

# TOP iSEO MISTAKES

AND HOW TO FIX THEM



## Overview

When it comes to going global, most people think of translation but forget about SEO. That's why in this eBook, we hope to show you some of the top mistakes companies make and how to avoid them so that you can go into your SEO journey set up for success.



# SEO vs. Translation

The way we do business has changed. Rather than relying on in-person meetings and traditional marketing methods, you have an online presence if you want to be found and grow your business. And that's precisely why translation doesn't cut it anymore. To expand globally in an organic way, you have to make sure that you can be found online, which means dealing with iSEO.

Let's use Chinese websites as an example. If you don't SEO optimize your content, you risk paying for a translation that's not even indexed on Baidu, China's version of Google. This company below spent thousands of euros creating a lovely Chinese website, only to be entirely invisible to Chinese consumers.



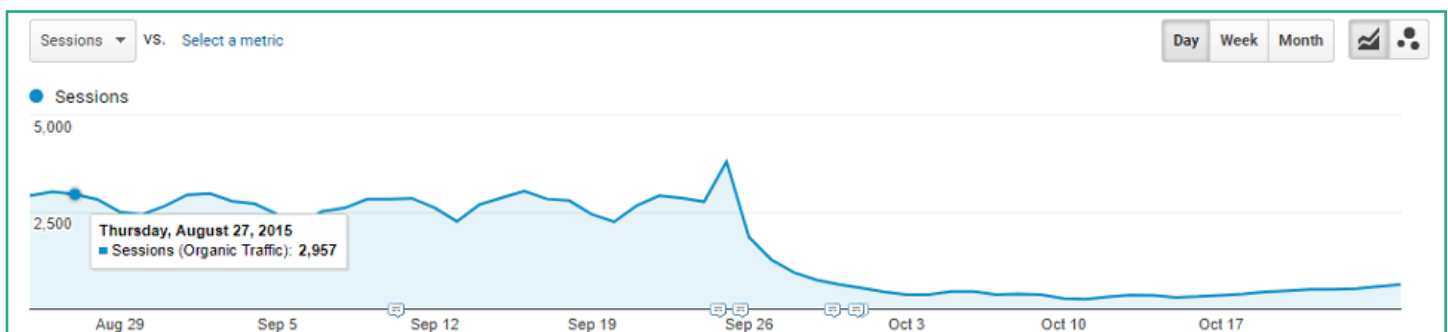


# When's the right time to do SEO?

Two of the biggest mistakes we see are that people leave iSEO to the last minute regarding website rebuilds or think they can get away with a standard translation and SEO later.

When it comes to website rebuilds, you must think of SEO at the beginning of your design process. You need to audit your current website to know what you want to keep because it's working well for you and what you need to improve on. Next, you need to ensure that SEO informs your website's structure and that you brief your writers with SEO in mind.

Also, make sure that your web dev team knows what your SEO strategy is so that they don't come up with something really cool but also really bad for SEO at the same time. If you don't, you risk your rankings dropping off a cliff when you launch your website.



Source: Search Engine Land

Remember that it'll cost you much more in the long run when it comes to just pure translation. That's because you won't be visible online, which means you won't be making money back on your investment, plus you'll have to pay double to have it re-optimized later.



# Strategy



When people SEO their website, they often go all out on their English (or home market) strategy but don't bother to replicate that work across markets, thinking that just using English will work fine abroad. It's critical to note that different countries have different content needs, and what works in one market might not work in another. Plus, you're not allowing yourselves to open up to individual opportunities for different markets.

Also, not everyone uses Google. Baidu is China's leading search engine and has lots of "lovely" rules and regulations that businesses need to follow, and if you don't speak Chinese, it's pretty tough. Also, the ranking factors are entirely different from Google, so you need to ensure that you're optimizing for Baidu, including major technical optimization and not just having some Chinese pages. Then, you have Yandex, which is used in Russia, Naver in Korea, and you'll need a mix of Yahoo and Google in Japan.

Plus, it's hard to define key stakeholders if you're not creating strategies for each market. Most companies tend to have an agency for their English SEO, a Japanese SEO agency, and a translation agency that does SEO translations for Japan. These stakeholders are typically disconnected, so some people do one thing, and others do something completely different. You're not only going to have people standing on each other's toes, but you're also risking this impacting your SEO.

# Keyword Research

In iSEO, keyword research is one of the most misunderstood elements. You have companies ordering straight translations of their keywords or others using Google Translate or other MT engines to translate their keywords, and neither of these approaches works well at all.

Keyword	Translation	SV
aunt gifts	teta dárky	0
baby boy gift	chlapeček dárek	0
baby girl gift	holčička dárek	0
uncle gift	dar strýčka	0

*What you think you're getting*

*What you're really getting*

If you're translating your keywords, you probably think you're getting keywords that will work in that market. But because they haven't taken trends and localization into account, what you're really getting is a load of keywords that:

- a) might not make sense at all and,
- b) have no search volumes, so you're not going to rank because no one is searching for them.



When it comes to languages like Japanese, they're even more complex because they use three alphabets and up to four ways to say one thing. So, if you choose the "wrong" translation, you risk getting poor search volumes.

### Hirigana/Katagana/Kanji keywords?

Hiragana, Katakana, Kanji Keyword Examples:

There are 4 Japanese characters in the "Egg" translation.

タマゴ - **Katakana**

たまご - **Hiragana**

卵 - **Kanji**

玉子 - **Kanji**

These all mean "Egg".

This is also why you need a native speaker and experienced SEO because translations simply won't cut it. Below you can see that when "Social media" is spelled out phonetically it only get's 6,600 searches and when the term SNS is used instead it has many more searches.

### Why you need a native speaker

Social media = ソーシャルメディア(6,600)  
SNS(110,000)

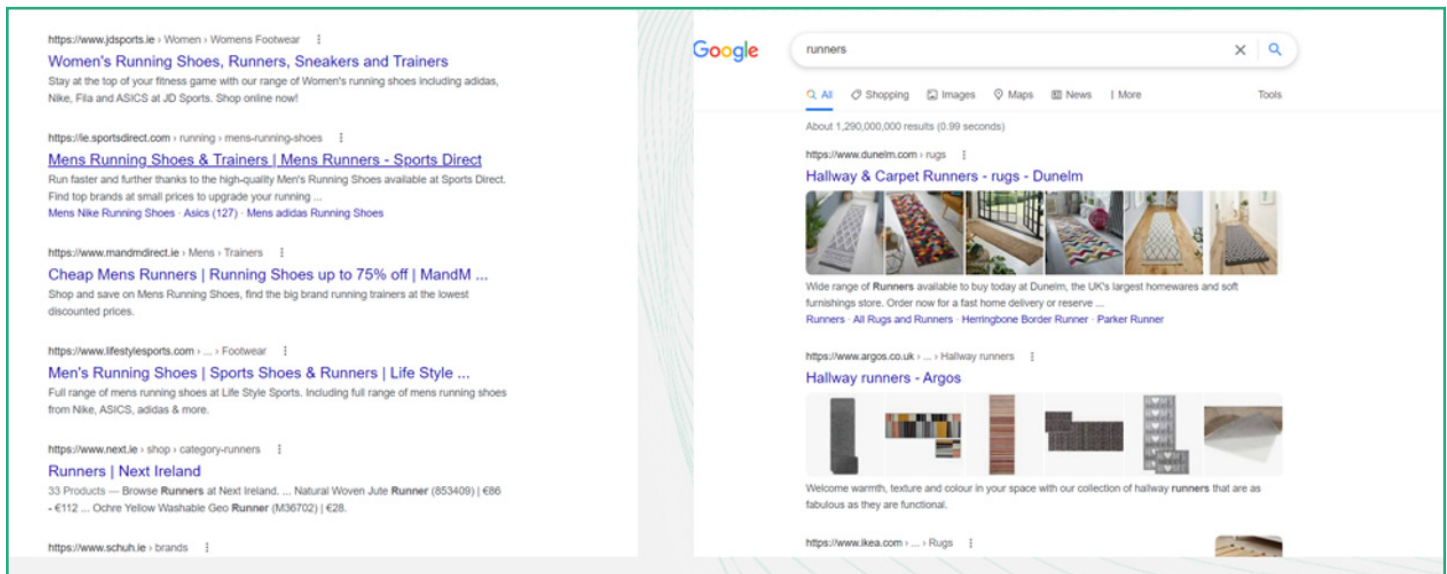
Social media marketing = SNSマーケティング(9,900)  
ソーシャルメディアマーケティング(390)

And as you can see below, different countries mean different opportunities, so if you're not adapting your keywords, you risk missing bigger opportunities. Here we've used Czech to show the differences between literal Czech translations and proper keyword research that adapts the keywords to a specific market.

English	SV	Literal Czech Translation	SV	Adapted Keyword	SV	Back translation	Why?
gifts for her	74,000	dárky pro ni	10	dárky pro ženy	8,100	Gifts for women	Czechs search differently
christening gifts	33,100	dárky ke křtu	0	Dárek ke křtinám	480	Christening gift	The Google translate keyword has 0, but a proper translation has 480
personalised gifts	74,000	personalizované dárky	10	originální dárky	3,600	Original gifts	This is another way of saying personalised gifts
valentines gifts for him	27,100	valentýnské dárky pro něj	0	dárek k svátku pro muže	590	name day present for men	From a cultural point of view, name days are more popular than Valentines
baby shower gifts	18,100	Dárky na babyshower	0	dárek pro miminko	2,400	present for baby	Baby showers aren't a Czech tradition, you'd tend to buy the baby a present for when you meet them for the first time



And just to add another spanner in the works, it's essential you're not just focusing on different languages. You must adapt between locales, too, e.g., UK English vs. Irish English, French in France vs. French in Belgium, German in Germany vs. German in Austria, etc. Here you can see an example of the UK vs. Ireland. Both use the word runners, but they have quite different meanings. In Ireland, runners mean sneakers/trainers, while in the UK, runners are used for rugs, and you can see vast differences in SERP results to reflect this.



## So, what are your options for keyword research?

Here you can see standard keyword research. You provide us with a list of keywords, and we adapt them to new markets. Then you can decide how you want to use them.

English	SV	Target Keyword	SV	Back translation	Comments
gifts for her	74,000	dárky pro ženy	8,100	Gifts for women	Czechs search differently
christening gifts	33,100	Dárek ke křtinám	480	Christening gift	
personalised gifts	74,000	originální dárky	3,600	Original gifts	This is another way of saying personalised gifts
valentines gifts for him	27,100	dárek k svátku pro muže	590	name day present for men	From a cultural point of view, name days are more popular than Valentines
baby shower gifts	18,100	dárek pro miminko	2,400	present for baby	Baby showers aren't a Czech tradition, you'd tend to buy the baby a present for when you meet them for the first time

Next, you have blind keyword research. This approach is great because you give us topics and how many keywords you would like, and we can look at real market insights to provide you with what works in that market without sticking too closely to English.

Theme	Keyword	SV	Back Translation
Gifts for women	dárky pro ženy	8,100	Presents for women
Gifts for women	vánoční dárky pro ženy	2,900	xmas presents for women
Gifts for women	vtipné dárky pro ženy	1,000	funny presents for women
Gifts for women	dárek pro ženu k narozeninám	1,300	bday present for women
Gifts for women	dárek k výročí pro ženu	480	anniversary present for women
Gifts for men	dárky pro muže	40,500	presents for men
Gifts for men	vtipné dárky pro muže	2,900	funny presents for men
Gifts for men	dárky pro muže k narozeninám	2,400	bday presents for men
Gifts for men	netradiční dárky pro muže	720	original present for men
Gifts for men	dárek pro muže	9,900	present for men

Finally, you have keyword mapping, which is great if you're looking to optimize certain web pages because it ensures you're not using the keywords in multiple places.

URL	KW 1	SV	Back Translation	Keyword 2	SV	Back Translation
<a href="https://www.argosmultilingual.com/translation-services">https://www.argosmultilingual.com/translation-services</a>	překladatelské služby	110	translation services	překladatelská agentura	260	translation agency
<a href="https://www.argosmultilingual.com/website-localization-and-translation">https://www.argosmultilingual.com/website-localization-and-translation</a>	překlad webové stránky	70	website translation	překlad webu	70	website translation



# On-page Optimization

When it comes to on-page optimization, if you're going for a standard translation, even one where you ask the translation agency to add the keywords in, you're missing out on on-page best practices, which are vital for SEO success. Also, if you translate your metadata, it won't be optimized, it'll be too long, and it won't entice people to come to your website.

Another mistake that people make is translating everything that's not relevant. An example: publishing an article about foxes and how to stop them from being pests, which targets the UK. Translating this into several Eastern European languages won't resonate because foxes aren't classed as pests since they aren't urbanized. However, moles are one of the biggest pests in Eastern Europe, as they are famous for digging up people's gardens. So, creating an article on moles for that region would be much better.



# SEO and CAT Tools



Now, let's look at SEO and CAT (Computer-assisted Translation) tools. In this case, CAT tools aren't ideal because they're designed for translation, not SEO. When we SEOs write content, we don't work in a way that breaks it up sentence by sentence, as that hampers the creative process and doesn't allow us to see where we've optimized very easily. Plus, the quality reports report SEO differences as errors, which can be time-consuming to comb through later to mark them as irrelevant!

So, what can you do? You can change your writing process to write in Google Docs, Word, or your CMS, as these all mimic how content writers create content. If you do need to use a CAT tool, make sure that you:

- Unlock matches so they can all be edited
- Set the segments to be at least paragraphs
- Don't add keywords to your glossary because they need to be unique to just one page and not used all over
- Have a separate TM (Translation Memory) for web content, so you don't pollute your technical TMs
- Make sure you have the option for in-context review so that you can see how the optimization looks in real life
- Make sure you don't bundle up content so it's all mixed and you don't know what content belongs to which page

Also, never use AI or MT to create content – it's against Google's guidelines and never ends well!



# UX & Off-page

We've looked at on-page optimization, but it's imperative to ensure that you're taking UX, off-page optimization, and technical content into account, too, as on-page optimization is only one piece of the puzzle.

Make sure that you don't have the following:

- German pages linking to English pages, for example
- Country flags instead of country names or languages because that could be offensive to Irish consumers to give them the Union Jack
- Wrong language pop-ups, e.g., having a Brazilian cookie notice on a Polish website
- Non-localized content. If you want to have a handful of pages in a particular language, don't leave the rest of the website in English because it looks lazy
- Mixed language content means, don't have English randomly appearing on your Japanese website. There's no guarantee that people will understand it, and some countries are so sensitive to English mixed into their content that they'll leave your website because of it



# Technical Optimization



There are over 200 ranking factors for Google. Now, you don't need to be doing all of them, but you do need to ensure that your website is healthy from a technical perspective. Regarding iSEO, it's much more than putting in some hreflang tags. You need to ensure that your website follows all of the technical requirements you've got for English, plus completely different ones if you're dealing with Baidu.

Talking of hreflang tags, here are two examples:

On the top website, they're using en-GB as their HTML language, but since this is an Irish website, it should be en-ie. Below, they're using standard English, en, when it would be better to go for en-ie. The same often happens with Brazilian Portuguese, for example, with people using pt-pt for Portugal or just pt.

```
wrap ☐ hreflang 0/0
<!DOCTYPE HTML>
<html lang="en-gb" dir="ltr" data-config='{ "twitter":0,"plusone":0,"facebook":0,"style":"modus"}'>

<head>
<!-- CookiePro Cookies Consent Notice start for www.cnag.ie -->
<script src="https://cookie-cdn.cookiepro.com/scripttemplates/otSDKStub.js" type="text/javascript" charset="UTF-8" data-domain-script="c2ec8156-2c86-4ae3-a1ef-d3ad8085a8c7-te">
</script>
<script type="text/javascript">
function OptanonWrapper() { }
</script>
<!-- CookiePro Cookies Consent Notice end for www.cnag.ie -->
<meta charset="utf-8">
<meta http-equiv="X-UA-Compatible" content="IE=edge">
<meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1">
<base href="https://www.gmpg.org/xfn/11">
<meta http-equiv="content-type" content="text/html; charset=utf-8" />
<meta name="description" content="democratic forum for the Irish-speaking community." />

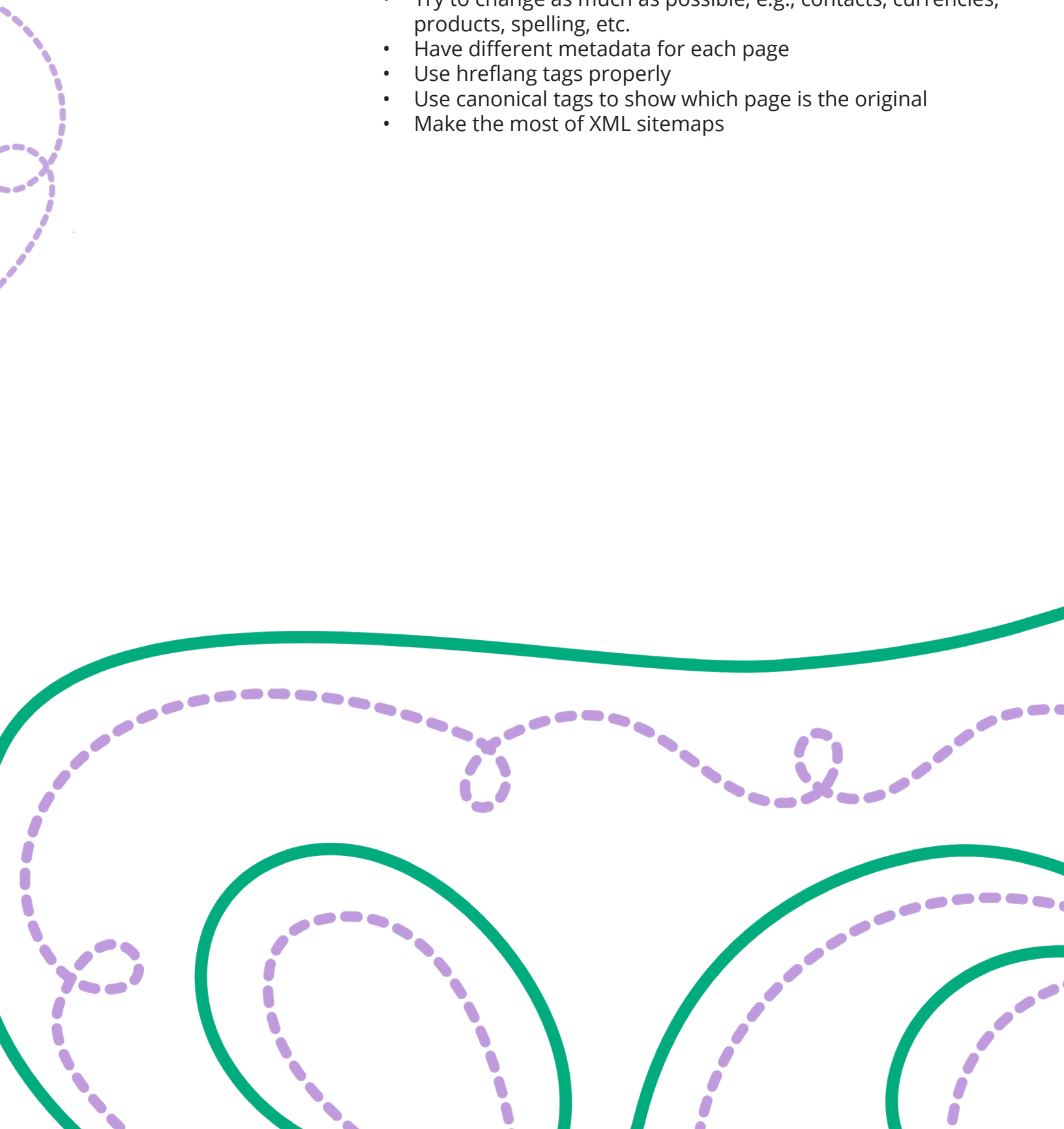
<link rel="profile" href="https://gmpg.org/xfn/11">

<meta name="robots" content="index, follow, max-image-preview:large, max-snippet:-1, max-video-preview:-1" />
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="ga" href="https://www.gmpg.org/xfn/11" />
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en" href="https://www.gmpg.org/xfn/11" />
```



Additionally, when it comes to having multiple English locales, like UK/AUS/US/NZ, you must do all you can to differentiate them as much as possible. While it's not always feasible to create completely different websites for each locale, there are things that you can do to help with the optimization:

- Perform keyword research for each locale
- Try to change as much as possible, e.g., contacts, currencies, products, spelling, etc.
- Have different metadata for each page
- Use hreflang tags properly
- Use canonical tags to show which page is the original
- Make the most of XML sitemaps



# What are my options?

If you'd like to know what options are out there, take a look at these three levels of SEO to help you make an informed decision.

## Level 1

- Keyword research
- Having an SEO optimized translation

**Reality Check:** This is unlikely to provide results because all of the basic SEO elements are missing.



## Level 2

- Audit
- Content strategy
- Keyword Research
- Optimizing existing content
- SEO optimized translations for new content
- Tracking results

**Reality check:** This will get better results than level 1 but will still be limited due to lack of technical and other optimization best practices.



## Boss Level

- Audit
- Strategy for each market
- Having separate content plans for each market
- SEO translating content that's relevant to a particular market
- Copywriting from scratch content that's relevant to a specific market and is geared up to a local audience
- Getting rid of content that's not relevant for a certain market
- Working on technical SEO for each market, not just English
- Having a separate strategy with full technical support for Baidu
- Taking care with off-page factors like link building
- Tracking results

**Reality check:** You'll get your results within 6 months (as is normal with SEO).







# How to choose a partner

Now, looking at everything, you're probably thinking, whom should I choose? An SEO agency or translation agency? Both have advantages and disadvantages so let's look at them. LSPs (Language Service Providers) tend to only focus on a piece of the puzzle, focusing on keyword translations before adding them into a standard translation, while SEO agencies look at the whole picture, not just content.

When it comes to LSPs, they are great because they understand culture, language, and how things should work internationally. However, there are a few drawbacks:

- LSPs offer SEO differently from how we do SEO, and they're often missing out on the bigger picture.
- Most LSPs tend to offer "keyword translation" and add these keywords into content without following on-page best practices or diving into technical SEO or strategy.
- They'll do SEO in a CAT tool, which isn't ideal.

SEO agencies are brilliant because they understand every aspect of SEO, not just content. However:

- It's a very mixed bag in terms of quality, so you really do get what you pay for.
- Digital marketing agencies often lack international expertise. They send their campaigns to translation agencies thinking LSPs offer SEO at the same standard as they do but fail to realize that LSP SEO is significantly different.
- They don't always understand the need for localization and tend to think that what works at home will work globally.

Therefore, we'd suggest the following:

**Work with an SEO agency with proven international experience and a multilingual team or an LSP who bases their iSEO services on a digital marketing agency model.**

# Final thoughts...

As you can see, there's so much more to international success than just translating some English ads. So, if you're a marketing department that deals with everything centrally, don't hesitate to reach out for help. You can't be expected to know every market, but we can!



## About the writer

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## About Argos Multilingual

Argos Multilingual is a full-service agency providing international and multilingual SEO, PPC, and social media services to some of the world's biggest brands. If you're inspired by what you've read today, feel free to reach out and see what we can do for you.

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