



International
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Approaching Blogging Internationally

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Introduction

As more and more people are spending more and more time online, there is a growing need to increase the appeal of our web presence and relate to new and emerging local communities throughout the world.

Blogs are now a standard used by many to establish an active online presence, and relate to an audience transforming it into a community.

This paper will describe technical and cultural issues related to multilingual blogging in an international environment, addressing problems and issues that many have been (or will be) addressed when expanding online presence with new languages.

Technical Issues

If you are preparing to add new languages, you're probably asking yourself a number of questions on how to implement a multilingual online presence.

Forums and blogs are populated with recurring questions such as:

- ➔ Which is the "best" Content Management System for Multilingual Blogging ?
- ➔ Should I place different languages on the same website ?
- ➔ Should different languages be placed in 3rd level domains ?
- ➔ Is there a difference between 3rd level domains and sub-folders ?
- ➔ Can geographically related TLD¹s improve my rankings ?
- ➔ Is there a duplicate content issue with multilingual content ?

More often than not forums and blogs will provide partial and at time incorrect information that may lead to a bad choice.

I provide answers to these questions as guidelines to creating a significant, meaningful, and effective multilingual online presence.

¹ Top Level Domains .co.uk, .com, .it, etc.

Which is the “best” Content Management System for Multilingual Blogging ?

Most CMS (Content Management Systems) with language modules manage content in an “aseptic” manner, simply moving it from one place to another in order to replicate it in another language: This is a critical limitation to many important CMSs.

Let's say that you'd like to buy a new car and go to the show room twice, once with your parents (who might even be paying for it) and a second time with friends. While there with mom and dad you'll be talking about the safety features and the mileage the car can offer, but when you are there with your friends it's all about RPMs, Max. acceleration and speed ... the focus of your conversation is very different.

Most CMS don't allow the freedom to write in different languages, obliging an association of content in different languages: In other words, if you write something in English it should be translated into Italian and Spanish and all the other languages the website may offer. While this may be true for an Ecommerce portal or the European Union, it definitely isn't the case when it comes to blogging.

Different audiences have different levels of sophistication and different expectations

Most platforms do not follow this line of thought making it difficult for multilingual bloggers to break free from this procedure.

Open source software such as WordPress provides a blogging platform with a generous community of developers offering clever functionalities².

WordPress has proven to be an optimal blogging tool also for a multilingual presence. Search Engines are clever enough to identify and manage multilingual content, so it's really a matter of presenting it properly to your audience, by grouping pages and categories in different languages.

I created a plugin called BlogSlot³ that allows to group and manage content in coherent language “slots” within the layout

² Take a look at my WordPress Bookmarks: <http://del.icio.us/sjachille/wordpress>

³ blog.achille.name/wordpress/wordpress-plugin-for-content-management-blogsloot/

By doing so users quickly identify content in their language and the search engines have no problems dealing with your blog.

Should I put the different languages in the same website ?

In principle I don't see any reasons for you not to do so ... however let's take a closer look.

I believe a big link rich blog (or website for that matter) is the way to proceed. Big sites with quantity and quality can generate many incoming links, all the better if the links are coming from different parts of the world – a sign of recognition which in turn confers reputation and authority on a subject.

Generating links from different (local) areas of the world will favor a wider presence of your blog and will favor organic placement locally in different languages⁴ – there are hundreds of millions of people searching the web every minute of day and night and they all do it differently: People in Italy run queries in English or someone out of Russia may run a query in Danish – search is unpredictable to a large extent and will become more so as the web further expands to different areas of the world with different cultures and know how. The introduction of universal search is making Search Results less deterministic than ever.

So in principle I tend to suggest to have everything under the same roof, also because it's easier to manage: Every interface is an expense, more webs or blogs are equivalent to multiplying your interfaces to the online world and there will be a price to pay in this respect.

⁴ You can get a boost from incoming links in a local language that may contribute to an important placement in the SERPs

Should different languages be placed in 3rd level domains ?

Sub-domains have been in use throughout the years ever since the web came around as a commercial media, Google, CNN and AmericanExpress have always used sub domains such as:

- news.google.com
- travel.americanexpress.com
- money.cnn.com

Sub-domains:

- provide an efficient way to place keywords in your domain name, offering an easy-to-remember URL
- add an ever-so-slight boost in relevancy - when all other factors are equal, the keyword-rich domain wins the ranking game
- are favored by people: Those searching for “shoes” are more likely to choose a domain name (link) containing the word shoes over one that does not
- offer keywords early on, since people tend to read the link from left to right: the earlier the keyword appears in the link, the more believable (relevant) it appears in the eyes of the user reviewing the SERPs.

Recent disclosure by Matt Cutts⁵ about problems related to so-called “host crowding” revealed how sub-domains now have less privileges and in some cases are equivalent to a folder.

In principle a sub-domain will find appropriate use to clearly identify content related to different products or services, and less to differentiate multilingual content.

⁵ <http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/subdomains-and-subdirectories/>

Is there a difference between 3rd level domains and sub-folders ?

The difference was significant in the past, recent Algorithm updates have mitigated the power of sub-domains which can be treated as equivalent to folders in particular cases, for example when a website tends to monopolize the SERPs with a TLD and related sub-domains.

Based on this particular case, sub-domains no longer have a major influence, and should not be used as a strategic search engine ranking factor, especially when it comes to language.

Can geographically related TLDs improve my rankings ?

Geo referencing your TLD is a key factor in identifying you as a local player. Simple tests show how search results change significantly running a query across different local versions of major search engines (especially Google).

Google Webmaster tools offers the possibility to reference your website just in case there is a geographical issue

Google Webmaster Tools

[Dashboard](#) > **Tools**

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www.dolcevitavillas.com

[Analyze robots.txt](#)

See whether your robots.txt file blocks specific URLs as is, or with modifications you make. Test against various Google user-agents, too.

[Generate robots.txt](#)

Interactively create a robots.txt file to indicate which robots you don't want crawling your site, and which files or directories you don't want crawled.

[Set geographic target](#)

Associate a particular geographic location with this site if you are targeting users within that area.

[Enhanced image search](#)

Enable Google's enhanced search for images on your site, including advanced labeling techniques for images hosted by Google.

[Manage site verification](#)

See all verified owners of this site, and optionally reverify them.

[Set crawl rate](#)

See statistics about how often Google crawls your site, and optionally adjust that speed if desired.

[Set preferred domain](#)

Associate a preferred domain with this site, to always or never show the leading "www." in Google's search results.

[Remove URLs](#)

Remove content from the Google index, including expediting that removal.

Although localization can be an advantage it will require a larger effort to establish a significant presence in all local markets, starting with local link building, managing multiple web sites ecc.

Careful planning and budgeting is required in such instances, and should be considered a viable solution after a careful evaluation of the local market potential.

Is there a duplicate content issue with multilingual content ?

From time to time there are newcomers to search engine optimization and junior webmasters who ask this question in forums.

Multiple language content is not considered duplicate content.

However problems do arise when you are targeting multiple countries with similar languages, for example a website written in English under a .com TLD, and wanting to target other English speaking areas of the world like USA, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand – how can you go about this ?

Again it will be a matter of balancing the required efforts to build up a significant local presence and compare it to the potential of each specific marketplace.

In this specific case (which can be easily extended to other parts of the world – take for example countries speaking Spanish or Portuguese) avoiding duplicate content problems means creating unique content for each and every country.

Culture and Content

When it comes to content creation for blogs, the greatest shortfall of blogging platforms is the assumption that whatever content is created is should be translated, but this is rarely the case.

Let's consider 2 markets for example the UK and Italy, the differences are not only related to different languages, but also to the marketplace and users attitude. Trends and habits viewed as a novelty in Italy would be frowned upon in the UK as old news – there would be no use (or advantage) in offering the same news or information to different users in different marketplaces.

In most cases multilingual blogging is far more than a mere translation of local news into different languages, requiring in depth knowledge of local markets. Each language is equivalent to a new blog, a new conversation with different people and a different approach.

Here are some tips on how to manage a multilingual blogging presence:

- setup multiple feeds related to the different markets (and languages) you would like to become active in
- follow local conversations, participate and learn what people are talking about and can be of interest to them.
- blog about relevant information coming from different markets you are following
- use the right approach, one size doesn't fit all in blogging – your readers will appreciate your efforts to relate to their needs and expectations

In conclusion multilingual blogging is a cumbersome task and requires a great deal of attention in order to be successful. Language and culture will play a significant part in your multilingual online success.