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THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL: THE CHALLENGES OF TAKING THE WEBSITE GLOBAL*

By Anna H. Perrault and Vicki L. Gregory

Introduction

How many of us have had the experience of looking at the geographic location of "hits" on our organization's website and being amazed at the traffic coming from all over the globe? No matter what type of organization we are working within, there is a need to think globally. It does not matter whether you are in education, a governmental agency, or the corporate sector; just merely putting up a website enters your organization (or you personally) into the global arena. Eric Ward reminds us just how easy and fast it is to become global -

"It happens to my site every day, and I have never advertised or sent my URL to anyone outside the U.S.--of course, even one e-mail message sent to a discussion list, of which a member is from another country, and bingo, your URL from your signature file is global in three seconds."¹

Ward points out that all websites de facto become global by virtue of being on the web. His statement makes us realize that all information professionals need to be conscious of globalization and know the basic tenets of shaping a culturally sensitive website that is accessible, understandable and inoffensive to people in other parts of the world.

The majority of the literature on website globalization is written for the corporate e-commerce audience. The e-commerce definition is that "Web site globalization is the configuring of a company's Web site so it can be used to market and sell products outside its home country."² But most of the advice given about website globalization applies no matter what the mission of the organization.

* Paper presented at the „Global 2000“ Worldwide Conference on Special Librarianship“ (Brighton, 16-19 October 2000) organised by the Special Libraries Association (SLA) and co-sponsored by several international library associations and organisations.

¹ Ward, Eric. "Make Simple Site Adjustments to do Business Globally-Better," *Business Marketing* (1 July 1999): 34.

² "Web Site Globalization." *Computerworld* (10 July 2000): 56.

Currently, the countries which produce the most traffic on the WWW are the United States, Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Users at non-United States domains account for close to half of all Web traffic, according to WebSideStory, an internet traffic measurement company.

"Data from traffic measurements at nearly 100,000 websites show that in 1999, from January to July, traffic from non-U.S. users rose from 36% to 42% in six months."³ And according to statistics from International Data Corp. (IDC), by 2005, Web users will number approximately 1 billion, with 70 percent being non-English speakers. The number of users accessing the Web via non-PC devices, such as mobile phones, handhelds, and TVs, is growing rapidly also.⁴

Basic Advice

There are numerous articles offering advice for developing an accessible, understandable, culturally sensitive website. Much of the advice is found in English language articles written for a Western audience. The following elements to include or watch out for have been culled from articles by Rick Borelli⁵, Laura Morelli⁶, Lynda Radosevich⁷, Anna and Yuri Radziewsky.⁸

- *Simple Language* -- Avoid complicated sentence structures; strive for clear, concise language by choosing a shorter word over a longer one.
- *Use the Active Voice*
- *Avoid Humor; Avoid words with multiple meanings*
- *Consider Dates, Time, and Geography* -- Many countries use different formats for dates. Spelling out the month can help avoid confusion which can be caused by numerical formats. Many cities have the same name in different countries. Give the country name for locations. Use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and bear in mind that foreign visitors to your site are in vastly different time zones.

³ <http://www.statmarket.com>

⁴ Biggs, Maggie. "Globalization Issues Forced to the Front Lines by Changing Online Demographics," InfoWorld v.21 no.36 (Sept. 1, 1999): 52.

⁵ Borelli, Rick. "A Worldwide Language Trap," Management Review 86 (Oct.1997): 52-54.

⁶ Morelli, Laura. "Writing for a Global Audience on the Web," Marketing News 32 (17 Aug.1998): 16.

⁷ Radosevich, Lynda. "Going Global Overnight," Infoworld 21.16 (1999): 1,34+

⁸ Radziewsky, Yuri and Anna Radziewsky. "Successful Global Web Sites Look Through Eyes of the Audience," Advertising Age's Business Marketing 83 (January 1998): 17.

- *Phone and fax numbers* -- U.S. based toll-free numbers are not reachable from other countries. Include direct-dial telephone and fax numbers with the country code. Fax numbers are crucial because reading and writing is often easier for non-native speakers to understand than verbal, and fax machines, like e-mail, are more time zone friendly.
- *Currency Conversion* --For e-commerce sites customers want the price information in their native currency. There are free programs for currency conversion so this is not a high cost issue.⁹
- *Avoid using terminology that does not easily lend itself to translation* -- such as lingo, slang, jargon, buzzwords, abbreviations, colloquialisms, regional dialects, euphemisms, acronyms, idiomatic phrases, cliches, proverbs, similes, easily confused words, metaphors, and military and sports terminology.¹⁰
- *Use graphics* to assist in communicating written concepts.

Technology

When building Websites to attract foreign users, those in countries which have widespread use of the latest and fastest technology for internet access need to keep in mind that this is not the case worldwide. In many places internet access is very expensive and also slow. If the site must be viewed at a lower resolution the designer must insure that the integrity of the page is maintained. Internet access via cellular phone is the preferred mode in some countries. For these customers, minimal content is a must.¹¹

Another aspect of web design which affects all websites is that many people with disabilities use the Web. "Web authors should be aware that some visitors to their sites may be using adaptive technologies, and authors should not forget to design pages to provide full access to users with disabilities."¹²

Language

By far the most prevalent topic in regard to website globalization is that of language and translation. The first thing that comes to mind when considering the

⁹ <http://www.toccat.com>

¹⁰ Borelli.

¹¹ Disabatino, Jennifer. "Globalization," Computerworld 10(July 2000): 46.

¹² Balas, Janet L. "The Don'ts of Web Page Design," Computers in Libraries 19(Sept.1999): 46-48. The author refers the reader to several websites which address the technological aspects of designing sites for accessibility by individuals with disabilities. In addition, there are references to useit.com and other sites which give "awards" for bad site design.

'world' part of the World Wide Web is language. This is more complex than the advice in the list above and asks the question "internationalization or localization"? Or to use the current catch phrase -- "Think Global, Act Local."¹³ The globalization/localization issue has received a great deal of attention in academic as well as commerce and marketing arenas, especially with respect to machine translation. Definitions have been developed for the key terms by the LISA (Localization Industry Standards Association) Education Initiative Taskforce:

Globalization

The adaptation of marketing strategies to regional requirements of all kinds (e.g. cultural, legal, and linguistic).

Internationalization

The engineering of a product (usually software) to enable efficient adaptation of the product to local requirements.

Localization

The adaptation of a product to a target language and culture (locale)¹⁴ .

According to Forrester Research, "Web users are three times more likely to make purchases at sites that are presented in their native language."¹⁵ Dell Computer recognizes this. Its Premier Pages Websites, built for its business clients, are available in 12 languages. "Dell's business customers need standardized information to be accessible throughout the world; Premier Pages offers them that capability. And its direct consumers want to buy their way," says Chris Halligan, formerly director of online development for Dell's corporate business. "If you're French you want [information] priced in francs."¹⁶ Localization reflects not only the native language but the local norms of weights and measures, time, currency, and other cultural issues.

Morelli maintains that for a website to be truly global, it must be multilingual. It is essential for customers abroad to find your site when key word searching in their native language. There is a strong bias toward English on the web - an "estimated 55 million English speakers currently access the internet, including residents of North America, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and India." Still, says Morelli,

¹³ Borelli.

¹⁴ LISA Education initiative Taskforce (LEIT) <http://www.ttt.org/leit/>.

¹⁵ Biggs.

¹⁶ Rasmusson, Erika. "E-commerce Around the World," Sales & Marketing Management. 5 (Feb. 2000): 94.

"Potential customers among the 9 million Japanese speakers, 6.9 million German speakers and 5.3 million Spanish speakers on-line should not be dismissed."¹⁷

Borelli points out that from an "operational perspective, it is less expensive to have one site in one language." But "visionary companies see that the benefits of localizing outweigh the costs. If money is not an issue the clear choice is to localize."¹⁸ Some companies even go as far as hiring Net marketing consultants to create multiple versions of their sites in different languages. Some even secure the domain name for the country for which they are building a site.

One example of localizing is Nike, a worldwide brand. Nike has a site that is intended for an American audience - "Nike.com." Then there is also "Nikefootball.com." This site was created specifically so that Nike could capitalize on the popularity of the Euro 2000 soccer championships. The website is available in English, French, Spanish, Italian Swedish, German, Portuguese and Dutch. Soccer fans represent such a large market that it was well worth the expense to attract them. While both Nike sites can be accessed worldwide, they have different objectives and intended audiences.¹⁹

Those who provide language translation services can expect a lucrative future. A recent report from Allied Business Intelligence indicates that the language translation market, which encompasses human translation, machine translation, and software and website localization, is expected to grow from over \$11 billion in 1999 to close to \$20 billion in 2004. The primary driver for this growth is e-commerce."²⁰

What has become known as the "localization industry" is now a source of employment for foreign language majors and native speakers of foreign languages alike who are being urged to learn translation technology.²¹ Vendors are emerging with software that helps manage multilingual website development and workflow. Global Sight (www.globalsight.com), produces a software product called Ambassador for multilingual content management that includes a workflow engine, access control, design tools, and a mechanism for flowing translated information into predesigned Web pages. "The key to Ambassador is the

¹⁷ Morelli.

¹⁸ Borelli.

¹⁹ DiSabatino.

²⁰ "Expanding the Borders: Gearing Up for a Global Web Market Means More than Language Translation," Internet and Electronic Commerce Strategies August 1999.

²¹ Abaitua, Joseba. "Is it Worth Learning Translation Technology?" 3rd Forum on Translation, May 12-15, 1999. Universitat de Vic, Spain.

separation of code and content. When a user comes to the website, Ambassador is able to detect the language specified in that user's browser. Using that language information, Ambassador generates on-the-fly pages in the language/country of the user. Because content is pulled dynamically from a database, the user does not need to manually select local-language versions of a website. However, with an entry price of about \$100,000, Ambassador is only for very large globalization projects."²²

For information professionals, it is a good idea to have some basic knowledge of the issues and systems available for website translation. In any environment there can be an occasional need to avail oneself of a translation site for interpreting information from a foreign language website or for appearing knowledgeable when asked about the availability of translation software by others within the organization. A thorough exploration of the topics of machine translation, translation technology and translation workflow are too complex and well beyond the bounds of this paper. Two recent papers on the subject which review many of the basic issues are by Abaitua²³ and Theologitis²⁴. Abaitua explores the necessity of machine technology and the "localization industry." The article reviews desirable characteristics for translation technology and mentions software currently available. Theologitis' more technical paper reports on systems which have been developed by the European Commission Translation Service. A listing of websites relating to translation has been attached to this article as an appendix.

Machine translation has been controversial and has not worked well in the past. Examples abound illustrating the gaffes that can occur in literal translation, such as the English word "kid." While the actual meaning is "a young goat," a much more prevalent colloquial use mean "a young human." But "kid" translated into Spanish still means "a young goat." New software and technologies have made machine translation much more satisfactory. Many companies combine both machine and human translation such as using machine translation to recognize and understand incoming e-mail from a customer. Then the machine translation is checked by someone fluent in the target language. The same can be done with translation of the contents of a site to other languages. A two step process can be utilized with both machine and human translation.

²² Radosevich.

²³ Abaitua.

²⁴ Theologitis, Dimitri. "Language Tools at the EC Translation Service: The Theory and the Practice," *Translating and the Computer 20: ASLIB Proceedings of the Twentieth International Conference on Translating and the Computer*. 12-13, November, 1998, London.

But simply translating your English-language or other native language site won't make it global or multiculturally correct. Successful multicultural net communication, essential to creating an authentic global presence, is often about nuance." National pride in culture and language must always be part of Web thinking, strategy and content," according to Yuri and Anna Radziewsky.²⁵ They warn that it's a "grave cultural error to assume a phrase as simple as 'home page' is universally understood. In Spain, home pages are called 'pagina inicial'-literally the first page. In France, it's 'page d'accueil'-the welcome page."²⁶ Jordan Woods, CEO of Global Sight, gives another example from working with Cisco on its globalization project. "The language issue was heavily charged--Spain wanted the Spanish word [for router]; Latin Americans didn't even know the Spanish word."²⁷ The Radziewsky's also advise the use of the name of the language in its original alphabet. If the site has Russian, Japanese, Chinese, etc., use the non-Roman alphabet to attract those users.²⁸

A few years ago, Anderson Consulting studied electronic commerce and travel services and collected travel brochures. It discovered that while African and German brochures stressed adventure and danger, U.S. brochures emphasized nature and family. In short, they appealed to consumers in different ways.²⁹ Similarly, the director of Internet Initiatives for Eastman Kodak Co., Terry Lund, experienced problems when translating into the German language. He had Kodak.com's key Web pages translated into other languages. But he found problems with this approach. "In Germany we translated some content--a guide to better pictures--that gets rave reviews on Kodak.com," he says. After it was posted, "the feedback was that the translation was accurate, but [the German users] didn't like the content. It wasn't suitable for the audience. They didn't like the style of the writing. That was a surprise to me--it didn't occur to me."³⁰

Another cultural aspect which affects website design is color. Company officials at Dell quickly realized they had made the mistake of surrounding most of the site's content with black borders, a sign of negativity or death in many cultures. The use

²⁵ Radziewsky.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Radosevich

²⁸ Radziewsky.

²⁹ Horwitt, Elisabeth. "Europe: Cultural, Language Barriers Challenge the Continent," *Computerworld*. (29 Sept. 1997): 21-23.

³⁰ Blankenhorn, Dana. "It's Not Such a Small World After All," *Datamation* March 1999: Online (<http://datamation.earthweb.com/ecommm/03web1.html>)

of black in graphics and backgrounds is very popular in the United States, but the color has sinister connotations in Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

These examples illustrate the difficulty of translating text from one language to another and conveying the original sense and content so that it is acceptable across cultures. There are other aspect of web design which can be both beneficial and also need careful use.

Graphics and Icons

Of course, language is just one issue that global e-commerce strategies must cover. As Dell found out, international sites must be designed with a knowledge of local culture. Just as using the wrong color can be bad for business, carelessly chosen icons can be especially dangerous. That is because even those commonly used in the United States may have no relevance in other countries. In most countries, for example, "You can forget about using mailboxes and shopping carts," said Martha Ferro Geller, vice president of globalization strategies at GlobalSight Corp, in San Jose, Calif. "Users in European countries don't take their mail from large, tubular receptacles, nor do many of them shop in stores large enough for wheeled carts."³¹ The icon for the American mailbox doesn't convey to citizens of other countries the idea of sending mail. A more universally recognized icon is an envelope.

Steve Allan, senior director for business development for Alis Technologies, Inc., a software and translation services company based in Montreal, places the issues Kodak is dealing with into internationalization and localization context. A successful effort will consider pictures as well as words. Instead of highlighting your translated by pages by linking to them with an image of a specific country's national flag, Allan suggests offering a picture of your product and some words in that language, in a font familiar to that country or region's users. "For instance, showing Austrians a German flag to claim you understand them doesn't work."³²

One aspect of functionality which relates to globalization is navigation within a site. A number of icons integral to commonly employed software have become de facto standards for indicating certain functions in software. Examples of these are the icons for folders, printers, bold, italics, underlines, arrows for forward and back. Beyond this small number of common icons, there are no universally accepted or adopted images.

³¹ Chen, Anne. "Going Global? Avoid Culture Clashes-Sites Must Reflect Local Customs and Ways of Doing Business to Achieve Success in Foreign Markets," PC Week (3 April 2000): 65.

³² Blankenhorn.

The travel arena has led the development of icons which have become globally recognized. "Never underestimate the power of graphics, which are especially important in the face of language barriers. Europeans understand the universality of graphical communication-long ago, they replaced 'hot' and 'cold' with red and blue dots on the restroom faucets in places such as international airports."³³ As content becomes increasingly global and multilingual, there is a need for a common set of navigational icons that all users of the Web will recognize. The use of such standardized symbols could greatly aid users in concentrating on content. In the meantime, the use of graphics and icons can facilitate the conveyance of simple ideas and common tasks in language neutral terms.

As a final suggestion on the topic we turn again to Morelli who asks, "Seeking examples of effective global sites on the Web? Look not to corporate America but to papal Rome. At the Vatican home page (<http://www.vatican.va>), everything is in place: Concise text, effective graphics, six different languages and links to sites of specialized interest. And if you're surprised about who's leading the way in international marketing on the Internet, don't be. After all, the Catholic Church has been in the global communications business longer than any of us."³⁴

Conclusion

As we prepared this paper, we became much more aware of internationalization for the intended audience, SLA's Brighton conference participants. The research we conducted yielded a number of articles written in journalistic style. We found the advice to avoid idioms, colloquialisms, etc. difficult to follow. These elements are still present in direct quotations throughout the paper and we realize that in spite of some consciousness to internationalize, the paper still has an English language, Western cultural bias. Just writing this paper has made us more aware of the necessity of adopting a broader world view.

Samuel Waltz Jr., Chairman and CEO of Public Relations Society of America in speaking of that profession has said, "Public relations professionals need to prepare to work globally, counsel globally and understand the big global picture with regards to events, business, people and trends. Globalization renders irrelevant traditional borders, boundaries and marketplace definitions for most businesses and non-profits." Waltz sees "The moral high ground for the public relations field will be its capability to develop strategy with regard to the deployment of resources to manage relationships, accomplish goals and achieve

³³ Morelli.

³⁴ Ibid.

the mission."³⁵ This same advice could easily apply to information professionals who now need to "work globally, counsel globally, and develop strategy with regard to deployment of resources," within the global environment. Being knowledgeable about the challenges of "Taking a Website Global," is one aspect of that environment.

APPENDIX

WEB SITES RELATING TO TRANSLATION

Translation and Linguistic Links:

Monterey Institute Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation
<http://gsti.miis.edu/>

Freelance Translator's Dictionary <http://foreignword.com/Translators/transdb.htm>

Internet Resources for Translators <http://www.deraaij.com/irt/>

Institute of Translation and Interpreting <http://www.iti.org.uk/>

Human-languages Page <http://www.june29.com/HLP/>

Translation Services:

FreeTranslation.com <http://www.freetranslation.com>

Fight the Fog-Write Clearly
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/translation/en/ftfog/index.htm>

Language Matters
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/translation/bulletins/matters/1/index.htm>

Parlo <http://www.parlo.com/>

Language Partners International
<http://www.languagepartners.com/products/translation-memory.html>

LISA Education Initiative Task Force
<http://www.ttt.org/leit/terminology.html>

³⁵ Heckman, James. "International in Internet Closes U.S. Lead," Marketing News 14(February) 2000): 4-7.

Trados http://www.trados.com/products/download_demo.asp

Dictionaries:

WordReference.com <http://www.wordreference.com/>

Idiom <http://www.idiominc.com/us/about/index.shtml>

WordFan <http://www.mv.com/ipusers/noetic/wordfan.html>

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