



DEEPCRAWL'S ULTIMATE GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL SEO



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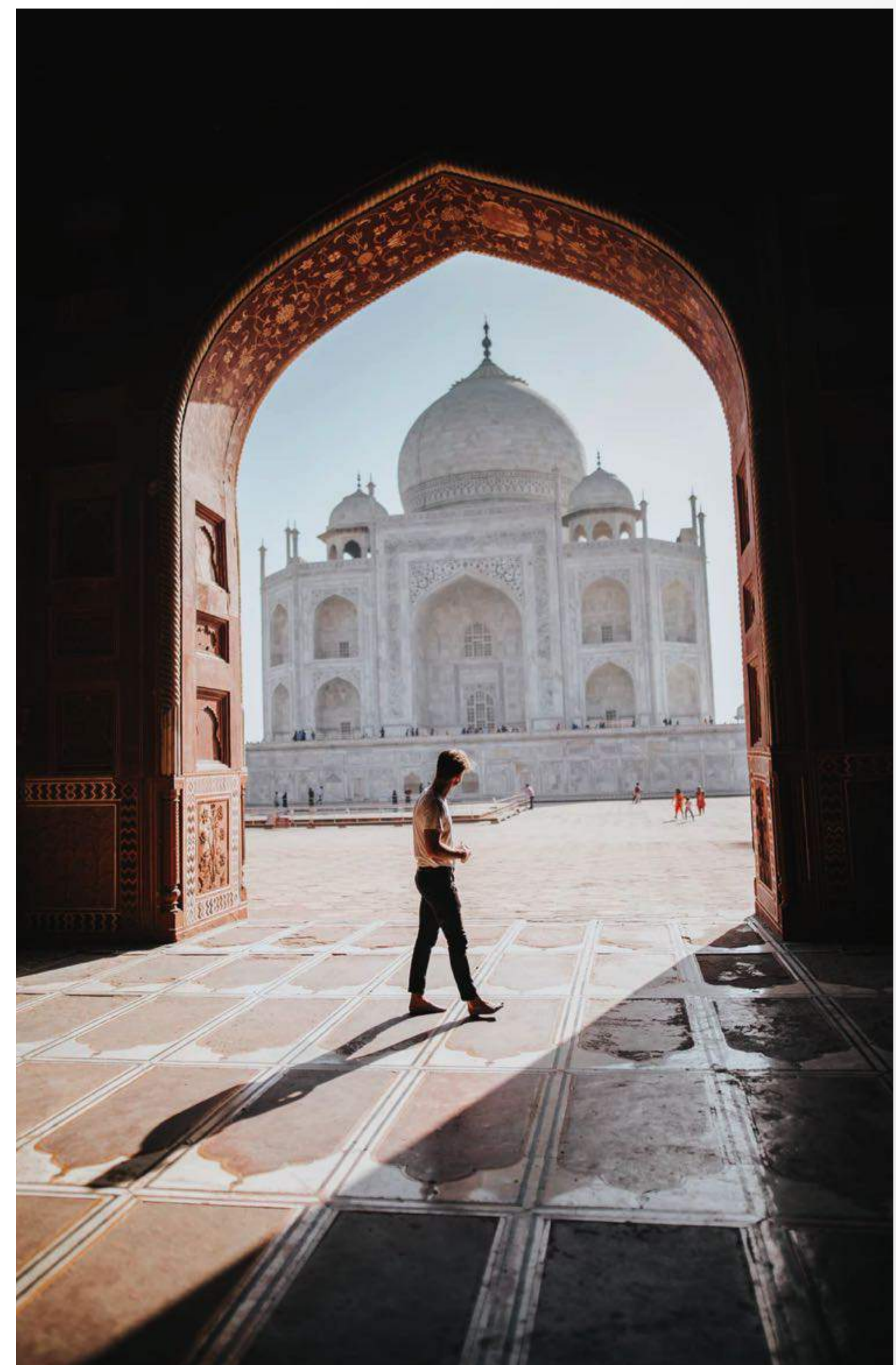
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The challenges of internationalisation for SEO

Business growth depends on market opportunity, so strategies often move towards internationalisation in order to tap into multiple markets to exponentially increase these opportunities.

Thinking about Google organic search in particular as a means of reaching new customers, there is huge potential. If you can orchestrate a winning international SEO strategy and get your website ranking in different countries, your site is suddenly opened up to an additional surge of users. Take India as an example: the country has a population of around 1.2 billion, and 94% of all of its desktop search traffic comes from Google alone. That's an enormous market share.



SHARE OF DESKTOP SEARCH TRAFFIC ORIGINATING FROM GOOGLE AS OF JUNE 2018

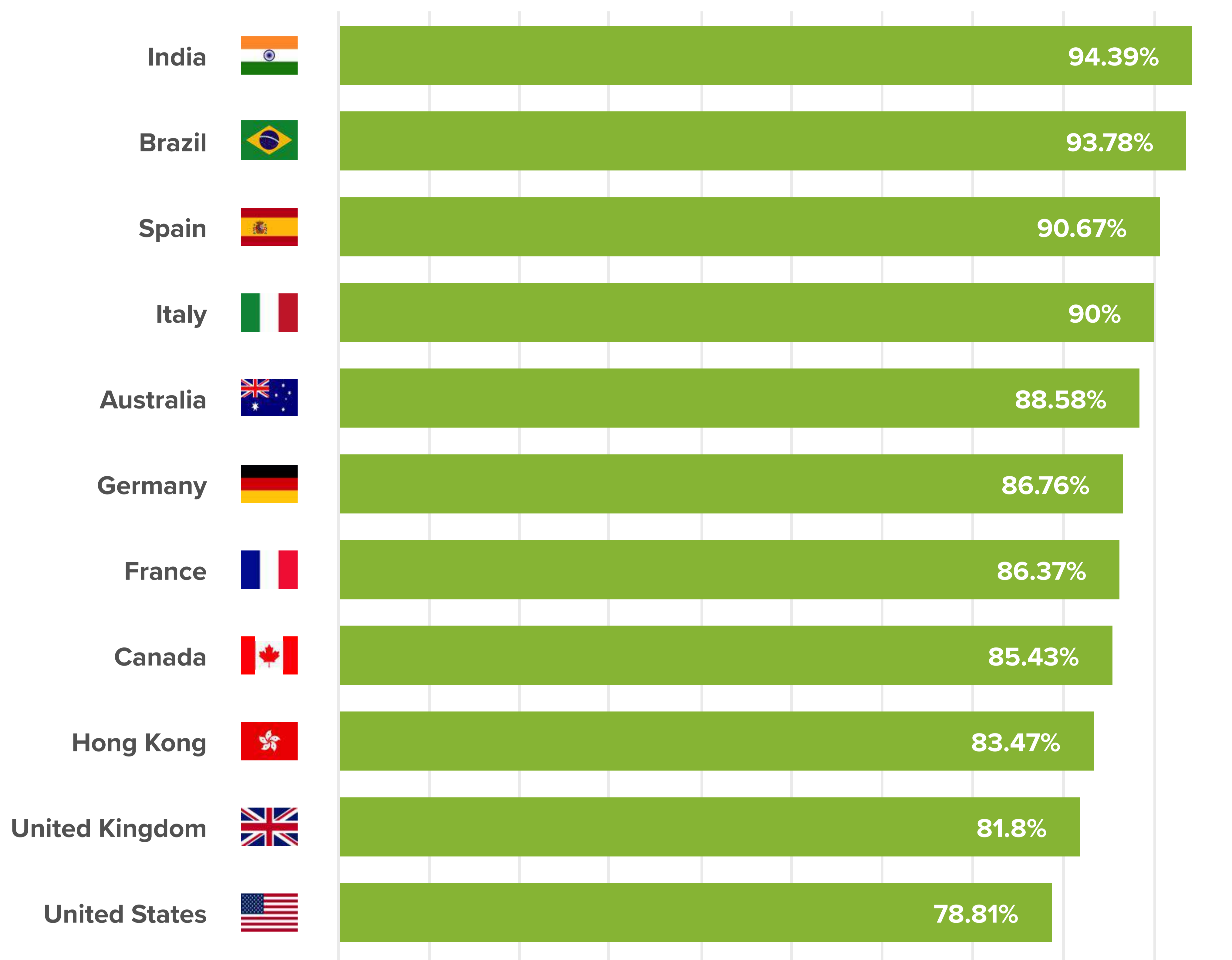


IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.STATISTA.COM/STATISTICS/220534/GOOGLES-SHARE-OF-SEARCH-MARKET-IN-SELECTED-COUNTRIES/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/220534/googles-share-of-search-market-in-selected-countries/)

This is why thought, planning and attention to detail all need to feed into a sound internationalisation strategy in order to achieve global success. Internationalisation isn't achieved overnight, however, and can be one of the most difficult aspects of SEO to get right, especially when you think about the language considerations and technical implementation required. That's why we created this guide to share best practice knowledge and advice to help search marketers get to grips with the key concepts of internationalisation, the mistakes to look out for and how to get it all right for your business.

Going global: Considerations for users

If a business has a marketing strategy and infrastructure that's working successfully in one particular language or territory and wants to replicate that success in other markets, we already have a problem. Digital marketing efforts can't simply be replicated across different countries, each market and its population have unique considerations.

“The biggest mistake websites make when it comes to internationalisation is to do it half-heartedly. Many website owners think that duplicating a site in English and aiming it at a country where they speak a different language is a perfectly valid approach to doing international business online. I cannot begin to explain just how wrong this approach is.

The key to successful internationalisation on the web is to go all out: every international presence you have needs to be as thoroughly optimised for that country and language as possible. Anything less than that will be immediately evident to the people you're trying to target. Nobody likes to do business with a website that doesn't take the effort to understand and communicate with its customers. For example, whenever someone arrives on your Spanish-language section, they should feel as if your business is a native Spanish entity, with every aspect of that section perfectly localised; from professional translations to currencies and shipping options.

While the web allows you to do business across the globe, that doesn't mean you can cheat your way there. It still takes a lot of effort to become a global business, and if you're not prepared to put in the effort you shouldn't even try.”

|| Barry Adams,
Founder of Polemic Digital





USERS SHOULD SIT AT THE CENTRE OF ANY INTERNATIONAL SEO STRATEGY, MEANING THAT YOU WILL HAVE TO TAILOR YOUR EFFORTS TO EACH INDIVIDUAL MARKET AND AUDIENCE.

Language considerations

You have to truly understand the nuances of new audiences, the countries they're from and the languages they speak in order to reach them. Detailed keyword and market research is essential for identifying the vocabulary that users from a location are actually searching with, which will help you talk to your users in the way they expect to be spoken to.

It may be necessary to consider going even further than generically targeting languages; for example, splitting up your strategy into English, French and Spanish might not be effective enough. People in Argentina and Mexico may speak Spanish, but that doesn't mean they speak the language in the same way as people from Spain. Every country will have its own unique language considerations and nuances to be aware of.

There are variations in structure to consider as well as just the words of a language. You need to understand how your users read and digest content in their language. A left-to-right, horizontal page layout that works for an English speaker won't work for someone who speaks Hebrew, which reads right to left, or for someone who speaks Japanese, which reads vertically.

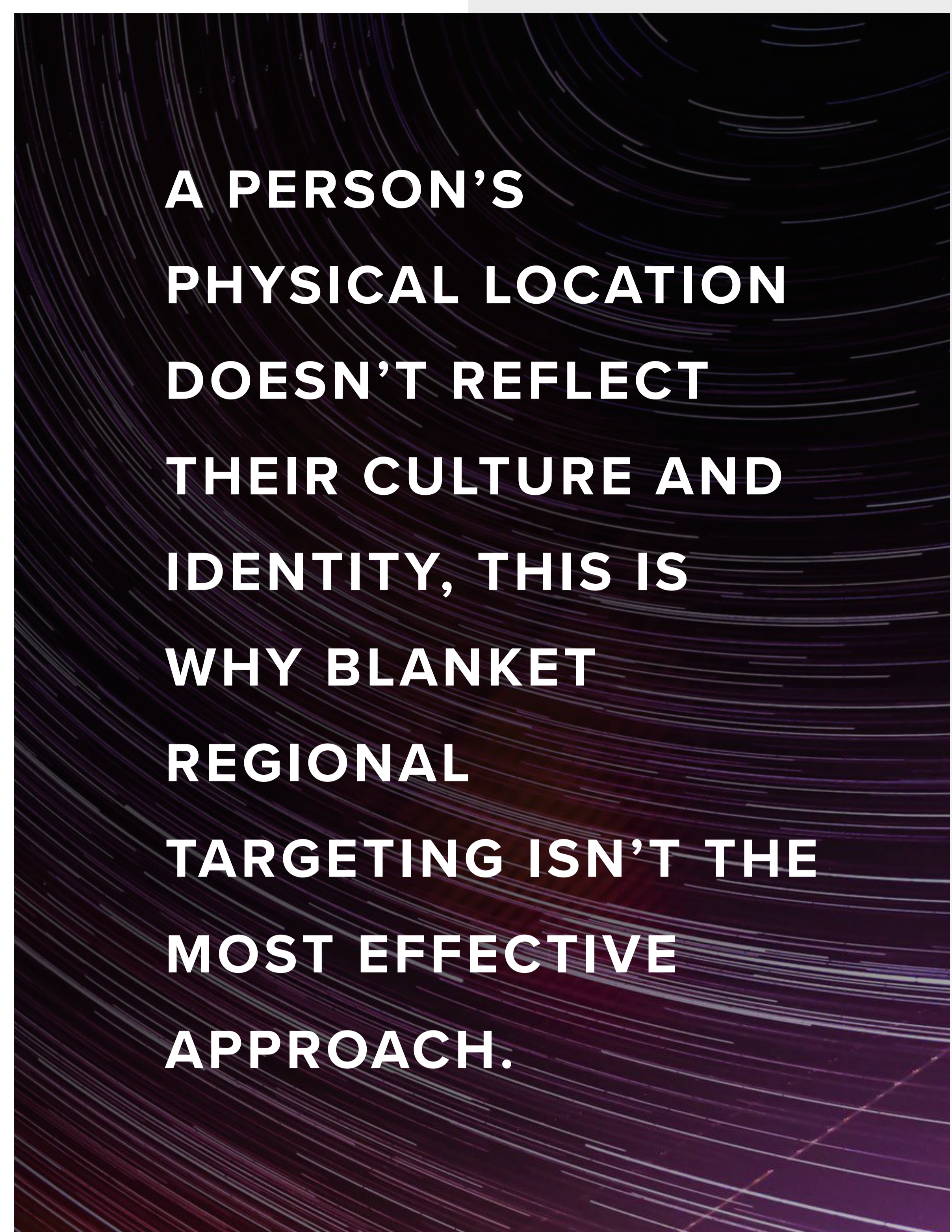


IF THE LANGUAGE THAT YOU'RE SERVING TO A USER ISN'T TRULY TALKING TO THEM, THEN YOU LOSE AUDIENCE TRUST AND POTENTIAL CONVERSION OPPORTUNITIES.

Cultural considerations

There are different search implications driven by culture as well as language, which affects the balance of search intent of people across the world. For example, seasonality plays a part in user behaviour, particularly when thinking about holiday months and buying behaviour over the year. A winter promotion for the US won't apply to Australia who will be experiencing their summer.

There are additional complexities which add to our marketing efforts when you consider that many different languages are spoken across the different countries. Blanket targeting the UK with an English language site doesn't reflect a multicultural reality. The main foreign languages spoken in the UK are French (23%), German (9%) and Spanish (8%),¹ for example. Take the time to understand the percentages of languages spoken within each target market.



“International SEO success is all about examining and understanding the local target audience. Every region is unique; people search differently, they see images and colors differently, and they require different approaches and messaging. Simplicity is key. The more you complicate the user experience, the more abandoned conversions you're going to get. In other words - think users first, think global next. Google will be drawn to the best UX.”

Liraz Rahmin Postan,
Senior SEO & Content Manager at **Outbrain**



¹ Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_United_Kingdom, 9th August 2018

As well as taking into consideration a user's language and culture, you also need to be mindful of their browsing conditions and how they are able to access content. International success depends on reaching users quickly across their different devices.

“If you want to be international, you'd better be mobile first and mobile fast. In the United States, 41% of total web traffic comes from mobile devices. For Asian markets, that share jumps to over 65%. 4G isn't worldwide and for many international users, there's a real monetary value attached to every MB. Can you imagine having to pay \$5 every time a site decided you really needed to see their hero image? These users need lightweight experiences that adapt. Use Lighthouse to test your site and ensure you can meet users' needs on slower networks.”

Jamie Alberico,
SEO Product Owner at **Arrow Electronics**

Take a look at our previous guides on **mobile** and **site speed** to learn more about how to better optimise your website for your users.



Going global: Considerations for search engines

One of the most important things for search engines with regard to internationalisation is that you provide the strongest geolocation signals possible. Search engines can do their best to figure out your site's international setup without full implementation on your end, as the team at Google explains:

“Note that even without taking action, Google might still find alternate language versions of your page, but it is usually best for you to explicitly indicate your language or region-specific pages.”

Google Search Console Help²

² Google Search Console Help, <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/189077>

It's good to know that Google provides a safety net, however, you should still do your best to adhere to its guidelines so you can be sure the right versions of your pages are actually being shown in the SERPs. Here are Google's top 5 pieces of advice on managing different language versions of a website: ³

- 1 “Use different URLs for different language versions”** - Use URLs to differentiate the language being served, instead of cookies, geographic location or browser settings.
- 2 “Make sure the page language is obvious”** - Visible content is used to determine a page's language, so help Google by using a single language on a page.
- 3 “Let the user switch the page language”** - Give users a choice around the language they see, as geotargeting isn't always perfect.
- 4 “Use language-specific URLs”** - Localised words can be used in URLs as long as they use UTF-8 encoding and are escaped properly, although this can make hreflang implementation significantly more complicated to implement.
- 5 “Tell Google about your different language versions”** - Mark your pages appropriately so Google knows which page corresponds to which language.

Googlebot crawls from California for the most part and uses a US IP address. This is essential to bear in mind if you have dynamically-generated content based on a user's location, or if you block IP addresses from certain countries. If a website can only be viewed in a country outside the US, Google wouldn't be able to crawl and index it, meaning the site won't rank anywhere.

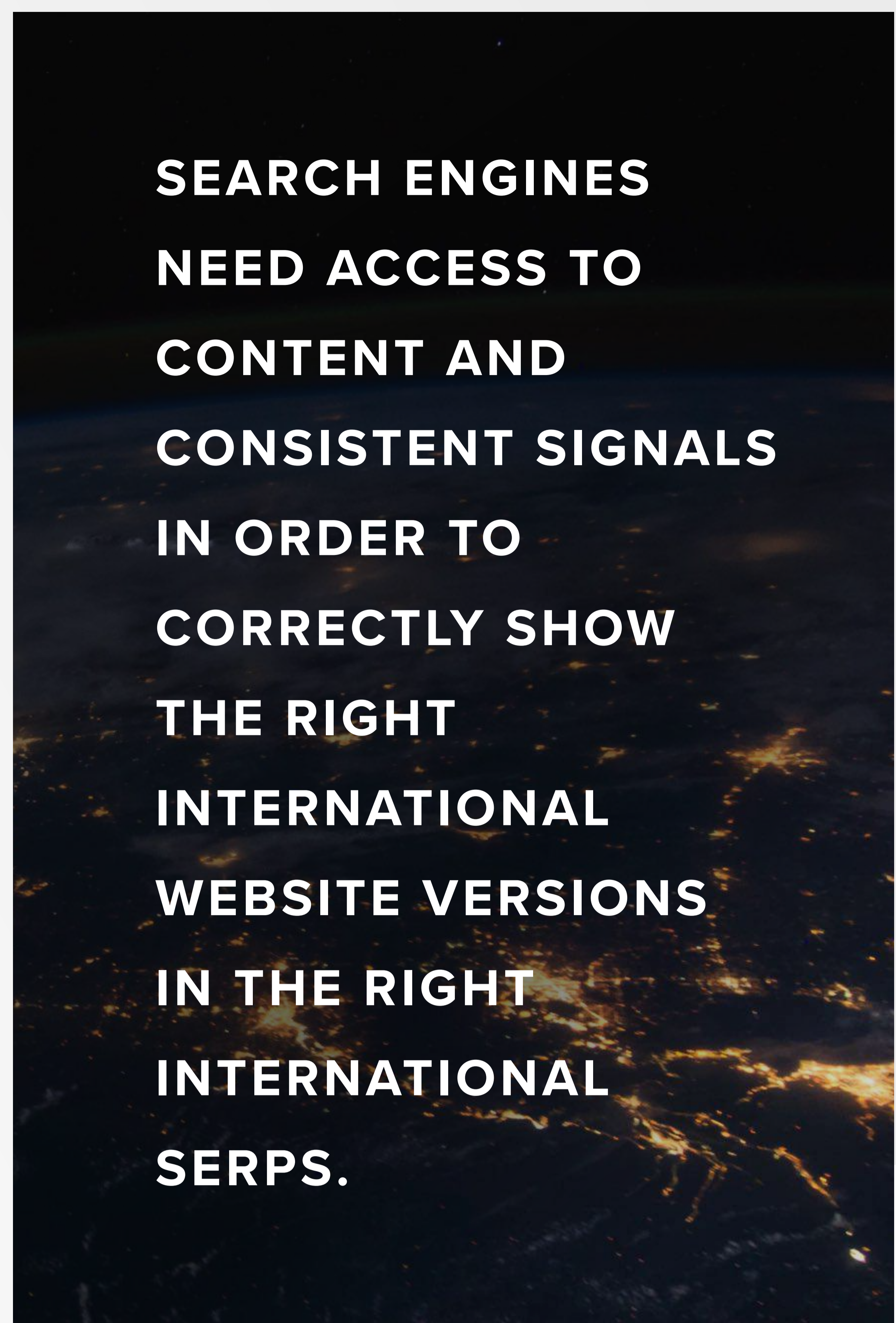
Blocking US IPs is likely to block Googlebot. Having at least some US-accessible content is recommended.

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

Having multiple languages on the same page can confuse search engines and make it harder for them to understand if a page is relevant to a particular audience. For example, if you have a mix of French and English content on a page, Google may not see it as a true French or English result and it may not be shown for either language. Use a single language per page where possible and use hreflang to connect page variations to make things as clear as possible.

Only have one language on a page to ensure it will appear in search.

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout



How other search engines handle internationalisation

Google isn't the only search engine to consider, especially in international search. Each one handles internationalisation differently; what works for Google may not work for the others. This table by Dan Taylor, Account Director at SALT.agency, lays out how each search engine handles hreflang:

Search Engine	Does it support hreflang?
Google	Yes, through both HTML and XML Sitemap
Yandex	Yes, through HTML
Baidu	No, need to use the HTML Meta Language Tag
Naver	No, need to use the HTML Meta Language Tag
Bing	No, need to use the HTML Meta Language Tag
Seznam	Yes, through HTML

HTML language tags are the best solution for international targeting with Bing, Baidu and Naver because they don't support hreflang tags. Here's how you can tell Bing about your page variations:

METHOD #1 Embed metadata into the document using "content-language" in the **<head>**.

```
<meta http-equiv="content-language" content="en-us"> (which is English in the United States)
```

METHOD #2 Include it in the **<html>** or **<title>** tags.

```
<html lang="en-us">  
<title lang="en-us">
```

METHOD #3 Set the "content-language" in the **HTTP headers**.

```
HTTP/1.1  
...  
Content-Language:en
```

SEARCH ENGINES HANDLE INTERNATIONALISATION DIFFERENTLY, SO MAKE SURE YOU READ UP ON THE CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ONES YOU PRIMARILY WANT TO APPEAR IN.

The **common mistakes** of internationalisation

Before launching an international strategy, it's important to take the time to learn from others' mistakes in order to avoid them yourself. Here are the 4 biggest issues to watch out for in your international strategy, as explained by Aleyda Solis:

- 1 Not having “enough resources” to properly optimise your target markets:** If you can’t afford to create localised, relevant content for your website variations, this is a consequence of not having selected them well in the first place.
- 2 Web structures that are not optimised for the target market:** Not being able to use the relevant language of each market in the URLs, an excess of pages generated by the CMS which are targeted to other countries etc.
- 3 Hreflang annotation issues:** From not using the relevant country or language code, to using region values that are not yet supported by Google, to not following the tag specification, to not including it in the right locations, to not tagging all of the relevant URLs.
- 4 Implementing automatic redirects based on the user’s IP or browser language:** This is intrusive and might assume too much about your visitor. You can also end up always referring Googlebot to only a few of your website’s versions.

||| **Aleyda Solis,**
International SEO Consultant at **Orainti**

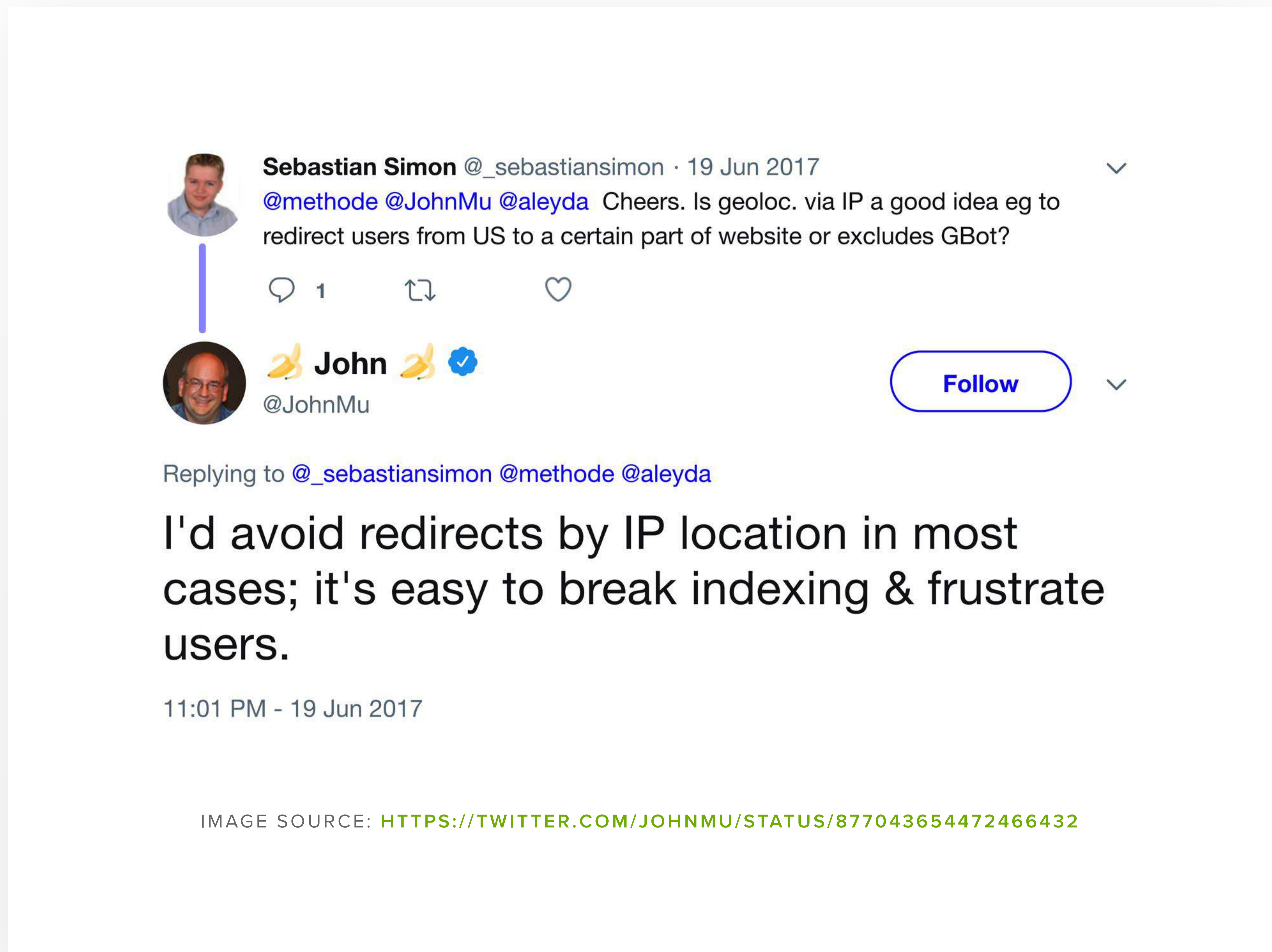


These are some of the biggest internationalisation mistakes to avoid, which we’ll cover in more detail:

- **Geographic redirection**
- **Incorrect page mapping**
- **Overcomplicating language targeting**
- **Forgetting about mobile**
- **Not combining different methods well**

Geographic redirection

As Aleyda says, having automatic redirects based on a user's assumed language should be avoided. From a user's perspective, this can be frustrating as they become blocked from accessing any other content versions on your site. This can often happen as automatic IP or language detection doesn't always work properly.



An alternative method that is often recommended by Google is to have a banner which allows users to select their own language.

Allow users to choose different language sites through JavaScript banners

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

Hej! Welcome to a world of inspiration for your home

Take me to IKEA United Kingdom

I want to choose another location

Using banners for language selection doesn't only provide a better user experience, but it also opens up your other page versions to search engines to be indexed. Automatic geographic redirects will keep sending Google back to US page versions where it usually crawls from, and will send Yandex to Russian versions, Baidu to Chinese versions, and so on. If you use geographic redirection, Google may never even know you have any other page versions apart from those for the US.

Use banners to suggest different language sites so Google can index them.

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

Watch out for JavaScript redirects which are sometimes used for this purpose, as these can cause indexing issues. Analyse any instances where you're using redirects like this to make sure they're not causing any issues for users or search engines.

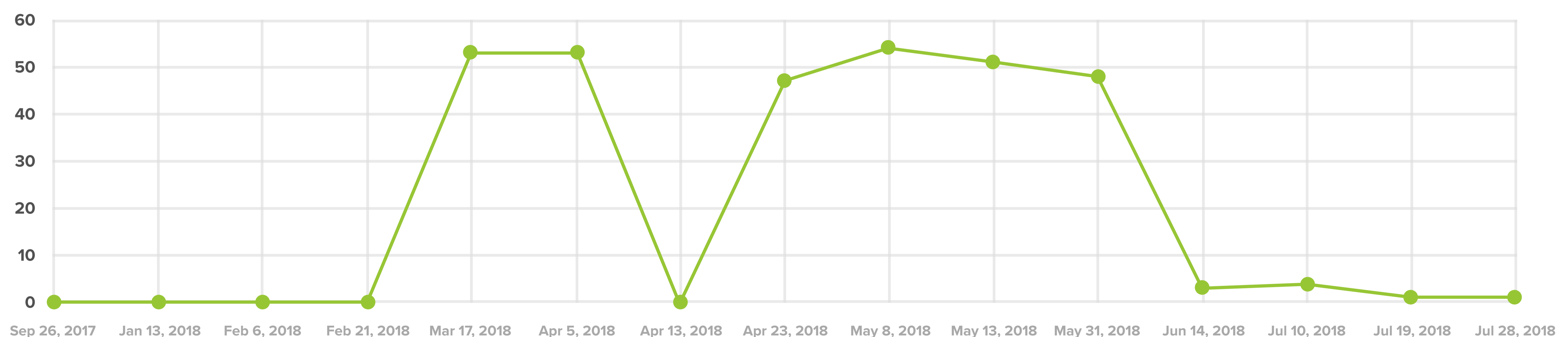
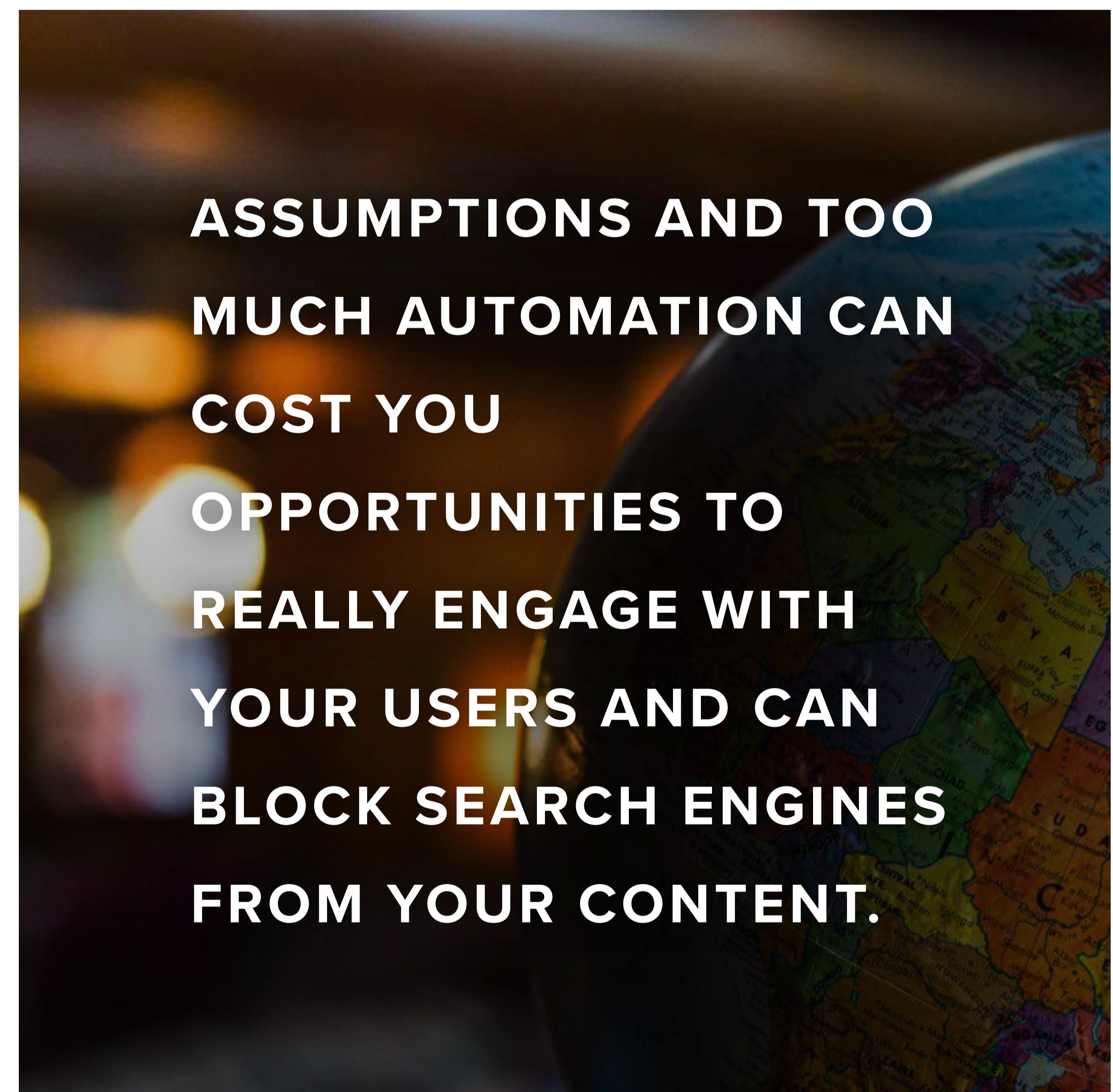
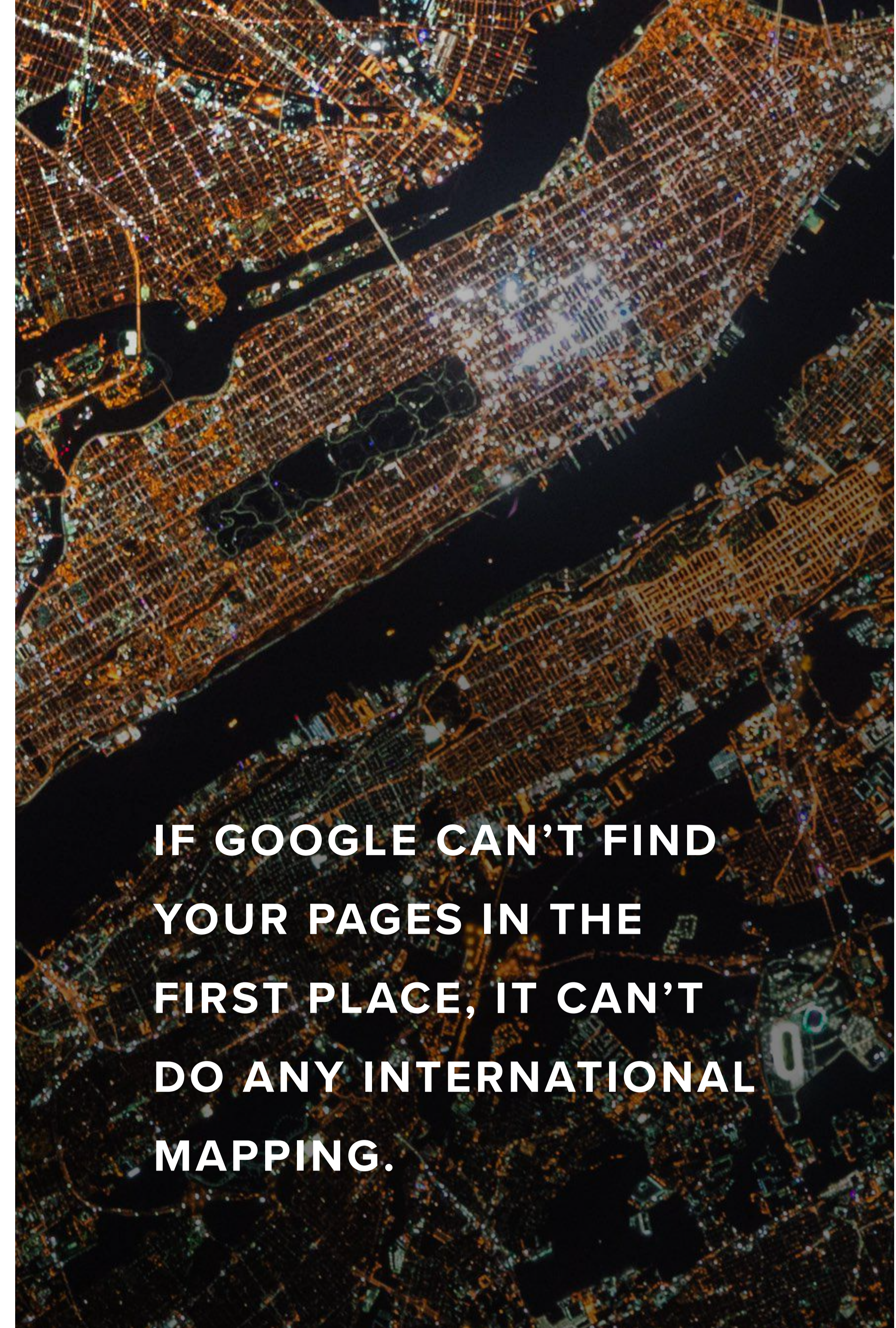


IMAGE SOURCE: WWW.DEEPCRAWL.COM

Incorrect page mapping

Incorrect mapping of page versions can cause many different issues for a website. If hreflang fails, for example, then you end up with lots of errors you need to manually fix. We'll cover hreflang in more detail later on in this guide.

One of the big sources of these errors is if Google sees a new page with tags on it back to other language versions. This will break because no alternates to this page would have been seen in the first place from the other pages. In this instance, look out for low index rates which could point to XML sitemaps only having a small selection of hreflang included.



Overcomplicating language targeting

As beneficial as it is to localise and tailor to your international audiences as much as possible, less is often more when it comes to language targeting. Just because you *can* accommodate every language variation, it doesn't mean you *should*. If you do, you'll end up making extra work for yourself by adding additional hreflang tags and page versions to keep track of, which may not even provide any value for your business.

Avoid cannibalisation issues by only targeting the language and country combinations where there's a real reason to. If you have too many unnecessary versions of a page this can actually dilute the value of your original content.





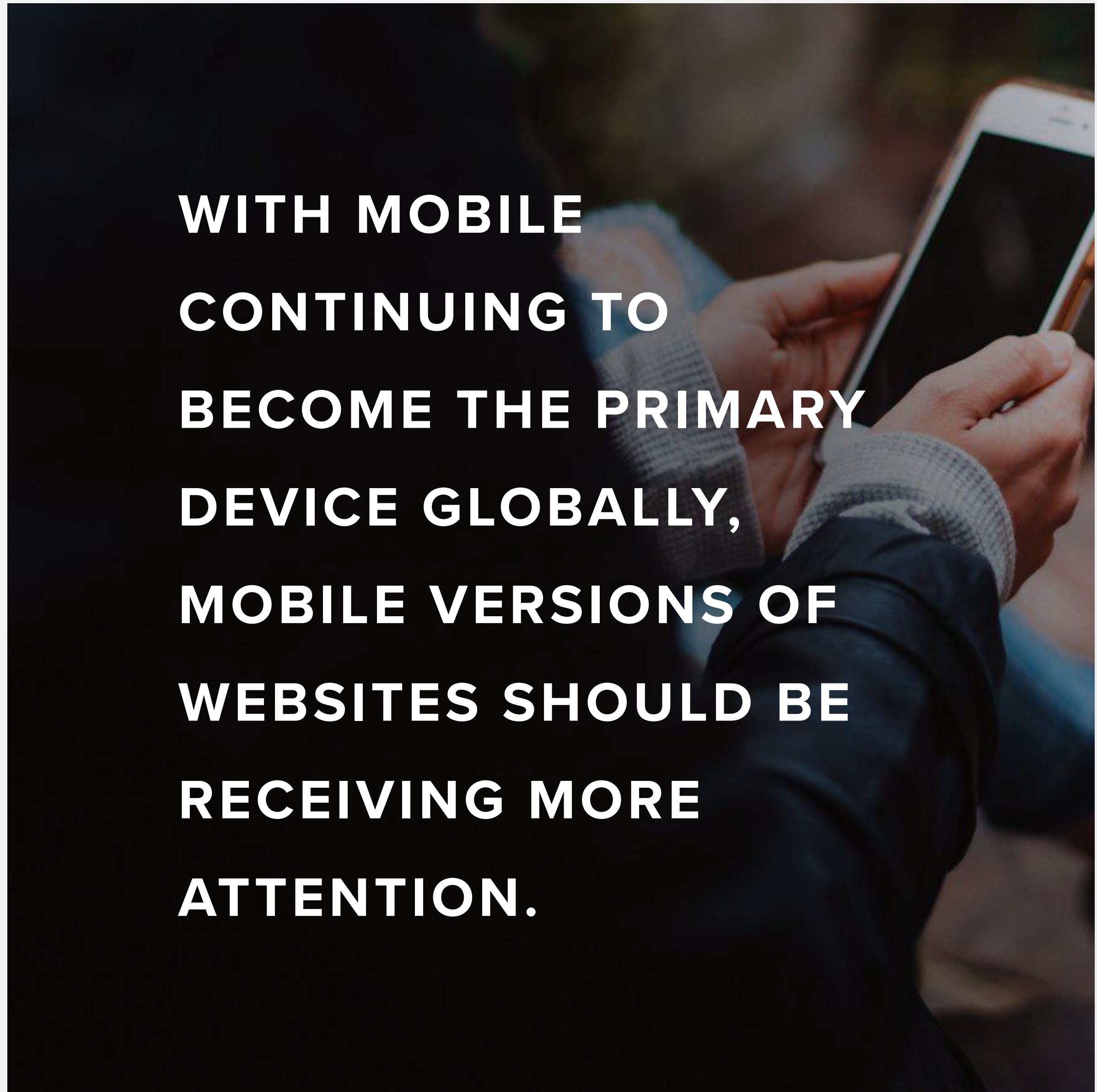
FOCUS ON TARGETING ONLY THE LANGUAGE AND COUNTRY COMBINATIONS THAT WILL BE PROFITABLE FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

Forgetting about mobile

Considering the rollout of Google's mobile-first index and the importance of mobile, it may seem surprising that businesses can bypass the mobile configuration of their websites when trying to expand in international search.

Neglecting mobile can cause decreases in rankings if there is reduced content on mobile pages. Some sites even forget to have hreflang set up for separate mobile pages.

Take a look at our [white paper on optimising for mobile-first indexing](#) to learn more about mobile considerations for a website.



WITH MOBILE CONTINUING TO BECOME THE PRIMARY DEVICE GLOBALLY, MOBILE VERSIONS OF WEBSITES SHOULD BE RECEIVING MORE ATTENTION.

Not combining different methods well

Internationalisation fails when you don't have a cohesive, aligned strategy that works for both search engines and your users. You may map your page variations well, but this good work is let down if you also have excessive JavaScript redirects. You may have great localised content, but this may not be found by search engines in the first place without correct hreflang implementation. **Consistent signals** are crucial across all aspects of your international sites for sending search engines the right messages about your pages versions.

“When going global, you need to pay attention to both technical and strategic factors.

On the technical side, you want to pay painful attention to hreflang tags. If you mess them up - even just slightly - Google often gets confused and might show results from different languages. In the best case, you audit your hreflang tags regularly and check the report in Google Search Console. Also make sure to have 90% of your content in the language you want it to rank for. Don't mix content in several languages!

On the strategic side, you need to be aware that there's a huge difference between translation and localization. Translation means to translate words from one language to another. Localization means to respect the cultural differences in doing so - and the difference is bigger than you would assume!”



|| Kevin Indig,
SEO at Atlassian

IF YOU DON'T HAVE AN ALIGNED INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGY, YOUR EFFORTS MAY GO TO WASTE AND YOU WON'T SEE THE GLOBAL SUCCESS YOU DESERVE.

The elements of a successful international SEO strategy

Now that we've explored what *not* to do, let's draw our attention back to what you should be doing in order to achieve results with your international SEO strategy. Here are the 8 things you need to do for success, as explained by Aleyda Solis:

- 1 Correctly identify your international target markets:** Which countries and/or languages are profitable and feasible for you to target and serve from a business perspective?
- 2 Check if you can hire someone native:** You'll need someone who can support you in the operations for your target market.
- 3 Establish the best web structure:** If you're targeting new countries, which web structure should you use - ccTLDs, subdomains or subdirectories?
- 4 Geolocate:** (In case you're targeting a country and you're not using a ccTLD.) The best way to do this is through the Google Search Console geolocation feature.
- 5 Localise:** URLs, navigation, content, titles, meta descriptions, headings, main text, currency, etc. If possible, the experience and design should be developed to better address the specific behaviour of the target markets.
- 6 Specify your language and country targeting with hreflang:** Add hreflang annotations for each of your variations in order to give an additional signal for Google to serve the most relevant version in their results to the targeted audience.
- 7 Grow your authority:** Have a content and promotion strategy in place to grow your popularity among each community and industry, building links from local sites.
- 8 Monitor your ranking:** For each of your targeted markets, see if you're ranking with the right pages and the relevant queries, growing your presence as desired vs. the local competition.

The businesses that succeed internationally are most often the ones that communicate internally and have international teams that continually learn from one another.

“Businesses that are successful have a central international SEO strategy, instead of several independent local or national SEO strategies. There needs to be a team or a person that is responsible for SEO on a global level and that provides guidance for the local teams involved. The SEO teams that are responsible for the different markets have to communicate with each other, in order to exchange insights and share tactics, and they must realise that they are stronger together than fighting for themselves.

Crucial elements of international SEO, such as domain strategy, technical website optimisations, or hreflang, should always be managed centrally. Activities that are best executed locally, such as content creation or outreach, should be supported by central guidelines and should always be evaluated from a global perspective. Processes that benefit all markets (e.g. create in one language > adapt to all languages > localise for every market) are priceless.

It’s a hackneyed phrase, but “think globally, act locally” definitely is the right way to go in international SEO.”

|| Eoghan Henn,
Co-founder of [searchVIU](#)

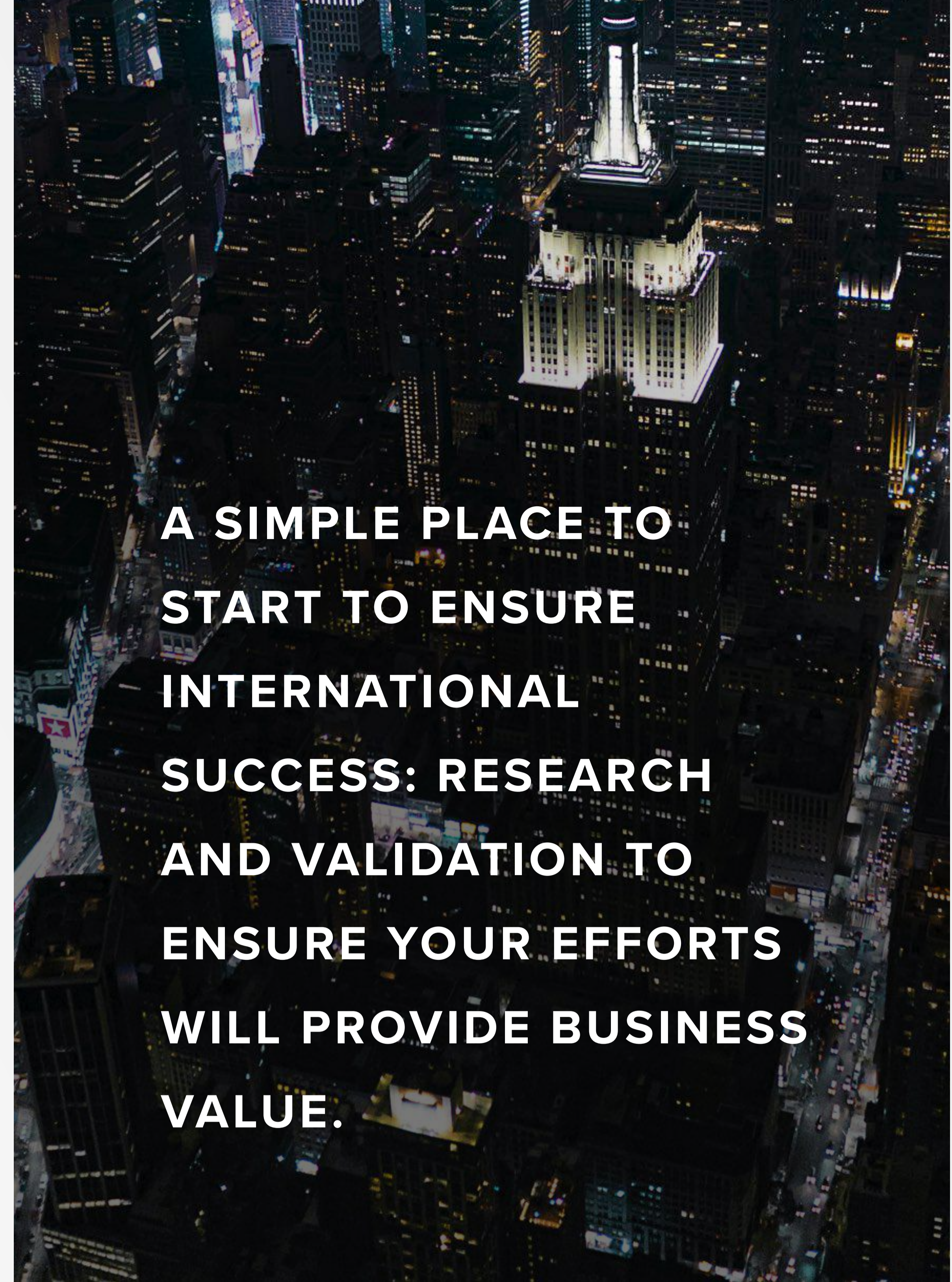


Let’s examine the key aspects you’ll need to implement within your international SEO strategy in order to achieve the best results possible.

Market research

Before planning or launching anything, make sure you do the required market research around your desired locations. Launching a new website in a new country may seem like a good idea, but you need to know it will be successful before investing in such a substantial project.

You need to realistically assess the supply and demand of potential new markets in advance of rolling out any launch plans. Before getting into the technical planning, make sure you ask yourself the following fundamental questions:



**A SIMPLE PLACE TO
START TO ENSURE
INTERNATIONAL
SUCCESS: RESEARCH
AND VALIDATION TO
ENSURE YOUR EFFORTS
WILL PROVIDE BUSINESS
VALUE.**

1 “What is the existing traffic and conversion potential?”

By simply using Google Analytics and Google Search Console data - we can discover:

- What countries visitors are coming from
- What languages they use in their browsers
- How many conversions are obtained from each country
- How many conversions are from users speaking languages other than English
- Whether the conversions generated from a specific country or from users speaking a specific language justify the cost of creating a website version targeting them
- Whether the potential traffic you may earn from that country or language is enough to achieve break-even in a sustainable amount of time”

2 “Which set of languages and countries is the business going to target?”

This question is a consequence of the previous one. Once you know which global and targeted language versions you need, it’s only now when you can finally ask what solution is ideal: subfolders, subdomains or a ccTLD?”



3 “What kind of business does the client/ company run?”

This can determine the main international SEO architecture you will use. For instance, ecommerce websites can have technical peculiarities that will make you choose a multi-country and ccTLD strategy. On the contrary, lead-based websites can have successful internationalization of their business with a simpler multilingual and subfolder-based international SEO strategy.”

5 “What are the search behaviours of people in your target markets?”

Local cultures determine what and how people search for products, and the differences can be so big that they deeply influence how to develop a website. You need a platform that offers the freedom to radically differentiate the navigation, aspects and content presented on the main landing pages to fully localize the website's versions, and this may mean being forced to create these versions on specific ccTLDs, if the platform is rigid and cannot offer the freedom you need on a subfolder level.”

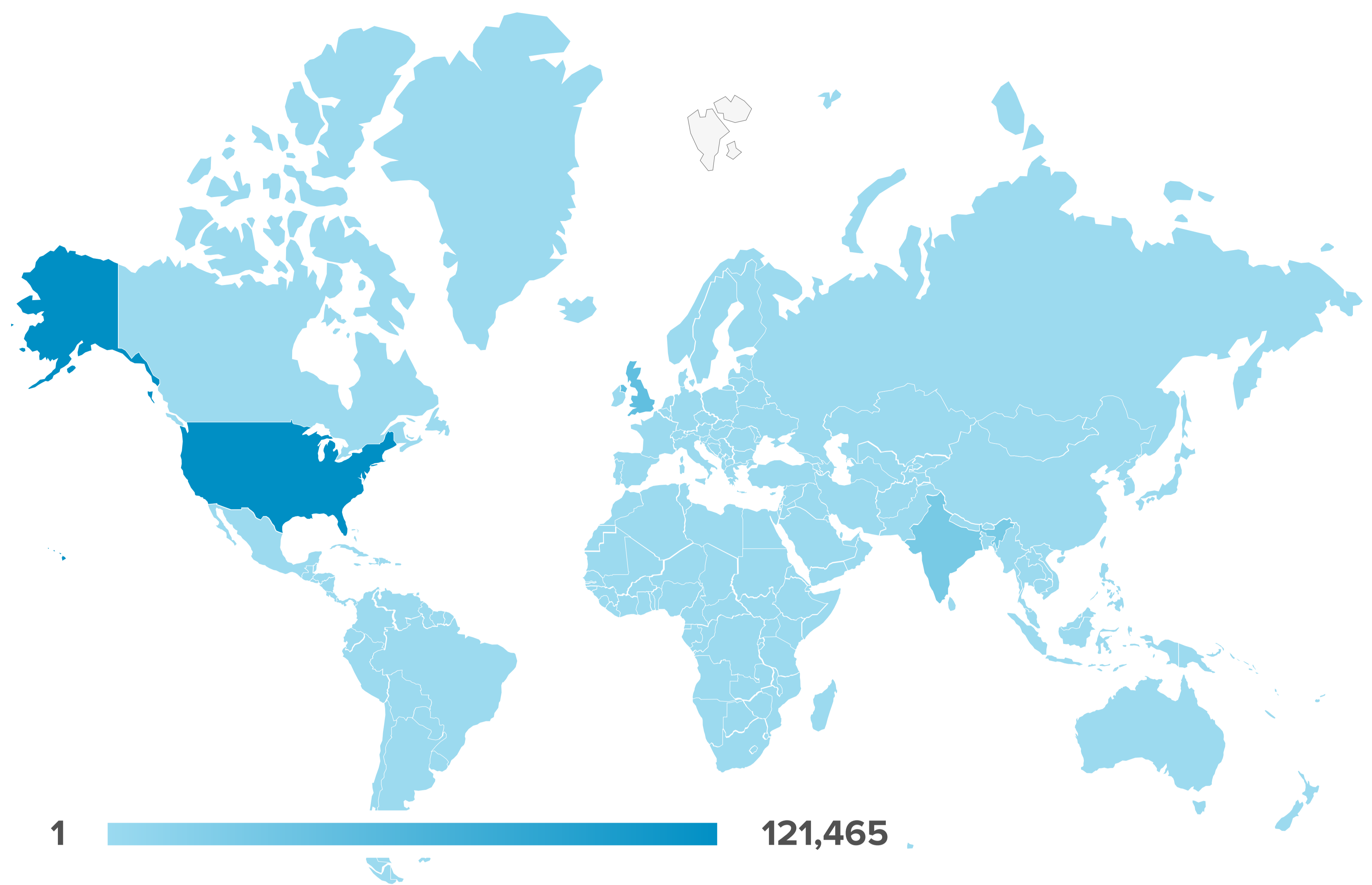
Gianluca Fiorelli,
Senior SEO & Inbound Marketing
Consultant at **ILoveSEO**








4 “Is the legislation related to the business the same all over the world or are there important differences that must be considered?”

SEOs tend to not think about legislation, but it really can affect their jobs, especially in international SEO. Countries legislate industries differently and even have different legal obligations. A subfolder or subdomain strategy may not work in this instance, meaning a website will be obligated to use ccTLDs from the start.”




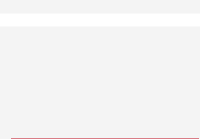
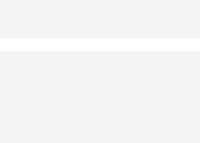
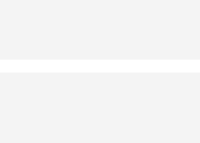


Explore your Google Analytics account to find out where your website traffic and conversions are currently coming from to help you identify where there is already interest and engagement with your brand. Go to the 'Geo' tab under the 'Audience' section where you can see users split by location and language.



Country	Acquisition	
	Users	
	356,459 % of Total: 100.00% (356,459)	
 United States	121,465	(34.04%)
 United Kingdom	48,174	(13.50%)
 India	32,411	(9.08%)
 Germany	12,702	(3.56%)
 Turkey	10,215	(2.86%)
 Spain	8,417	(2.36%)
 Canada	8,106	(2.27%)
 France	7,459	(2.09%)
 Australia	7,313	(2.05%)
 Poland	6,428	(1.80%)

Another good source for benchmarking current international reach is in Google Search Console. In the 'Performance' report you can filter by country to see which countries your site is already ranking in without active targeting on your part, as well as how many people are clicking through to your site from international SERPs.

Countries	Clicks	Impressions
 United States	16,570	817,092
 United Kingdom	8,154	353,538
 India	6,946	734,372
 Germany	2,397	86,976
 Canada	1,543	66,713
 Turkey	1,530	45,868
 Australia	1,356	75,633
 Spain	1,131	57,583
 Netherlands	1,099	55,450
 Poland	1,067	45,524

Also, be sure to validate the search volumes of any keywords you plan to target for each market to make sure they will be profitable enough for your business to justify launching a new site version to target them.



Geotargeting

Geotargeting is used to direct a website at a particular geographic location. This can improve rankings in that country, but this will impact performance in other regions or languages, as Google explains:

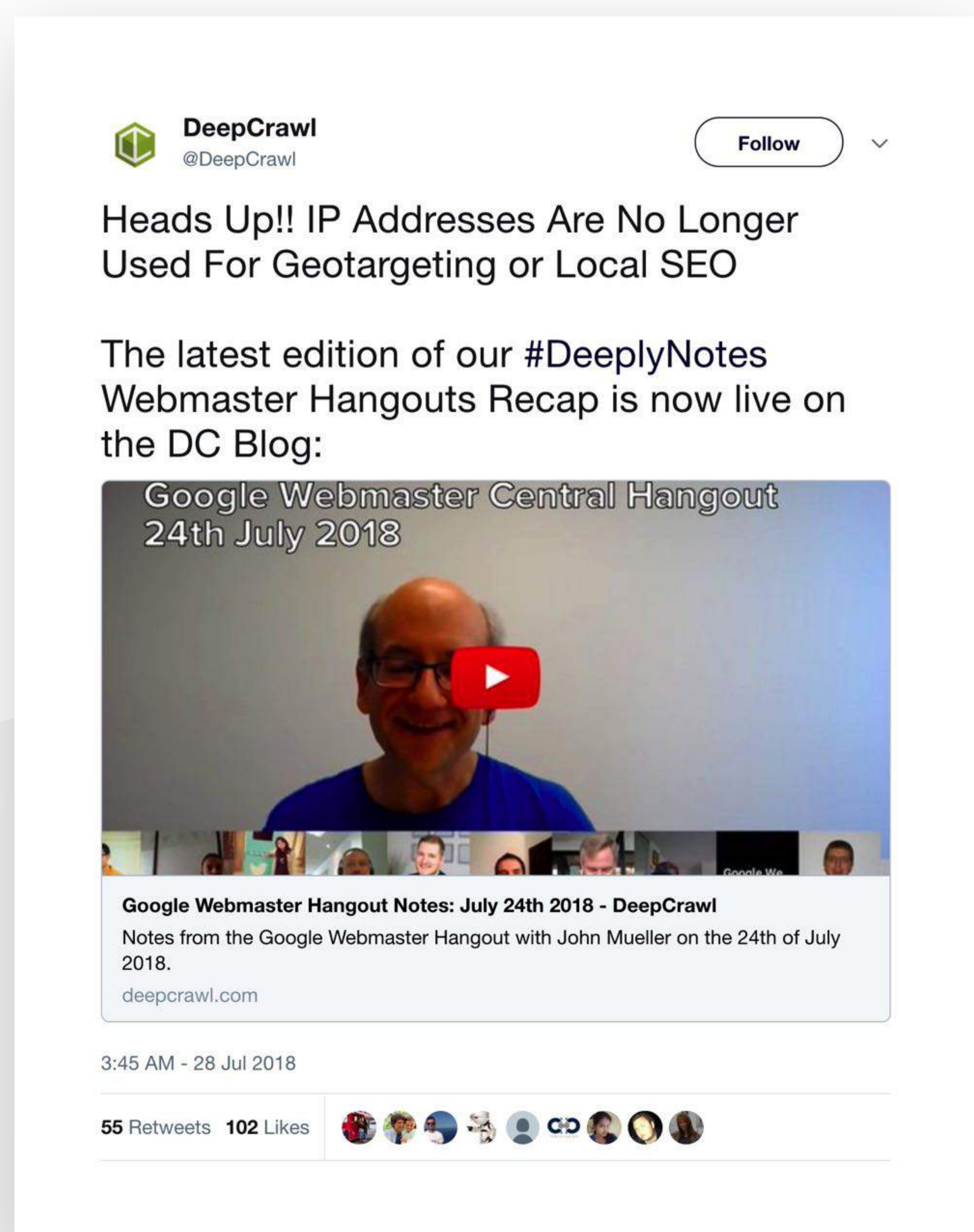
“You can target your website or parts of it to users in a single specific country speaking a specific language. This can improve your page rankings in the target country, but at the expense of results in other locales/languages.”

|| Google Search Console Help ⁴

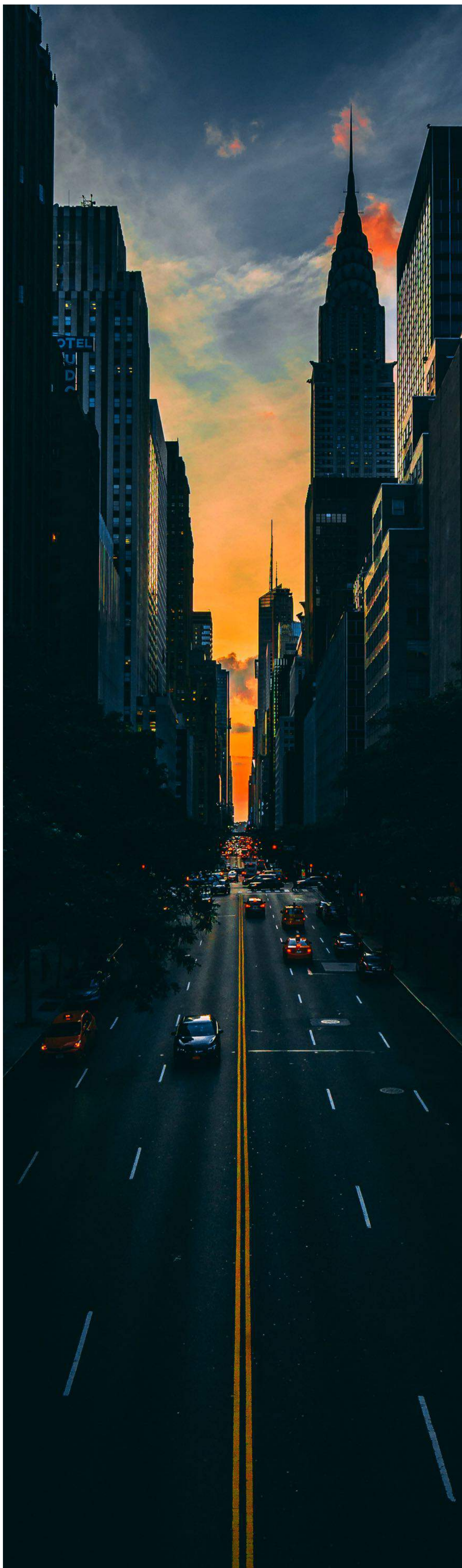
USE GEOTARGETING TO BETTER CONNECT YOUR WEBSITE VERSION TO ITS CORRESPONDING COUNTRY, WHICH WILL HELP SEARCH ENGINES TARGET THE RIGHT PAGE VERSIONS TO THE RIGHT MARKETS.

In the early days of Google’s geotargeting, server IP addresses used to be a signal to decide what country a website was targeting. The system is much more sophisticated now, and a variety of different sources are used in combination to infer geotargeting, which is much more useful than using just a single IP.

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/DEEPCRAWL/STATUS/1023157379955916800](https://twitter.com/DEEPCRAWL/status/1023157379955916800)



⁴ Google Search Console Help, <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/182192>



Here are some of the elements Google in particular looks at when determining the geotargeting of a page and deciding which country it is relevant to:

- **ccTLDs**
- Correct **hreflang** implementation
- **External linking** from sites within the target market
- Visible **on-page content** (e.g. language, addresses, phone numbers)
- **Anchor text language**
- **Server location** (which is now a light signal)
- **Google My Business settings**
- **Google Search Console geotargeting settings**

If you don't have a ccTLD which has automatic geotargeting, ideally you should have a distinct section of a site for each language and country version for Google. Subdomains or subdirectories work well here.

Google requires a distinct section on a site for geotargeting to be understood.

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

Here are some tips on geotargeting your site for search engines, and Google in particular:

- 1 Use locale-specific URLs** such as ccTLDs, or subdomains/subdirectories with gTLDs - this works on a page or site level
- 2 Use hreflang** - this works on a page level
- 3 Use Google's 'International Targeting' report** if you have a gTLD which only targets one country - this works on a site level

International web structure

If you offer content in different languages, then ideally you need to separate it out by having unique URLs for each language version. This is to make things as easy as possible for users and search engines to access your content, because relying on JavaScript or cookies to change content on the same page is a risky strategy.

The 3 most recommended methods for splitting out and structuring international versions of a website are:

- 1 ccTLDs
- 2 Subdomains
- 3 Subdirectories



**GOOGLE
REQUIRES
MULTILINGUAL
SITES TO
HAVE SOME
FORM OF URL
DIFFERENTIATION.**

|| John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

ccTLDs

A **country code top-level domain (ccTLD)** is a domain extension which corresponds to a particular country or geographic location, allowing a domain to be as local as possible and prove to search engine algorithms that your site is relevant for searches in that particular market.

This is an example of a ccTLD:

example.es

Geotargeting is automatically applied by Google for ccTLDs that have an official **ISO country code**. New TLDs such as .swiss or .tokyo are seen as generic top-level domains (gTLDs) so would need to be manually geotargeted. Automatic geotargeting means that you need to watch out for vanity ccTLDs. For example, if you have an IT business that you think would look great as domain.it, bear in mind that this will target your website exclusively to Italy.

It's also important to note that ccTLDs only target countries, **not** languages, so you'll still need to maintain a URL strategy for separating out content and managing any language targeting on top of this configuration.

PROS OF CCTLDS

- **Clear geotargeting** signals for search engines.
- Receives a **ranking boost** for localised queries in the target country.
- **Easy to separate** website versions.
- You **don't need to use hreflang for country targeting** as this is automatically applied.
- **Clearly apparent to users** of the target market which implies trust.

“The first thing you should choose is a proper web structure that will better connect and target your desired audience, and the more granular the geolocalization is, the better. ccTLDs are definitely ideal for targeting countries due to the signals and image they give to your audience about your website.”

Aleyda Solis,
International SEO Consultant at Orainti

CONS OF CCTLDS

- **Expensive and resource-intensive** to host and run different ccTLDs.
- There can be **strict requirements** to host them depending on the country.
- **Difficult to rank** in a new market above well-established competitor brands if you have a new ccTLD.
- **Consistent domain names may not be available** in all desired target markets.
- Having a lot of ccTLDs requires **additional tracking and monitoring** across the different domains.

ccTLDs are often described as the best option for geotargeting and geolocalisation, however, it depends on your business' capabilities. Do you have the resources to manage a variety of different properties across different hosting services?

Subdomains

A **subdomain** sits on a root domain and is a part of the larger domain, but is a distinctive part in its own right. Search engines such as Google see subdomains as separate entities.

This is an example of a subdomain:

es.example.com

PROS OF SUBDOMAINS

- **Simple to set up** and need fewer resources than a separate domain.
- Can use **Google Search Console targeting** if using a gTLD.
- **Easy to separate** website versions.
- **Geotargeting is straightforward** as a subdomain and its subdirectories will fall into the same geotarget.

CONS OF SUBDOMAINS

- **Users might not recognise geotargeting** from the URL alone.
- **Can't add to ccTLDs** as these are geotargeted automatically based on the domain.
- Link **equity doesn't automatically flow** from the subdomain to the root domain.

External link signals are only passed between domains and subdomains via internal linking.

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

Subdirectories

Subdirectories sit on the same domain and/or subdomain, and work as folders which separate out content. They are also known as subfolders.

Here's an example of a subdirectory:

example.com/es/

PROS OF SUBDIRECTORIES

- **Simple to set up** and cheaper to manage than a separate domain.
- Can use **Google Search Console targeting** if using a gTLD.
- **Low maintenance costs** as these are hosted on the same root domain.
- **Flexible in terms of targeting** as you can geolocate them or leave them as a general language version.
- **Will inherit authority from your established TLD** which is useful for new markets.

CONS OF SUBDIRECTORIES

- **Users might not recognise geotargeting** from the URL alone.
- **Can't add them to ccTLDs** as they are geotargeted automatically.
- There is **more chance of getting penalised** if something goes wrong as the versions are connected.
- **Sites aren't obviously separated** as they exist as folders on the same domain/subdomain.

CCTLDS, SUBDOMAINS OR SUBDIRECTORIES ARE THE BEST WAY OF STRUCTURING INTERNATIONAL PAGE VERSIONS. THE ONE YOU CHOOSE WILL DEPEND ON YOUR BUSINESS.

Hopefully this has helped you decide which structuring method makes the most sense for your business. For more advice on international web structure, take a look at Aleyda Solis' article on [selecting the right structure for international sites](#).

Hreflang

In order to crawl, index and show the right country or language version of your site to users in a particular market, first a search engine needs to know about the different variations you have and how they're connected. Hreflang is one of the best ways to communicate this, as it describes the intended language of a page and even the country it is intended for, helping you map out the different language versions available for a page.

“If you have multiple versions of a page for different languages or regions, tell Google about these different variations. Doing so will help Google Search point users to the most appropriate version of your page by language or region.”

|| **Google Search Console Help** ⁵

With hreflang, you **can**:

- Target specific countries
- Target specific languages
- Target specific countries and languages
- Target the same country with different languages

With hreflang, you **can't**:

- Target entire regions such as Europe, Asia and Latin America

Hreflang tags are needed because of businesses' desires to target the whole world, and the issues of duplication that can arise when you have a particular language version targeting many different countries. These tags are a technical solution for helping Google decide which page should appear where, so they shouldn't contribute to cannibalisation issues. With the correct implementation, Google will recognise a set of pages as alternates and swap out the URLs between the set depending on the SERP language, so rankings won't be changed. A page set will share the same collective ranking position.

Hreflang swaps URLs in the search results but doesn't affect rankings.

|| **John Mueller,**
Google Webmaster Hangout

Here's an example of what hreflang tags should look like across 3 different pages in a cluster:

⁵ Google Search Console Help, <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/189077>

○ Page: <https://www.example.com/page> (US)

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="x-default" href="https://  
www.example.com/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-US" href="https://  
www.example.com/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-GB" href="https://  
www.example.co.uk/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-AU" href="https://  
www.example.au/page" />
```

○ Page: <https://www.example.co.uk/page> (UK)

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="x-default" href="https://  
www.example.com/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-US" href="https://  
www.example.com/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-GB" href="https://  
www.example.co.uk/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-AU" href="https://  
www.example.au/page" />
```

○ Page: <https://www.example.com/page> (Australia)

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="x-default" href="https://  
www.example.com/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-US" href="https://  
www.example.com/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-GB" href="https://  
www.example.co.uk/page" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-AU" href="https://  
www.example.au/page" />
```

All pages in a cluster should be listed within hreflang tags on a page. This is why for an example where there are US, UK and Australian versions, each page version needs to reference the URLs of the other language pages as well as itself.

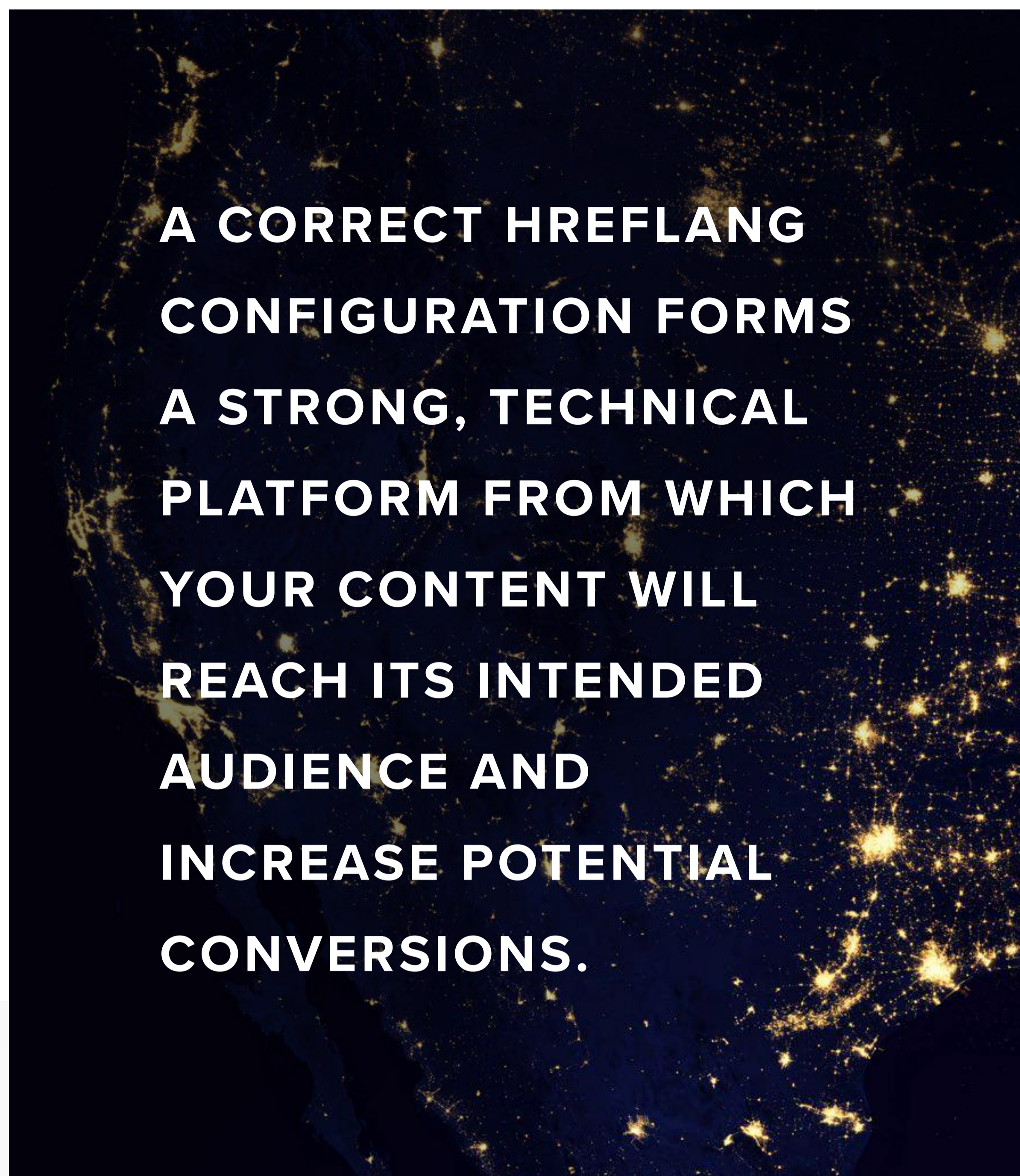


IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/GLENNGABE/STATUS/1013754955335954432](https://twitter.com/glenngabe/status/1013754955335954432)

“There's nothing more frustrating for users, and damaging to brand reputation than providing a negative user experience. The core function of hreflang is to make sure that the content you've optimised, translated, and invested in is shown to the right users, to provide the best brand and user experience possible.

Only once the unsung technical is working, will the marketing campaigns and creative messaging yield results for the business.”

Dan Taylor,
Technical Consultant & Account
Director at **SALT.agency**



Hreflang is certainly a useful technical tool to have at your disposal for your internationalisation efforts. However, hreflang is arguably one of the most complicated elements of internationalisation, and is, in Google's John Mueller's words, one of the most complicated thing about SEO full stop.

Despite this complexity, it's important to fully understand hreflang in order to ensure that it lives up to its full potential in helping your business succeed globally. So, let's explore the details, from configuration through to best practice and testing.



IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/JOHNMU/STATUS/965507331369984002](https://twitter.com/JohnMu/status/965507331369984002)

How to **implement hreflang**

These are the three main methods you can use to submit hreflang to search engines: in XML sitemaps, HTTP headers or the HTML <head>.

XML sitemaps

You can add hreflang child sections to each of your sitemap URLs. This is a useful method for sites with many language variations that want to avoid additional on-page code.

```
<url>

  <loc>https://www.example.com/english/page</loc>

  <xhtml:link rel="alternate" hreflang="en"
  href="https://www.example.com/english/page"/>

  <xhtml:link rel="alternate" hreflang="es"
  href="https://www.example.com/espanol/page"/>

  <xhtml:link rel="alternate" hreflang="de-ch"
  href="https://www.example.com/schweiz-deutsch/page"/>

</url>
```

Organising your sitemaps in a granular, clear-to-understand way can help in easily identifying problem areas. Make sure your sitemap implementation allows you to clearly analyse country, language, category and page type.

HTTP headers

HTTP headers are returned with your page's GET response, and you can include hreflang within them. This is useful for non-HTML pages such as PDFs.

```
Link: <https://www.example.com/file.pdf>; rel="alternate";  
      hreflang="en",  
  
      <http://www.example.com/de/file.pdf>; rel="alternate";  
      hreflang="de-at",  
  
      <http://www.example.com/fr/file.pdf>; rel="alternate";  
      hreflang="fr-ch"
```

This is a good option if you have a development team you can rely on, however, it can be more difficult and time-consuming to validate hreflang in the HTTP header compared to the HTML head or XML sitemaps.

HTML <head>

Hreflang HTML tags can be added into the <head> section of a page. This is useful if you don't have a sitemap or are unable to configure a site's HTTP headers.

```
<head>

  <title>Example</title>

  <link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-gb" href="https://
example.com/page" />

  <link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-au" href="https://
au.example.com/page" />

  <link rel="alternate" hreflang="x-default" href="https://
www.example.com/" />

</head>
```

There is more coding flexibility with this method, but make sure the <head> isn't being broken by any iframes or div tags, meaning your hreflang could be ignored by search engines. Ideally you should have hreflang above these tags and any JavaScript that modifies the head, but the best solution is to not have these types of scripts or tags in the <head> at all.

Put hreflang tags higher up in the head.

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

Page weight and code file size is a consideration for hreflang on-page implementation through the HTML head or HTTP header. These methods are manageable if you have a few language versions, but it can get messy if you have many different variations.

“The problem we have with any hreflang implementation other than XML sitemaps is, and this is the big irony I’ve asked Google - “If we’re telling people to reduce code from our pages, why are we also enabling people to put what can be hundreds lines of code on a page to manage hreflang language?” If you have 5 language variations or fewer, then go for it, but if you have more than that you need to think about how you can map and cross-identify these pages, and there is no better way than an XML sitemap to do that.”



Bill Hunt,
President of **Back Azimuth**
Consulting

USE WHICHEVER HREFLANG CONFIGURATION MAKES MOST SENSE FOR YOUR BUSINESS, BUT XML SITEMAPS ARE OFTEN THE EASIEST TO MANAGE, ESPECIALLY FOR LARGE SITES.

Whichever method you choose for implementing hreflang, make sure you use that one consistently. Avoid combining different methods so you’re giving the search engines the clearest signals possible with your hreflang configuration.

For more details and assistance on methods for indicating alternate pages, take a look at [Google’s guidelines](#).

Hreflang best practice

When configuring hreflang, these are the top 10 things you need to include in your audit checklist:

- 1** Scope out implementation methods and which one works best for your business.
- 2** Map out the variations you actually need, rather than implementing all of them.
- 3** Language variations have been included for all page versions including the current page.
- 4** Reciprocal tags are in place on other pages in a cluster.
- 5** The correct region and country codes have been used and in the right order.
- 6** The tags match the language of the content on the target page.
- 7** Only absolute, canonical URLs have been used.
- 8** Submit configurations for both desktop and mobile sites if they are separate.
- 9** The configuration has been validated before launch.
- 10** The configuration has been tested for any errors once live.

If hreflang isn't implemented correctly, Google may simply ignore the tags. This is why it's essential to get even the smallest details right.

Here are some of the details to pay attention to in order to make sure your hreflang tags are respected by Google:

- Hreflang codes must be separated by dashes rather than underscores.
- The language code must be followed by the country code, not the other way around.
- The href attribute needs to include the full protocol.
- Hreflang tags should match the target language of the page content.
- There must be reciprocal links between hreflang tags (so, if a French page points to a German page, the German page must also point to the French page).

Hreflang tags without a reciprocal tag will be ignored.

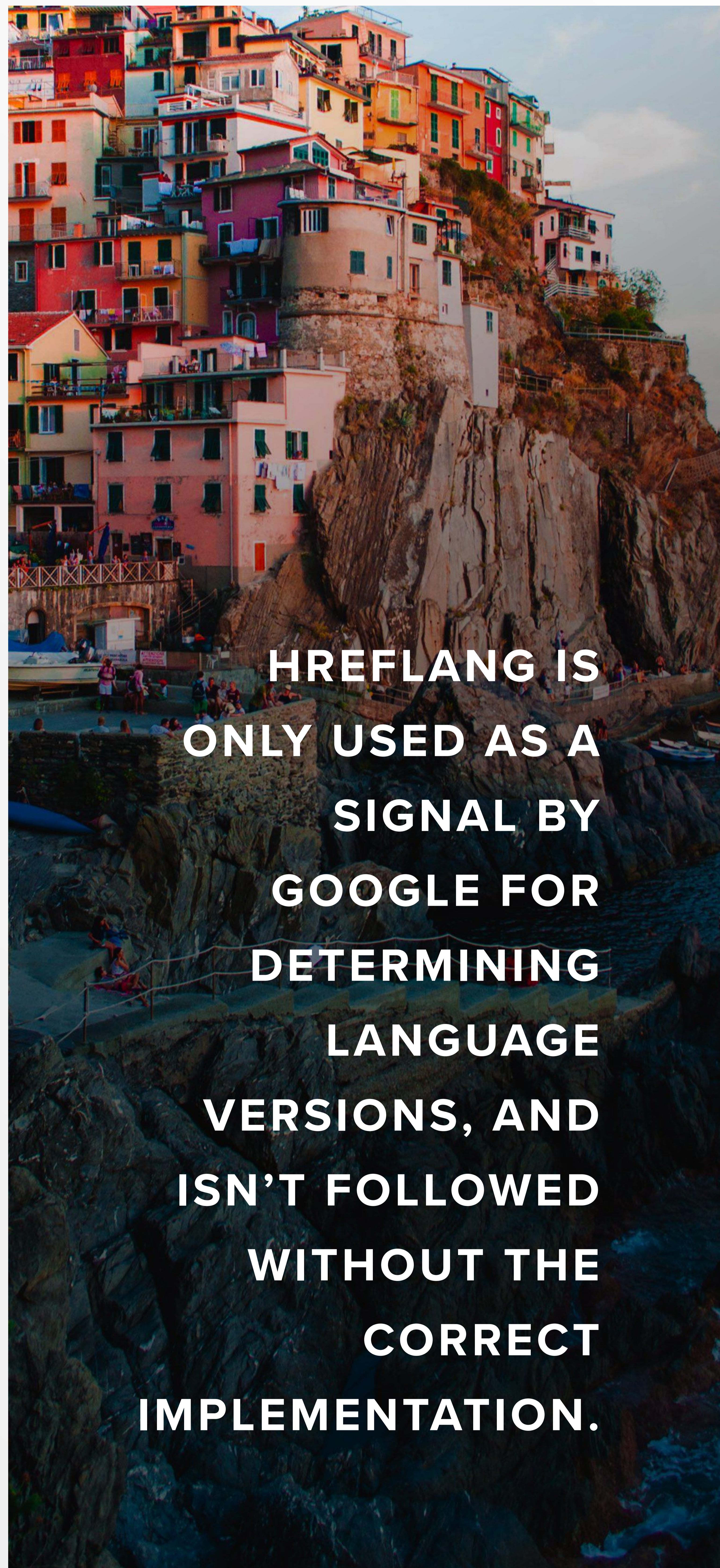
John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout

Google explains that reciprocal tags are needed “so that someone on another site can't arbitrarily create a tag naming itself as an alternative version of one of your pages.”

Google Search Console Help⁶

Google ignores incorrect language tags.

John Mueller,
Google Webmaster Hangout



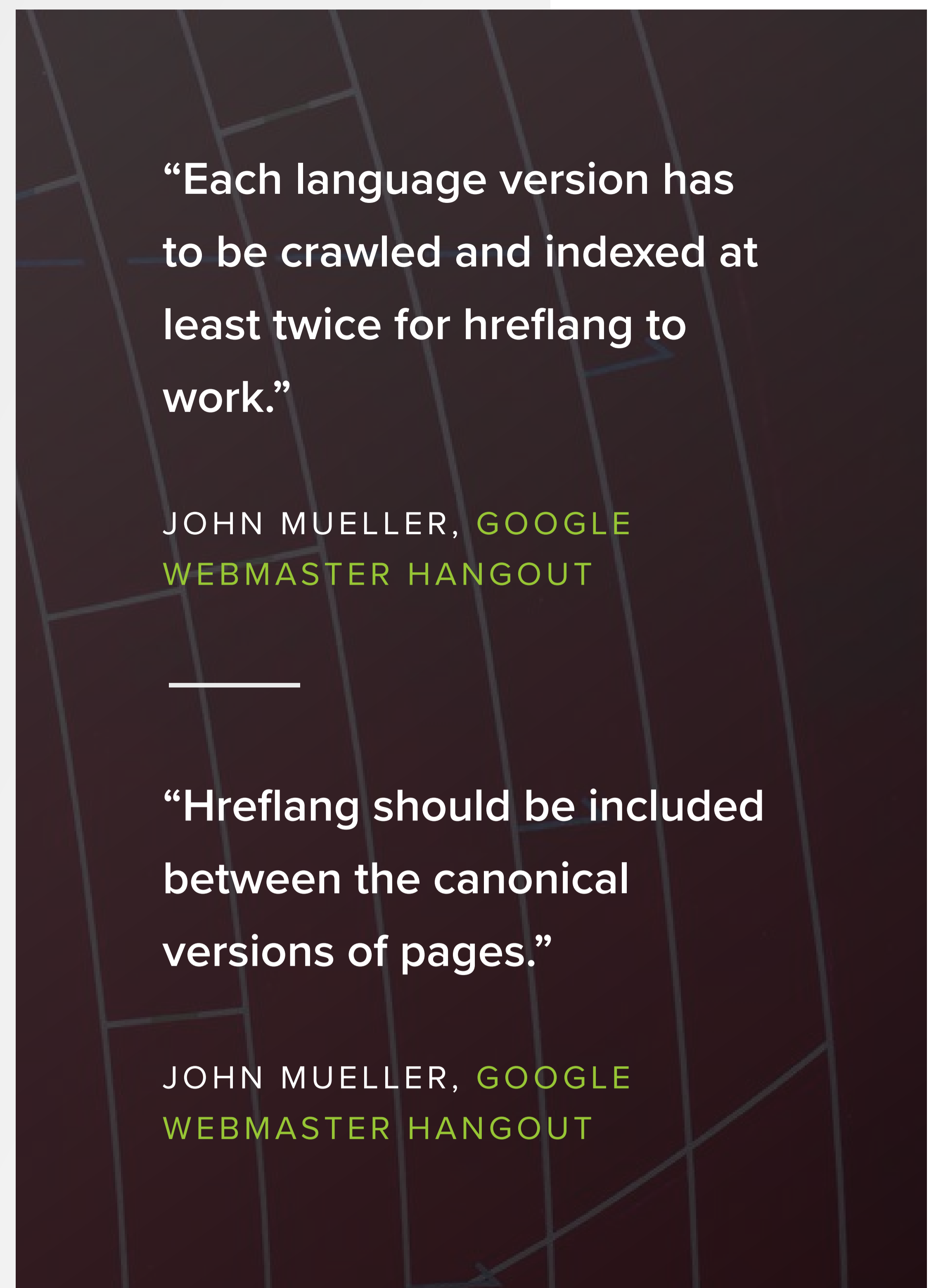
⁶ Google Search Console Help, <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/189077>

In order to validate and actively use the URLs within hreflang sets, Google needs to be able to crawl them in the first place. It needs to crawl them at least twice, in fact.

This is why they have to be final destination, canonical URLs serving 200 status codes that aren't blocked in the robots.txt file, so that search engines are being sent clear signals on your language versions and can crawl and process these pages in the first place.

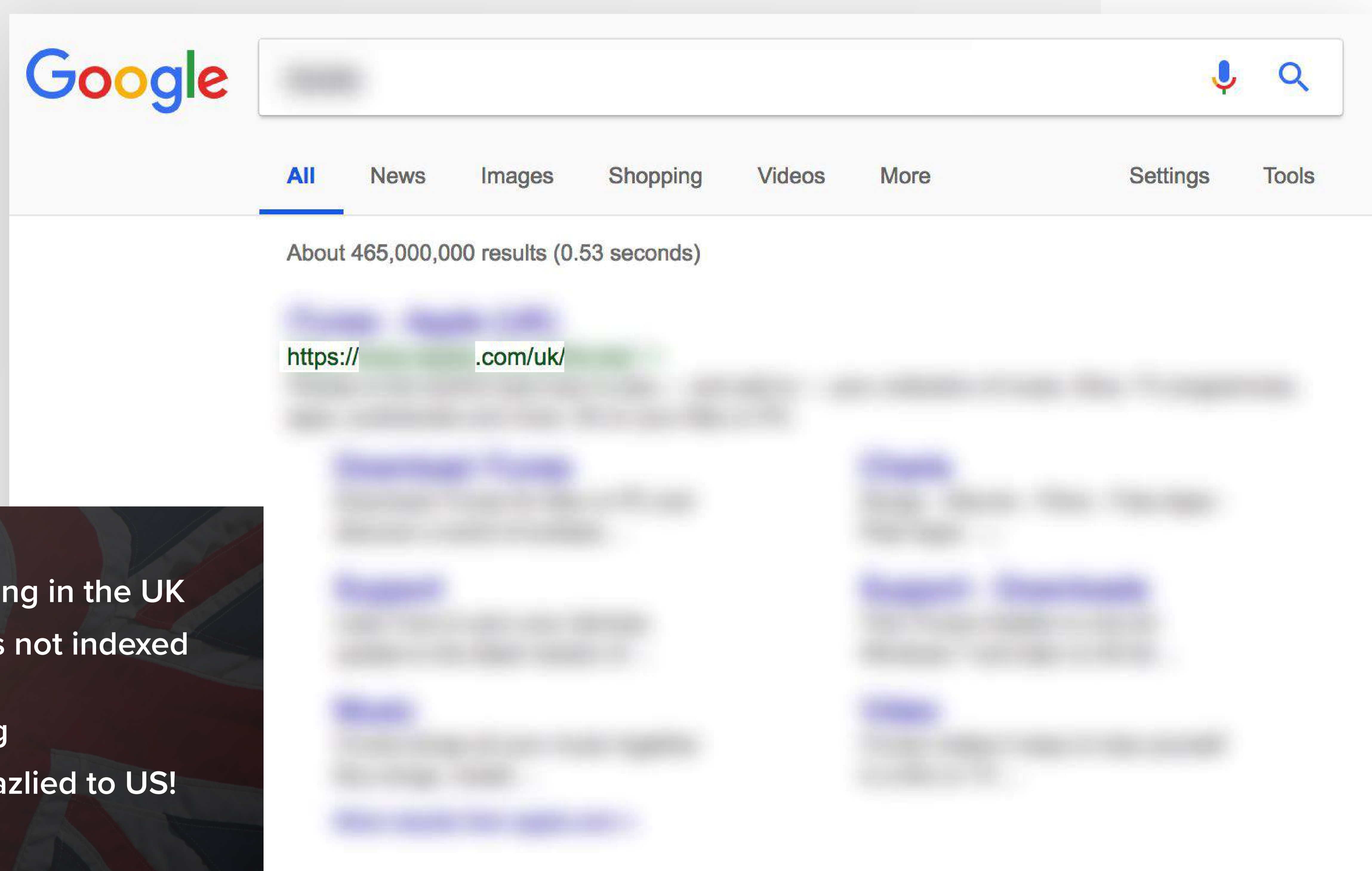
However, you might be surprised to learn that it is possible to canonicalise URLs to another page of the same language, which Glenn Gabe discovered:

“Typically, you should have each page that’s part of an hreflang cluster indexable with self-referencing canonical tags. But some site owners choose to canonicalize alternative URLs in the same language to one, even when the URLs target different countries. With that setup, you would think that since Google is not indexing the canonicalized URLs, then they would never surface in the SERPs. That’s not true, actually!



Google can still surface those URLs when it sees users searching from the other countries.

Here is an example of what can happen. The /uk/ url is being canonicalized, but still appears in the SERPs for users searching in the UK:



UK ranking in the UK when it's not indexed

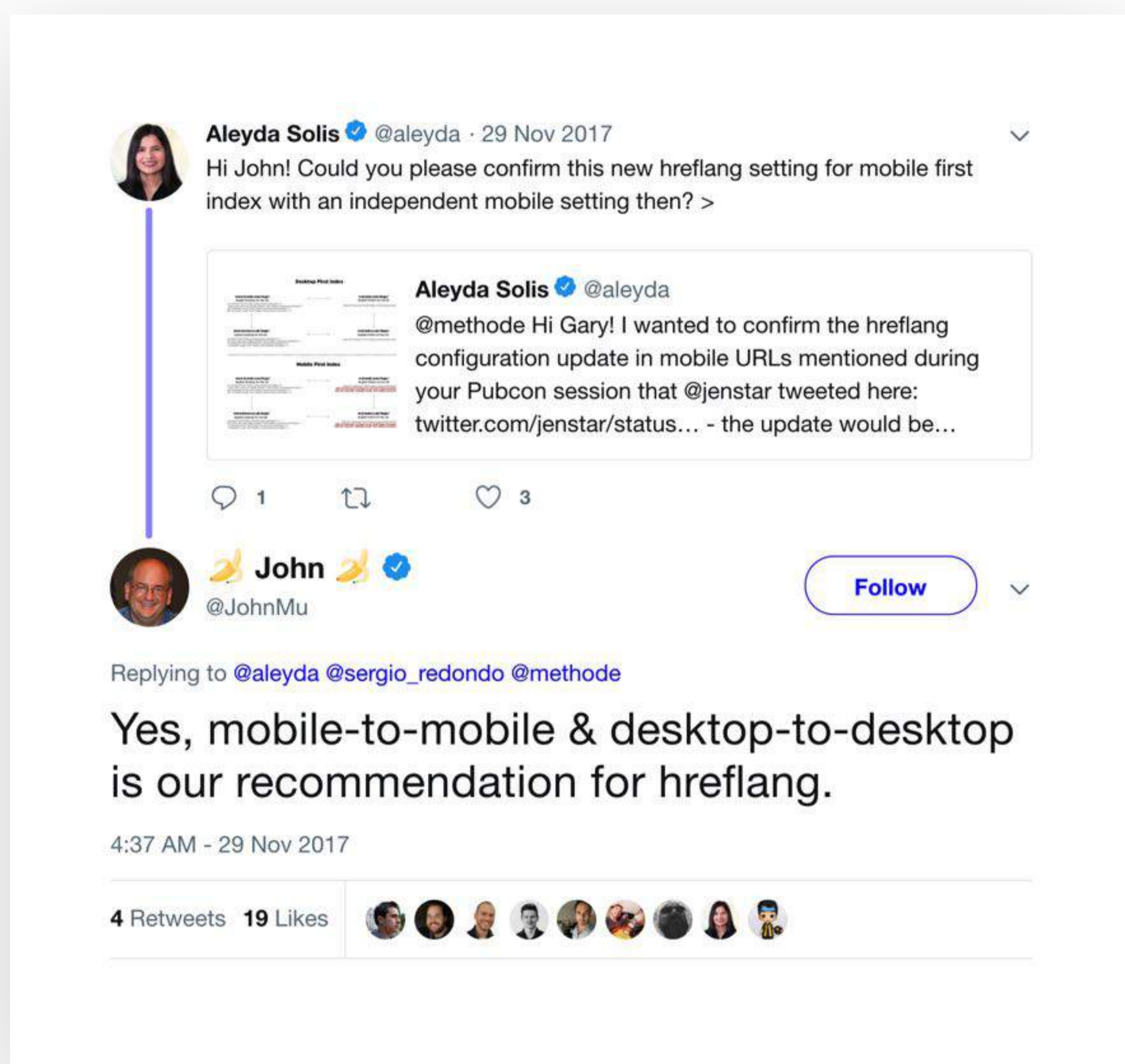
It's being canonicalized to US!

So even if the /uk/ version isn't indexed, it can still show up in the SERPs when Google sees hreflang tags properly set up and a user searching from England. I ended up asking Google's John Mueller about this mystery during a webmaster hangout and he **confirmed this was the case**. John explained that Google can follow hreflang tags even when it chooses one version as the canonical URL (for multiple urls in the same language).

So for international SEO, just remember that if you are using hreflang for URLs in the same language but targeting different countries, Google has a few tricks up its sleeve. The right URLs can appear in the SERPs by country, even when they are being canonicalized to other urls (and not indexed). Strange, but true."



Glenn Gabe,
President of **G-Squared Interactive**

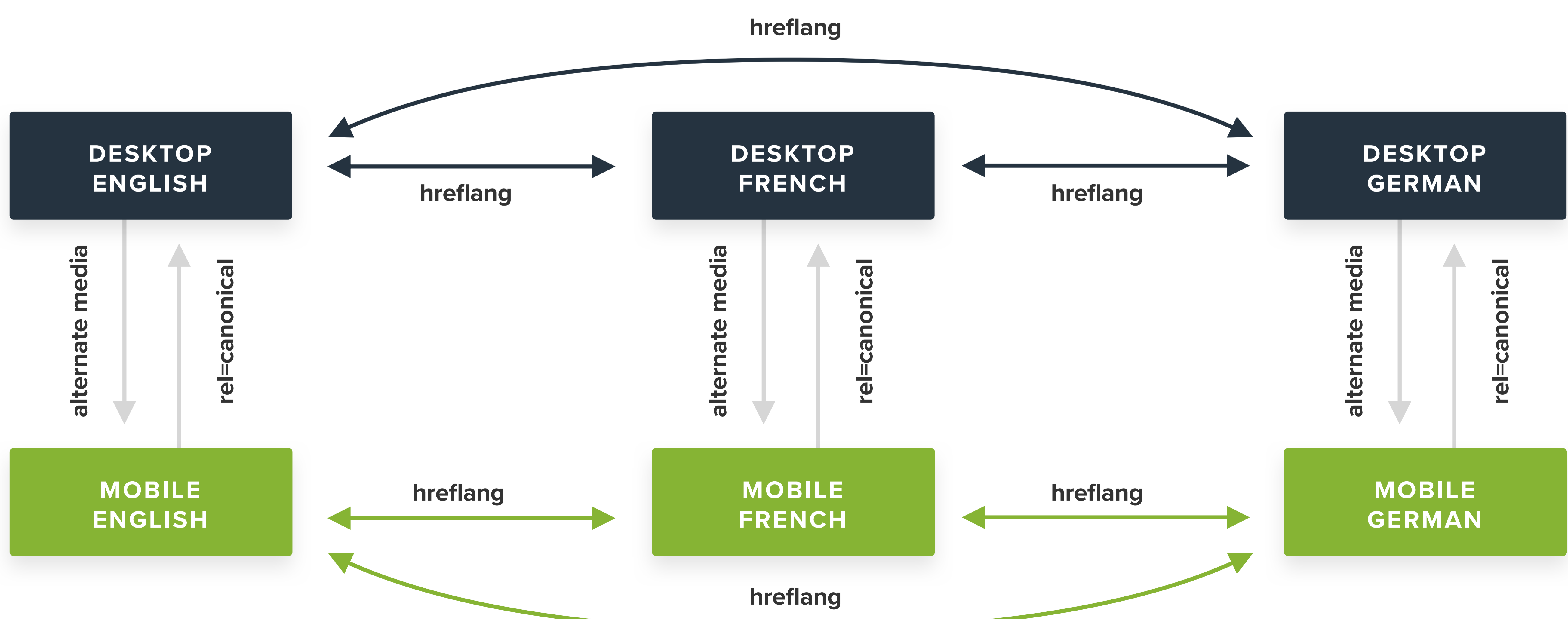


For page alternatives like separate m-dot sites, make sure you submit hreflang for these pages too. These pages especially need to be found following the rollout of **Google's mobile-first index**. Not only do separate mobile sites need to have their own hreflang tags, but the tags should only point to other pages within that particular configuration type. This separate configuration was confirmed by John Mueller on Twitter.

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/JOHNMU/STATUS/965507331369984002](https://twitter.com/JohnMu/status/965507331369984002)



This is how hreflang tags should be mapped out across mobile and desktop, as demonstrated by **Ashley Berman Hale**, Technical SEO Lead at **DeepCrawl**.



Language and country codes

Hreflang tags are made up of one or two codes in combination: the language code and the country code, e.g. 'en-GB'. The language always needs to be specified as the foundational element. You can target just by language, but can also refine this by adding a country. However, you can't just target a country with hreflang.

There are simple solutions out there for finding the right codes you need. Aleyda Solis' **Hreflang Tag Generator Tool** is a must use, which automatically shows you the code combination you need after you input the language and country you want to target. Another tool for managing hreflang annotations at scale is Bill Hunt's **Hreflang Builder tool**.

Make sure you double check **Google's official specifications on hreflang codes** before implementing them. There are many instances of people mistakenly using 'uk' instead of 'gb' or using 'eu' to target the whole of Europe, for example, neither of which are supported country codes.

Hreflang accepts the **ISO 639-1** language codes and the **ISO 3166-1 Alpha 2 format** country codes, so make sure to check the official documentation to get your codes right from the offset. If the language you want to target has different script variations (such as Chinese which has a traditional and simplified version), then you can use **ISO 15924** codes.

In cases where you want to set a default language version for pages not explicitly targeted with a language or country code, you can use the x-default hreflang attribute. This works well in the instance of a homepage with a banner for choosing a language.

**THE X-DEFAULT
HREFLANG
ATTRIBUTE VALUE
SIGNALS TO OUR
ALGORITHMS
THAT THIS PAGE
DOESN'T TARGET
ANY SPECIFIC
LANGUAGE OR
LOCALE AND IS
THE DEFAULT
PAGE WHEN NO
OTHER PAGE IS
BETTER SUITED.**

Google Webmaster
Central Blog ⁷

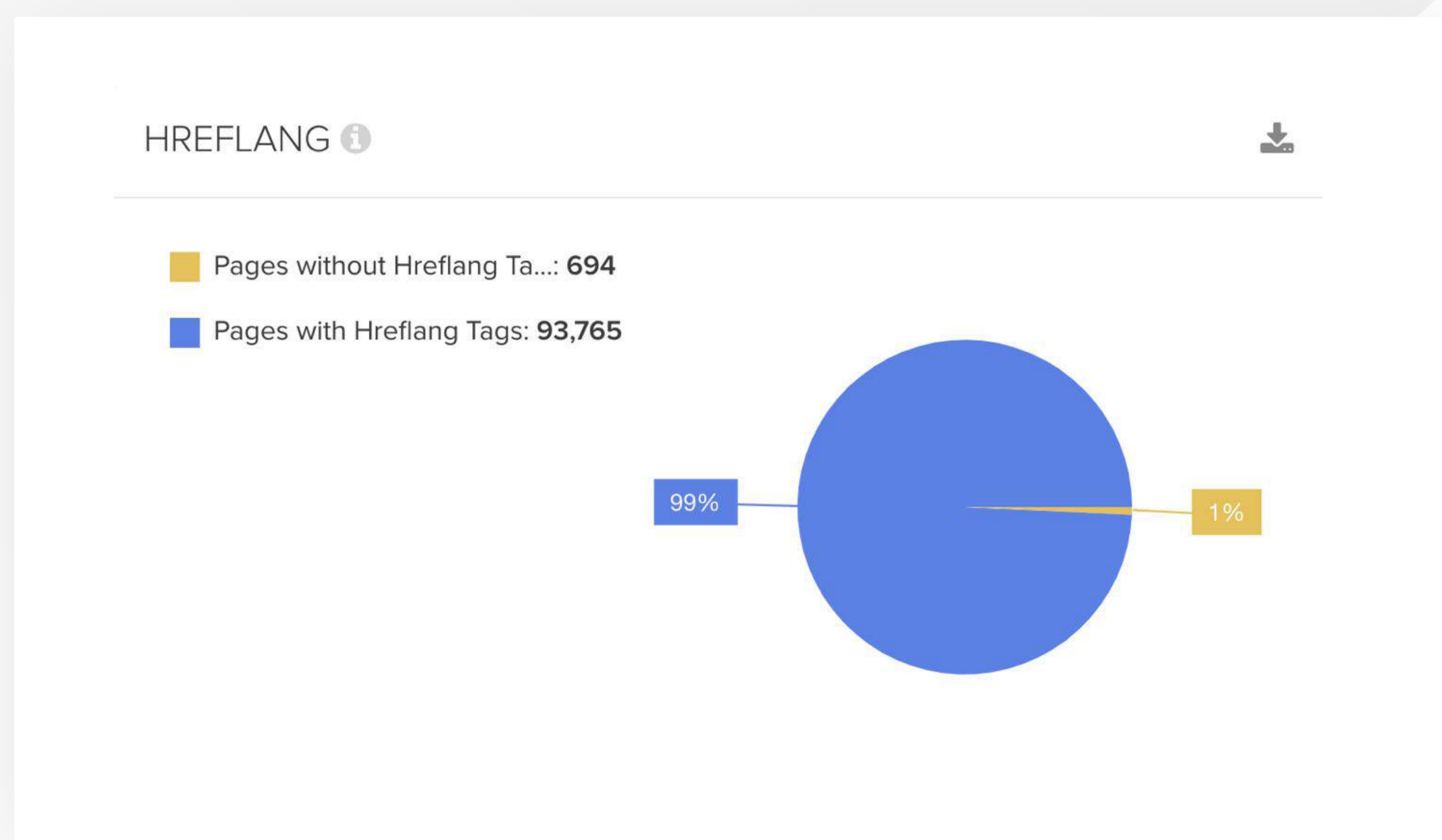
How to test your hreflang configuration

Generating hreflang tags is one thing, but testing them is a different story, especially when dealing with legacy tags.

These are the **main errors** you'll need to watch out for when testing the pages within your hreflang configuration:

- The page **isn't indexable**
- The page **isn't a canonical URL**
- The page **is returning an error code**
- The page **is redirecting**
- The page **is blocked**

Luckily, these are elements that DeepCrawl reports on. Our crawling tool helps you analyse pages without hreflang tags, the different hreflang combinations for each page, broken hreflang links, hreflang links pointing to non-indexable pages, and more.



Hreflang						
Pages without Hreflang Tags		694	54 ▲ (+ 8%)	173	86	33
Pages with Hreflang Tags		93,765	7,868 ▲ (+ 9%)	14,083	4,489	1,726
Not Supported Hreflang Links		0	0	0	0	0
All Hreflang Links		250,907	23,627 ▲ (+ 10%)	29,905	98,638	6,278
Unsupported Hreflang Links		0	0	0	0	0
Broken Hreflang Links		15,067	675 ▲ (+ 5%)	1,765	16,008	561
All Hreflang Combinations		164	4 ▲ (+ 3%)	4	0	0
Hreflang to Non-200 URLs		15,598	732 ▲ (+ 5%)	1,845	16,031	567
Non-indexable Pages with Hreflang Links In		836	419 ▲ (+ 100%)	467	32	16

DeepRank	Level	HTTP Sta...	Indexable	Hreflang Combination	
1	6.55	1	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
2	6.23	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
3	4.05	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
4	3.93	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
5	3.85	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
6	3.5	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
7	3.37	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
8	3.26	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
9	2.93	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
10	2.79	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
11	2.78	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
12	2.71	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
13	2.55	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
14	2.53	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
15	2.47	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
16	2.4	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
17	2.39	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
18	2.39	2	200	Yes	ar-EG ar-SA cs-CZ de-AT de-CH en-AE en-AR en-AT en-AU en-BE en-BR en-CA en-CH en-CL en-CO en
19	2.38	3	200	Yes	ar cs de en-AU en-CA en-GB en-IN en-MY en-NZ en-SG es es-419 es-MX fr fr-BE fr-CA hi id it ja
20	2.27	2	200	Yes	ar cs de en-AU en-CA en-GB en-IN en-MY en-NZ en-SG es es-419 es-MX fr fr-BE fr-CA hi id it ja

If you want more insights into your hreflang configuration, take DeepCrawl for a spin and see what you can discover for your international SEO auditing.

[Try Out DeepCrawl](#)

While hreflang is undoubtedly a useful method in international SEO, be mindful that it shouldn't be the defining element of your strategy. It should be used as one of many correctly implemented signals to point search engines to your different language variations.



“Some people get obsessed with hreflang annotations, overlooking that they're part of a higher number of signals that Google uses to correctly identify a page target, such as unique, better-targeted and localised content, more links from local sites, etc.

Trying to tag every single page for sites with millions of URLs is very time-consuming, when you could start by prioritising the pages that have a higher risk of ranking in non-relevant SERPs: those that share the same language, for example. A good way to identify this is by going to your GSC or GA account and seeing which countries shouldn't be served by each web version, and which pages are attracting non-relevant rankings and visits and see if you already offer that same content in another relevant website version.”

Aleyda Solis,
International SEO
Consultant at [Orainti](#)

Localisation

In SEO, localisation involves tailoring a website version and its content to a particular target audience and their culture. Successful localisation isn't about word-for-word language translation, so this is where market research and knowing your audience is incredibly valuable.

LOCALISATION ISN'T ABOUT TRANSLATING WORDS INTO A PARTICULAR LANGUAGE, IT'S ABOUT TRANSLATING THOSE WORDS INTO SOMETHING MEANINGFUL FOR A UNIQUE CULTURE.

“Before entering a new market or country, devising a localisation strategy is of the utmost importance. It is vital to get to grips with your target country’s culture and worldview to really speak their language.

Cultural differences have an enormous significance and must be taken into account when building international search strategies - this is where localisation rather than translation is essential. It also requires a deep knowledge of regional trends and expertise in regards to search engines and the social media platforms used by a target audience.”



||| **Bastian Grimm,**
Director of Organic Search at **Peak Ace AG**

A localised website will speak to the user in their own language and provide them with an online experience that feels native to their target market, which instils trust. In order to achieve this it’s recommended that you have a native speaker on board who truly understands the language and culture of the country you want to target.

“The biggest issue that many sites face when getting internationalisation right is they don't focus on ensuring localisation is done well. If your translations are as good as what Google Translate can do then you are not doing enough for your visitors. When it comes to onsite content and meta titles and descriptions for internationalisation is to remember that Arabic and Hebrew are written from right to left and Chinese and Japanese can be written horizontally or vertically, so you might also have to think about different content layouts in your templates in some countries.

From a technical perspective, one of the biggest challenges in internationalisation is if you encode the URLs to handle local languages or not, as too often the easy option is you use English characters. The issue of not localising the URLs is that in many non-English markets the users can't understand the English characters so will certainly impact CTR but can also impact sharing of the English URLs on social media.”

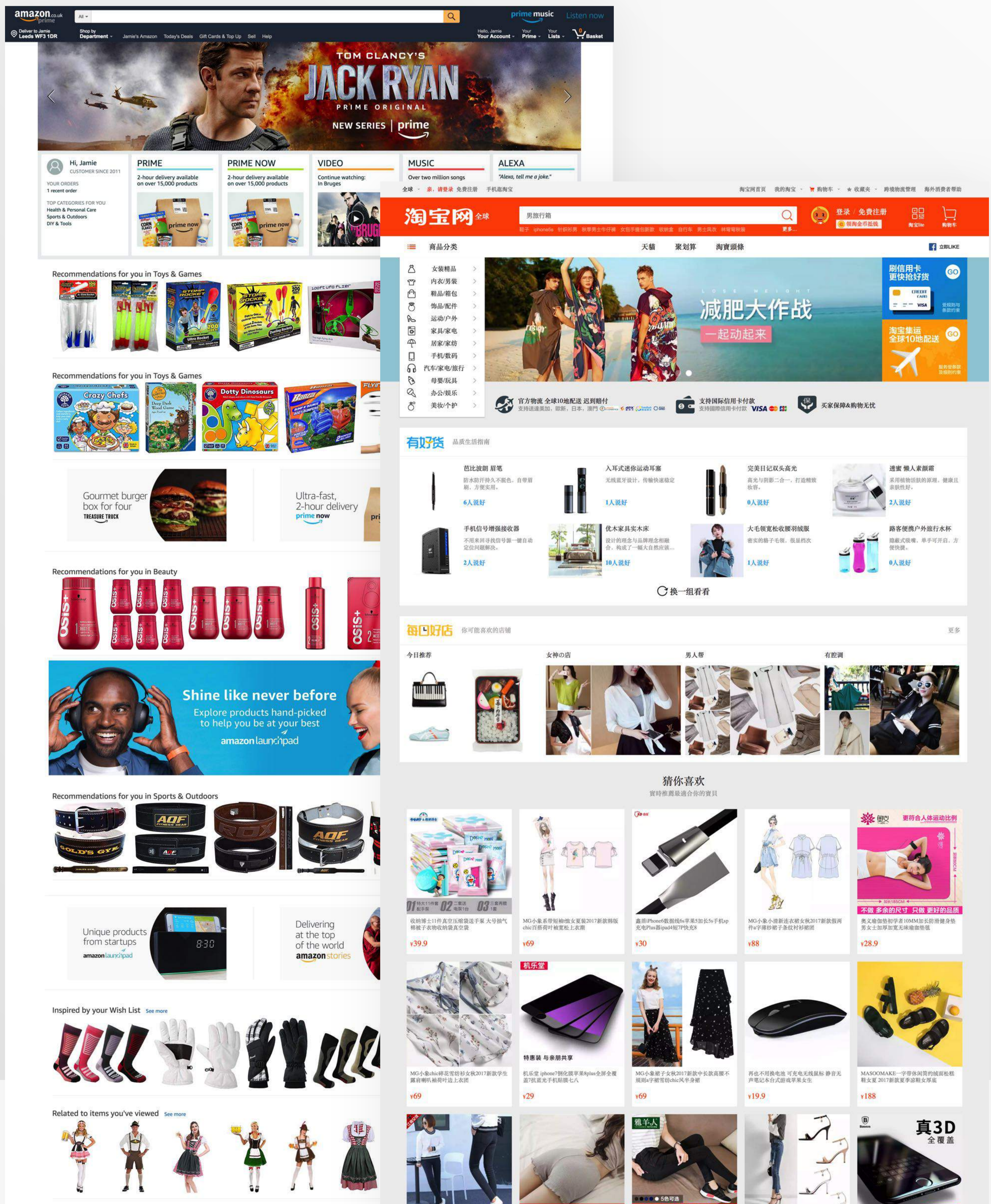


||| **David Iwanow,**
Global SEO Manager at **Schibsted Media Group**

These are some of the elements you'll need to localise, not just translate:

- URLs
- Navigation
- On-page content
- Headings
- Titles
- Meta descriptions
- Images
- Currency
- Products
- Delivery options
- Customer service support
- Overall web experience

Page layout, design and the overall experience needs to be considered. People browse and digest content very differently across the world.

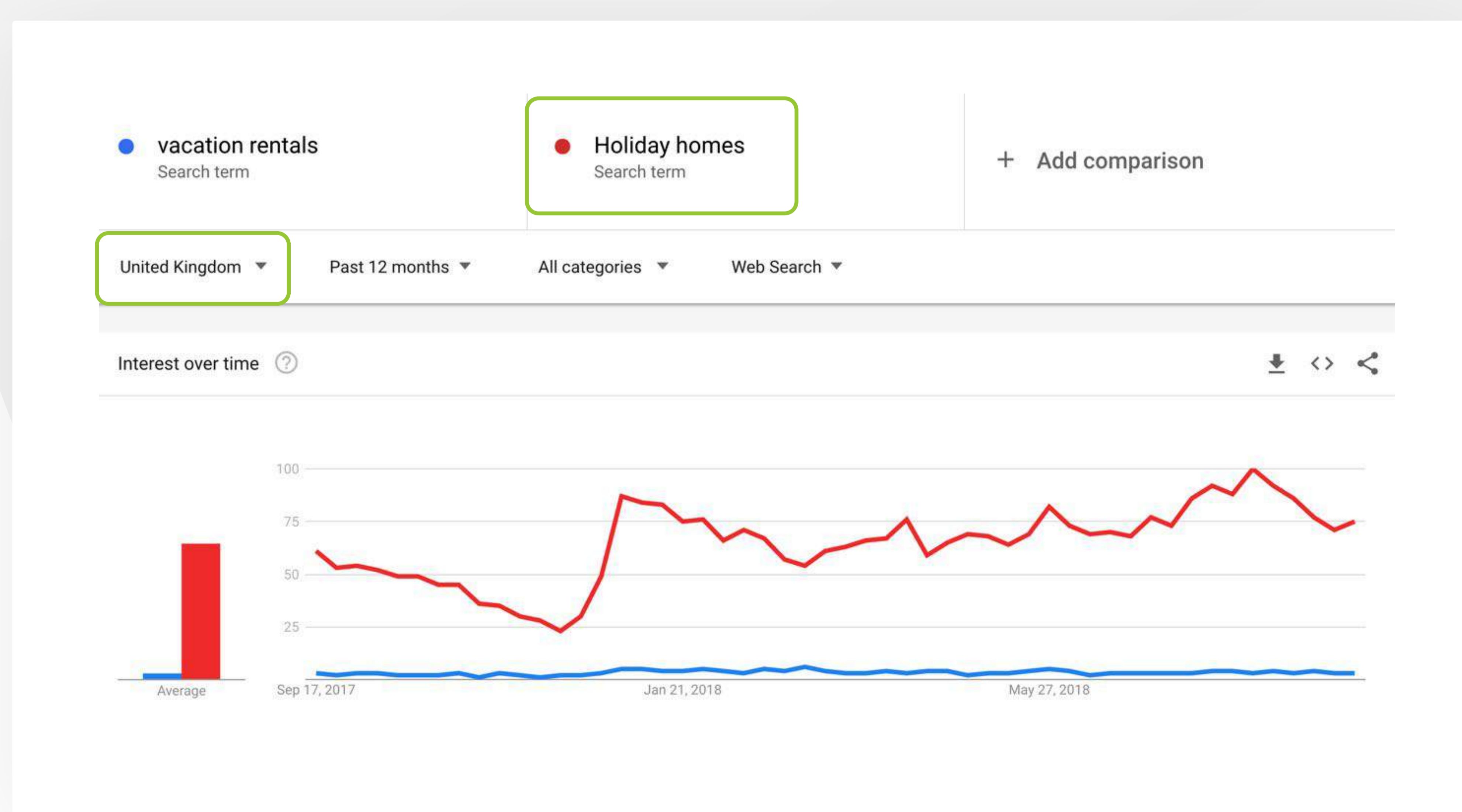
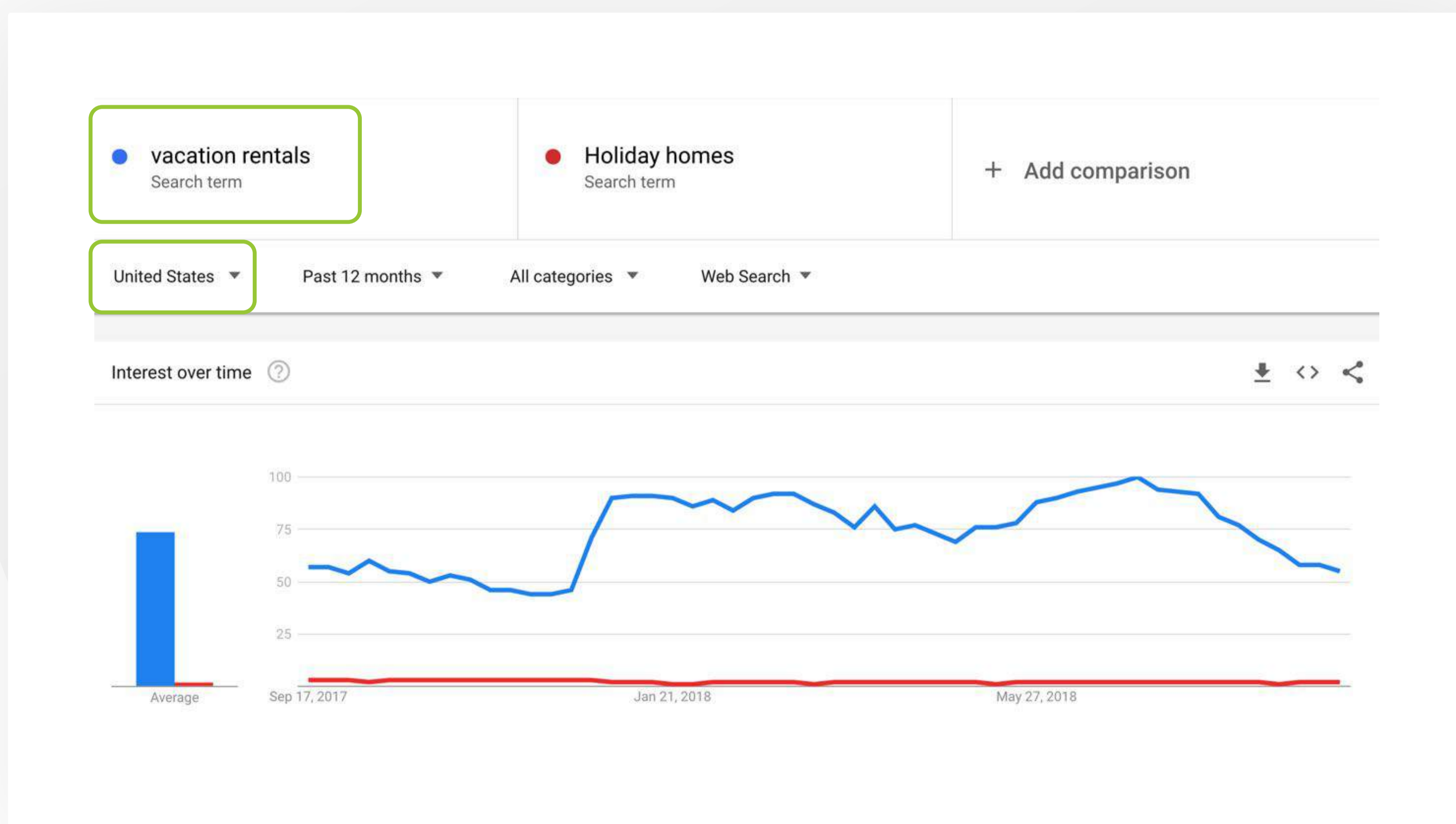


“In a perfect world, I’d recommend appearing as local as possible. This means you’ll have a ccTLD, bring in strong links from the target country, localize tone and photography in the content, as well as office addresses/phone numbers... and even the server if possible. The more local your site is to a specific country, more trust is built for both the user and the search engine - signals it needs to be successful.”



Michael Bonfils,
CEO & Founder of **SEM International**

Any keyword research needs to be localised as well to make sure you’re getting an accurate idea of how your target audience is searching. Use tools like **Google Trends** to do spot checks on key terms and make sure you’re using the same language as them.



“You'll need 1st class translated and targeted content if you want your international SEO efforts pushing up the SERPs. Get the content re-written for languages and cultures, instead of bulk translating for multiple countries. Consider the language nuances - some words and phrases may not be translatable, the meanings can be lost in translation and make no sense to the reader. Give the best possible experience to your visitor by making your internationalized pages the best they can be. Do well with international search by serving your audience the quality content they deserve, then go get your hreflang attribution sorted.”



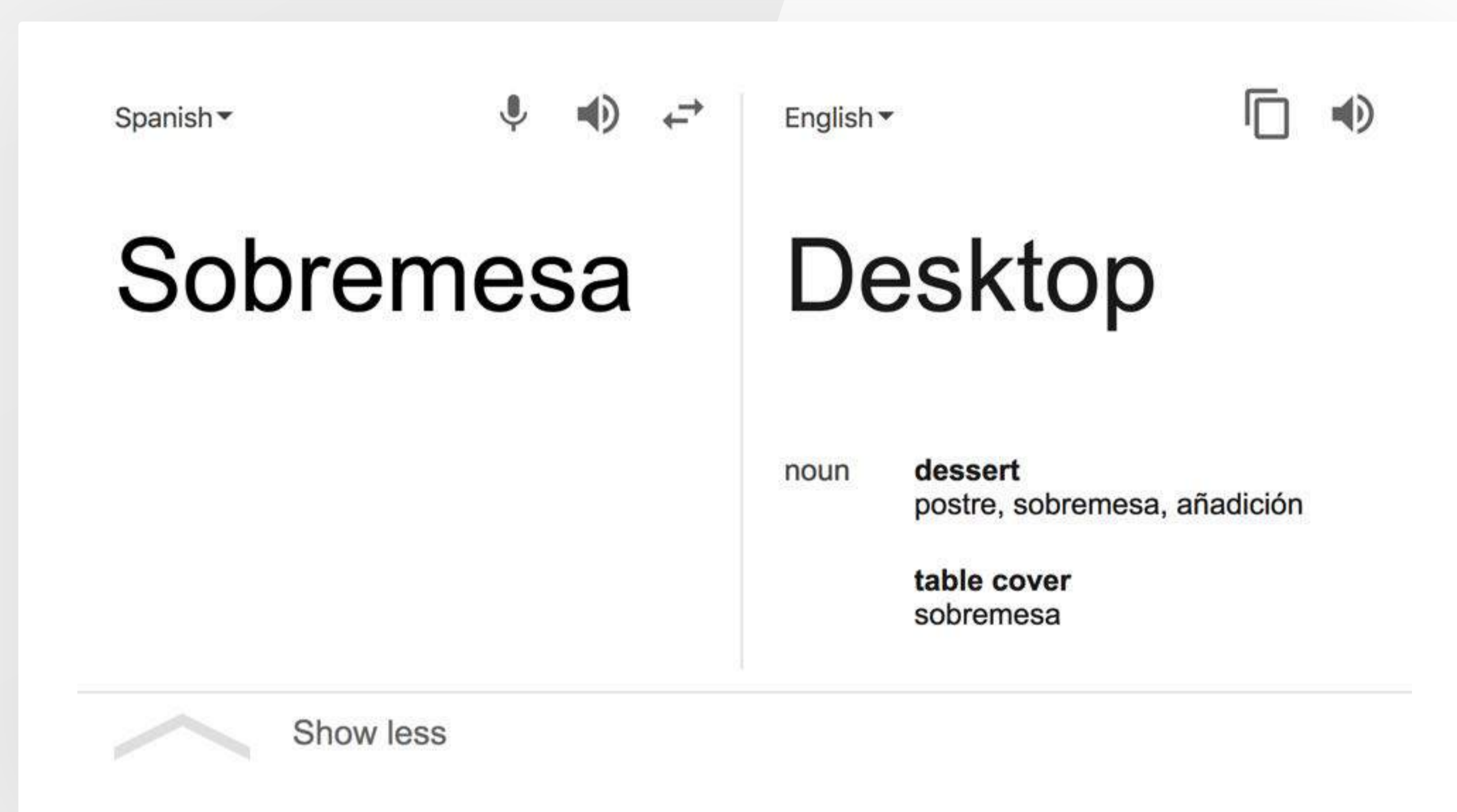
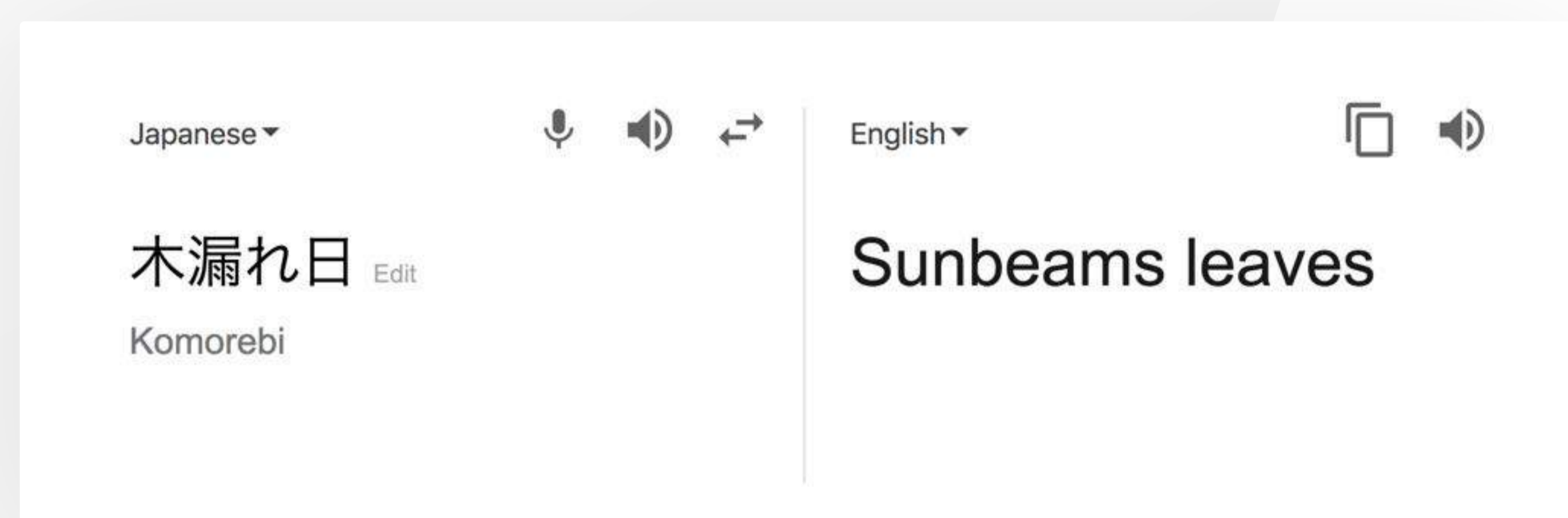
Peter Mead,
SEO Consultant at **Peter Mead iT**

One of the main reasons why you need to localise rather than translate, is that languages will have words that don't have proper equivalents in other languages and have a complexity that is truly untranslatable. To demonstrate this point, take a look at some of these examples and see what happened to them at the hands of Google Translate:

Komorebi (Japanese): The pattern of sunlight that is filtered through the leaves of trees.

Jayus (Indonesian): A bad joke that still manages to make people laugh because of just how bad it is, or at least react with a good nature rather than irritation.

Sobremesa (Spanish): The time you spend after an afternoon or evening meal socialising, relaxing and spending time with the people you ate with.



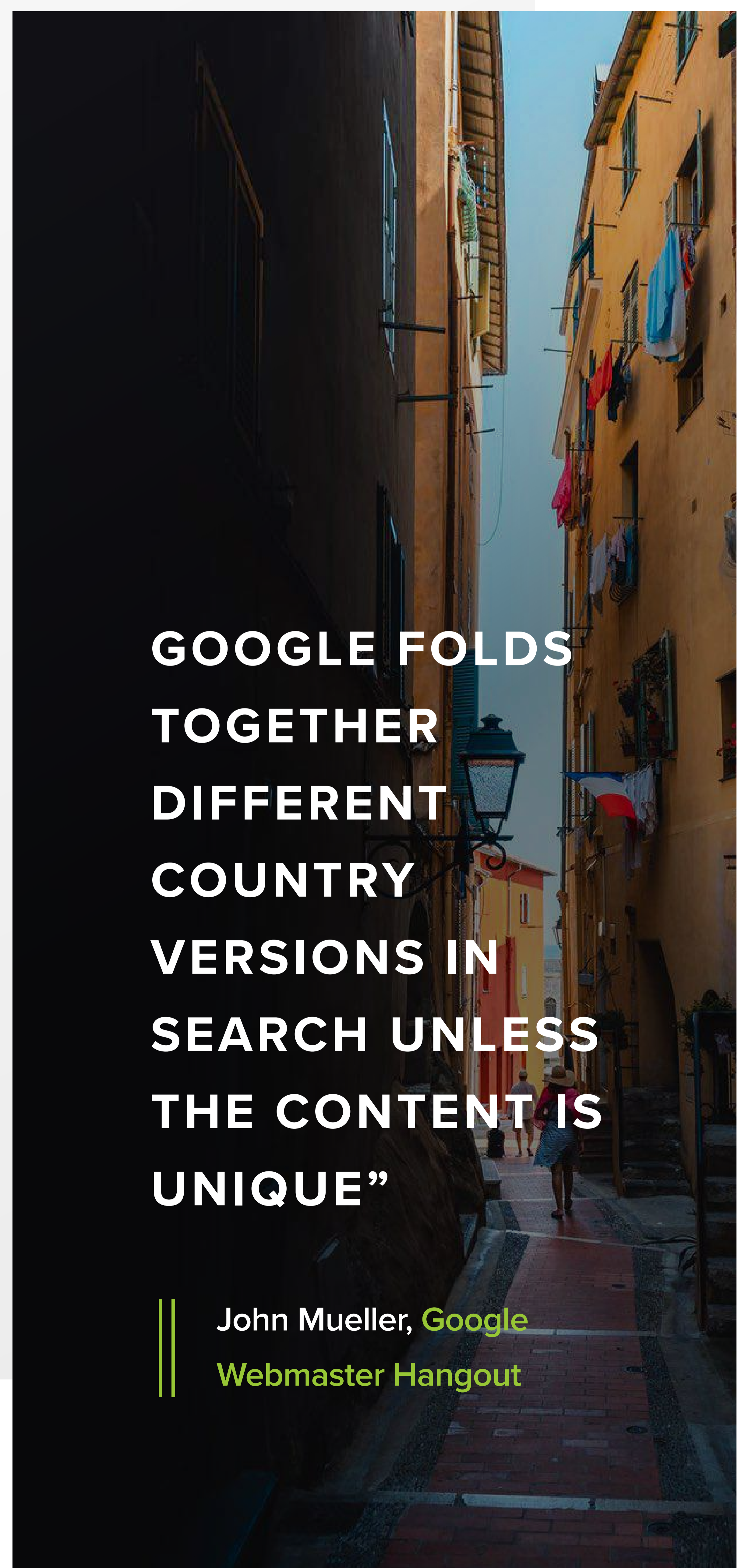
“One of the most common mistakes I have seen in terms of internationalization is the over-use of Google Translate to machine translate content on a website. The irony is not lost on me that Google Translate is a tool that Google Webmaster Trends Analysts such as John Mueller have recommended not using for large-scale website translation. Google Translate is a remarkable machine translation tool, one that is getting better every day, but it is better for one-off translation projects. Machine translation is still not as good as human translation. In creating content for SEO, it’s important to use well-written, natural language, and that remains the rule when localizing content for other languages.”



Kaitlin McMichael,
SEO Manager at **Getty Images**

Content for international sites must be engaging for users and unique. Auto-generated content is not engaging, and content duplicated across pages targeting different countries is not unique. When you’re translating and localising content, be mindful that this should always happen in the proper HTML web structure for each version, to ensure that this content will be picked up by search engines.

Writing unique, localised content won’t just help your users; it will also help to stop search engines from folding different international-targeted URLs together and indexing just one if they suspect duplicate content issues. This can happen in cases when a site has multiple variations of the same language page targeting different countries with almost identical content.



**GOOGLE FOLDS
TOGETHER
DIFFERENT
COUNTRY
VERSIONS IN
SEARCH UNLESS
THE CONTENT IS
UNIQUE”**

John Mueller, **Google**
Webmaster Hangout

Building authority locally

An important thing to remember is to invest in building the authority of your market version sites in their respective locations. Inspire and incentivise the local community to start talking about and sharing your website version. This is a great way to start building natural links and brand awareness.

You can have a solid technical implementation, but this doesn't mean much without strong content or a solid product offering combined with an engaged audience. Search engines will do their part in spreading your content, but you need to put the work in to get local communities excited about your brand.

FOCUS ON BALANCING ENGAGING CONTENT, RELEVANT LINKS AND TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION, AS YOU NEED ALL THREE FOR SUCCESS IN AN INTERNATIONAL MARKET.

In conclusion

Prioritisation and careful planning are essential for global success. It isn't as simple as rolling out a batch of new international websites and seeing what happens. You need to make sure you have the resource to be able to give each language version the time and attention it needs to perform well in organic search, from making sure each version is structured in the best way to appeal to users within international SERPs, to hiring native speakers to make sure the language on-site is really speaking to people.

Once a realistic strategy is in place, then you can focus on serving useful, engaging content to your target audience, which will only get in front of them with the right technical setup such as hreflang configuration and URL structuring. If you can create an engaging experience for each of your international audiences as well as making sure that every website version is accessible and understandable to search engines, then you're sure to have a winning strategy on your hands.



We don't believe in fads, we believe in building solid foundations which you can build upon. In our opinion, your site's architecture is the foundation needed for optimal SEO performance.

Originally there were no options out there for crawling the largest, hardest-to-manage websites, so our founders created a new, tailor-made tool that could meet their needs from an SEO perspective. DeepCrawl was built by SEOs for SEOs.

We aim to build a comprehensive search marketing platform with a unified vision by delivering, growing and innovating together with the marketing community.

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About the Author

Rachel Costello is a Technical SEO at DeepCrawl and spends her time researching and communicating the latest developments in search, as well as driving the DeepCrawl brand forwards.

