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3 Keys to Exporting: Fulfillment, Language, Payment

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If **you've been** selling online for any period of time you're probably selling to at least some international customers. The good news is you've broadened your reach. The bad news may be lower overall customer satisfaction.

Like domestic customers, international customers appreciate free shipping offers and timely delivery. And although English is a universal second language in a number of countries, localized content helps lower barriers to sales, as does the acceptance of local payment methods.

Global businesses understand that a localized approach to globalization helps fuel international sales. Smaller businesses acknowledge the benefit but are reluctant to take the necessary steps because they fear the additional overhead. However, as we'll see in this article, you don't necessarily have to do everything at once and some things may be more cost-effective than you think.

Tackling International Shipping

If you're sending more than the occasional package internationally you've probably come to the conclusion there has to be a more efficient way than sending packages one-by-one via popular delivery services. Even though you may be fulfilling international orders in a timely manner, the packages may be held up in customs or may disappear, either of which can result in poor seller ratings, charge-backs and the need to reship product.

The breaking point for Andrew Simmons, founder of art and craft software provider [ThoughtFish Media](#), was dramatic product losses.

"If I shipped to Canada, the package had a 50/50 chance of arriving," he said. "Some customers would claim they didn't receive the product so we'd get hit with charge-backs. Sometimes I had to ship products [a] third time. I came to the conclusion there had to be a better way."

Simmons decided to work with [Shipwire](#), which provides warehousing and fulfillment services. In Simmons' case, he shipped inventory to Shipwire's distribution centers outside of the U.S., and then fulfilled individual orders in those locales from those warehouses. Almost overnight the number of charge-backs decreased and packages started arriving at their destinations in a timely manner. In addition, customers no longer had to pay a value-added tax (VAT) or duty on products because all of that had been taken care of in bulk beforehand by ThoughtFish Media. The end result was happier customers, fewer bad reviews, fewer charge-backs, and fewer re-ships.

"I hated shipping anything to Canada," said Simmons. "We always got flack because packages were not getting to customers and so we'd get bad reviews. A bad review written five or six years ago still affects us."

Shipwire has distribution centers in Canada, the U.K., and Australia that assist merchants to cost-effectively provide free shipping and easy returns within those countries. The U.K. and Australia locations also help expedite shipping to Europe and Asia. ThoughtFish Media maintains product inventory in all Shipwire locations and currently has 26,000 customers in 77 countries. In Simmon's case, Shipwire's automation capabilities allowed him to reduce headcount and focus on higher value tasks.

Speaking the Local Language

Quite often, U.S. online merchants give too much weight to the pervasiveness of the English language abroad. Some also assume that English-speaking countries like the U.K. and Australia are happy to do business the American Way, which is presumably why American businesses have a reputation for being arrogant.

In the short-term, an American English website works well domestically and less well in other countries. If you're serious about growing your business in

a certain region, however, seriously consider communicating in the local language. After all, even The King's English and American English have their differences.

Translating a site doesn't have to be expensive. In fact, you can do it free using Google Translator [www.translate.google.com], TranslatorBar [translatorbar.com] or WorldLingo [www.worldlingo.com]. Of course, free services aren't perfect but they may be "good enough" by some as a means of breaking down language barriers.

Another more expensive option is human translation, which can range in price. Options include [Professional Translations](#), [Avantpage](#), and [Lingo24](#). The upside of human translation is accuracy and accountability. Properly translated words, grammar, and even slang will help position your company as a serious international player and can assist in search-engine-optimization efforts in international markets, as well. This was addressed earlier here in "[4 Tips For Language Translation, Optimization.](#)"

Payment the Customer's Way

One way to get a customer to abandon a shopping cart is to require payment in a form that is out of sync with the payment methods used in the region.

"Abandonment rates are an issue if you don't accept local currencies and payment methods," said Rich Brower, business development manager at [GlobalCollect](#), an international payment service that supports 170 currencies and payment methods in 200 countries. "Don't assume credit cards are a valid form of payment."

In Germany, less than 20 percent of the population is using credit cards and those that have them tend not to use them, said Brower. In other countries, only some people have credit cards or bank accounts which results in "village buyers" who make purchases on behalf of others. Fraud detection issues tend to arise because a single person may be making 15 legitimate purchases a day that appear to be fraudulent. There are cash solutions for customers who lack bank accounts but they are not popular because they are an expensive.

As with all things, customer demand, opportunity costs, and out-of-pocket costs drive the decision of when to support various forms of payment.

Bottom Line

If you're serious about exporting, you'll want to make it as easy as possible for customers to buy from you regardless of where the customer is located. To increase the number of happy customers while reducing complaints, charge-backs, and poor reviews, consider localized fulfillment. Then, as your business dictates, add localized content and other forms of payment that reflect your customers' preferences.

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