

best practices

Hilton International Localizes Web Sites with Translations.com

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In 2002, Hilton International made a commitment to grow the business from our direct distribution channels by focusing on the development of branded Web sites in local language, with local content, for our major source markets. The decision was taken to design and build eight branded

Web sites: three Hilton Web sites selling all Hilton properties to our UK, German and Japanese markets and five Scandic Web sites selling all Scandic properties to our Danish, Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian markets, plus an additional "global" Scandic Web site.

Translations.com GlobalLink

GlobalLink is a Globalization Management System, which facilitates the creation of custom global content. GlobalLink works by first identifying source language content for regional and local markets around the world and then triggering the translation/localization process.

Our objective was to provide our customers with localized, content-rich, intuitive Web sites that featured local offers and promotions and provided more relevant information about our hotels than any other channel. The sheer number of properties, the detailed information about each one and the dynamic nature of the content created tremendous information management challenges. Hilton International operates 405 hotels, with 263 branded Hilton, plus 142 under the Scandic brand. A global marketing alliance between Hilton International and Hilton Hotels Corporation extends the number of hotels operated by both companies worldwide to more than 2,700, of which more than 500 are branded Hilton. Hilton International employs more than 70,000 staff members in 78 countries.

The translation and localization challenges of building eight localized, content-rich Web sites from scratch were apparent from the start. The logistics of managing enormous amounts of content for such a large number of hotels in so many different languages for such a decentralized company, required complex content management. However, the business required simple and efficient processes that they could easily adopt to maintain the content. Balancing the needs of the business with the capabilities of the technology – while focusing firmly on the customer requirements – was key to the success of the project.

The customer was Hilton's reference point throughout the design process, and the focus remained firmly on using the best technology to enhance the user experience. Because it was also vital to ensure the business could embrace and manage the new technology and processes in the long-term in addition to defining user experience priorities, it was important to involve the right resources within the company and choose the right external partners with the expertise to help us design and implement the best processes for the way we do business.

The localization system we designed relied heavily on the functionality of our existing content management architecture, with the addition of an application commonly known as a Globalization Management System (GMS). This system today controls the creation of all languages for our resulting eight local market Web sites. The sites offer local content presented at each stage of the visitor research, selection and reservation process plus local and global offers. Each hotel has its own property pages with multiple pages for each restaurant, facility, conference room and function room.

To localize our Web sites, we needed to process this huge volume of multilingual content through our content management system (CMS), Interwoven's TeamSite, and into local language versions for each of the markets mentioned – in three months. The creation of these Web sites resulted in more than 4 million words of content stored in more than 25,000 data capture records.

The ability to process and localize this volume of content without serious repercussions required a Globalization

Management System that worked effectively with TeamSite and that could be implemented/maintained without a significant drain on our resources. We chose Translations.com's GMS application, GlobalLink.

GlobalLink works as a multilingual content module for the CMS and allows to us manage our localization process through the CMS workflows. The primary benefit of the software from a technical perspective is that it integrates seamlessly with the source content repositories to monitor content that may require translation. All relevant content is automatically exported from and (when translated content is ready) re-imported into content repositories, requiring no additional effort from the business. Integration of the GlobalLink software architecture with our custom installation of TeamSite took only one week and required only minimal adjustments to our overall workflow to accommodate the localization workflows.

Localization on a large scale is a complex process with numerous potential pitfalls. I would advise any manager to ensure success on large localization projects:

Keep it simple (or at least as simple as possible!). CMS implementations are complex enough and there is rarely the time or resources available for a cumbersome GMS implementation. Make sure the technical solution really does integrate with your chosen CMS with as little impact on your CMS solution as possible. Have a clear understanding of how the business will maintain this localized content and ensure the resulting

business processes are straightforward.

Hire experts with the right attitude. If your localization team is not capable of understanding your content architecture and workflows as well as providing flexible solutions to integrate the localization process with your content workflows, you are in trouble and may find yourself spending a disproportionate amount of time trying to find solutions that work for your CMS and your localization vendor. Translations.com was the ideal partner for Hilton International, as they already had an adaptor for TeamSite and provide similar solutions to other TeamSite clients. Their experience meant that they could provide Hilton with valuable advice on best practices for GlobalLink's use with TeamSite.

Work together - closely. Tight time frames and high volumes dictated that everyone involved in the Hilton Web sites project, including Translations.com's project managers, worked on site at our system integrator's office for the key three months of the project. This arrangement fostered a great team attitude and allowed us to work through all issues as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Don't forget the language teams. What we all want at the end of the localization process is great localized content - the technical solution is just the means, not the end result. Make sure all the translators are native speakers and will remain with the project. Brief them thoroughly on your brand, test the quality of their work and make sure your markets are happy with the resulting localized content. It

doesn't matter how good the technical solution is if the localization is substandard. At Hilton International, we chose the complete solution (software and services) provided by Translations.com (TDC). This was by far the most efficient way of managing our language and technical requirements, and Translations.com is equally strong in its technical solutions and the quality of its localization. Although GlobalLink will allow us to use any localization vendor, the ability to work with one team, or even one person, on a complex project is a distinct advantage. The flexibility and responsiveness of the TDC team on this project was outstanding.

Today, Hilton International has eight localized Web sites up and running, and year to date our Web sites are 161 percent ahead of year one AFE. We believe that our sites have not only changed the way Hilton International does business, but have also led to a change in strategy throughout the industry, as more hotels follow our lead and focus on obtaining reservations directly through their own localized Web sites. The figures show our customers turn more and more to our Web sites both for research and reservations. At the recent e-TID Online Travel Distribution Awards, www.hilton.co.uk was awarded best hotel site by the readers of e-TID.com. 

* Hilton International (HI) is the operating division of the UK based Hilton Group plc, and owns the rights to the Hilton brand name throughout the world, with the exception of the USA where the Hilton brand is owned and managed by Hilton Hotels Corporation (HHC).