pupsic

The untold secret of localising Wordpress, the sweet way.

#DIGITAL

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Table of content

1. Introduction

Understanding the challenges

When it comes to websites, many still struggle when trying to understand why it can cost so many effort to get them right. Usually, having one in your native language with pure static content to handle is a piece of cake. It is way more sensitive when you decide to have 2 or more languages to roll-out. Why? Well, simply put, managing languages is where your website becomes a portal to a various set of parameters that will complexity it for good.

For instance, managing special characters and UTF codes, or right-to-left languages are just the top of the iceberg.

But wait. Let's take a step back. Mostly we translate to give access to more visitors to your content. Are you trying to localise your website by country origin? By language? Both? It seems a silly question now, but if you have an e-commerce website, you will need to answer currencies, VAT levels and many more items that you wished you had prepared before.

In some cases, you need to separate your audiences by countries as the law forces you to do. You need to filter IPs by origin and push them to the right page. This induce having a page for them to land on. And so on and so forth, the list can grow very fast as you ask these questions to your team. Localising a website is from our experience the true test in scaling your business online, as it can be a 1-0 experience. Either you manage it well and learn by it step by step, or you rush it and you end-up micro-managing bits and pieces.

Planning your deployment again and again

When it comes to planning, there are some checklist you can easily draw at the start of the project. In this report, we selected Wordpress simply as this is the main CMS used worldwide, but most of the advices you will get from here are true for any technologies powering your content.

Technologies are not the solutions. They are vehicles for ideas but they can't fix everything. You need to identify a team capable of helping you localise your project. 2 main options arise in these cases: you might go with a network partner, with branches all over the world or recruit one team per country/languages. In the first case, you will definitely pay more to the team in question, as they will pilot the whole localisation project for you. It doesn't mean the quality will be there as often quantity wins over quality. On the other hand, be aware that even if you might get a more sensitive translation from small local teams that will fight to win your project, some hidden costs for managing them all are often forgotten, and can kill the ROI of the whole project, assuming everything went ok.

A real case study from Labatec Pharma, Switzerland

In order to illustrate our example, we will use a real case with Labatec Pharma who recently launched EveryD, a vitamin D for sportive individuals and family members. Challenges on their project were mostly due to timing, and hence Wordpress was selected to get everybody a hand at their project without having to code much. Being in Switzerland, you get to translate up to 3 languages which can be

very long to do if you are not sized with the right approach.

What you will get from this report

This is why the main objective of these lines is not give you a one-size-fits-all strategy when it comes to localisations of pixels but rather to help you get reflexes that will force you to ask the right questions.

We do not promote one approach or the other but we felt that some ideas we tested gave us less headaches. We wish saving you from some too.

We love learning from others too so if you spotted something we have missed or we told something you feel wrong, please feel free to write us at erratum@pupsic.xyz.

2. Planning your localisation
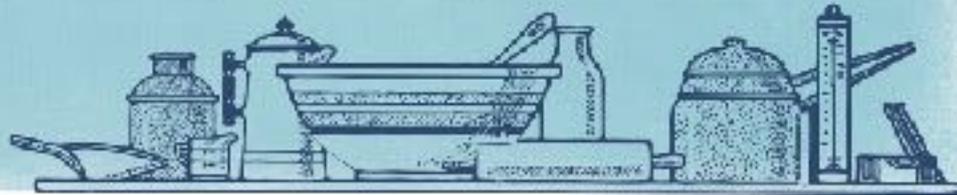
Start with your native language

It is tempting to go large with some mainstream languages such as English first, but usually you can't write it as well as a native. Even if you do find one, it is still tricky to get your first baseline ready and you would have lost many weeks in trying to correct your ideas in a foreign languages. Keep your first language as a baseline for translating the others.

Plan the effort

Once you have you website in your native language, you should have already done:

- a sitemap
- some scenarios for features (such as contact forms)
- mockups or wireframes

All these elements will help you build a localisation toolkit that you will re-use in future translations.

You will need to build a word document with 2 columns, one on the left with your native language and an open column for the new one. Keep one document per language and avoid trying to add more as it would be messy.

With a sitemap, mockups and scenarios, it is usually enough for a translator to work on your doc and for a developer or a graphical designer to take your kit and integrate it.

Do not under-estimate the level of details. If you feel adding a comment is necessary to perfectly translate a menu (for instance, avoiding a menu to fall on 2 lines), please do so.

Some translators might fancy an advance tool for translations, but we prefer being tool agnostics here, in order to work with 80% of the planet. Tools are fantastics but they often narrow your chance to be working with local teams with

perhaps less advanced tools, but as efficient as the others.

Last but not the least, keep 3 to 4 weeks per translations if you have a website around 50 pages (800 words per page in average).

Corrections loop are as much important than the first sprint so focus on them to review the points that you feel will hurt the project if rushed.

Should I plan to translate the domain too?

This is also a tricky question. As it would have low impact on SEO, what is important is to know if your brand strategy requires you to change the name in various languages. Just note that domain authority in SEO is a metric to follow, and you risk diluting your brand effort into multiple domains. In today's world where marketing is everywhere, we do recommend consistency for brands from a market to another, except for brands with a deep cultural bonds locally. Please refer to your Brand IP specialist to guide you on protecting your brand name on several markets.

How to structure your website for localisation?

Here you can rely on the experience of your dev team to guide you.

Usually, you end-up having a domain such as domain.com/?lang=UK-EN.
You might want to have a country split so that your website has various local parameters. Our example becomes uk.domain.com/=lang=EN.
This last example can be helpful in countries with multiple languages such as Canada or Switzerland.
The only variable is the way you will have discrepancy from one language to the other.
Are you doing a 100% translation whatever the content is? Then your split is by language and you can keep it that way on the long run.

If you plan to have local affiliates publish their own post in their own languages, having their own currency or liberty to edit their static pages, then the split is country > languages.

We recommend that e-commerce websites use the second approach as it gives them more flexibility to personalise their approach, but it does add a complexity.

3. Implementing choices and options for wordpress

About Wordpress

As we introduced it, Wordpress is now used by many companies and this is mostly due to its scalability and community. The downside is the risks of hacks the platform is subject to most of the year, so be aware and protect yourself. Wordpress is simple to use, and it makes a great proof-of-concept for your future website. It is normal than localisation came as a topic quickly among the community. This chapter is exploring the various options to localise your wordpress website. Please note that we talk here about the hosted version of Wordpress, not the wordpress.com ones.

PO and MO files

For long as we remember, translating in Wordpress was going through POedit, a free utility to change strings of PO files and generating MO ones. This is a process that is still used in many agencies and as it is painful sometimes, it is incredibly reliable. This is used mostly in a one site one language type of roll-out, hence making the project very easy to manage.

WPML

WPML is one of the most popular paid plugin in the wordpress community, but also one of the heavy to setup and get right. Properly supported, we faced many problems nevertheless to make it work when you have a website with numerous plugins setup. Compatibility most of the time is ok

but you definitely need a dev here to ensure it works well. What we like about WPML is the seamless integration it has with Woo-commerce, especially when managing currencies and VATs in Europe. We prefer to recommend WPML for small scale website with less than 4-5 languages to keep it neat.

MultilingualPress

A plugin for Wordpress multisite that can match several localise websites to each other. Multisite is a specific version of Wordpress that enable you to have a network of sites such as uk.everyd3.com, fr.everyd3.com etc , etc. We selected that one for our case with everyd.ch as it gave us the flexibility of creating websites that would be respectively different. Some would be a one pager, some would be richer and we knew that the localisation would not be centralised but managed in a clustered way, each affiliate managing its own zone.

Once you are on a multisite setup, you must bear in mind that it is not a standard wordpress anymore. You have heavy maintenance to do as each components needs to be tested against the compatibility with Wordpress Multisite. Hence, it is recommended for websites where you know that you will have multiple markets (more than 4-5) and

equipped with a strong team for roll-out.

Automatic translations

You might be tempted to use automatic translations but we definitely advise against. All our tentatives to launch websites using Google Translate like solutions ended having more troubles fixing the localised content.

4. Localisations and SEO

Is SEO part of the integration?

That is a really good question, but first we need to define what is SEO here to ensure you will have an answer that is useful later on.

SEO is about ranking a page up high in a search engine for a matched query. It is dependant on language, but also on quality of content and quality of the technical part of the website.
Let's divide the SEO in 3 parts. The level 1 of your pyramid is related to the technical piece of your website, such as speed, sitemap and so on. This is too long to explain here and would be a great report to tackle later. Let's just say that your dev team should create all the technical elements required to meet this level. The level 2 is about quality of content. If you have 20 keywords you want to position yourself on, such as Vitamin D, Vitamin D deficiency, Swiss Vitamin D and so on, your pages needs to somehow be relevant in front of these queries. It doesn't mean you need to forget

writing for human being and focus on robots expectations, but you should keep in mind that your keyword density will determine your ranking. Usually, your content is already written when you give it for translation. Ensure your source language is already tested for a few months on SEO before giving it to translation. This will give you an idea on what to change on the source file before you go wild and translate it further.
Moreover, you should plan for translating dynamic pages too. Once you translated all the pages, your site is dynamic and will live. You need to negotiate somehow to have your website grow along the way with all languages, not just one.

If you externalise the SEO, please be aware of the best practice when it comes to the level 3, which is the equivalent of PR in the web world. A lot of practices exist to generate backlinks to your website, and if one language is border line, this is your whole domain that would take the heat.

5. Where to from here?

When it comes to localisations, you can find many solutions but at the end of the day, it comes to you to make the right choice as an agency for your customer or as a project manager internally.

Wordpress is a good platform to kick-start your ideas and grow them. We love it. You just need to find the right mix of effort. This table can help you decide where to go depending on your objectives.

Project Size	Translators	Tools	Budget
2 languages	Individual or local	POedit	++
From 2 to 4 languages	Individual or local	WPML	+++
More than 4 languages	Network	Multilingual Press	++++
Woo-commerce	Individual or local	WPML	++++

About Pupsic.xyz

Our expertise was born from the adaptation of brands launches in global organisation such as Gedeon Richter or Hoya Vision. We know that time to market is key for successful sales, and this KPI is mostly hurt by wrong execution in localisation projects. This is mostly due to the multiplication of digital channels, requiring a special expertise.

This is why Kristina Rychkova created Pupsic, a localisation agency based in Switzerland and designed for brand teams. Based on native speakers in key languages and an expertise in new channels, we believe we complete existing agencies by providing a boutique services shop for accessing North American, WEU, CIS or CEE markets. Feel free to contact us if you need help in your project by dropping us a line at letsgo@pupsic.xyz.