



How to Get Your Message Across the Border

You'll find a wealth of supporters around the globe.
Be sure they get the right message.

By Matt Baird

With globalism continuing its rise, and the internet making our world smaller than ever, there's no better time to spread your message abroad. Going global is a great way to attract brand-new supporters.

But before you cross the border, consider this: Less than 6% of the world's population speaks English well enough to make decisions in that language. Most people prefer surfing online in their native language – and that includes millennials, history's first “digital natives.” The message is clear: To forge bonds, offer local-language content.

Creating valuable content is just as important in foreign markets as in the U.S. You must invest in the story and turn people into fans.

When you transport content across borders, it has to pass through language and cultural barriers. Preparation is the key to smooth entry. Here are some tips to get you started.

Translate It. But . . .

This may seem obvious, but you can't tell a story if people can't read it. So, the first step is having your content correctly translated. And that's the caveat. You'll spare yourself a lot of wasted time and frustration by seeking out translators who specialize in creating content.

These language geeks can capture the nuances of your content and avoid embarrassing – or costly – mistranslations. As native speakers of your target language, they'll point

out culturally sensitive subject matter and offer ways to appropriately repackage your message.

While a bilingual colleague or an eager and inexpensive college student may help you understand something written in another language, they probably don't have the skills to produce high-quality content in that language.

Resist the Machines

Your goal is to engage human beings and elicit a human response. Even translation technology vendors will tell you that it doesn't pay to use their machines for creative materials. Translation technology will continue to make headlines, but remember this: Even one of the world's most famous (fictional) robots, C-3PO, said, "Sometimes I just don't understand human behavior."

Build Locally & They Will Come

Once you've put your story in a new language, it's time to go deeper. Avoid the mistakes of others who build captivating content marketing campaigns that lead to a brick wall of English text. Every step of the customer journey must be in their language – from the Facebook post to the landing page to the DONATE button.

The industry term is "localization," which means converting everything from language, currency, and dates to the look and feel of your sites to match local preferences. Even the right colors make a difference. The entire experience should feel native.

And be sure to keep this in mind: Marketing channels vary across the globe. While Facebook dominates the Western world, it's nearly non-existent in China, where WeChat and Weibo are the places to see and be seen.

Take It Slowly & Talk to the Experts


A truly global content marketing campaign is serious business. Take it one step at a time.

Talk to localization experts to learn the tricks of the global marketing trade. You can probably get away with publishing your white papers, case studies, and blog articles in English in Norway, Sweden, or Denmark; German in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland; and universal Spanish in the nine Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. On the other hand, if you're targeting people in specific age groups on social media, you'll need to adapt the content for each individual country.

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Depending on the size of your international aspirations, this may be only the tip of the iceberg. But don't be discouraged. With such a sea of potential supporters, you'd be well advised to take the plunge below the surface. Use these tips as a guide to get you started. Focus on your message, work with professionals, and keep your sights on creating a native customer experience in each country.

The lesson is that you not only have to speak the language, you have to do so in a voice the locals can understand. If you can appreciate that difference, then you'll be well on your way to seeing your content arrive perfectly packaged on the doorsteps of potential supporters around the world. 

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Choose the Right Words & Voice

For more insight into marketing in the language of your intended audience, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Do You Need a Translator? Make Sure People Understand Your Message (Vol. 36, No. 1)

Make the Overseas Leap to Raise More Funds (Vol. 21, No. 5)

Marketing Your Website with Search Engines (Vol. 17, No. 2)

Is Your Organization Culturally Competent? (Vol. 26, No. 6)

Driving Traffic to Your Website (Vol. 20, No. 6)

Internet Content Management (Vol. 19, No. 6)

Going International from the Inside Out (Vol. 38, No. 2)

Not Connecting with All Your Audiences? Maybe You're Not Speaking Their Language (Vol. 39, No. 1)

Nonprofits Going Global: Opportunities and Problems from a Communicator's Perspective (Vol. 13, No. 6)

Using Multi-Generational Marketing to Target Donors (Vol. 23, No. 5)