



How to Develop a Global Content Strategy That Goes Beyond Translation

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Distributing great content on a global scale, while tailoring it to individual markets, can be tricky. One of the core challenges is the balancing act of strategizing holistically while providing relevant material in different locations.

Global content marketers are challenged to maintain consistent, universal, and recognizable branding and content, but also adapt their content across subgroups and cultures. Meanwhile, moods change, people change, economies change, and media is constantly changing and evolving.

As the lead content strategist for Alibaba International User Experience and Design, I'm responsible for the content creation for AliExpress, our international business-to-customer e-commerce site. Based on my experience, here are four tips for striking a balance between global content strategy and localized execution:

1. Keep the Big Picture Top of Mind

The key to successful global [content marketing strategy](#) is employing a bottom-up approach, rather than one that's top-down. Not all products resonate the same way around the world, so taking a global view of your strategy and simply applying it across regions is sure to fail.

You must think about what your customers want and need from you across regions, personalize that content, and then bubble that up to form the big picture. In this case, the big picture should be a conglomerate of a set of localized efforts, rather than a universally applied global approach.

For AliExpress, understanding the larger context has required us to be flexible and assume nothing. Working with international colleagues has helped expand our view of global markets, and allowed us go beyond just following best practices. While best practices work in theory and should act as guidelines, they are not the final answer. When dealing with vastly different markets internationally, you'll need to learn as you go.

2. Prioritize Localization (Beyond Translation)

For the most part, all customers, regardless of where they live, want the same thing: interesting products that add value to and reflect their lifestyles. Everyone consumes content differently and has varied expectations of what a brand will provide (and how it will provide it).

At AliExpress, a cool #ootd shot, latte in hand, next to an Instagram wall may be exactly what people want to see in the US, but may not be the best way for a Spanish customer to identify with our lifestyle.

Many content professionals think of localization in an overly narrow way, focusing too heavily on eliminating language barriers and translating content, rather than truly tailoring it and making it relevant to an audience.

Don't treat your customers only as demographics and income brackets; talk to them the way they talk to their friends and use the same tools they're using, whether that's Line, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Facebook, or WeChat. Global marketing is about fully understanding and appreciating the nuances and unique demands of different regions.

AliExpress put this approach into action when marketing 11.11 (our biggest sale event). We understood that there was limited awareness of 11.11 in some markets, while it was a massive phenomenon in others. To account for this, during 11.11, a single email blast had 55 different versions to account for localization, segmentation, and personalization (including a [video series](#) that focused on a universal message and minimal text to make translations feasible).

This effort also included a #happy1111 social campaign that saw over 20,000 entries (4x the original goal for engagement), which spoke to the universality of the human condition as well as the common thread AliExpress was able to strike with our content across the globe.

3. Prepare for the Rise of Emerging Markets

Up and coming markets that may or not be at the top of your radar still have potential to make a big splash in the future. For AliExpress, the next emerging market can be anywhere, so it's important to be prepared.

AliExpress is a universal brand that touches people on every scale, so we need to make sure the differences in what people in emerging markets want is reflected in our posts and how we communicate. In many instances we do a lot of educating about what we do, who we are, how to set up accounts, etc. For you, this may mean raising awareness around your brand, or focusing on product demos.

Understand where your emerging markets are, and don't wait until there is demand to get started. Educate emerging markets on your business, and get ahead of the competition.

4. Take Risks (and Have Fun!)

Keep your customers interested. Don't just produce the content you want to produce, or even the content your customers expect. Think outside the box and experiment with different approaches and content types. Some might work, and some might not, but it's the most original or standout content that tends to catch customers' eye or go viral.

Be spontaneous – but be smart about it. Leverage your data to inform where and how to experiment. In this profession, we're pretty lucky that a lot of what we do is measurable, especially in the digital world. That said, don't get so lost in the data that you can't be flexible and evolve.

If your content and your strategy can grow and improve, you only get closer and closer to creating a brand your customers want to engage with. Take an idea, try it, learn from it (and your customers), and try it again. Have some fun with it; be creative. Use social media or live video feeds and write silly poems and one-liners. 99% of the time, a B2C customer wants to see that, and if you're good, they want to be a part of it. Be the brand your customers love, and want to stick with.

Going Beyond What's Tried and True

Mastering your content strategy globally is not just about being aware of and executing best practices. International markets are ripe with opportunities to grow your business and reach larger, more varied audiences. But, you must tune into the distinctions and preferences among different markets, and experiment to figure out what works. Even when you've locked down an approach that resonates, keep a constant eye out for how these circumstances may shift. The world will keep turning, changing, and shifting, and you'll need to be tuned in to respond in kind.

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