

Creating a Web Page or Microsite for International Exhibitors

By Michelle Bruno

Creating a website or microsite specifically for international exhibitors participating in a U.S. show has a number of advantages: it demonstrates that the organizer is interested in “courting” international companies, addresses the special needs that international companies have, saves on the number of questions that an international exhibitor might ask and reduces the costs of mailing expensive exhibitor kits overseas. There are a number of design and content elements that are important for organizers who want to take advantage of the Web for communicating with their international customers.

Design

Many colors have entirely different meanings outside the U.S. Even though varying the colors on a page might be a brand departure, designers should consider moderating the use of certain colors that have negative connotations for the intended audience—white in Asian cultures signifies death, for example.



Images should be a point of consideration for websites that appeal to a global audience. The use of females, particularly those dressed immodestly (think swim suit, surfing or apparel shows), could be offensive to some cultures. Using large images of any type that require a long time to download can be cumbersome in regions where Internet speed is still an issue.

Page layouts should be considered when appealing to cultures that don't read from left to right including Arabic-speaking populations that read from right to left and Asian cultures that read characters in straight vertical lines from top to bottom. In these cases, translation involves more than word substitution; the entire page may have to be redesigned to improve navigation for readers outside the U.S.

Not every person in the world has access to the most updated browser or computer. Because of that, every page

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has to be tested on different computers and web browsers to make sure that the text (especially non-English characters) and images are rendering appropriately. Also, some exhibitors may be accessing the website on a mobile device from time to time and the design of the website should be optimized for mobile.

Content

Some words and expressions are written differently in other languages and countries. In many countries, dates are written as CCYY-DD-MM (year, day, month respectively). This is important to note when deadline dates are being highlighted. Weights and measures should also be expressed as kilograms and square meters in addition to pounds and square feet. Telephone numbers should include international dialing codes in addition to area codes and the 7-digit number. American cities should include the state and country when they are referenced since not every person who arrives at the page will have come through the home page or have already signed up to exhibit. The type of currency (U.S. dollars) should be stated on any order forms—a link to a currency converter could be a nice touch.

The jury is out on whether to translate a page into other languages besides English. There are considerable costs associated with doing so correctly. One point that most website experts agree on is to make sure that when translation is performed, that it be done professionally using native speakers.

The international page or microsite is perfectly suited for providing detailed information on subjects that are exclusive to international exhibitors:

- **Shipping and customs clearance procedures**—the official freight forwarder, shipping instructions, list of local forwarder representatives around the world and rules and regulations regarding importation.
- **Using the show's mobile app without incurring expensive international roaming charges**—use of a native app (downloaded before departure) vs. using the mobile web via a browser.
- **Securing Visas**—list of the embassies and consular offices that issue visas, current wait times, information on the Visa Waiver Program, procedures for obtaining a visa and an application for a letter of invitation from the show organizer.
- **Exhibiting in the U.S.**—booth etiquette, badges, engaging customers in the aisles, gift giving, prime booth locations, and technology (mobile apps, match-making/appointment setting, lead retrieval).
- **Paying invoices**—use of credit cards and wire transfers, how to order services and pay general contractors on site, what invoices look like and an explanation of all of the charges.
- **Obtaining Translation services**—how to order services and reputable or official vendors for translation services.

There are other subjects worthy of inclusion on a website that aren't necessarily exclusive to international visitors, but may require further explanation for them:

- Working with general contractors (the role they play, exclusivity, pricing, deadlines)
- Understanding drayage
- Working with labor unions (union jurisdictions, work rules and procedures)
- Using pipe and drape in U.S. shows
- Navigating the city on public transportation
- Using 911 for medical emergencies
- Making a local telephone call
- Accessing local services—medical, office supplies, printing, courier

More and more individuals are using the Internet to find trade shows, select booths, sign contracts and participate. Accommodating international exhibitors through efficient design and helpful content is one way for trade show organizers to grow a show internationally and demonstrate their interest in attracting international companies.

Global View Notes is published by:
Rogers Worldwide

1550 E. Higgins Road, Suite 106
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007

Contact:

Jeanette Mucha, LCB
Director National Sales
Tel: (847) 806-9200
Mobile: (847) 970-8017
jmucha@rerogers.com

Editor:

Michelle Bruno,
CMP, CEM
Tel: (801) 520-0797
michelle@brunogroup.com

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