

Perspectives

The future of localization in India and other emerging markets

Devaki Datar-Kunte

Devaki Datar-Kunte has run the family business, Languages Services Bureau, established in 1979 by Madhuri Datar, for the last 16 years.



The advances in information and communication technology have contributed to the formulation of a global business context, though one of the most fundamental trade barriers still exists: language. That's why it is important to not only localize your products and services into the target market's language, but also understand the customs, culture and sensitivities to ensure the product is a success in that market.

"Content is king," they say...but of what use is it if it's in a language one does not understand? Businesses have long ignored the language impact of their communication!

Africa is something of a last frontier in this regard — there is high language diversity here, though Arabic, French, Portuguese and English are supposedly widely known due to past colonization. It is some to one-third of the world's 6,000 languages. Swahili is the most spoken language, followed by Amharic, Yoruba, Oromo and Hausa. What's more, seven of the ten fastest growing economies are in Africa, beating even the Asian tigers in growth rates — so this is a market a business can't afford to miss!

Asia, especially India, will be the global growth engine for various industries, thanks to its growing consumer power and internet penetration in the remotest corners. India is a densely multilingual country. Despite having 30 languages spoken by more than a million native speakers each, and over 1,600 dialects, it is still considered an English-speaking country. However, roughly 10-13% of the population understands English.

In the case of Hindi, only half of the Indian population can understand it.

A recent survey by KPMG about Indian language internet users has brought to light eye-opening data about the usages and preferences of these new users when it comes to language support. By 2021, it is predicted that the number of Indian language internet users will be thrice as compared to English language internet users, and will constitute 75% of India's internet users.

It is therefore a myth that English will be all pervasive, or Hindi will help you communicate with your target customers. A consumer is more likely to buy a product or service when communicated to in his or her language, as proven by many surveys the world over. In a survey of App Annie, it was found that users in most Asian countries prefer to download and buy apps localized in their language. On

the same lines, according to the KPMG survey, 88% of Indian language internet users are more likely to respond to an Indian language ad.

After having saturated markets in the Tier 1 cities of the country, businesses are already looking at the Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, as well as the villages of India, for untapped markets. The rural internet users, in fact, have a higher engagement level than their urban counterparts. However, most of them state limited language support as a major challenge for accessing various online apps and sites.

Local language enablement is therefore imperative for the following categories:

- [E-tailing
- [Online government services (fastest growing category)
- [Digital payments
- [Digital news
- [Digital classifieds
- [Digital entertainment
- [Chat apps
- [Social media platforms
- [Apps
- [Video content
- [Translation and localization as an integral business practice proves

to be an essential corporate strategy to succeed in today's market.

End-to-end localization enablement is a critical requirement. Take, for example, a user who clicks on a local language ad and lands on a page in a different language. Or perhaps the user finds that some images on the website are in a different language. This internet user is bound to be disgruntled!

Every business stage, right from discovery → payment → fulfillment → after sales service, needs thorough localization, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of images, audio and video, currencies, timing, measurement units, color schemes, political correctness and geographical boundaries, just to name a few.

Though machine translation is the current buzz for the language industry, it is still in a nascent stage for all Indian languages. Partnering with a professional language company is therefore imperative to be able to speak locally to your clients.

When companies write their corporate content or localize it, it is crucial to have a language service provider to guide them with their

insights on cultural sensitization, content optimization, geo-political sensitivities, various scripts of the same language, locale-specific terminology and so on. During our 40 years of business experience in the industry, we have seen businesses facing entry barriers due to lack of localization of product or service information. Sometimes companies have tight budgets for localization, whereas marketing enjoys wealthy budgets. They fail to understand that localization is critical to marketing, in an international and local frame of reference. Unfortunately, such businesses don't even have their marketing and commercial material or website ready for the target market!

On the other hand, in an actual business case, one of our clients saw a 90% rise in enquiries after multilingual localization of their website. Only those businesses that convert this tremendous opportunity in India and other such roaring markets with the help of localization can hope to stand their ground in times of disruptive business trends. [M]

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Global Content Solutions
Tel: +353 1 416 0000
info@vistatec.com
www.vistatec.com