

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL MULTILINGUAL SEO



The difference between multilingual SEO and international SEO.



Key considerations for planning a multilingual SEO strategy.



How Digibutsu experts conduct multilingual keyword research and SEO.



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It's no secret that **consumers prefer to shop in their own language** – they feel safer navigating a website they can fully understand, which, in turn, makes them more willing to buy the products it offers. If you want to sell in a few different markets – or dream big and want to go global – having only one language version of your website will not cut the deal.

Still, well-translated content is only a tiny piece of the expansion puzzle – to get your business and products noticed, you need to actually reach your target audiences. **Identifying region-specific keywords and optimising your content for multiple languages** can be of great help – and make entering new markets way less difficult than it would've been otherwise.

Multilingual SEO is a long-term investment that has the potential to take your business to a whole new level – if done right, that is. And how to do it right, exactly?

Read our guide to find out:

- **what multilingual SEO is and how it's different from international SEO,**
- **what should be taken into account when planning a multilingual SEO strategy,**
- **how the experts at Digibutsu do multilingual keyword research and SEO.**

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Head of SEO

Multilingual SEO is a long-term investment that can take you to new heights – if you do it right, of course!



What is multilingual SEO?

Before we get to the bottom of multilingual SEO, let's start with the basics – search engine optimisation itself.

SEO (search engine optimisation) is a set of practices that make websites, products and services rank higher on search engine results pages (the so-called SERPs).

It involves taking care of various technical aspects – such as website structure, page speed, or mobile-friendliness – as well as formatting already-published content and enriching it with the most searchable keywords typed by world wide web users.




Generally, SEO best practices include:

- 1 Research into competition:** Looking up market competition and conducting an initial assessment of visibility and SEO. In other words, keep your friends close, but your competition closer.
- 2 Targeting:** Identifying keywords specific to a country or region by doing keyword research.
- 3 Language:** Ensuring that website content is translated accurately for the target audience, preferably by a native speaker.
- 4 Localisation:** Tailoring content to suit local cultures, dialects, slang, symbolism, customs, and references.
- 5 Technical optimisation:** Guaranteeing the website is optimised for search engine crawlers – both in terms of on-page and off-page SEO – and selecting fitting domain/subdomain options.
- 6 Link building:** Collecting links from legitimate websites within the target country.
- 7 Analytics:** Implementing analytic tools to monitor website performance across various countries.



Now, multilingual SEO is the process of optimising different language versions of your website. Even though native languages play a huge role in driving sales, **translating content is not enough to guarantee success in foreign markets** – especially if you want to compete with well-established domestic brands. To successfully win over a local audience, you first need to make them aware of your business's existence.

Multilingual SEO will help you do just that – and way more.



Since people from respective countries, regions, and cultures use essentially distinct phrases and have different search habits, incorporating multilingual SEO into your multilingual website is the perfect way to reach out to them, gain their trust, and boost their engagement.

Multilingual SEO vs international SEO

Although the terms carry similar connotations (and are often used interchangeably), multilingual SEO and international SEO are two different things.



Multilingual SEO

As the name suggests, it refers to optimising content for multiple languages. For example, if somebody runs a U.S.-based business, to reach the widest audience possible, they might want to make their website available in both English and Spanish. Now, this doesn't necessarily mean that they're trying to target all Spanish speakers from around the world – they simply want to make their products more accessible to the huge number of Spanish speakers living in the States. However, if the brand does decide to tap into South American and Spanish markets, then a different strategy will have to be adopted, which brings us to...



International SEO

An umbrella term for both multilingual and multiregional SEO. Each country has a unique audience with very specific buying patterns, and brands that want to grow their customer base and win over global audiences need to take all this (and more) into account when coming up with an international SEO strategy. Increasing the visibility of your website/content in various foreign markets is a crucial business expansion step.

To successfully go global, build a solid search presence in multiple regions, and ultimately boost sales, you need localised content that's not only well-translated, but also enriched with the most popular and region-specific keywords – only then will your target audience be able to organically find you.



Why is multilingual SEO important?

Paradoxically enough, attracting new customers in an era when they can buy a product with just a few clicks has never been harder. Digital marketplaces are more crowded than ever and businesses have to fight for consumer attention by making their products stand out from the endless sea of competitors. Because of that,

**SEO is no longer an additional boost,
but an absolute must.**

If you sell in a few markets, the same stands for multilingual SEO which is worth investing in regardless of the scale of your online shop. The business results it drives – more often than not – outweigh the costs in the long run.

Multilingual search engine optimisation (multilingual SEO) is a key strategy for amplifying online visibility and tapping into diverse language environments and emerging markets.



Let's take a look at some of the benefits of multilingual SEO:

Global reach

By optimising your website for multiple languages, you'll drive traffic from different countries and regions, ultimately growing your customer base.

Increased visibility

Multilingual SEO helps websites rank higher on SERPs and makes them more appealing to potential customers.

Improved brand awareness

By reaching a wider audience, multilingual SEO can help you establish a global brand and build customer loyalty across the globe.

Better user experience

If your content is in the user's preferred language, they're more likely to browse your products/services, which in turn leads to deeper engagement and higher conversion rates.

Competitive advantage

Websites that appear on the first few search pages attract more people and come off as more trustworthy to consumers.

Now, you can decide for yourself if multilingual SEO is worth the effort.



International expansion and multilingual websites

The significance of having a multilingual website for global expansion cannot be overstated. Effectively reaching new markets requires more than just translation; it demands direct communication of our brand to new audiences.

Tailoring communication to match the language spoken by prospect customers and making the most of cultural context:

- reduces the distance between the company and its audience,
- establishes trust and fosters customer loyalty,
- plays a pivotal role in driving traffic and maximising profits.

However, merely translating the original content, more often than not, falls short. The process of content localisation involves considering a broad spectrum of factors which extend beyond language. It encompasses **technical specifications, KWR and SEO, as well as meeting UI- and UX-related expectations.**



What to base your multilingual SEO strategy on

There are several factors to consider when planning a multilingual SEO strategy. It's essential that you do market research, localise your content, and do separate keyword research for each language; however, your [multi-language website checklist](#) should also include some **technical aspects**.

Structure: dedicated URLs

It isn't without reason that even [Google experts](#) recommend using dedicated URLs – they make it easier for crawlers to track down, read, and index all language versions of your content, effectively boosting your site's positioning.

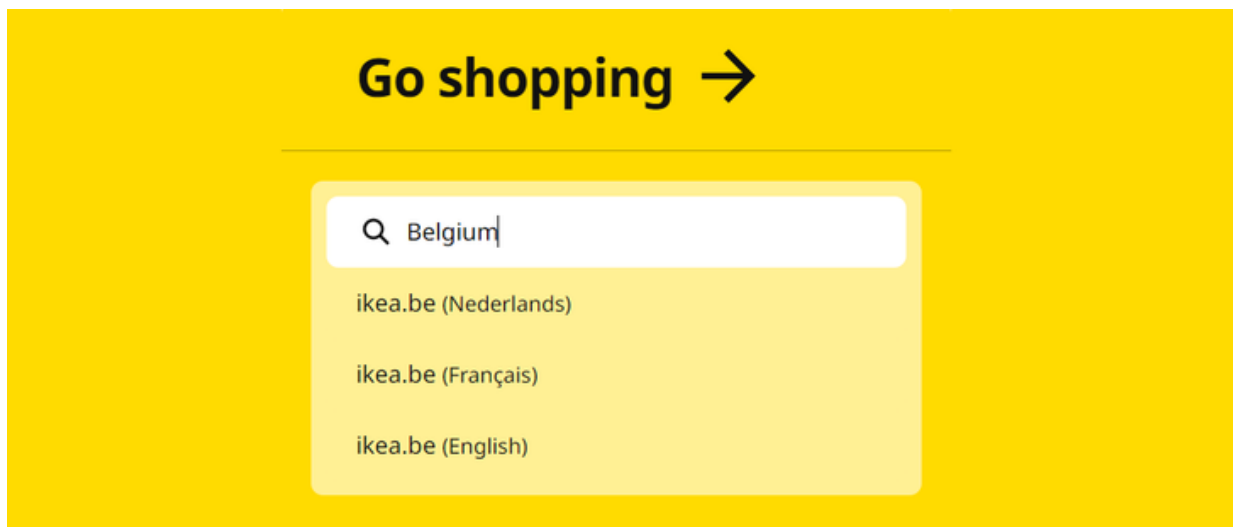
There are a few **URL structure options to choose from**:

- **country-specific domains – website.se**
- **subdomains with generic top-level domains – se.website.com**
- **subdirectories with generic top-level domains – website.com/se/**



Let's take a look at IKEA Belgium which uses the last structure.

Belgian users get to decide in which language they want to browse the Swedish giant's website: ikea.com/be/nl/ is for Dutch, ikea.com/be/fr/ is for French, and ikea.com/be/en/ is for English.



Source: A screenshot of the IKEA website.

Using dedicated URLs also makes it easier to manage multiple language versions of a website, track their performance, and make improvements based on real data.



Hreflang tags

Hreflang tags are HTML attributes used by the most popular search engines **to specify the language and geographical targeting of a website**. They're a crucial element of any successful multilingual SEO strategy, as they help search engines understand which language version of a website to serve to users in different regions.

Without hreflang tags, search engines may display the wrong language in search results, contributing to a poor user experience and potentially damaging the website's ranking.

Hreflang tags are particularly important for websites that have identical or similar content across multiple language versions. By indicating which version of the page is intended for which language or region, hreflang tags can help search engines avoid duplicate content issues and correctly serve the appropriate language version of a website to users.

An hreflang attribute looks like this:

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en"  
hrefuse="https://www.website.com">
```



The easiest way to add it to a website code is to put it in the **<head> tag**; however, if your site is available in multiple languages and has lots of subpages, this method may turn out to be very time-consuming. Another approach is to add hreflang tags to your **XML sitemap** – this way, you won't have to edit every single HTML document, and you'll be able to keep them neatly organised in a single file.

It's vital to mention that **not all search engines use hreflang attributes** – for example, Bing uses an alternative tag that looks like this: `<meta http-equiv="content-language" content="en-gb">` with en-gb standing for the language code of British English.

**Not sure if you've considered every aspect
of hreflang implementation?**

**Download our ultimate checklist
for hreflang implementation!**

 [Hreflang Master](#)

One-language pages

To ensure that your website is easily readable and navigable for users, **it's essential that languages not be mixed**. If your content is only partly translated – or includes side-by-side translations – users may find it confusing and even sketchy, and search engine algorithms may not be able to accurately identify the primary language of the page.

At the end of the day, **all SEO experts agree that sticking to only one language per page is the best way to go.**

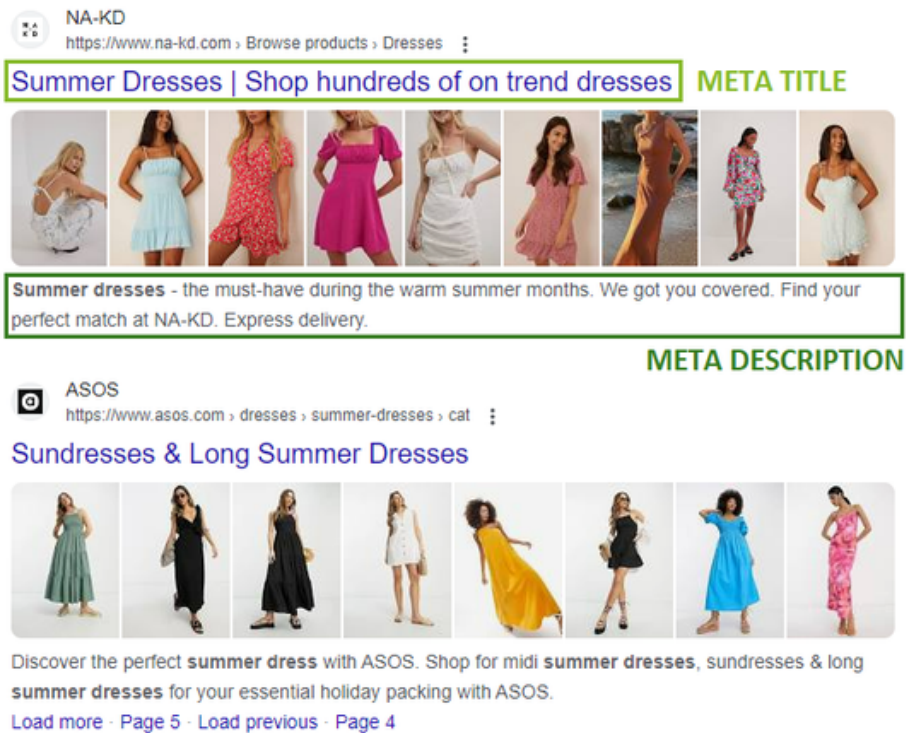
Nonetheless, this shouldn't stop you from creating quality content in multiple languages.

Translated metadata

Meta titles and meta descriptions – which together make up metadata – **provide the first impression and summary of a website's content to both algorithms and potential visitors.** They don't appear on the page itself, but on Google and other search engines whenever someone looks up a certain word, phrase, or webpage.



For example, this is what you see after googling “summer dresses”:



Source: Google screenshot.

Translating metadata ensures that users with different language backgrounds can **understand what the page is about**, which significantly increases the chances of them visiting it. It also provides a more user-friendly experience, as consumers can quickly determine if the page is relevant to their search query.

When writing meta titles and meta descriptions, one needs to keep in mind various spatial constraints. Search engine results look different depending on what we’re using to surf the net – be it a PC, laptop, or mobile device.

The ideal lengths for a meta title and meta description used to be 60 and 160 characters, respectively, but nowadays, it’s pixels that matter the most.

To make sure that your content is readable on different-sized screens, you can preview it using Chrome’s [mobile simulator tool](#).



Multilingual keyword research done by native speakers

When it comes to multilingual keyword research, properly identified and topic-specific keyphrases aren't the only thing that counts.

Knowledge of local cultures greatly helps put everything into perspective, making it easier to verify the relevance of given keywords.

Even the best SEO experts out there don't know the ins and outs of every single market in the world – and if your business partner doesn't rely on native speakers' help with keyword identification, you could be missing out on great sales opportunities.

Native speakers have a **better understanding of the nuances and context of their language**, including slang, regional variations, and idiomatic expressions; therefore, it's easier for them to identify more accurate keywords that are likely to be used by a given target audience. They're also aware of **various cultural and social factors** that influence language use, which allows them to better analyse the intent behind certain search queries.

Native speakers provide a more up-to-date perspective on which keywords are the most relevant – and more likely to produce great results.



A comprehensive multilingual keyword analysis carried out by experts using dedicated tools offers numerous advantages when it comes to showcasing your brand in new markets. Some of these benefits include:

- **optimising your content to match users' actual search queries,**
- **gaining insights into a specific market to identify which of your services or products might interest people (or not interest them at all),**
- **placing higher in search results,**
- **getting to know your (potential) customer base,**
- **optimising ad expenses,**
- **identifying content gaps,**
- **capturing customer attention,**
- **gaining a competitive edge in search results and boosting organic website traffic,**
- **increasing your sales.**

At Digibutsu, keyword research is always done from scratch for each market and then verified by native speakers of the language your content is translated into.



Local and global content strategy

We'll risk sounding like Captain Obvious here, but when it comes to expansion, the most important step involves doing **market research**. Let's say you have an Italian clothing brand. Last year, you reported record sales, which made you want to enter the Norwegian market. Your brand, as a whole, might do relatively well, but your best-selling product – a gorgeous sun hat – might not be the most sought-after piece of clothing in the North.

To avoid any potential failures, before entering any new market, you should always narrow down your target audience and choose which products and/or services actually stand a chance of grabbing customers' attention.

It's essential to localise and culturally adapt the content published on your website rather than simply translate it – it's a way of showing your new audiences that you truly respect them, and as such it's vital for customer acquisition. For example, when planning seasonal marketing campaigns, it would be a good idea to do a thorough research on local holidays, even if celebrations seem universal.

After you've done that, it's time to get through to your target audience by localising your content. Doing so will gain you credibility, build customer loyalty, and increase brand recognition. Both small businesses and e-commerce giants often **create multilingual content by preparing an English master version and then localising it into other languages**. To people outside the translation industry, this may seem like a game of Chinese whispers, but in reality, it doesn't have to mean that your content is going to end up sounding weird or distorted. You can avoid mistakes and misunderstandings by creating a brand book or a style guide explaining your brand's preferred tone of voice and formatting style, as well as containing any **reference materials which translators might find useful when transcreating content** that's in line with your original intent.

By taking these factors into consideration, companies can create effective multilingual content that resonates with their target audience and helps drive business growth.



“Less important” search engines

There’s no doubt that optimisation for Google’s algorithm should be one of the top priorities for any website looking to increase visibility, reach new customers, and make more profit – after all, **the engine dominates the industry and drives the majority of web traffic**. However, if you want to achieve the best results, it’s important not to disregard search engines other than Google, which hold a relatively small (but still significant!) market share – such as **Bing, Yahoo!, Baidu, or Naver**.

In China and South Korea, Baidu and Naver are the most used search engines, respectively – and anyone who plans on selling products in those markets should be aware of the engines’ popularity. When it comes to the above-mentioned countries, optimising your content solely for Google might produce unsatisfactory results.

Search engines that are less popular (at least by Western standards) have different algorithms and ranking factors, which means that **your SEO strategy may require a different approach**.

Still, tailoring your SEO efforts to the specific requirements of each search engine is definitely worthwhile, as it will help you reach more people and increase visibility in certain regions or industries.



AI-generated SEO content, translation, and copywriting

Given the explosive growth of artificial intelligence (AI), we're bound to see more and more content agencies either partly incorporating it into their services or completely relying on it. Take the incredibly popular ChatGPT as an example – it's great at **generating writing prompts, it can compose rather cohesive paragraphs, and it never experiences writer's block**; therefore, it's inevitable that in the upcoming years, we'll see an influx of AI-generated content.

Can ChatGPT help you with multilingual SEO content creation, though? How many languages does it even cover? Let's ask the bot itself:

How many languages can you create content in?



As an AI language model, I have been trained on a vast corpus of text from the internet, which includes a wide variety of languages. I can create content in many different languages, including but not limited to English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Russian, and many more.



However, my proficiency and accuracy in creating content may vary depending on the language and the complexity of the subject matter. In general, I am most proficient in creating content in languages for which I have been extensively trained on a large corpus of text data.

Source: Own screenshot.



As you can see, ChatGPT itself realises that (as of right now) it hasn't perfected most languages. And even if it eventually does, **it will probably still severely lack the human touch that digital marketing so desperately needs these days**. Nevertheless, the bot can be used for research (e.g. generating blog post topics) and even writing longer texts based on specific prompts – but to deliver the best results,

AI SEO content needs to be thoroughly verified by professional copywriters who can tweak it just the right way.

AI can rewrite or generate texts with provided keywords; it can relieve the writers from mundane duties and provide them with content foundations or variations that can be further expanded to deliver great articles that will rank high on internet search engines. It creates various content types with user-preferred style or tone. However, it may make factual errors or sound generic, so human supervision is necessary.

Most frequently asked questions about multilingual SEO

Is it expensive to do multilingual SEO?

The cost of multilingual SEO varies depending on the number of languages and the scope of the project. If you have to work with several agencies to cover each language separately, it can be a bit pricey. It's best to find an all-in-one SEO agency that offers optimised solutions and can help you save both time and money.

Is multilingual SEO worth the effort?

If you're looking to enter foreign markets and attract more customers, multilingual SEO is definitely worth the effort. By optimising your website for multiple languages, search engines, and marketplaces, you can gain a competitive edge, build customer loyalty, and boost your rankings in different countries and regions.



Why is multilingual SEO important?

Multilingual SEO makes it easier for businesses to tap into new markets. Optimised multilingual content increases the visibility of your business, products, and services, helps build credibility, and improves conversion rates – all of which will eventually lead to higher revenues.

Is a multi-language website good for SEO?

Multi-language websites allow businesses to reach more people and target specific audiences from all around the world. Multilingual content makes customers feel more confident when doing online shopping, which, in turn, leads to deeper engagement, increased website traffic, and higher search engine rankings.



Grow with Digibutsu

Are you struggling to make your website visible to users who speak different languages? Are you looking for ways to give your products a boost on Amazon? Digibutsu is here to help!

Our team of experienced SEO specialists and content writers will make sure that your texts and/or products gain maximum visibility – regardless of the language or location.

We tailor our SEO strategies to each client's unique needs and business goals, conducting keyword research separately for each market and taking into account local language and cultural nuances.

Don't let language barriers hold your business back and contact us today to learn more about our comprehensive solutions and reach a wider audience.

The whole world is at your fingertips!



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