Creating a successful web presence in Switzerland

Regardless of whether you sell to business or to consumers, having a strong web presence in your new target market is critical to success, as customers increasingly go online to start researching into potential suppliers. This is especially important in Switzerland, which has one of the highest internet penetration rates anywhere in the world – more than 85 per cent of the population, according to the International Telecommunications Union.

Internationalising your web presence isn't just a matter of translating the content on your existing site word for word. A Swiss audience will have very different expectations of your site. For example, they will not be interested in your company's mission statement but will want to know the physical dimensions of your product and all of its relevant specifications. Many Swiss people are willing to provide their contact details on a web form in return for downloading this kind of technical information.

Keeping these factors in mind, it is vital that:

- Your web presence in Switzerland meets the requirements and expectations of prospects there;

- Your website can be found by potential customers and partners in Switzerland, i.e. is optimised and supported by an Internet marketing strategy for that market.

Here are the main areas to look at and the key questions to ask and answer when adapting your web presence to the Swiss market.

1. Developing a competitive Internet strategy for Switzerland

As in your local market, your web presence should start with a clear strategy that lays down the goals of your web presence abroad and a high-level plan as to how these can be achieved.

Given that Switzerland is a competitive market, the most important questions to ask at this stage relate to your overall value proposition and how you articulate that on your Swiss website to make it stand out and appeal to potential customers.

- **Purpose**: What is the purpose of your website abroad? Is it the same as at home or, due to a different mix of your sales channels and of your resources in that market, does the new site have a somewhat different purpose and different KPIs?

- **Competitive differentiation:** Who are your online and offline competitors in Switzerland? What do their websites look like, how do they compete, and what implications does that have for your Swiss-focused site?

- **Target market audience:** Who is the target audience in Switzerland: What is their demographic make-up, what needs and expectations do they have, what is their culture and language? What implications do these differences in target audience have for the required features, functionality and content, use of language (including spelling and keywords) of your new target market website?

- **Value proposition and USP:** In the light of different competitors and a different audience abroad, what is your value proposition and USP for Switzerland? How can you clearly and compellingly articulate your USP within that target market on your website? What role does your brand play in your value proposition and how well known is your brand abroad for this to form part of your value proposition abroad?

- **Technical:** Are there any new or additional technical implications you need to consider to ensure your website can be found and used in Switzerland, e.g. based on the technical infrastructure in that market and requirements for search engine optimisation for that market? The Swiss top-level domain is .ch; while most local sites use it, a .com address may be sufficient for your site; however, Swiss visitors may find a .ie address too parochial

- **Legal and miscellaneous**: Are there legal or regulatory considerations that need to be taken into account? For example, since 2012 every Swiss site must maintain an *impressum*, or imprint: clear and complete details about the company name, its address and contact details including an email address.

- **Process and resources**: Last but not least, the new website will typically have an impact on some of your current business processes and on resource requirements. What resources (financial and human) will you need to create, maintain and update your web presence for the Swiss market? What implications, if any, does your web presence in Switzerland have on your processes?

2. *Creating content that meets the cultural requirements of Internet users in Switzerland*

Having defined 'what' you want to achieve and what is required to articulate your value proposition and to differentiate yourself in Switzerland, you need to turn your attention to 'how' this is best achieved in Switzerland – given you are operating in a different cultural environment.

- **Content**: What content, and in which format, is best suited for Switzerland so you meet the requirements of the local market and differentiate yourself from competitors? How will you produce that content and how can you integrate it into your Swiss website and into your other Internet marketing tactics?

- **Language**: For all text content, language is key, as it needs to be appropriate for the target audience and should contain the relevant keywords used by searchers in the new market. What language do your target customers in Switzerland use and what impact does that have on the words and style of your text content? Many business sectors in Switzerland tend to focus around a particular region, and therefore you may only need to translate your content into one language such as German or French.

- **Translation and trans-creation**: How can you best create the text content of your website in Swiss-German, French and Italian? How do you ensure that the foreign text clearly articulates your value proposition and markets your offering? How will you approach text updates and the ongoing creation of fresh content on the web platforms you have chosen for Switzerland?

- **Trust:** Building trust is a special challenge for non-Swiss companies. In Switzerland, a good way to build trust is to be open and transparent. Providing comprehensive technical information about your product and service, and listing the contact details of the relevant people in your company, will go a long way towards establishing your credibility with a Swiss prospect. A short video which shows your staff and premises, giving the viewer a sense that you have the capacity to deliver on a large customer order, will also be well received by prospects in Switzerland.

- **Local relevance**: People like to see and best trust content that has local relevance. How can you integrate local signals into your web presence and make your content relevant to users in Switzerland? One way to make your website look more Swiss-focused is, if you already have customers there, to include case studies or at least reference the company name in order to enhance your credibility in the market.

3. *Making your web presence visible to Internet users in Switzerland*

While the purpose of your web presence in Switzerland is to support your marketing, your web presence itself also needs to be marketed in order to ensure it reaches your target audience in Switzerland. This is especially important when your brand is not known in the new market.

Key areas to look at and plan for include:

- **Domain strategy:** What is your domain name for Switzerland? Does that name convey any meaning or association for a German, French or Italian speaker? Is the name easy to spell and remember for someone fluent in one or more of those languages? What is your approach to URL structure for Switzerland, and why?

- **On-page search engine optimisation (SEO) of your new website**: What are the typical keywords potential customers in Switzerland use when searching for an offering like yours? What are the keywords that describe your USP in Switzerland? How will you integrate these keywords into your website in Switzerland – text content and meta-tags? How can you optimise your website for the search engine/s used and search patterns used in Switzerland?

- **Off-page search engine optimisation (SEO)**: What are suitable high-quality local websites that you should target for inbound links into your website in Switzerland? How can you approach these link targets and what content/value can you offer them to get them to link to your site?

- **Social media**: What are the social media your target audience in Switzerland uses? How can you become active on these social media? How you can share content and what content should you share, and how often?

- **Other digital platforms**: What are the typical digital platforms used by your target audience in Switzerland? Are there local online directories, online marketplaces, price comparison engines etc. on which you should get a listing for your Swiss site?

- **Other digital marketing approaches**: Do you need to employ additional paid digital marketing approaches (e.g. affiliate marketing, search engine marketing) to be found in the new market, and if so, which are most appropriate for Switzerland?

The local digital marketing characteristics in particular are important to bear in mind. Considerable differences exist between popular sites and platforms used in different countries and if you want to compete at a par with your local online competitors, you need to understand these:

For example, in Switzerland, these include:

- Most popular search engines used: Google, Bing
- Online directories: Local.ch, Search.ch
- Online market places: Scout24, Anibis.ch, ebay.ch,
- Price comparison engines: Toppreise
- Social media for B2B businesses: XING, LinkedIn
- Social media for B2C businesses: Facebook, Twitter

Enterprise Ireland's Internet Marketing Unit (IMU) helps export-focused clients across all sectors to exploit the Internet as a route to market and to assist them in developing a strategy that will shape how they do business online.

The IMU provides a range of services, including strategic guidance, workshops and seminars and funding support.

Please contact your Development Adviser for further information.