TOP TIPS FOR ONLINE TRANSLATION

Research has shown that 9 out of 10 web users prefer using a website in their native language. More importantly for us as tourism businesses, customers are five times more likely to purchase if the site is translated. But if you decide to translate some or all of your website, it is imperative that you get it right. While translation tools are ever improving and useful for a short email, they still expose your business to errors that could lead to misunderstanding or worse still offence.

Options for translating your website are:

- Use free tools such as Google Translate, Bing Translator, ImTranslator, PROMT or FreeTranslation. These tools are continually improving and can be a good starting point. However, you do get what you pay for and there is enormous scope for error and offence.

- Use a professional translation company. They have all the relevant skills under one roof and could potentially turn around your translation project quickly.

- Hire a qualified linguist with strong tourism industry knowledge.

Whichever route you chose, always weigh up the time and cost involved, with the quality of the resulting translated website.

Ten quick tips to help you prepare for any translation project

1. Always use an experienced translator

Not only should the translator you hire be fluent in that language, but they should also understand the nuances and preferences of that culture. Images, video, level of formality should be appropriate for that target audience, or offence could be caused. That said, if you have a native speaker as part of your staff, they are certainly going to be very useful for translating simple flyers and e-mail responses.

But for a full brochure or website, use someone who knows the culture, the industry and ideally has some online technical knowledge so they can help you with SEO translations too. When using a translator, the more detail you can provide, the better as this will help them to truly translate all nuances and tone. Remember, this is a key marketing tool for you, and has to work.

2. Translate your SEO

It makes logical sense that a French speaker will use Google in French (www.google.fr) and a German speaker will use Google in German (www.google.de).

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But unless we have the keywords on our French website and German on our German website, neither can find us. We will simply not appear for those phrases.

This also applies to other English speaking countries. For example, Americans refer to accommodation as lodging and to a holiday as a vacation.   They also have different descriptions for bed sizes. It is important that we translate for non-English speaking countries in our content and SEO and for other English speaking countries too.

3.   Create both a translation glossary and a style guide

A translation glossary should include any specific terminology, abbreviations and acronyms that you use in your business. Also, any terms that should remain in English, like brand and product names should be listed.   A style guide describes the tone of voice that each language should have.   It also outlines the colours to use and to avoid (some colours have negative meanings in certain cultures, like white in China) and similarly with video and imagery (do not include pictures of the soles of feet for Middle Eastern customers. This is hugely insulting).

Both the glossary and style guide ensure consistency and quality across languages and across all platforms being translated.

4.   Plan for updates and maintenance

Website content can date incredibly quickly, so even the most impressively translated site today could be irrelevant in a few months' time if you cannot update it.

Do you have someone in-house or locally who make quick yet accurate changes on an ongoing basis? Can you build in a monthly fee with your translator that allows for minor changes?

5.   Use culturally relevant pictures

To maintain a professional image you will need to review all images for offensive content. What is acceptable in Ireland may not be in another market. For example, certain cultures would be offended by pictures of alcohol, or scantily clad women, or even a man and a woman shaking hands.

Think about the secondary meaning your audience might give the images you use. Do they evoke confidence? And would including pictures of people who look like them, encourage them to book? Just as the text needs to be translated so should the pictures.

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6. Location and language selector

Visitors to your website need to be able to quickly find the language icon relevant to them, so they can switch with ease. A flag in the top right-hand corner is most common, but adding a phrase in their language to draw the eye is even better.

7. Test your website locally

A competent language translation services agency will test your site in the actual country for which it is intended. It is critical to ensure that your website design, imagery, tone and content all suit the preferences and sensibilities of this target market.

8. Avoid humour

It rarely translates with impact. This also applies to jargon, regional phrases, or metaphors.   Keep your copy culturally neutral.

9. Be clear with international numbering

Measurements, weights and dates are written differently in many countries. For example, we shorten the 1st April 2017 to 01.04.17, while Americans would write it as 04.01.17.

So not only should you make sure that you clarify all numbers, but your style guide should inform how large numerals, measurements of weight, height, width, temperature, time, phone numbers, currency should be written for each language.

10. Make sure the text fits

Written English is often shorter than other languages, which means ample space may be needed for expansion (up to 30-40% in some cases). If your translated text is significantly longer, it could affect the look and layout of the web pages.

11. Insist on quality assurance

Your translations should all be double checked by another native speaker. Some businesses insist on giving the text to a 3rd party to translate it back into English (without seeing the original) so check that it makes sense.

Remember: This translated website is often the first impression that the customer is getting of your business. Make it a good one.

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Questions to ask web developers prior to translation

Questions	✓
Can you create new pages for the new language?	
Can you add flags?	
Can you set up the pages without them showing up live?	
Can you create a new menu for the language? e.g. German - Startseite, French – Accueil, etc	
Are there any English menu items appearing where they should not?	
Does the CMS allow you to add/edit page titles, description?	
Can you add images?	
Can you edit the alt and title tags on the images?	
Can you link the new pages together with either the menu or hard coding a sub menu?	
Can you create a folder for the language de/fr?	
Can you upload the sitemap.xml file?	

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