

Chapter 1.15

Web Site Localization Practices: Some Insights into the Localization Industry

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ABSTRACT

The e-commerce industry has experienced spectacular growth, change and development. This situation has initiated an enormous business revolution that has affected the process of globalization tremendously. The goal of this study was to analyze the Web sites of localization companies that provide localization and translation services to other companies and see if they themselves are practicing what they are preaching. The results suggest that localization companies are indeed not practicing what they are preaching. Analysis shows that localization company Web sites are less localized than the Web sites of their clients, the multinational companies. The findings provide some implications to domestic and international marketers who currently operate in or are planning to enter into the global markets in the near

future. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]

INTRODUCTION

From the mid-1990s to the present day, the e-commerce industry has experienced spectacular growth, change and development. The global online population is estimated to reach 1.8 billion by 2012 (Jupiter Research, 2008). In 2008 North America accounted for only 17.5% of the online population and that percentage is in decline as countries such as China, Brazil, India, and Russia show the highest level of online population growth (Internet World Stats, 2008). This situation has initiated an enormous business revolution that has affected the process of globalization tremendously (Cyr & Lew, 2003). During the past several years

an entire industry (the localization industry) has grown up around helping companies design multilingual Web sites and software applications for different countries. An industry report estimates the size of the worldwide translation and localization services market at US\$ 8.8 billion (DePalma & Beninatto, 2006). According to this report the commercial market for localization services is estimated at US\$6 billion and the government market at US\$ 2.8 billion worldwide.

Localization is the process of adapting products and services (Web sites, manuals and software) in accordance to linguistic, cultural, technical and other locale-specific requirements of the target market (Localization Program at California State University, Chico, College of Business, 2008). Localization is now being seen by multinationals as a necessary process to develop multilingual and multicultural content to effectively tap global markets. Forester research estimates put the 2006 global e-commerce revenues at around \$12.6 trillion. Furthermore, research has shown that consumers prefer Web sites in their native language and Web sites that reflect their local preferences (Singh, Furrer, & Ostinelli, 2004). Thus, companies around the world are creating multilingual Web sites to tap this vibrant online market. Companies like IBM, Oracle, Intel and other have almost 90 international sites to take advantage of the global online markets and communicate with their global customers. This surge in creating multilingual online content and software has also led to the growth of the localization industry which is helping these companies by effectively translating their Web sites, user interfaces, software, and manuals. Beyond translation the localization companies are also involved in the following (Esselink, 2000):

- Making visual or graphics, technical and textual modifications to the site content.
- Rewriting the text, translating the text, and ensuring translation, idiomatic, and conceptual equivalence of the translated text.

- Modifying graphics, data fields, tables, forms, layout, colors and tables etc.
- Modifying the cultural content of the site or software to be congruent to the local culture.
- International e-commerce readiness for multi-country transactions.
- Web site navigational modifications to meet local preferences.

This study analyzes the Web sites of localization service providers in order to understand to what extent these companies are translating and localizing their own sites, and modifying graphics, layout, colors, text, policies, navigation, and cultural content. The study then compares the localization efforts of the localization vendor company with their clients, who are generally multinational companies. This analysis will reveal if the companies that are preaching localization are also effectively implementing it on their own Web sites. After all, the localization service providers should set the benchmarks for their clients to follow. Moreover, the companies that will be the winners in this fast growing and consolidating localization industry will be the ones that are able to highlight and exemplify the need for Web site localization. What is a localization service provider telling their current clients along with potential future clients if their own Web sites are not sufficiently localized? The goal of this article is to gain understanding of the localization processes used in the localization industry and to focus on the current trends in the localization industry.

This article is composed of seven sections. The first section presents and introduces a review of the globalization and localization literature. Section two explains the research methodology. Section three provides a presentation of the analysis. Section four provides a discussion of the results, section five describes some managerial implications, section six explains some limitations along with future research ideas, and finally section seven provides a conclusion.

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