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Weaving Culture Into e-Commerce

By Gary Hyman

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You probably already know that the non-English speaking Internet audience transacts 63% of the global e-Commerce transactions. If you know that then you're definitely aware that by 2004 this audience is expected to growth more than 10 percent. That's at least 2 trillion dollars multiplied by 75%...

...need I say more.

I going to share two words with you that should help towards your International e-Commerce Market Entry initiative. These word need to be taken very seriously if you wish to become truly successful in International e-Commerce.

"Local and Language!"

Yes the local language of your Internet audience needs to be considered very carefully. Not only is it polite to show your non-English speaker their local language, but also you'll find a keen sense of trust that develops by the time your purchaser hits that purchase button.

It's all about developing trust and a comfort level sufficient enough that your customer will purchase your product. I have spent many years working Internationally and there's nothing more important than developing a relationship through the use of language.

When it comes to shopping carts you don't want to be one of those abandoned shopping cart statistics. A high percentage of your non-English speakers will abandon the purchase if your website is not in their language, but more importantly if the shopping cart is not in their native language the likelihood of an abandoned transaction will be very high. If they do not have a comfort level to understand for example the fine print, shipping costs, the product that they're getting you can expect - No Purchase!

The Multilingual Shopping Cart

This short articles focuses on two key International, multilingual, commercial grade shopping cart solutions. One is free and the other one will cost you some money.

Without a doubt its a significant challenge to implement a shopping cart solution that has the ability to service the International (and more specifically the non-Englising) Internet Population. There are many `ready made' International Shopping Cart solutions. Most of the solutions are ready to integrate directly into your existing e-Commerce infrastructure, one of which is OSCommerce (OSC) and another is Shopfactory.

If you're on a tight budget then OSC could be right for you. It is 100% free, although it may require an `OSC expert' to handle the integration. OSC does make a claim that the software is an `out-of-the-box installation... minimum effort...". You should take into account your level of expertise. It may be more cost effective to bring in an OSC guru.

OSC is extremely robust. It includes PHP modules (a web scripting language), and runs on top of various platforms such as Linux, Solaris, BSD, and Microsoft Windows. OSC also makes use MySQL as a backend, and probably as no surprise the Apache version of OSC is the most stable.

OSC is a mature product. At last count they had about 1,400 implementations, and are backed by a well rounded International development and Support organization. Some of the OSC members are from Spain, Japan, France, Australia, USA, and Germany.

OSC is a true Open Source Solution, just like that of UNIX. There are customized versions of OSC, but the public source is still controlled as an Open Source License. It seems that the intent of OSC is to keep the license in the public domain.

Here are some live examples of the OSC implementations. Please note that these are random selections, and are not necessarily endorsed by The eCommerce Growth Group:

Japanese: <http://usa-generalstore.com/index.html>

Spanish: <http://www.nucleodigital.com/ienda/default.php>

German: <http://www.bbsstore.de/>

You can get more details on OSC at their website:

<http://oscommerce.com>

They also have a companion website that handles the product documentation and support. The website can be found at:

<http://oscdox.com>

Over 100,000 Shops

The other product is Shopfactory. This is a product that I have covered in Japan Online: New Opportunities and New Markets. I included this software because it has Japanese language and currency support (amongst many other software vendors too) capabilities. In fact, the solution has been thoroughly tested in and for the Japanese market.

Unlike OSC this product comes with a price tag attached to it. The cost is affordable though – an entry level price of \$179, and a high end of approximately \$1,000 for the full blown International version.

Shopfactory boast more than 100,000 shops globally and supports a dozen languages.

I thought it may be helpful to take a look at the product from a very high level...

It's a website development tool that automates the creation of complex websites. ShopFactory has a lot in common with Microsoft FrontPage, because ShopFactory never requires you to program HTML code. However, experts do have the option of customizing the appearance with manual HTML entry. ShopFactory also supports templates that change the colors and appearance of your entire website with a couple mouse clicks. Finally ShopFactory manages the toolbars for navigation throughout your website.

Despite the high-level similarities with Microsoft FrontPage, ShopFactory is a very different tool. Whereas FrontPage is designed to handle generic websites, ShopFactory is specifically designed to build shopping carts. Therefore ShopFactory automatically manages the functions that are required for shopping carts. Some examples are a privacy policy, an introductory front page, departments, product pages, an item cart, checkout, shipping cost calculations, and payment handling. All of these functions are automated, so you and your staff can focus on describing your company and your products without getting tied down in technical details.

The Website Wizard

After running ShopFactory for the first time, the program presents you with the Website Startup Wizard designed to step you through the process of setting up your first site. First the Wizard asks you about the introductory (index.html) page, with fields for Title, Introduction, Description, and Logo Image. All fields are optional, and the difference between the Introduction and Description are the position on the page and the size of the font used.

The next step of the Wizard asks for the theme of the website. Themes are a preconfigured settings for the overall look and feel of the website, including fonts, colors, graphics used to spice up the site, the location of the navigation bar and title, the location of the "Add to Cart" button relative to the items, and other settings. In the demo version of the software there are already 33 different themes, plus several color options within each theme. The themes are also customizable, allowing you to start with a default theme and modify it to your requirements. It is important to emphasize that the theme settings span all the pages of your site, for a consistent look and feel throughout the site.

Once you select the theme of the site, the Wizard asks you for the contact information for the company. This information is automatically inserted into the relevant pages of the site, such as the About Us page.

Next in the Wizard is the Classification page, which lets you select up to 15 categories for your site, Such as Beverages (Alcoholic, Coffee and Tea), or Children (Baby, Gifts), etc. These categories are used to list your site on the company's portal mall.

The final step of the Wizard presents you with various Optional Settings buttons. We will discuss these, along with some advanced features of ShopFactory in another article.

Lastly you press "Finish" in the Wizard, which will leave you at the main window of ShopFactory. Here

all of the various components of your website are listed in the left panel, where they can be easily edited or modified. From here you should save your website, and you also have the option of previewing the website in a web browser.

It is important to remember that all the settings configured by the wizard can be edited or modified later via several properties panels. The wizard provides a mechanism to get a basic website working very quickly. As you are stepping through the Wizard don't spend too much time deliberating the various details, because they are very easy to preview and change later.

A demo version of ShopFactory is available at:

<http://www.shopfactory.com/index.html>

Last Words

As you can see language presentation is an extremely important component to be successful in the International e-Commerce Market. Hopefully these two shopping cart solutions will help with your e-Commerce initiative. They are proven and tested to work in the International e-Commerce arena.

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The History Of Rugs

By James Adams

The history of rugs is quite amazing. The weaving of rugs and carpets dates back to at least 500 BC. Rugs are made by weaving, at least this is how they started making rugs. Weaving is nothing new, our ancestors have been doing it for thousands of years. The first weaving that was done was to make baskets. They made baskets out of anything that was pliable, leaves, grass, twigs and whatever materials could be found at the time.

The most common material used for rugs back then was most likely goat and sheep hair. Later on the Chinese produced wool piles. Some of the first Chinese rugs and carpets were made out of cotton and wool backings.

Some of the first looms were made with two branches that looked like a fork and connected by a crosspiece. The binding threads were then flattened with a bar usually made of wood. They later learned to dye the threads with various natural colors from fruit, vegetables, animals and bugs.

In 1769 a machine was invented by a Richard Arkwright. The machine was designed to spin thread onto a bobbin. Not too many years later a machine was designed to spin a thousand threads at a time. Eventually it progressed to where we are at today.

An archaeologist in the 1950's found a rug that dated back to 500 BC or before. It was found in a frozen state in Siberia. It was a knotted rug of Turkish descent. This just goes to show you that rugs are by no means something new. Our ancestors have been using them since the beginning of time.

Before people ever started weaving hunters would use the animal hides they got off of their prey to make clothing, rugs, maps and other various things. Today rugs are mass produced by machines and most people have forgotten the history behind rugs. When buying your next rug, remember the history of rugs!

Learn more about the history of rugs at



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