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**Don't Lose Your Foreign Web Site Visitors by Insulting Them With Brain–Dead Translation Services**

**By Ralph Tegtmeier**

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For some internet marketers it's become a cutting edge strategy to offer multi lingual navigation and promo material on their sites in the hope of expanding their client base. While it is true that international users whose mother tongue is anything but English are beginning to hit the web in hefty numbers, catering to them in their own linguistic format is an art in itself which doesn't lend itself to the cheap and easy "no brainer" pseudo solutions currently being hawked on the net. If you offer them one of those, chances are you'll fend them off forever. Count it as a well–meaning blunder as much as you will, fact is these clients–to–be can be quite relentless if you convey the impression that you couldn't care less about offering first class services. Don't forget that very many people actually love their mother tongue and don't enjoy seeing it massacred.

Linguistics and translation are sciences in their own right demanding due respect or – at the very least – professional handling. One thing the non–expert should get rid off – the sooner the better! – is the fond myth that familiarity with your mother tongue implies that you know all about language and its social ramifications. And it's not about lack of command of

a foreign tongue either – more often than not, it's the basic concepts which are flawed, such as the belief that a word–by–word translation, though admittedly not very elegant, will at least give you a "general idea" of the source text's content. While this may actually be true to some extent within the very limited context of highly specialized technical fields (academic papers on chemistry rich in formulae and procedural descriptions being a case in point), the old law school adage "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" rules even here. Needless to say, relying on imperfect automatization can make matters even worse.

Translation bots tend to reflect this faulty reasoning, and their backing by popular opinion – uneducated in these matters as it usually is – is no great help either.

Here's just one example of what can happen if you opt for less–than–professional (read: usually free) "translation services". Let's take a real life German site rich in textual content and have a look at what the most popular translator bot makes of it.

"Welcomely  
tsigaan soft systems  
tsigaan news  
Software and computer services, also very good, give it meanwhile like the proverbial sand at the sea. Thousands of companies and Hirnen compile world–wide daily the most refined solutions, and although within this area – like everywhere in the life – all gold is long not, which probably shines there, then the standards and the requirements of the users in the last years nevertheless ever more rose."

Source:

"Translation":

Seriously – would you really want to see your site represented in this manner? Welcomely, indeed!

And don't try to argue that this is, after all, "better than nothing" – it's the seeming familiarity

of the language presented, the fond illusion of "at least getting the gist of it" that's the really nasty part. Because it can (and most certainly will!) lead you astray in ever so many subtle ways, and in the end you may be worse off by a long shot than if you hadn't understood a single word in the first place. Simply ask yourself if you would sign a million dollar contract of this linguistic "quality" ...

With the current US dominance of the WWW clearly waning (as all major studies and analyses will show), getting linked internationally will become ever more critical. World wide, surfers aren't content with sticking to local or localized search engines in their own language: rather, the English language is rapidly

gaining ground everywhere, even in the former communist states, not mention in formerly French or Spanish dominated regions. These people, more and more of whom are well educated, bilingual and fairly well versed in English, are increasingly making use of stateside search engines. It is only a question of time until even All–American engines will have to adapt to this situation, if only to accomodate their international advertisers. Hence, it stands to reason that only link popularity based on real world web demographics (as opposed to mere wishful thinking and established political and cultural prejudices) will be able to satisfy advertisers' and users' demands.

So do it right or do it not! Either employ a bona fide professional translation service or get someone to revamp your online copy to accomodate all those international clients whose command of English, while fairly well informed, is not quite up to par with your US or UK biased industrial lingo, er, parlance.

This holds true vice versa for non–English sites as well, of course: don't even dream of relying on one of the translator bots doing a good job and permitting you to cut one single sale! And while your English teacher at school may have lauded your enthusiasm over and again, don't delude yourself that this makes you a native speaker.

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If you are interested in English or American or Australian or New Zealand clients at all, don't give them the impression of amateurish incompetence by refusing to acknowledge the fact that your command of English may be less than perfect. This is, after all, nothing to be ashamed of – whereas trying to get by this problem on the cheap very well should be! If there's one thing you want to avoid in marketing it's getting laughed out of court.

The following sites offer "translation" services or, rather, pretend to do so – use at own risk:

<http://babelfish.altavista.com/>

<http://ranslator.go.com/>

<http://www.dictionary.com/ranslate/>

<http://www.voila.com/Services/Translate/>

### **Language – Who Can Read Your Web Site?**

**By Grant McNamara**

#### **Language – Who Can Read Your Web Site? by Grant McNamara**

We assume that people looking at our web site can read the words. But can they? If they can't read what is

presented, they certainly won't buy. Tens of millions of people use the Internet to buy products and services

everyday, but they won't buy from you. Why not? Because they can't read English.

English is the first language in only a small number of countries, and many people have English as a second

language. But consider for a moment the hundreds of millions of people that can't read English. Who do

they buy from? Well it won't be from you.

No doubt you've seen sites which allow the user to select from a list of language options. Perhaps it's an

option for your site. It is a relatively simple and inexpensive option to present your web site in multiple languages.

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By giving your audience a choice you are improving your service. Everyone prefers to deal with organisations that understand and meet their needs. Fundamental to quality service is the ability to communicate. And you are widening your potential market by millions and millions and millions. The benefits of allowing foreign language readers the ability to view your site are astounding. And the cost of making the site available in multiple languages is probably far lower than you think.

There are many firms specializing in language translation services. They take your English based text and

graphics and translate them into Spanish or German or Chinese or whatever languages you think best. And

they can do the same with your newsletters, your e-books, and yes, even software products.

We provide translations of web sites. And for most jobs, clients are surprised at how cost effective the service is. They kick themselves for not doing it earlier. Especially once the orders start to roll in from their

new markets. All that extra revenue, and so little effort.

Most web sites are somewhere between 500 and 1,500 words. The cost of translating such a small amount

of text is small, and the effort needed to amend the web site quite modest.

But a word of warning! Only human translators can accurately provide a precise translation of a specific

language. If you want a perfect translation, only a real person can assure you of getting one. Human translators excel at creating perfect translations. When translating general topics, it is necessary to use an

expert skilled at the appropriate targeted language, for example, English into German

For specialized fields, one needs to find an experienced translator who also possesses knowledge of the

terminology in that particular subject matter. In addition, if you intend to print, publish or distribute your

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translated materials to others, it is highly recommended that you have a competent human translator review

and edit the material.

And yes there are a number of automated translation products. And most work reasonably well. But their

translations only provide a rough approximation. The reader can understand what is meant, but the words

are often wrong or in the wrong order. It's just like talking to someone who doesn't know English well. You

can understand much of what they say, and communicate, but it is hard work. That's how translation software usually reads. Using such software won't give your prospective customers any degree of confidence that you provide quality.

Another alternative is to ask friends. No doubt you will have friends or colleagues, or friends of friends that

have language skills. It is best to have people translate into their 'mother tongues'. A mother tongue is the

language that a person learnt as a child. If you use friends and family though, it's a good idea to get a professional translator to proof read the results. Proof reading is usually about 20% of the price of the equivalent translation.

And if your budget is very small, you can include a simple welcome page for your foreign language visitors.

Here you would just describe the web site in general terms, explaining what you do and the key benefits of

the products and services you offer.

I hope this has given you something to think about.

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