

Web site suitability

Depending on your product or service, your needs and your objectives, your company's Web site might do any or all of the following:

- provide information that will attract potential customers to your product or service;
- provide an online catalogue and a secure electronic means for your customers to order and pay for your goods or services;
- provide your customers with access to their invoices and records of orders; and
- serve as a marketing tool for your products or services.

Doing this properly, if you're an exporter, means that you have to adapt your Web site to suit your target market. This is called *localization*.

Language is probably the most important issue in localization. If you want to sell to someone, you'll more likely succeed if you use his or her native tongue – even if that person is also fluent in English. This means that an exporter's Web site, or at least part of it, has to speak the same language as its target market.

Completely translating a Web site can be expensive, so you may prefer to begin by localizing only the most important pages. But be sure to use professional translators familiar with the target market and the target language.

Other suitability issues to consider are branding, currency denomination and payment methods. Branding that reflects the market's customs, laws and traditions, as well as language, will make a potential buyer feel more at home. Using local currency for pricing, shipping and tax calculations will do the same and will allow customers to compare prices more easily. Related to this is the ability to accept payment in local or U.S. funds, and to do so efficiently and simply.

The technical issues of e-business

You may have already set up your Web site yourself, using your own hardware and staff to develop and maintain it. However, because of the demands that international e-business can place on a system, this may not be the best solution for your move into Internet-based exporting.

Security, for example, is very important in persuading other companies or retail customers to do business with you. This means that your e-business systems must have some or all of the following security mechanisms:

- Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology;
- software and hardware firewalls;
- physical site security;
- secure payment systems;
- data encryption;
- server certificates;
- digital certificates for authenticating the parties to an online transaction; and
- personal certificates to authenticate secure email.

TIP

To be truly international, a Web site should be accessible in English, French, German, Japanese and Spanish. A possible exception is sites that deal primarily in technical information, which is commonly written in English and is understood by buyers in most countries.