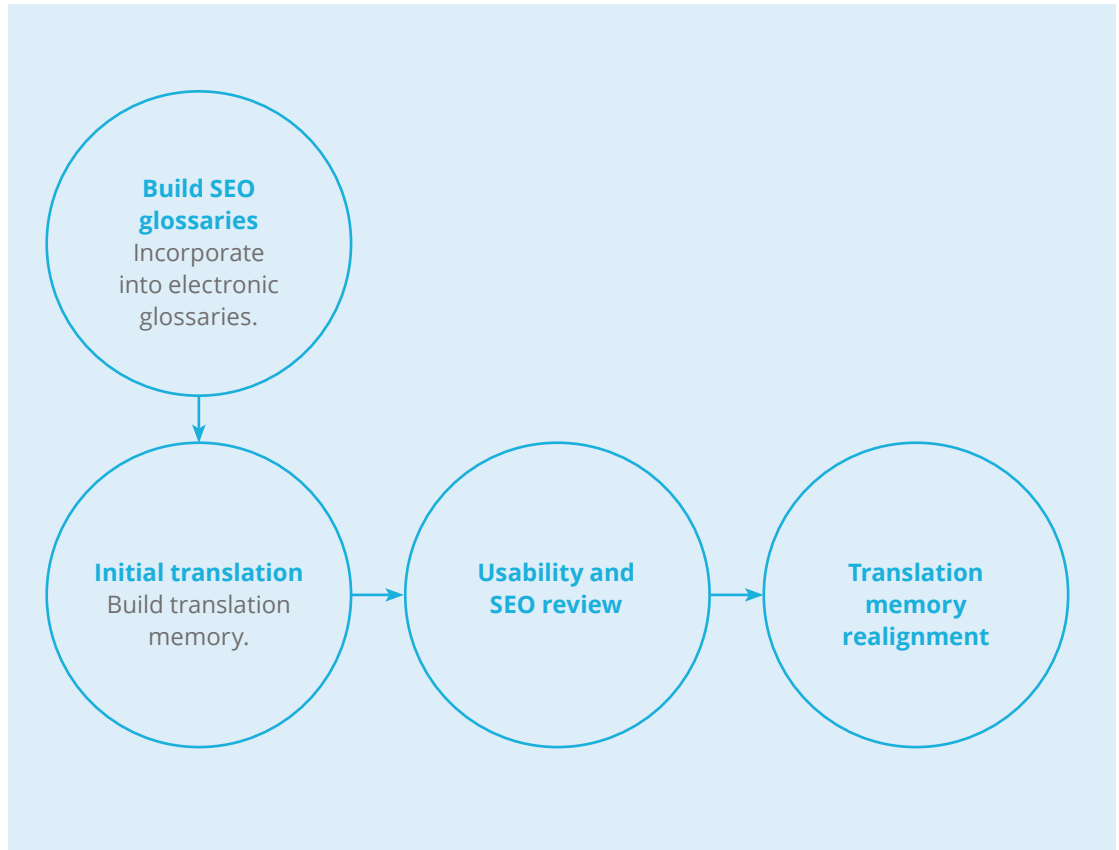
A translation agency is required to ensure your website can cater for the required language, but they alone cannot do the job of making it market and search engine friendly.

This is why we believe you will gain more from your translated website, if you engage a digital agency with international know-how and native linguists to support, to guide and optimise the website alongside your chosen translation agency.

Rather than translating your site, then optimising it at a later date and potentially having to re-work large sections of the website as these are not optimised from a digital perspective, begin your translation work with a digital agency at your disposal. They can guide and advise you as to the most efficient way of working. Furthermore, relying solely on translation with no technical guidance may result in future updates becoming increasingly expensive and complex because the legacy structure has made it impossible to apply cost-saving tools and techniques.



This process of translation agency and digital agency working side-by-side to gain the most efficient end result can work as follows:



The SEO glossaries are built by the digitally trained mother-tongue linguists to ensure that before translation starts the translators are armed with the most appropriate terms for the target language and these terms will automatically be suggested to them each time a keyword appears in the source text.

The initial translation is performed using the latest translation memory software so that:

1. Translation is consistent across the site.
2. Costs are kept to a minimum.
3. Changes to any page in future do not cause a complete re-translation.

Content is then reviewed for usability and SEO. This is critical to ensure the page will rank well and convert well in the target market. The SEO and usability amendments must be reincorporated into the translation memory

to ensure consistency across the site and to negate the amendments being undone next time the page is changed.

Nevertheless, the majority of companies still use a stand-alone translation agency to create and manage the entirety of their international digital campaigns without consideration of optimising key terms for the market.

Pitfalls of relying solely on translation for your global campaigns:

Through no fault of their own translators simply do not know technical SEO restrictions, as they are not trained in this field.

In order to ensure accurate identification of foreign language search terms, digital marketers must consider how native speakers

employ local phrases, alongside the variety of alternative terms that could be used to make the same search request.

The reductive approach taken by automated and human translators will drastically restrict the number of French search terms that the car hire company identifies, limiting the number of SERPs it could target. This means that its visibility in the French market for users and search engines alike is equally restricted, regardless of how effective subsequent techniques may be at establishing a high ranking for the company.

Example: A car hire company expands to French

A UK car hire company is expanding into France and is starting to explore French search terms in order to inform its search marketing strategy. Back in the UK, the company has already identified the following terms that its customers use in search engines in order to find companies offering this service:

- "Car hire"
- "Vehicle rental"
- "Automobile lease"
- "Charter motor"

Going a step further, these pairs of words can be interchanged to create sixteen possible combinations of these search terms which could all be entered into a search engine in order to retrieve similar SERPs: 'vehicle hire', 'automobile rental', 'car lease' etc.

In this case, it is likely that both human and automated translators would reduce these sixteen possible combinations down to one or two phrases - "location de voiture", for example. Both are trained to find the 'best match' between words and phrases through which they can transport meaning from one language to another.

This is a reductive approach to translation and is actually the opposite of what our car hire company requires. To inform a French search marketing campaign that will ensure its website appears on the SERPs of as many French-language consumers as possible, the company needs to identify the highest possible number of alternative search terms, not only those that provide the "best match".

Localisation – A step beyond translation

The importance of localising through the use of not only the correct language, but also relevant terms and colloquialisms has been discussed in the section above; however, there is more to localisation than language alone. Big and small changes to your campaign to further localise it can have a drastic impact on how you are perceived by your target audience. This is the reason why localisation to further enhance your customers experience whilst they are on your website is key to any international digital campaign.

Localisation is relevant for establishing trust in an overseas market, as well as gaining visibility. Trust will help your business establish itself within the market and compete with its local rivals, while visibility can be earned through following best practices within that market and ensuring that campaigns are targeted towards the target audience.

Trust is the main benefit of localisation and while campaigns and their content is relevant, there are also trust factors within a website which vary from market to market, thereby making the knowledge of what is and is not a trust factor for a market ever more important.

Some of the main website trust factors that can also be localised for optimum effect are:

Use of imagery

Particularly when targeting an ethnically different or more diverse market, it is best practice to ensure that not all images are Caucasian-only. However localising images properly goes much deeper than this. One must remember that behaviour varies too. While in the US, a typical business photo might include suited men punching the air with their fist in victory, in markets such as France this would be wholly inappropriate and misunderstood. Pictures that are clearly US-centric may not work in more reserved European markets and could damage your credibility so careful consideration should be paid to selecting culturally appropriate media.

Customer services

When expanding overseas, it is vital to consider all necessary resources for this, including customer services. If a customer is required to liaise with a service team which cannot support them in their native language, then this will diminish trust. The customer may feel that the business is not taking the overseas market seriously, and concerns may be raised over how much your brand can be relied upon.

Furthermore with customer services, there's the consideration of technology. With instant communication becoming ever more the norm, customer services via social media accounts, as well as instant messaging tools (as is common within China), need to be in place and prepared for customer support.

Payment methods

Naturally if a customer cannot access the payment method of their choice, then trust and purchasing intent can be instantly damaged. It can also signal to a customer that a business is not fully knowledgeable about the market they're in, thereby giving already established and local competitors an advantage.

For example, in Germany the use of debit and credit cards is not as common practice as compared to the UK. In Germany the option of a bank transfer still very much dominates in payment methods despite it seeming rather unusual in other markets. This is also a reason why payment systems, such as PayPal are not as





wide-spread in Germany as in the UK, as these rely heavily on a debit or credit card option. Both of these payment options are available in Germany and should be given as an option, but the majority of your German customers would prefer to have the choice of a bank transfer.

In Japan it was revealed that 73.7% of people would leave an online shop if their preferred payment method was not available.

With a wide range of different payment methods expected in Japan, such as the deferred payment option via convenience stores like 7Eleven, as well as via banks or post offices, it is highly beneficial to be aware of these preferences, in order not to miss out on any sales.

Calls to action

Every market requires calls to action for general understanding of what can be gained through engaging with a business and its services. Yet some markets, such as the UK and US are more accustomed to strong and persistent calls to action, while other markets, such as for example the French market, people prefer more subtle

action indicators, which are based around providing further information. Localising your calls to action market by market is therefore of high importance in order to ensure you gain the most out of your investment in all the markets you are present in.

Localise or prepare to miss out. When a customer has to choose between a fully-localised site and a non-localised site selling the same thing, those companies who have failed to pay attention to making the customer feel 'at home' are likely to lose out financially. As an example, after many years of servicing their Mexico audience through their US website, Amazon has now decided to develop a website purely for Mexico, which will make customer transactions with Amazon cheaper for the Mexican audience and build stronger trust for Amazon's brand in this market.

Cultural differences are key – Knowing your market

When advertising in different countries it is necessary to take into account cultural sensitivity in order to protect your brand image and ensure that you are reaching consumers effectively (and without offending them).

It is also important for those running your digital marketing and search campaigns to be familiar with the values each country and culture has.

Without this knowledge or gaining this insight, cultural faux pas may occur, and these can be detrimental to your market entry. For example, in Russia, an even number of flowers are only used at funerals, so an ad-text advertising “A Dozen Red Roses” in Russia could send an unintended message – namely one implying an invitation of death rather than an invitation of love. This is highly likely to lead to a poor click-through rate.

Search habits

Search habits and search terms vary from country to country, and while a translation agency can help you discover what your preferred search term in the language you are optimising for is, this does not guarantee that the translated term is the one most used. You need to be optimising for the most profitable keywords and phrases, those with the most intent. This is where translation alone will hinder your success.

This doesn’t only apply to markets which speak a different language either, there are many countries that speak the same language, but with their own variations. Both America and the United Kingdom speak English. However, in the UK, an “Elevator” is a “Lift” and a “Line” is a “Queue”. Furthermore, in the UK, “Color” is spelt “Colour” and “Localize” is spelt “Localise”. Even localising for such similar markets is key to your online performance.

Variations are extremely common across Spanish speaking countries as well. For example, “Cake” in Mexico is “Pastel”, in Puerto Rico “Bizcocho”, in Spain “Tarta”, and in Venezuela “Torta”. It is therefore vital to have someone who is aware of and has knowledge of these cultural differences supporting your campaign.

When it comes to search habits, there is also the order of the language to consider. For example, in Arabic cultures, sentences are read right to left, and what a Westerner may

Example: “Additional information” vs. “did you know?”

Search Laboratory’s native French linguists have rejected content used in a perfectly translated French version of an English website, on the grounds of it being culturally inappropriate for French businessmen.

In this particular case, an English page offering customers a number of market insights entitled “Did you know...?” was

deemed by French linguists to be patronizing to French businessmen who, rather than have it suggested that they may not be in possession of all the facts, vastly prefer to be guided toward a neutral page of “additional information”.

The true value of what initially looked like an overly-fastidious observation was revealed when the requested amend was made to the page and the subsequent click-through rates of French visitors surged as a result.

consider the front of a book would be the back for an Arabic speaker. The right to left reading would need to be considered for website navigation and design, as well as for the target keyword selection.

In fact, search behaviour is very different in Arabic speaking countries, due to only 4% of digital content being in Arabic and the majority of this being considered as spam. What an average Arabic user does to gain the best results is often to type the search term in Arabic then use an online translation tool and paste the English version in the search engine. The English results are then entered into the translation tool to translate them back into Arabic. A long process, but one still widely used in the Arabic states. Campaigns in Arabic countries would thereby need to be aware of and adapt to this unusual search behaviour.

Furthermore, in China, the most popular search engine 'Baidu', has a strong emphasis on paid search campaigns, due to the fact that Chinese audiences generally trust the paid adverts over the organic search results. It is therefore highly recommended to enter the Chinese market via a paid search campaign, with an SEO campaign supporting it.

Being equipped with local country knowledge of your prospects' search habits and behaviours is key to building successful campaigns from the ground up. These nuances may even help inform your choice of in-country promotion method. While a cultural consideration can mean a relatively small amend, this knowledge can have a large impact on your country-specific strategy.

Knowing your market and exploiting opportunities

No one wants to miss key opportunities in local markets like not taking advantage of holidays that are uniquely popular to that country.

In America, for example, there is a strong understanding within the business world of the benefits of focusing content marketing campaigns around the Christmas season. Most prominent examples of a holiday opportunity are Black Friday and Cyber Monday, where online sales from Thanksgiving through to Cyber Monday rose by 23% in 2014 compared to 2013, with over 2 million people discussing Black Friday on social media and mobile sales accounting for 27.9% of online sales.

Even such significant global holidays can have key differences in other cultures and countries. Christmas is now highly popular in Japan, but is not seen as a family holiday. Instead it is more comparable with Valentine's Day in the West and is viewed as a holiday for lovers. Strategically a brand could be missing out by positioning itself as a great place to shop for family presents in Japan during Christmas, when a focus on items for the significant other would prove more profitable.

Knowing and understanding the cultural differences of overseas markets, even with familiar topics, such as Christmas, is important insight to have in order to create and maintain an international content campaign.



International SEO – Improving your global visibility and rankings organically

For a successful international SEO campaign, the same skillsets and know-how are required as in a domestic campaign. The difference however is that these skillsets and this know-how need to match the market, language and the audience you wish to engage with. This can be a daunting prospect for many businesses however, in reality it's easier than ever to enter new territories as long as you have the right partners to guide you.

The principle remains the same - today's fully optimised sites need to present content in a convenient and user-friendly manner, and work to make search results more relevant. By placing users at the heart of your globalisation efforts, businesses provide an overall more satisfying experience for users. For example, someone searching for 'ladies shoes' should be presented with results that guide them not only to websites specifically featuring ladies shoes, but to those that present their content in a logical, structured and familiar manner. The use of correct, fully localised language is of the utmost importance here.

Campaigns therefore need to be localised; and the team creating the campaign need to be aware of both the technical SEO needs of a different market, as well as the cultural, linguistic and content /PR context, in order to gain maximum visibility and trust within the market.

Technical SEO

If separate partners are being used for translation, web development and SEO, it is vital to ensure there is collaborative dialogue between them. Technical SEO should be considered from the outset as there are elements within the site's infrastructure that are extremely important to optimise.

URLs

(See also 'Which local domain' discussed earlier).

An example of this is the use of URLs. 'SEO and user-friendly' URLs include strategic keywords in the directory structure or filename that allow visitors to clearly see the path they have followed. These keywords in URLs are also identified by search engine spiders and contribute to a site's overall page ranking.

A SEO-friendly URL:

www.yoursite.com/digital-cameras/kodak-x1.aspx

A non-SEO-friendly URL:

www.yoursite.com/products.aspx?cat=1&subcat=9&prod=3

When placed in the hands of a translation agency, the URLs are often forgotten in the localisation process, as the agency may not possess the required digital know-how to localise them.

This can lead to two problems. Firstly, the foreign customer will see immediately that this is an English site. This can be detrimental to the customer's overall appraisal of the organisation, and may lead to a lack of trust between consumer and brand. Secondly, the keyword friendly URLs that remain in English will not support foreign language SEO, where the search engine spiders are tuned to identify and favour keywords in their local language.

If SEO-friendly URLs are going to be used,



brands must ensure they translate and optimise clearly for the required languages.

Keywords

Identification of the most suitable keywords is an integral element of your SEO campaign. While a translation agency has the ability to convert your English keywords into the correct language, this alone cannot guarantee that these are the terms which your target audience overseas is actually searching for. All sorts of linguistic nuances and semantics are at play here and only a native linguist will be able to correctly advise you on where best to focus your efforts.

Meta data

Meta data plays a significant role when optimising a website both for a search engine, as well as for a user.

When optimising for a campaign in an overseas market, the length of a language can be more relevant than initially anticipated. For example, while the original English title tag may be within the 50-60 character limitation, the translated version may be too long for the full title to show in search engine results. This leads to too little information coming through for the user and search engine to understand what the website is about and how it is relevant to the search query typed. This can result in fewer visitors coming to the site.

Hreflang

A key method for creating and maintaining local domains in the most optimised way is by correctly implementing hreflang code. This markup signals to search engine robots that the duplicated sites belong together, yet different versions serve different markets and languages, which are relevant for different audiences. The code also implies site pages where there is the same language, however they are targeted at different regions e.g. Portuguese for Portugal and Portuguese for Brazil.

An example of a hreflang set-up is shown here:

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://example.com" hreflang="en-us" />
```

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://example.co.uk" hreflang="en-gb" />
```

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://example.de" hreflang="de-de" />
```

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://example.at" hreflang="de-at" />
```

```
<link rel="alternate" href="http://example.br" hreflang="br-pt" />
```

It's important to ensure the hreflang code is set-up correctly when going global, as failure to do so may not only affect search engine rankings and visibility in-country, but can also affect the domestic website and all connected sites.

Content and online PR

From an SEO perspective, a site that has only been translated, will have significantly lower organic visibility compared to its original English site's domain. On top of many other things, this is because the foreign site needs to create its own backlink profile, within its own territory (especially if you've chosen a ccTLD or sub-domain rather than a sub-folder), as well as its brand reputation and visibility, often from the ground up. This naturally takes time and resource.

One of the key challenges for a brand entering a new market is often the existing brand perception the audience in this market already has. This is frequently seen with larger brands, which are likely to be already known by the audience, even if until recently no physical presence or brand communication efforts have taken place in the new region. As you cannot assume that you will enter a new market with a

clean canvas, it is important to be aware of and understand your current brand perception, as this will need to greatly influence your content and online PR planning.

In order to establish yourself in a new market - and this includes improving your brand visibility and developing your backlink profile - a strategic content marketing and content outreach plan tailored towards the interests, and trends relevant to the target audience and market is required. Without a localised content marketing strategy, in your target language, and focused on culturally-sensitive and specific content, the authority of a site and your brand's reputation in a new market will struggle.

Universally-relevant content

Brands that do well with a global audience often do well because they have adapted and localised to the audience, and understand what their appeal to a particular market is. Similarities and common ground can be found across languages, continents and cultures; and content that has a universal appeal can successfully be utilised as market-targeted and local content.

For a universal content campaign to be successful it is advisable to first identify what the main hook for any audience is and what is appealing about your brand to them. The next step would be to closely examine how this fits in with recent campaigns and trends within each market in which the content will be launched. It is often not necessary to change universal content from the ground up, but instead just tweak it to be more relevant for an individual market. This includes determining what angle is most suitable and how to communicate this message in the most effective way.

Content which possesses a universal appeal is highly desirable as it enables you to grow visibility and awareness across borders with the same brand voice, and enables you to integrate your resources and plans.

Seasonal campaigns

When focusing on what you require to achieve in your domestic business, as well as similarly Northern Hemisphere based ones,

the key seasonal fluctuation of North and South can be and has been easily overlooked by many brands.

To truly engage with your audience, it is not only important not to be discussing a culturally niche topic popular in the United Kingdom with a French or Spanish audience, who have never heard of the topic or person, but equally important to avoid discussing latest summer fashions, when your audience is in the middle of their winter season.

Being aware of and remembering the season of your audience, although a small thing, can make a large difference to a consumer's view of a brand, which also affects their trust within the brand.

Online PR

When in a new market, it is not only important to build trust and a positive relationship with your target audience, but to also engage with them via their preferred information resources. This helps to build visibility for your brand within the market, not only improving awareness and trust, but also supporting your website's rankings within the search engine results.

In order to build said visibility it is vital to have your audience, bloggers and the general media talking about your brand and your creative campaigns. To gain the positive attention you require, you will not only need targeted content, but a targeted promotion plan for each country or territory.

Digitally skilled mother-tongue linguists, who not only communicate with journalists and media correspondents in their preferred language, but also understand what angles and stories are most likely to gain coverage, will always have an advantage over those who do not spend resources on a promotion plan, or try to use non-language specific information to gain an interest.

A communications expert will be able to give you an insight into what challenges and rewards their work entails, and how time, skill and the right resources need to be committed to this to reap any rewards.

Keys aspects of in-country promotion include:

- **Understanding how your content fits into current news, trends and topics of interest**
 - To accomplish this regular screening of a market's news sites and key influencers is necessary
- **Knowing who is the person to pitch your content to and how to do so**
 - Researching their past articles, understanding their interests and meeting their needs
- **Choosing the right communication medium**
 - Matching when they need the story; using the preferred communication medium be it email, phone, social media or a combination of all
- **Building and maintaining relationships with journalists and media correspondents**
 - Who you know is key for PR campaigns. A lot of professionals keep their contacts close to their chest, as they understand the power of having an existing relationship with a media professional when you are promoting a campaign

If you are not able to address these aspects due to a lack of understanding and cultural insight, then you are likely to encounter challenges in your new market.

Finding a suitable platform

Identifying the magazines, news sites, and websites, which your audience is most likely to engage with, is the best way to gain the most out of a campaign. You not only want the public to see your campaigns, but you also want your target audience to see it.

While trusted and influential sites in the West often include newspaper websites, magazines and bloggers specialised in a certain area with a strong following, equally trusted sites can look very different elsewhere in the world.

In China, for example, forum sites and online cafes are very much the dominant and authoritative platforms for users to find information. From a Western SEO point of view, these platforms are generally considered less trustworthy and even associated with spam, but that is mainly due to little content of value or interest being featured on the Western versions of these sites, while in China and other Eastern countries these platforms do include useful and credible information.

You will get the most from your content marketing and online PR campaigns by using a localised approach adapted to your audience and their preferred communication methods.

Social media

Social media is becoming increasingly important for communicating and engaging with your audience; in some markets it's even used for pitching media stories to journalists. Tailor your approach territorially.

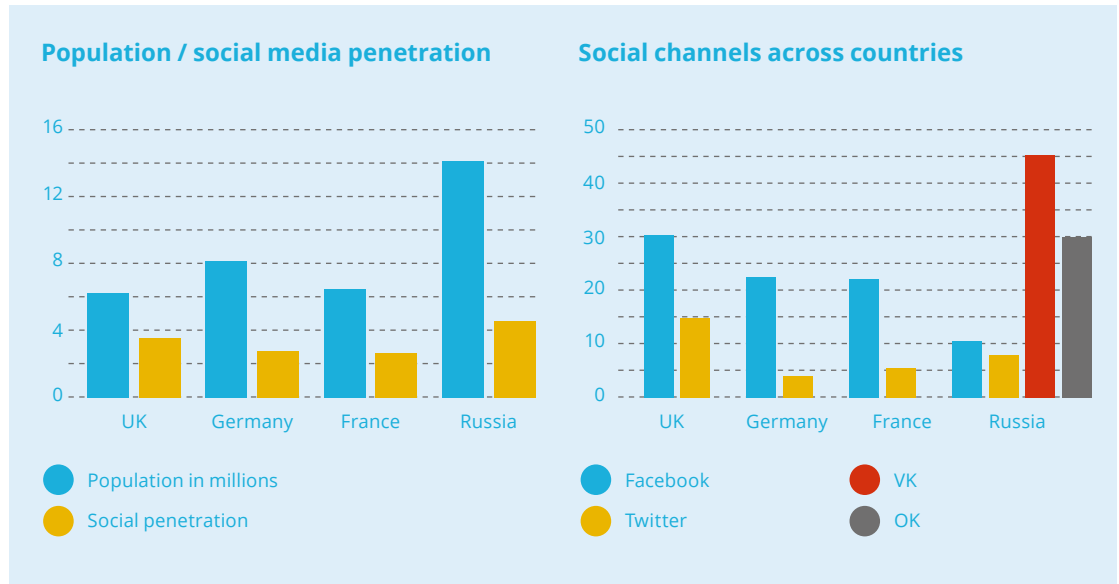
Twitter is a journalists ally in the UK and USA but this is not so in all markets. Other regions have completely different social media platforms. In China and Russia, for instance, the most used social media channels are Sina Weibo (CN) and V-Kontakte (RU), also referred to as VK. While in Russia the social media channel Odnoklassniki (Ok) is VK's main rival followed thereafter by Facebook.

When harnessing social for your international campaign, it is beneficial to know which platforms to use to your advantage in each market, and also how your target audience uses and perceives social.



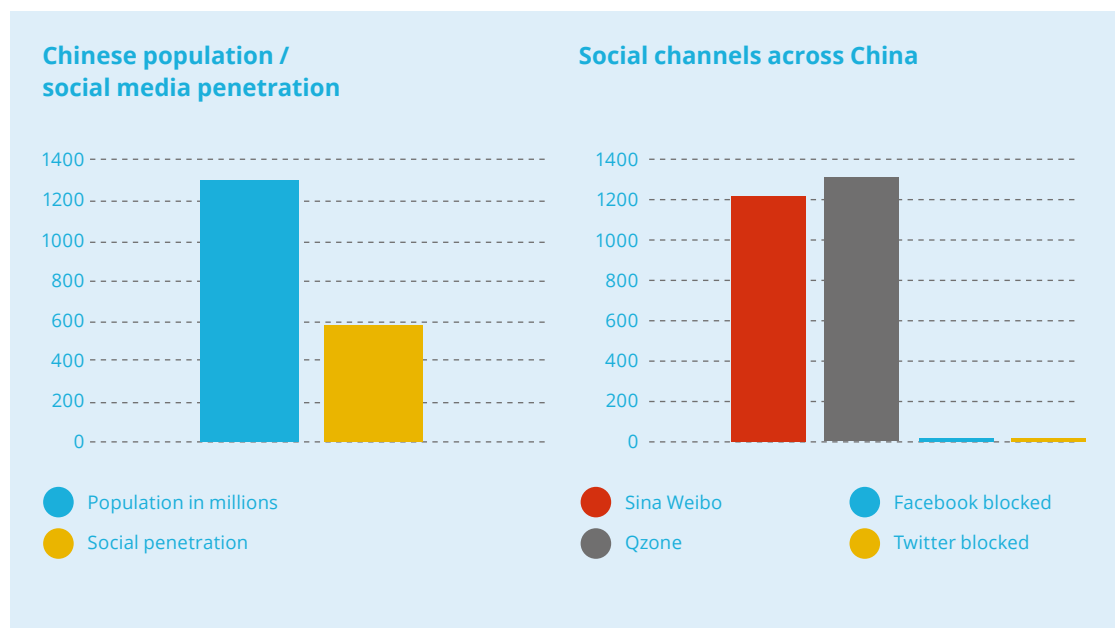
A social strategy for the UK is unlikely to be like for like transferable to a different market. To highlight how different social is across markets, the graphs below show how social penetration varies from market to market, and what social channels are dominant in which markets:

The social channels below show how many million users each channel has per market, which also highlights the popularity of said channels.



As China has a much larger population compared to the Western countries shown, the population and social penetration split will be shown in a separate graph to further highlight the difference:

Please note that although Facebook and Twitter are blocked in mainland China there is still some usage and access to these channels in some areas, though the graph above shows an estimate of this engagement based on research as no official statistics are conclusive.



International paid search

Paid search is a great place to start your market entry as it can produce short-term results, for a fixed budget. Where content marketing and SEO efforts may take months to get results, PPC will give you an instant flavour of the demand for your products in new international markets.

Google and other search engines have a wide range of support for advertising in additional languages.

However, limiting your global paid search activities to only Google could severely restrict the exposure of your ads, your website traffic, and ultimately your company's revenue; especially when it comes to certain countries. In different locations the popularity of search engines varies significantly.

Selecting your platforms

Among PPC providers, Google AdWords and Microsoft's Bing Ads are the two largest network operators, and both operate under a bid-based model.

Depending on the market, there may be alternative advertising platforms, which will need to be used in place of, or in addition to AdWords and Bing Ads. For example, in Russia, Yandex is the most relevant platform, while in China, Google trails behind rival search engines Baidu and Haosou, which cater to the Chinese audience. In South Korea, Naver, caters for most searches, while in the Czech Republic Seznam is frequently used, but Google is gaining in popularity, so here a combination of ad campaigns present on Google and Seznam is recommended.

As you may have expected however, Google dominates almost every market: it is the top search engine in all but six of the top global markets (and generally by a very substantial margin).

There are many considerations to make when considering and planning international paid search campaigns. It is always worth familiarising yourself with the markets you are looking to advertise in; as each market will be slightly different in terms of how users respond.

Here are some initial considerations to make before entering a new market:

- **Which devices users will be searching on**
 - Many developing markets are accessing the internet much more on mobile devices, largely due to the increasing penetration of smartphones worldwide. In fact, many mobile web users in the developing world are now mobile-only, in that they never or very rarely access the internet on any other kind of device. For example, 70% of Egyptian internet users are mobile-only, closely followed by India at 59%, and South Africa at 57%. Closer to the other end of the scale are China, the US and the UK, with 30%, 25%, and 20% respectively.

- **Landing pages and localisation**

- A major consideration must be that of the language that you are presenting your company in online. The cons of not having a language ready website is explored in detail in the section “Translation”, but is also highly relevant for paid search campaigns, as failure to localise the language for a campaign can result in a high bounce rate and wasted budget. If you cannot afford to fully localise your website, consider using a localised landing page or microsite.
- Small tweaks to landing pages can make a significant difference to your conversion rate from paid campaigns. Impeccable online customer experience must always be the goal, whether that involves only subtle adjustments, such as switching from British to American English, or more fundamental changes to accommodate a unique audience.

For a successful PPC campaign, the following three elements need to be present:

1. A well thought-out setup for a successful launch
2. Ongoing optimisation and ad testing to ensure you have the most effective messages for your audience
3. ROI focused budgeting and strategic bid management decisions

Results from the Search Laboratory survey showed that 40% of businesses don't think communicating with customers in their native language is important, even though 3 out of 5 businesses rely on up to 50% of business from global markets. Despite 40% of businesses currently not communicating in the language of their target audience, this paper has already shown the key benefits of communicating in your audience's native language.

When developing a paid search campaign, creating an ad campaign in your audience's native language will signal to your audience that your campaign is relevant to their needs. It also makes your campaign more competitive with local rivals, who are building and maintaining

ad campaigns in the local language. If you have opted for developing an ad campaign in your audience's preferred language, but kept the website in English to save costs, you will inevitably have a higher bounce rate compared to websites which have been localised. This bounce rate not only leads to poor sales, but may also damage the overall quality score of your ad campaign and thereby lead to less visibility for your ads.

Since many of the alternative ad networks are not the most straightforward to set up new campaigns with, it is often recommended to try advertising on Google first in foreign languages and territories, and use the results from that to inform further campaigns on the native platforms.

Given the additional difficulties of the language barrier caused by the basic navigability of some of these sites and the lack of English support, you will generally be better off working with a linguist or a specialist agency with knowledge of these platforms than going it alone.

Campaign structure

If a campaign is successful in the English market, the next step is often to replicate this ad structure and keyword choice in your international paid search campaigns to gain equal success.

While the theory seems logical, the reality of this tactic is very different. As mentioned above languages evolve and change with time. The keyword choices for the English campaign are likely to be the most profitable ones for an English audience, but are usually simply not transferable.

Even if you factor language into your campaign and get a professional agency to directly translate your optimised keywords, these translated keywords do not take actual search volume in the market or profitability of a keyword into consideration. Nor do they consider semantic nuances which could make you decide to drop certain keywords or phrases that in your new market no longer make sense.

When it comes to an international paid search campaign, the best practice is to look at the

English campaign as a point of reference, but to ultimately build your international campaign from the ground up. This will enable you to gain the most relevant and profitable keywords for your campaign.

With languages changing and evolving, not all languages are creating new words for new technology or systems, but instead adapting the globally most commonly used ones. For example in Germany the new technology systems and data terms, such as data clouds, are being referred to as “Data Clouds”; however, in France it is more common to develop a French equivalent or even alternative. As this is not always the case and is dependent on the industry of the terms being researched, it further proves the significance of gaining advice from a digitally trained linguist or specialist agency.

The main takeaway is that bidding blindly for the sake of bidding on a keyword you think is relevant, but do not understand why it is being searched for, is not the most strategic way to set-up your campaign, or the most profitable in the long term. Native linguists, not translators are your friend here.

Best practice differs

While keyword selection is key, ad texts should also be given careful consideration. An engaging ad text encourages the audience to complete the call to action, however, best practice varies between markets. In most English campaigns, it is best practice to capitalise the first letter of each of the principle words in an ad text, but in France, it is the opposite and an ad written in title case could be viewed as bordering on spam, thus damaging the click-through rate.

The tone of your message and choice of wording can also play a key role. Again in most English campaigns it is common practice to have some straight-forward calls to action which are often based on buying opportunities. Such strong calls to action are seen as too pushy in most European markets and your campaigns are less likely to gain clicks if the tone of the ads are not adapted to the market.

While for PPC translation is viewed as the

enemy, localisation, on the flip side, is PPC's strongest ally.

Optimise and test

One of the appeals of a paid search campaign is the chance to continuously test your ads against each other. This competitive testing requires ongoing maintenance of your campaign, not only including regular analysis of ad performances, but also reviewing the actual search terms that have brought traffic to the site to ensure that quality is high, and budget is not being wasted on unprofitable areas.

While this is common practice for paid search campaigns, international campaigns add the complexity of language and understanding of the cultural differences, which affect best practices for advert writing.

Resourcing translation support every time your paid search campaign requires maintenance is not cost effective, and a translation agency will not necessarily pick up on any missed opportunities due to the search habits of the target audience.

Having the option of maintaining your international paid search campaigns with someone who has the language resources and the digital skills required for the ongoing maintenance, can make your international campaign easier to manage and gives you one point of call rather than several different agencies to support with the different elements (language and digital opportunities) of your campaign.

Strategically using PPC insight

Utilising a contained PPC campaign can help inform the selection of search terms that are used in the ‘natural’ SEO strategy for that market. PPC campaigns can be used as exploratory tactics to test the effectiveness of potential keywords, the most potent of which can be built into your corresponding SEO campaign.



Global programmatic advertising

Programmatic trading is the latest phenomenon taking over the digital landscape. Through technology, media and data, advertisers now have the opportunity to buy highly relevant audiences at scale. This therefore means that advertisers can target the right user, at the right time, with the right message served in 'real time'.

The ability to increase the effectiveness of digital campaigns has led to a huge rise in investment across programmatic with 90% of stakeholders across Europe set to increase their activity significantly over the next 12-months.

The 'online' behaviour of a user can differ from country to country, as a result it is essential that advertisers have the right data and technology in place to help maximise efficiency and localise the campaign. 'Online behaviour' also relates to how brands are received differently in each country by their target audience and attract new audiences based on the market reception to their products or services. Successful audience targeting will not perform identically between regions.

Platform differences

In programmatic advertising, the platforms vary greatly from market to market, and a poor platform choice will mean that what should be a highly targeted campaign, is unable to reach its audience.

Programmatic advertising allows a level of control that was not previously possible with traditional display/media, leading to statistically optimised campaigns achieving:

- Cost per conversion and ROIs that were never before possible with display
- Transparent, reportable results on every key metric including the success of an audience for branding

As the success of programmatic advertising is based on its ability to highly target your business' audience, localisation of your messages across markets is therefore absolutely key for your campaign to work.

If you are not in the position to localise your campaign, then it is critical that you find a partner who has the resources to support you with your programmatic advertising goals.



Other key in-country market considerations

Laws

It is important to be aware of and understand the laws in the different countries you are targeting. Being compliant and providing adequate reassurance to your customers is likely to help your international sales revenues. Make sure your terms and conditions are localised properly and always consult an in-country lawyer if unsure. Legal considerations go beyond your T&Cs however, certain countries have their own licensing, taxation and compliance requirements which you will need to be familiar with.

In China, for example, websites need to comply with the censorship rulings and before being able to launch your website, it is necessary to apply for an Internet Content Provider License (also referred to as ICP License), which is a permit to allow you to legally operate in mainland China.

A breach of laws in any market may not only lead to a damaged reputation and disappointed customers, but in the worst case scenario, could also result in a costly lawsuit against the business and should be avoided.



Conclusion

Search Laboratory's latest research has shown that businesses are interested in seeking increased revenue from global markets and are also reliant on this expansion. However, many are still failing to consider the impact of their non-localised, English-only websites and campaigns are having on their profitability.

If businesses are to generate new and significant revenues from overseas, their key players need to embrace digital marketing as a strategic fundamental and understand the key differences between translation and true localisation.

As the UK leads the way in terms of ecommerce, local businesses are more equipped than most to take advantage of internationalisation and the opportunities for growth in new markets.

Those that focus their efforts and resources on attracting and converting buyers in a manner they can relate to and a language they understand, will reap the rewards globalisation can offer.



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