

COLUMNS

## 8 questions brands should ask about mobile app localization

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By AN AMERICAN MARKETER COLUMNIST

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In many parts of the world, consumers are far more likely to own mobile devices than computers.

Research firm IDC confirmed this in 2012 when it announced that of the world's 7 billion inhabitants, one in seven carries a smartphone or similar device. That is a billion chances for marketers to put their brand messages directly into consumers' hands as long those brands have been smart about localizing their mobile applications for global needs.

As enterprises in industries such as retail, hospitality and legal services consider how best to approach the mobile opportunity, they should start by asking some targeted questions about communicating on these platforms.

Here are eight questions that brands should consider as they create their international mobile marketing strategies.

1. Can we create one mobile app and deploy it everywhere we want to be? The marketer's job would certainly be easier if the answer to this question were "yes."

Unfortunately, with a half-million offerings in Apple's App Store alone, consumers have plenty of choices when it comes to mobile apps.

Whether they are selecting apps that offer games, news, movies or shopping experiences, prospects are far more likely to choose the ones that have been localized for their language and culture. Marketers cannot afford a one-app-fits-all-approach when it comes to mobile strategy.

2. Our U.S.-focused mobile app is extensive. How can we localize all that content for multiple international markets all at once? You cannot, at least not all at once.

Start by prioritizing your content. Determine which content requires extra focus on creative messaging and copy adaptation, which content is appropriate for straightforward localization, and which content such as user-generated text and media is best served by a more fluid style of translation.

3. What are we talking about when we say "localization?" Most marketers hear this term and instantly think, "translation." That is a big part of it.

Content must be translated into the language of your target markets. Consumers want to do business in their native languages, and you will achieve more successful engagement when you speak the language of your customers.

However, translation is not enough on its own. Marketers must also consider cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, images and layout, just to name a few additional elements. The whole mobile experience must feel

local to users.

4. Are there special challenges to localizing on mobile devices? Absolutely. Just like brands cannot approach Russian consumers in the same way they would French customers, the various devices users choose have implications on a mobile marketing strategy.

Look at which devices are most popular in your initial target markets, and use that information to inform your localization efforts.

If a brand is looking to move into China, for example, it should know that Samsung holds the largest mobile market share in that country and that Apple is a distant fifth.

In other regions, it might make more sense to design mobile apps first for iOS, Android, BlackBerry or Windows.

5. Can we use the same images for each regional version of our mobile app? Make sure your localization provider vets your images before you reuse them in new markets.

Just like poorly translated idioms, a poorly selected picture can convey a muddled message, or worse, a negative one.

A qualified localization expert will determine whether these visual elements "translate" across cultures and can help you optimize pictures for individual audiences, protecting your brand messaging in international markets.

6. Once we localize a mobile app for a specific region on a specific operating system, are we done? Not quite. Testing should be your final step before you move on to localize for your next market.

However, that final step can present one of the greatest challenges.

Brands must test apps on each platform for which they have localized, as well as for major mobile browsers. This process will illustrate how well an app works on various operating systems and ensure consistency.

Testing will also help you spot load-time problems and other glitches that could sink the user experience and threaten your brand's entry into a new market.

7. Is there an imperative to act now, or can we table localized app development for the next few years? Venture Capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers noted that there were approximately 726 million 3G global mobile subscribers around the world in the fall of 2010. That was 14 percent global market penetration at the time, and the figure has undoubtedly grown since.

The time to move on mobile app localization is now.

8. Which mobile markets are growing fastest? Brazil and China are booming, but the countries that matter most to your brand might differ depending on your market.

Evaluate where the greatest potential business exists for your industry, and then work toward reaching those audiences on the mobile devices they prefer.

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