



Fresh Egg

International SEO checklist

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1

Analysing current international traffic

1. Existing international customer base

The first step is to analyse what international traffic currently visits your website. If your website has a subscription analytics package, there should be a report or dashboard where you can examine geographical traffic.

However, there are free tools available (such as Google Analytics) which can also give you detailed and useful information:

1.1 Google Analytics

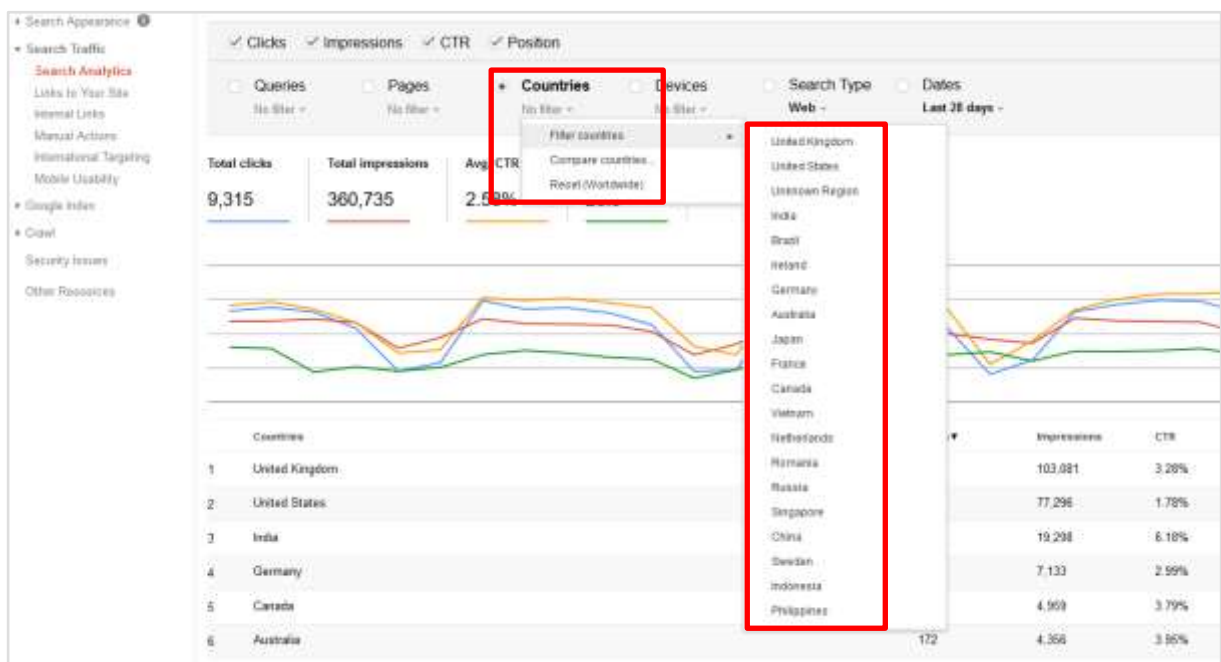


Country	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions E-commerce		
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	Transactions	Revenue	E-commerce Conversion Rate
	11,688 % of Total: 30.28% (33,074)	83.43% Avg for View: 80.22% (2,99%)	9,751 % of Total: 63.81% (16,08)	45.96% Avg for View: 43.31% (5,44%)	1.30 Avg for View: 1.30 (13,67%)	00:01:51 Avg for View: 00:01:54 (1,54%)	0 % of Total: 0.00% (0)	£0.00 % of Total: 3.00% (£0.80)	0.00% Avg for View: 0.00% (0.00%)
1. United States	3,182 (27.23%)	88.62%	2,820 (28.92%)	45.60%	1.20	00:01:25	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
2. India	1,667 (14.26%)	82.42%	1,374 (14.09%)	51.95%	1.49	00:02:37	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
3. Australia	513 (4.39%)	76.41%	392 (4.02%)	42.50%	1.33	00:02:05	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
4. Germany	459 (3.93%)	84.97%	390 (4.03%)	36.17%	1.21	00:01:27	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
5. Canada	293 (2.49%)	79.39%	312 (3.20%)	33.84%	1.18	00:01:18	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
6. France	332 (2.84%)	84.04%	279 (2.88%)	47.59%	1.27	00:01:31	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
7. Netherlands	290 (2.48%)	87.24%	253 (2.59%)	37.93%	1.33	00:02:03	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
8. Philippines	236 (2.02%)	85.90%	198 (2.02%)	61.44%	1.32	00:01:54	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
9. Spain	230 (1.97%)	73.91%	170 (1.74%)	38.26%	1.55	00:02:29	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
10. Malaysia	218 (1.86%)	89.91%	196 (2.01%)	49.54%	1.18	00:02:03	0 (0.00%)	£0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%

- In the 'Audience' section, the 'Geo' tab will give the option of displaying the geographic location of traffic (shown above) or the language used by the users' browser
- The 'Location' option offers the ability to drill down into specific continent, sub-continent and city-level for detailed regional information

- As with all Google Analytics dashboard reports, you can use the advanced reporting and segmentation features to isolate useful groups of traffic, such as those who convert well or stay on the site for longer
- The data needs to be accurate: bot traffic from countries can distort traffic figures if it is not filtered out
- In addition to traffic, you also need to consider the engagement and conversion rate of traffic (the example above isn't an e-commerce site, so has no conversion figures or value). This will assist you in calculating if the cost of expanding a web presence to another country or countries will pay off financially
- Conversion, CTR and bounce rates will also suggest what local language content may be useful to include, even if you are not going to forge ahead with creating a new international website

1.2 Google Search Console



- Google Search Console also allows you to filter by international traffic
- Average CTR and position can be used to determine if a regional-specific site would gain further visibility
- You can further filter by pages, devices and date range (within the 90-day window that Search Console provides)
- The 'Queries' tab will give you examples of search phrases used where your site appeared in results

1.3 Yandex Metrica



- Yandex also offers a free webmaster toolset; in addition to being very useful for general site analysis it should be an additional tracking feature used if you are considering a customer market in Eastern Europe
- The ‘Geography’ dashboard (under ‘Reports’ > ‘Users’) allows you to further filter by predefined or custom segments. This helps isolate useful, converting traffic
- There are detailed sector breakdowns for Yandex’s key territories: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Turkey
- The heat map scale is relative and can be misleading between different comparison views: always check the unit scale

Things to consider

- Does your product or service have international scope and popularity?
 - There may be potential search popularity suggested by keyword/audience research that is not reflected in current search traffic. This is especially true for new products or services
- Can you sell/deliver/fulfil products and services to the target countries?
- Is your fulfilment system and website set up for multi-currency payment and applying the correct tax percentages?
- Is additional staffing needed at the regional locations?
- Can customer support handle regional time zone coverage (or can alternate

Things to consider

methods such as chatbots be put into place to cover gaps)?

- Can regional contact numbers, email and snail mail addresses be set up (this is also important for regional SEO signals)
- If business ROI does not indicate a compelling financial reason to create an international site presence, but there is still a large audience from different countries, you may want to consider having regional language content on the site instead to improve conversion

2

Assessing international opportunity

2. Market research

As with any online business strategy, a thorough analysis of the customer market needs to be made: what they search for, the prospective volume of traffic, and what topics and trends are popular in the target countries.

2.1 Keyword research

There are numerous keyword tools that you can use to help calculate potential search traffic from a regionalised audience. Remember to use the country filters to isolate the required country.

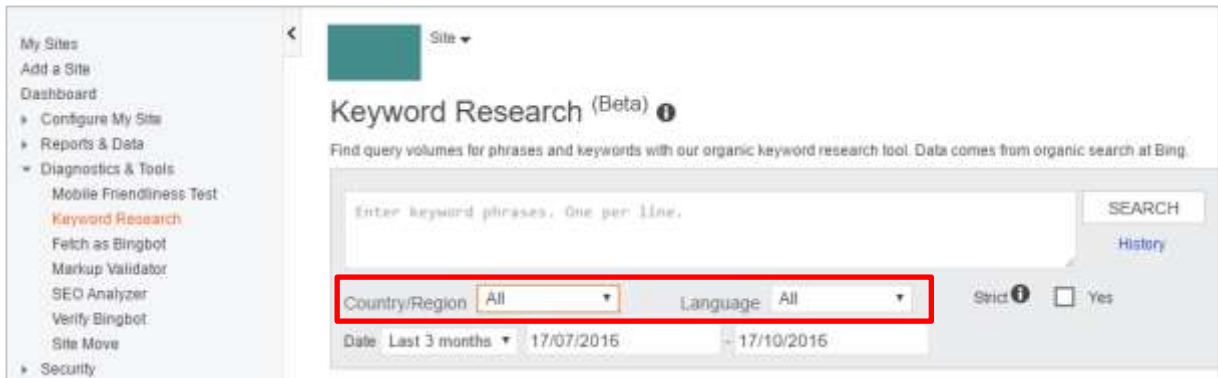
2.1.1 Google Adwords

The screenshot shows the Google Adwords keyword suggestion tool interface. At the top, it says "Find new keywords and get search volume data". Below this is a dropdown menu "Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category". There are three input fields: "Your product or service" with "SEO" entered, "Your landing page" with "www.example.com/page" entered, and "Your product category" with a dropdown menu. Below these is a "Targeting" section with a "Customise your search" link. The "Targeting" section has a "Locations" dropdown menu with "All locations" selected. A search input field contains "singa" and an "Advanced search" link. Below this is a "Matches" section with a highlighted entry "Singapore - country" and "Add | Nearby" link. There is also a "Related locations" section with entries: "Bali, Indonesia - province", "Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India - city", "Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia - city", and "Tamil Nadu, India - state", each with an "Add | Nearby" link. A "Get ideas" button is at the bottom left.

- The [Adword keyword suggestion tool](#) provides an idea of keyword volumes but has some drawbacks for predictions for organic traffic. It doesn't recognise emergent trends and the volume bands are very broad

- Search phrases can be aggregated, reflecting the fact Google is more intelligent in returning search synonyms, but distorting expectations for traffic volume

2.1.2 Bing Webmaster Tools



- Bing offers a [free webmaster tools](#) interface; authorisation and set-up is similar to Google Search Console
- It offers a regional and language keyword search function (but does not currently display regional traffic data in the site dashboard interface)
- Bing has better market share in the USA and Asia-Pacific areas

2.1.3 Yandex

Statistics by keyword	Displays per month
seo	147,324
seo сайта	18,527
seo продвижение	13,919
seo sprint	11,507
seo fast	9,885
seo оптимизация	9,114
seo ru	7,920
seo продвижение сайта	6,230
seo текст	4,240
seo специалист	4,022
seo анализ	3,721
seo оптимизация сайта	3,718
seo поисковая	3,197
суть seo	3,056

Statistics by keyword	Displays per month
сайт продвижение	98,037
сайт раскрутка	24,148
контекстный реклама	53,757
seo продвижение	7,353
сайт seo	9,996
сайт оптимизация	20,162
сайт разработка	57,296
продвижение сайт цена	2,178
раскручивать сайт	8,274
сайт создание	218,896
интернет маркетинг	23,539
яндекс директ	228,662
интернет сайт продвижение	5,963

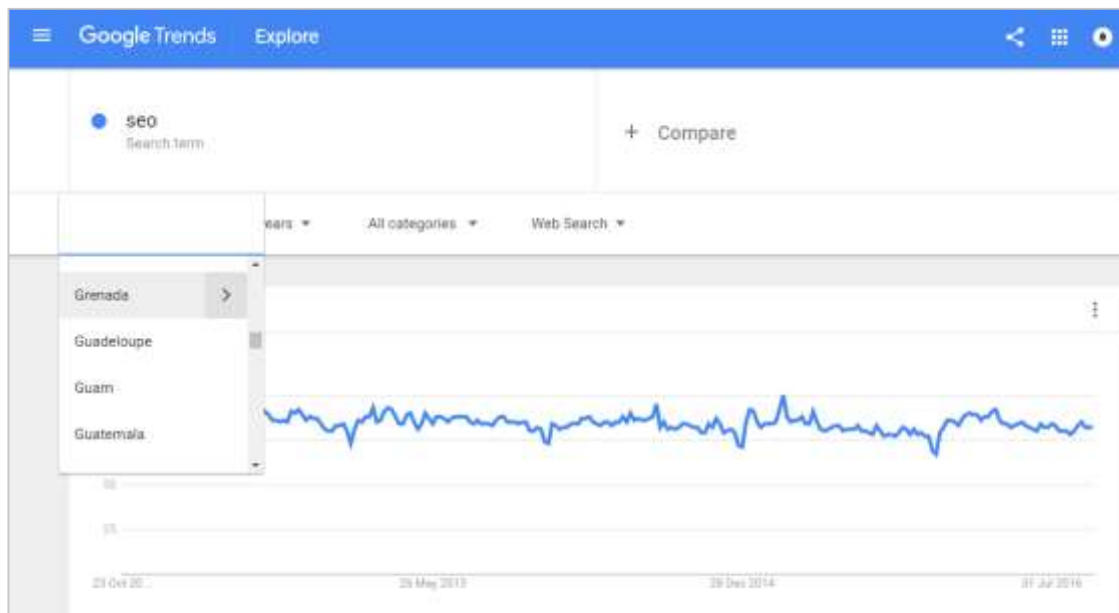
- Yandex offers a [keyword statistics tool](#) that shows the estimated monthly search impressions for a phrase and keyword variants

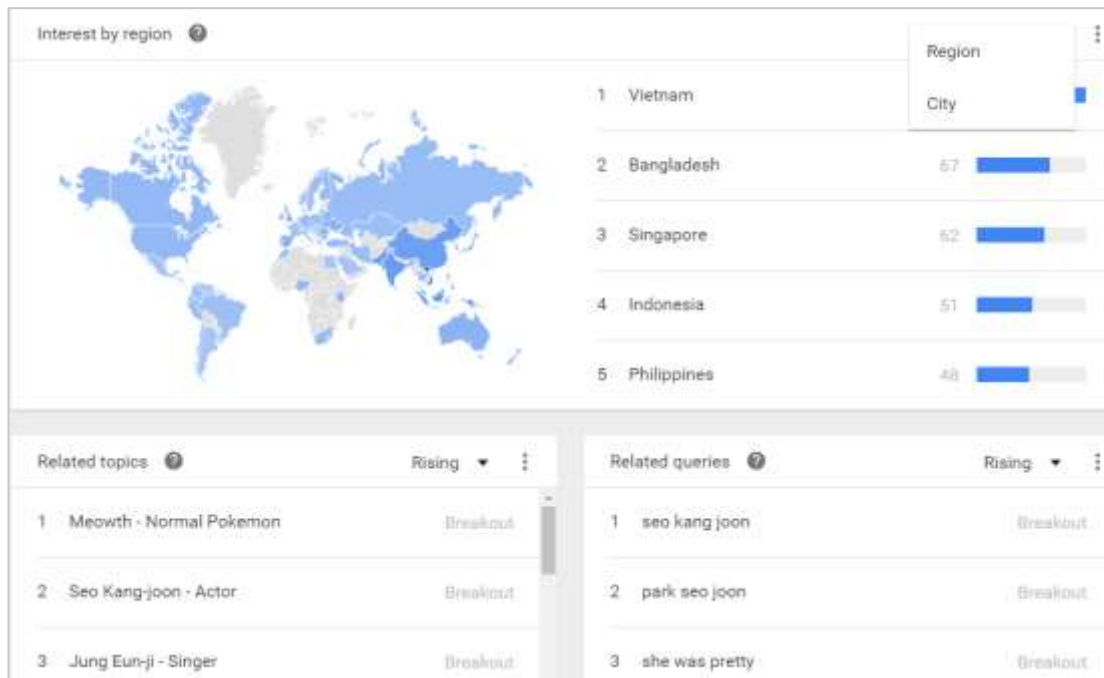
2.1.4 Baidu



- Baidu has a [keyword trend guide](#) and also a [keyword research tool](#) for its paid promotional services
- Both are free, but require registration which can be tricky if you lack a contact number in the required Chinese digit format

2.1.5 Google Trends





- Google Trends shows a regional breakdown of popular search trends
- Regions can be drilled down to city level
- Beware of ambiguity with search queries; it may provide unhelpful data or show unrelated subjects (e.g. 'SEO' in the example above shows popular searches for people with 'seo' as part of their name)

2.1.6 Searchintent



- The [searchintent tool](#) is supported by Fresh Egg and it's free to use. It can be set to pull results from 19 regional Google pages

- Searchintent pulls the related search queries for a specified term or phrase
- These are queries that Google has noted are popular search terms connected with the word/phrase. This reflects current search trends and new search niches which do not yet have an established trend volume that is recognised by Adwords. It also reflects the language searchers use around the content they want to see (avoiding legacy methods of trying to optimise sites for head tail 'key term' traffic)
- The 'tree' can be explored to find deeper niches of search intent

2.2 Competition

It is also important to identify what the current competition is like in the target region and business and niche.

One of the easiest (but manual) ways of doing this is using a regionalised search engine and noting the main businesses that have the most visibility. Other resources such as [Alexa Top Sites](#) are also free, but make certain of how they measure their popularity metrics.

There are also a number of subscription tools available which will offer competitive information and intelligence in regional markets (but you may need to check their coverage: not all markets will be tracked). Some may offer product trials where you can evaluate the information they provide.

Tools include:

- [SEMRush](#)
- [Searchmetrics](#)
- [Similarweb](#)
- Backlink analysis tools such as [Majestic SEO](#) and [Ahrefs](#) have limited tools to investigate popular sites, and can be used to analyse specific authority domains

Things to consider

- It is always better to get a local language speaker to review content and search strategy. Even those fluent in a foreign language may not appreciate cultural habits and nuances of a regional audience
- There are lots of [real stories and myths](#) about businesses failing to appreciate differences in languages and cultures with their brands and products
- Use as much regional data and survey information as possible to understand the audience intent and motivation for regional customers, e.g.
 - Mobile network coverage in some countries is poor: customers may prefer apps for shopping rather than relying on slow bandwidth to browse
 - Some countries prefer cash on delivery, rather than online e-commerce
 - There are subtle differences and associations even amongst same language speakers in different countries

3

Site structure

3. Site structure

You need to decide on the best structure for your international content. There are three options:

3.1 Country code top level domains (ccTLDs)

- Mydomain.**fr**
- Mydomain.**de**
- Mydomain.**ru**. etc.
 - Sends the strongest regional signals to search engines
 - Can be supported with local regional hosting to improve performance for users
 - Exact brand matches may not always be available
 - Some domains are considered 'generic' and do not necessarily convey regional signals
 - Sites will have to be developed separately and will be independent of each other

3.2 Subfolders/subdirectories

- Mydomain.com/**fr/**
- Mydomain.com/**de/**
- Mydomain.com/**ru/** etc.
 - Keeps traffic within the main domain; regional visibility will assist the main brand
 - Easier for customer to locate brand site
 - Pushes folder structure out by another level (makes URL more complicated)
 - Can be difficult to 'retro-fit' into existing site structure and require content migration
 - Sends weaker regional signals to Google
 - Loses possible benefit of regional hosting

3.3 Subdomains

- **Fr**.mydomain.com
- **De**.mydomain.com
- **Ru**.mydomain.com etc.
 - Keeps traffic within the main domain
 - Sometimes associated with the main domain, but this varies between search engines
 - Can be configured on local IPs
 - Sends weaker regional signals to Google

If you are simply considering hosting different local language content, then your options are restricted to 3.2 and 3.3. However, you may start to acquire branded ccTLDs anyway for future expansion and to prevent cyber-squatting.

Things to consider

- Currently, the option that sends the strongest signals to search engines is the ccTLD approach. Some countries also show audience preference for clicking on sites with a corresponding country code in the address
- The ccTLD approach does have its own set of drawbacks (e.g. overall cost of securing domains, time and effort developing separate sites, etc.), and there are successful examples of major businesses that use the ccTLD, subfolder or subdomain method on the web
 - Amazon uses a ccTLD approach (Amazon.fr, Amazon.de, etc.)
 - Next Direct uses a subdomain approach (ch.nextdirect.com, de.nextdirect.com, etc.)
 - Debenhams uses a subfolder approach (Debenhams.com/en-au, Debenhams.com/en-fr, etc.)
- Consider the current site structure: using a subfolder approach may interfere with current deep directories and require content migration (especially if different languages are being considered for a single region, for example English and French in Canada)
- Avoid the use of dynamic code or scripting to display regional content. This presents difficulties for search engines to index and associate with the target region

4

Regional optimisation

4. Optimising for the target region

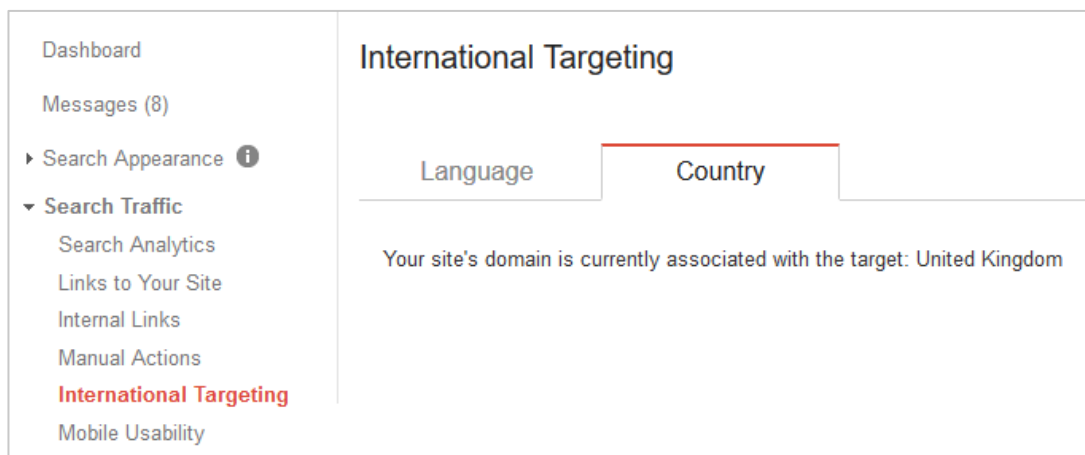
Once the structure has been decided upon, the next step is to ensure that the on and off-site elements are in place to give content the best chance to be found and visited by its target audience.

4.1 Site preferences

Bing and Google provide the opportunity to target ccTLDs, subdomains and subfolders to specific geographical locations.

4.1.1 Google Search Console

Each of the ccTLDs, subdomains or subfolders will need to be set up as a profile and have the geotargeting set.



4.1.2 Bing Webmaster Tools

You can specify subdomain, subdirectory or even page-level geo targeting within Bing Webmaster Tools. Use the tool to identify the content you wish to associate with selected regions.



4.2 Language tags

Where content is available in different languages, remember to set the right [language declaration](#) on the page HTML.

4.3 Hreflang tags and duplicate content

4.3.1 Hreflang

Google supports the 'hreflang' tag that signals to the search engine where an alternate version of a page exists for users in another region. Google Search Console will detect hreflang tags and alert users to any issues or errors occurring with them.

- Hreflang can be used to indicate content for different languages in the same region, e.g. Spanish-speakers in the USA
- Tags are bi-directional: each page must list itself and the alternate versions available
- 'X-default' can be used to indicate a page that is not specifically targeting anyone (i.e. a country selection page)
- The correct codes for languages and regions must be used
- Hreflang helps eliminate problems caused by duplicate content: adding it to pages **does not** provide any regional targeting signals for search

4.3.2 Duplicate content

Duplicate pages are an issue where content is used for the same language in different regions, e.g. English content on UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand domains.

- Google [doesn't have a problem](#) with **different language translations** of the same content
- If the same language content is more-or-less identical, Google may have problems displaying the correct regional version if domain or local page signals are weak
 - If there are no clear regional signals, it will likely display the content that has more popularity (i.e. links)

4.4 Local page signals

As mentioned, Google primarily looks at ccTLD for clues as to what content to present to regional audiences. Other things it looks at:

- Geo-location settings in Search Console
- Text in local language
- Regional currencies
- Regional addresses and telephone numbers
- Links from other regionally-identified sites
 - Pages with low regional signals may not always be displayed to the correct regional audience
 - Avoid having conflicting page signals (e.g. a page for French speakers where you can change the text to German, and change the product prices to Yen). Use a canonical or 'noindex' tag to mop up variations and streamline signals

4.5 User detection

It's important that users and search engines are able to navigate to regional versions of sites that are available.

- It's fine to use IP detection to suggest a specific site for a user, but do not automatically redirect them
 - Customers may be visiting a country and using a local IP, but not native language speakers
 - Search crawlers may be using a non-local IP to crawl and will miss the regional content if they are redirected to a specific URL
- Avoid dynamic or scripting solutions to select other regional site variations; these are harder for crawlers to detect than static links
- Regional cookies can be used to direct return visitors to the appropriate content (and avoid the use of interstitial pop-ups)

4.6 **Regional hosting**

This is no longer such an important factor in signalling regional relevance, but still can have major implications on site performance for regional audiences.

- Sites that are hosted regionally will be able to physically return data faster and provide a quicker load experience for customers
- If using a content delivery network (CDN), check that assets are optimised for local delivery
 - CDN assets that are hosted in geographically distant locations can result in slower site performance

4.7 **On-page content**

Page content for regional audience should be written and checked by local-language speakers.

- Do not use auto-translation services. Content that is auto-generated will not convert well and may be regarded as spam
- Don't forget to use local language for page titles and meta descriptions

4.8 **Local links**

Encouraging links from local authority sources will improve the site's visibility for regional customers.

- Ensure that linking guidelines are followed; artificial and low quality spam may impact on other regions if content is hosted on a subdomain or subdirectory
- Separate ccTLDs will need to cultivate their own link profiles to gain search visibility

5

Further resources

5. Further resources

We hope you found this guide helpful, and if you have any queries or things you'd like to talk about, please feel free to get in touch with a member of the team:

<http://www.freshegg.co.uk/contact-us>

Additionally, there some other great sources of information on the web:

- Google's support page on [Hreflang implementation](#)
- [Aleyda Solis](#) is an international SEO consultant, author of several guides and conference speaker, and provides a number of useful tools and resources on her site (including an Hreflang tag generator)
- [Built Visible](#) have produced a useful guide to Baidu for non-Chinese speakers



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