Going Global

ECommerce, Best Practices

gengo™

INTRODUCTION

This guide contains straightforward advice for Ecommerce businesses who want to start selling internationally.

It's not too hard to see the merits of globalizing your business. Foreign markets can be large and lucrative, and the internet allows low cost distribution. What's harder is knowing where to start, what topics to focus on, and how to ensure your internationalization strategy succeeds.
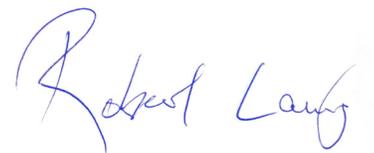
That's why we created this short guide.

At Gengo we meet and work with a number of Ecommerce businesses, large and small, who are all at different stages of their global expansion. The challenges they face as they go global can be grouped into a few key areas:

- **Basic** questions about strategy.

- Decisions on how to **define their offering**: What products will be available globally. How deep will their internationalization go.

- Questions about how to **manage global content**: How to translate different content types like product descriptions, social media messages, marketing copy and more.

- Decisions about global **marketing**: As you start to go global, how do you manage the different channels of communication with your customers, across languages?

- **Technical** decisions: How do you build a flexible and robust system to handle your content?

- Specific questions for **B2B and B2C Channels**: How do you allow multiple vendors operating through your platform to go global? How do you demonstrate the benefits to them?

Because everyone's business is different, and every foreign market is unique, the guide is just a starting point. We hope it's useful and thought provoking as you go global.

Robert Laing, CEO Gengo

INDEX

The Basics

ASSIGN OWNERSHIP

Head of international division
Without a single accountable owner for international, and clearly allocated funding, you won't succeed. For companies larger than 50 people, it should normally be their only role for them to have sufficient focus. This individual should have at least worked or lived overseas, and should have experience launching new products, new companies and working on a test-as-you-go basis.

Country managers
In a large enough organization, assign a country owner who is singularly responsible for the success of that market. They should be located in the country and should be adaptable, scrappy and used to working with limited resources and a turbulent environment, like a startup. Because of the risk factor, compensating country owners with stock options or performance-related bonuses can be an effective motivator. This is not a role for the faint of heart.

CREATE STRATEGY

Going global involves risk, so your guiding principle should be to research and plan first, and to grow based on return on investment (ROI) measurement and constant iteration, rather than making huge jumps. Combine this mindset with your company's core mission and values to create a set of working principles as you go global. This is where the element of the "startup attitude" is important. You are going to get some things wrong with your international plan. That said, it's better to have the plan than to expect to be able to feel your way there.

You can't please everyone
You will come across customer feedback and market opportunities that will encourage you to change your approach. If you do not adapt to local markets and incorporate feedback, you will fail. It also pays to follow the 10% rule. If you're changing your offering more than 10%, you're creating essentially a new business—and probably losing the core values that made your company great.

PHASES OF GLOBAL GROWTH

At the start, your emphasis should be on constant testing and iteration. Keeping investment low, staying flexible and listening to feedback is essential in this phase. For instance, you might rely on outside vendors for local marketing and test multiple sales channels. As you achieve success, you can start to optimize and focus on growth. Don't run before you walk!

It's important to set appropriate benchmarks for each phase. For example, your heavily optimized Ecommerce site in your local market will have vastly higher conversions than your first forays into the Korean market. And cost of impression (CPM) rates vary across markets widely, making advertising campaigns perform differently. So monitor local benchmarks, and track relative improvements.

Define Your Offering

MARKET CHOICE

We could write a whole book on how to choose the next foreign market for your Ecommerce site. But you will need to take the following factors into consideration:

- Competitor presence
- Local proximity for shipping
- GDP per capita and market size
- Language
- Currency
- Electrical system
- Web and mobile adoption
- Tax
- Channel partner presence
- Trade agreements
- Political stability

Treat market choices as seriously as you would a hiring decision. If red flags appear in your research, do not treat them lightly. If there are shortcuts (for instance, translating into Spanish provides access to a large set of new audiences), take advantage of them.

LEVEL OF SERVICE

You will need to choose the level of internationalization that your site will offer. It can be easy to offer "shallow" internationalization (e.g. multi-currency, international shipping), but this will still preclude most foreign users being able to find or use your website. Broadly, your investment and accessibility will increase as you go down the following list:

- International content availability
- (for streamed/licensed media content)
- International currency support
- Internationalized payment methods
- and billing addresses
- International shipping
- Internationalized content
- Country-specific content

Accessibility
Ensure you have a smart, consistent message:
For users who won't be able to purchase via your site, a clear early warning is only fair. Smaller Ecommerce sites in particular often fail at this step. Don't mislead before the checkout, and don't assume everyone with an English-language browser is located in the US.

Have a plan for "globetrotting" users:
Some smaller Ecommerce websites still make it difficult for customers with a different billing and shipping address. While catering for a minority audience can be cumbersome, these users are often loyal and high spending.

PRODUCT SELECTION

Your Ecommerce site, and your strategy is defined by the products you carry. For smaller retailers with a limited product selection, the choice is normally easy: All products available.

For retailers that offer "everything under one roof," the way you reflect that strategy as you go global is a critical part of your approach. For example, your international strategy could be to identify a market that does not offer this broad product range, and to always have a policy of making this content available to all users. That said, this does not come without its costs. Careful consideration about your product lines in your target market is essential.

Research phase:
Identify competitive / non-competitive categories
Determine how you will identify which categories of your store will be saleable and competitive in the target country. This requires careful consideration of factors including:

· Electrical needs
· Weight
· Fragility
· Cultural
· Cost advantage
· Availability
· Seasonal (Northern/Southern Hemisphere)

Launch phase:
Test with a subset of your product catalog
If you have a large number of SKUs, we recommend you choose a subset of high performing products, like your top 10% performers by revenue or sales, to test out in a foreign language. This allows you to try things out at a smaller scale and iron out any wrinkles in your approach without making a huge investment.

Dynamic, performance-based availability
With an "always on" responsive translation service you can dynamically translate SKUs one by one as their performance meets a threshold. For instance, top weekly performers in your US store can be translated as soon as performance triggers are met.

Can you keep your core brand proposition with a limited selection of items?
For retailers who are known as "everything in one place:" Will a limited selection really work? What is the hard-to-measure advantage of a complete catalogue?
For high brand-oriented retailers: What is the cost or benefit of a limited product selection?
If you are known for a specific product and customers can't find it, what is your response?
Do you provide a way for international users to request unavailable products?

Be prepared to be dynamic about translation costs and quality

Translation Approach

Going global in any online business involves translating your content and managing it in multiple languages. For companies doing this for the first time, it can be a challenge. The first step is to ensure you treat your content like any other asset—i.e. work with it objectively and ensure you get a return on investment from everything you do.

The completeness (or otherwise) of your translation is a signifier of quality on your website. For instance, it's all very well having a perfectly translated French homepage, but if your product catalogue is left in English, your website will give off a half-finished impression.

BE AN ECOMMERCE RETAILER, NOT A TRANSLATION COMPANY

As you scale and enter new global markets, you need to make the decision of how much translation to do internally. Time and again we see companies who are able to handle small amounts of translation and localization at the beginning all internally, but become overwhelmed with the management overhead once they start adding extra languages or more scale. This is why we recommend companies use external services for all translation production, and only keep quality control and technical resource internally. This allows you to ensure you're getting good work, but removes the "chore" of managing translators and coping with fluctuating needs.

Generally there are two types of resource that you will use (but they may both be offered by a single company):

Boutique translation agency & individuals for marketing copy, transcreation
For your high impact, high visibility copy, especially advertising campaigns and brand messages, you need to work closely with the translator to ensure they capture your brand and make your messages work in the local languages. This involves creativity and adaptation rather than literal translation. The "per word" rate of this translation may be very high, because the message must be perfect.

Scalable translation service for bulk, elastic capacity
For thousands of product descriptions to be translated

by qualified individuals, you need a service that ensures consistency, quality and scale at an affordable price. The "per word" rate of this translation can be low, allowing you to translate large volumes.

BE OBJECTIVE ABOUT QUALITY REVIEWS

If you invite five people to give their input on a translation, you'll get five different opinions. Expecting the translation of a user review to have equal style and tone to your homepage marketing copy is unrealistic and, ultimately, unprofitable.
Instead, create objective internal benchmarks for quality appropriate to the particular content you are reviewing. This way, opinions can be left at the door and ROI becomes the key consideration. If there is no localization team, the country manager should be the ultimate arbiter of quality for the market.

DYNAMIC QUALITY, ELASTIC SCALE

The best practice is for all of your content to be translated at the appropriate quality level, and for you to be able to push through however much content you need, at any given time. Whatever translation service you use should follow the demand and targets of your Ecommerce site— not the other way around.
This is not about mistakes—these are unacceptable at any level of content. We're talking about levels of tone, and literal translations versus carefully crafted creative text. High visibility content should have a different standard than lower level text.

High visibility content is the text that the majority of users see. It's also the text they form opinions of your brand about. For example, a banner on your homepage has a significant effect on brand perception. In contrast, lower level product description content is normally found on a deeper sub-page, and may not have a large effect on a purchasing decision. In an extreme example, a user review written by a member of the public may be negatively

impacted by going through a high-end professional translation, because it will lose the 'human' quality that a customer can give over a professional writer.

Intelligently managing global content to allow lower-level texts to be translated quickly and affordably will improve your agility while allowing high visibility content to shine.

Managing Global Content

PRODUCT SELECTION

Your product descriptions will normally form the bulk of the content on your website. For retailers with hundreds of thousands of SKUs, choose a solution that allows you to easily identify products for translation, rather than having to do the whole product catalog at a time.

Content Authoring Tools (CAT)
When creating content from scratch, the way you create your product descriptions and the tools you use can help dramatically increase efficiency when it comes to translation. Defining content attributes prior to creation helps the translation process run smoothly, helping you deliver a higher quality output. Taking advantage of content authoring tools helps ensure quality is high and style, terminology, and readability are consist. There are a number of different providers of content authoring tools, so choose a tool that works well with your existing systems. At the very least, examine your content production workflow to figure out how to efficiently move content from the creation phase to the translation phase without having to export, extract or reformat content. We still see many companies managing hundreds of Excel files—trust us, there are better ways of doing things.

Translation Memory, Glossaries
In a large product catalogue, you can expect a large amount of duplicate or "fuzzy matched" content which can reduce translation costs. Before you undertake the translation of your full catalogue, you should also work with the translation provider to create a "glossary" of

key brand terms. This will ensure that these terms are consistently translated whenever they occur, protecting the brand and guiding the user.

Machine translation and SEO
Search engine optimization (SEO) is such a significant factor in product SKU content that it's worth a more detailed mention here. In short, using machine translation for product descriptions may well harm your search ranking:

> *"...using automated translation tools to directly create content for your site could be seen as creating auto-generated content, which would be against our Webmaster Guidelines. Instead of just taking the output of a program like Google Translate, I'd strongly recommend at least having it corrected before putting it online. While Googlebot may initially fall for some Spanish keywords in your text, your users are not going to appreciate content that has been automatically translated and published without a review. I love Google Translate, but if you publish the results and get them indexed without having them reviewed, you're not showing a lot of respect to your users..."*
>
> *-- John Mueller, Senior Webmaster Trend Analyst, Google Switzerland*

Data feeds
By creating openly accessible data feeds for product content, you can more easily translate content and allow local markets to integrate the feeds into product comparison sites, etc.

OTHER DYNAMIC CONTENT

User Reviews

Translations of new user reviews can be as valuable as product descriptions in creating a truly local foreign presence. Particularly for sites that carry the same items as competing retailers, having unique reviews in the local language carries a real SEO and trust benefit. Traditionally, user reviews have been seen as "low priority" content, and so have only been machine translated or left untranslated. Because of the above benefits, we're now seeing more human translated reviews appearing.

High-end professional translators are generally not appropriate for user reviews because of the cost, and because they may even make a review sound too polished and therefore inauthentic. For full disclosure, you should indicate to users that the review is a translation.

Videos

Some translation providers will handle the transcription of content that does not already have closed captions or existing subtitle tracks. Producing a caption track is not only beneficial for translation; it has SEO benefits too. Decide whether you need to create a native language voiceover or a subtitle track will suffice. Services such as VoiceBunny allow you to create simple voiceovers easily, and have an application programing interface (API) that lets you send content directly from your application.

Marketing Copy, Marketing Emails, Special Offers, Blog, Press Releases

Marketing emails (as opposed to transactional emails) are the place for creative copy and brand-level messages. However, you will need to balance the need for quick turnaround time with high quality translation. Whether this content is stored in your core platform or a separate email management platform, being able to order the translation directly from the management system ensures an efficient workflow.

The same goes for other marketing copy, blog pages and the occasional press release. Per word translation rates will be higher when you need to combine fast turnaround with extra levels of quality assurance.

Customer Support

For support ticket content, there are a number of options. It is possible to have a team of native speaker support staff (and normally necessary, for retailers with a significant and mature presence in a country). For smaller teams or new market entry, the ideal is to have a translation integration with your support ticketing system. A common practice is to translate incoming messages through machine translation, and translate outgoing messages using a human/professional translation. Ensuring that agents' canned responses or "macros" are translated can dramatically reduce turnaround times and the cost of translation.

Knowledge Base

Knowledge base or Q&A content may change 10-20% per year depending on your product selection, but probably does not change as rapidly as other parts of your site. Best practice is to create an on demand connection to your translation service, so that new content is translated as it is added in your source language. SEO is a factor here— ensure your translated content is search engine accessible and unique.

Landing pages

If you use a large number of landing pages for categories and product descriptions, you may need to mix in high impact marketing copy with lower level SEO-driven explanatory copy. Your translation service can advise on how to do this effectively (normally with a "senior" translator leading a team).

STATIC CONTENT

So-called "static" content forms the framework of your site, and often appears on every page. Because this content changes rarely, and is very visible on your website, it should be treated slightly differently. This content should always be translated at a high level and quality assurance (QA) checked before launch.

- **Website application localization**
  This is the text for the navigation of your website, buttons, drop-down menus, footers, etc. Normally this content is quite low in volume (even for large websites, just a few thousand words). As a key part of the experience for users using your website, and a key brand signifier, it's important to strike the right tone of voice and personality.

- **Transactional emails and messages**
  Transactional messages are sent to your customers when they sign up, place an order or similar. Like your website structure content, these convey your brand and contain important information.

- **Terms of Service (ToS), Legal**
  Your terms of service and other legal documents should be handled by professional services with experience translating legal copy. Much of this content may be standard.

Technical DOs and DON'Ts

DOS

DO Choose a scalable domain strategy
Choose an approach that is scalable—one correct for your size, technical choices and aspirations. For example, an e-retailer called holepunch.com has the following options, each of which has issues:

- **Country-specific Top-level doman (TLD) (e.g. holepunch.fr for France)**
  You may not have the opportunity to purchase the domain in all the TLDs you need for this approach, leading to potential inconsistency down the road. Additionally, countries such as Switzerland and Belgium have multiple languages, meaning your audience and content must further be divided upon reaching the site.

- **Language specific subdomain (e.g. fr.holepunch.com)**
  Recommended for sites where the content on each subdomain is essentially identical but translated. This technique can become complex if additional subdomains are used. Also, users may not ever get into the habit of typing in a subdomain as opposed to "www" when they visit your site.

- **Language or country specific domain (e.g. perforatrice.com)**
  This allows a language specific brand name, and normally a language specific website. However, you will lose most of the credibility your local brand may have had overseas. Following this approach multiple times can also create confusion.

- **Language specific subdirectory (e.g. holepunch.com/fr/)**
  Recommended for sites where the content on each subdomain is identical but translated.

DO Make the ability to offer global content a key architectural principle
Only build or buy systems that strongly support internationalization and multi-language content. Do not accept a vendor's answer that international support "is coming." Don't allow system improvements and maintenance without localization being considered.

DO Learn about the best practice for translating different types of content
It's in your best interest to ensure that translation is done efficiently at scale. For Ecommerce, traditional solutions are often unwieldy, so make sure you are using the most up-to-date technologies and services.

DO Always aim to reduce complexity
Increased complexity is almost inevitable when offering multi-language, multi-region stores. Along with product information in multiple languages, you have multiple advertising campaigns, multiple shipping, tax and different users. So wherever you can, focus, reduce and avoid complexity.

DO Understand structured data vs translation memory
Understand the benefits of clean structured data over translation memory. Translation service providers can use translation memory (TM or TMX) to automatically find content that has already been translated before. However, the process is imperfect when there is not an exact match,

and a human normally needs to review the output. If you structure your data correctly, however, you can avoid having to send content for translation in the first place. For example, if your website has multiple products with a "collar size" attribute, structuring that data consistently will make the translation job far easier.

Using translation oriented content authoring technology can help you significantly in organizing your data and making it more efficient to translate. Providers such as Across, Acrolinx and others offer tools that allow you to author content at scale, improve consistency and reduce the time it takes to translate content.

DO Identify where in the data chain you should translate SKUs

For larger retailers carrying product lines from multiple brands, defining where to translate SKU item information can be difficult. If you use a Product Information Management (PIM) system, in combination with an ERP system, but hold your web product catalog separately, you need to ensure that you are able to manage the translations of your content in the appropriate system. Talk to your system vendor/reseller for advice.

DO own your content

Some hosted proxy services for translation are convenient for smaller sites because they are a "plug and play" solution (although they do not allow you to own your content). For small sites, this is not a huge issue, but for large sites with thousands of products, not owning your translation can be a huge risk if your service provider fails or you choose to use another system. Make sure that you own your translated content.

DO Design with multi-language in mind

This is a basic design consideration, but when planning to go global, design with other languages in mind. This means making sure that your buttons, navigation, drop-down menus, etc. can accept longer "strings." For instance, German and Russian strings are usually considerably longer than English, meaning your navigation may take up to 25% more space. Japanese and Chinese strings may be significantly shorter. Always design with dynamic text where possible—translating and updating text within images is a more complex process.

DO Identify if you can share SKU translations

You may also be able to leverage existing translations of the SKUs that you carry, although this is not as common as it should be. Ask the brand or the source of your SKU item descriptions whether you can access multiple-language versions.

DON'TS

DON'T use manual file handling

With an API solution, translation of your product content is something you can do within your normal workflow. A translation API can be fully integrated into the administration area of your Ecommerce site, giving you the control to order and manage translations of product descriptions. That way, you can minimize file handling between you and your translation service. This reduces error, reduces manual effort and allows you to manage content at much larger scales efficiently.

DON'T build your own translation tools

Because the initial problems to solve look easy, many internal development teams try to make simple translation/localization tools instead of relying on external services. Normally this just delays problems for the future. As your translation needs grow, self-made tools either don't scale, or require more and more attention from the development team. Instead, use trusted third-party tools and APIs.

DON'T become a translation company

Smaller Ecommerce sites can often manage translation into one or two languages by using freelancers or local country managers to translate much of their content. However, once they approach more than three languages, the overhead of managing these processes can turn the company into what looks like a translation agency. For most companies, this is not their core competency or their company vision. In the same way, larger Ecommerce retailers may be able to achieve some cost reductions by handling translations internally. In the process, they may lose flexibility, scale, and the best practices that translation companies own.

Technical Options

API APPROACH

Our recommendation for larger Ecommerce retailers is to store and manage different content types in two ways, and to use an API to send and receive content from a translation provider like Gengo. You can work with your Ecommerce platform vendor to add-on or build a plugin for the system that will work via an API.

This approach gives you complete control over your content, and allows you to dynamically order translation as you scale. You control your website server, and you own all your translated content.

In slightly more detail:

- **Static content** like website navigation is stored in language files (e.g. Gettext PO format) for speed. Depending on your Ecommerce platform, you may manage this content through an admin UI or through developers managing the files directly. If managing the files directly, you can use a tool like Transifex to oversee translations of this content.

- **Dynamic content** (e.g. product descriptions) is stored in your Ecommerce platform's database for flexibility and scale. Using an API connection in a plugin/addon to your platform, you can send and receive content for translation from a service like Gengo. This plugin can be as "smart" as you like. For instance, you may automatically order translation for high performing products, or new products as they come online. Or you may give managers the control to translate products on an item-by-item basis.

Considerations for the API approach:

- Requires development time to integrate into your system
- Requires content planning so that you decide which areas to translate
- May not be suitable for small sites with no development resource

PROXY APPROACH

A proxy server is a separate service to your website that may do all or some of the following:

· Serve a foreign language version of your website (usually on a subdomain like fr.holepunch.com)
· Detect content updates and new content on your website
· Allow you to select which content to translate
· Send content for machine or human translation
· Allow translators to view and/or edit content "in situ" on the page

Proxy servers for translation are good for smaller sites with simple structures and smaller development teams, because they offer a 'fire and forget' approach, which needs very little maintenance or development.

There are issues with the proxy server approach:

· **Data ownership**
  Some proxy server solutions also do not allow you to own your content, putting you at risk.

· **Uptime requirement**
  For companies that do not want to add additional risk to their hosting, adding a proxy server creates additional downtime risk that may not be acceptable.

· **Multiple-device usage**
  Proxy servers do not easily allow you to leverage the same content in different places, for instance within a mobile app, a white paper and a website.

· **Working with complex sites**
  The approach is not recommended for larger sites with different types of content, as you do not have easy control over which content is translated and when.

· **Latency and speed**
  You may not be able to control or improve the website speed experienced by foreign language users who access the proxy server.

For B2C and B2B channels

If you run a B2C and B2B Ecommerce service, by opening up your merchants' stores to buyers from other countries, you can give them access to a large number of new potential customers. Take these basic steps as you do.

DO THE BASICS RIGHT

Merchants who have never sold internationally before can be reluctant. You're asking them to take a leap into a new style of business, and to spend a small amount of money on translating their product descriptions and some marketing material. Your platform needs to provide them the best set of tools for selling in foreign markets.

The biggest advantage you can provide is ensuring that foreign buyers can find the products they need. Fully functioning foreign-market SEO and platform-level search engine marketing (SEM) gives merchants a head start. A well localized foreign language UI ensures that new site visitors have a positive experience. Anything less is a disservice.

SEED, BUT PASS TRANSLATION COST ONTO MERCHANTS

We recommend you choose a subset of high performing merchants or products, to "seed" your foreign market content. This can allow you to create a platform-specific set of data to prove the ROI of translation to your merchants (see below). After this point, pass the cost of translation onto your merchants. You can either pass through the cost directly, continue to subsidize the cost in order to encourage international trade or mark up the cost to merchants.

REMOVING BARRIERS

It can help to offer promotions that reduce their outlay and risk. For example, Gengo creates co-promotions with platforms. We offer $10-$25 free translation to merchants, co-sponsored by the platform. This can get merchants over the initial trepidation, and allow them to test out a limited number of products for free.

One of the most effective ways of encouraging merchants to sell internationally is to prove the ROI. Gengo works with platforms like Buy.com to do this for merchants. For example, we found that translation costs for reasonably popular items are recouped from revenue after just 70 additional visitors are brought to the item page. Showing simple examples such as these reduces the apparent risk to merchants of outlay for translations.

As the number of international merchants increases, you can also allow them to share some of the benefits that normally only large retailers have. For instance, large retailers who have repetitive or duplicate product descriptions only need to pay for one translation. Merchants in your platform can get the same advantages of a shared translation memory—lower cost and faster speed of translation.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Most B2B and B2C channels offer their merchants education about how to sell effectively, how to handle shipping and returns and how to manage customer support. We recommend you do the same with international merchants.

If your platform offers multiple languages, provide tools which help the merchant decide which market to enter first. The long term success and international liquidity of your platform depends on you being straightforward here. Avoid encouraging merchants to invest in markets without long term potential, and guide them to the appropriate channels.

Just as this guide aims to supply a few of the basics, you won't be able to give 100% of the information, or ensure that all your merchants produce international success. But provide the framework for them to take the first few steps.

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