

How should I structure my URLs for both SEO and localization?

 webmasters.stackexchange.com/questions/403/how-should-i-structure-my-urls-for-both-seo-and-localization

When I set up a site in multiple languages, how should I set up my URLs for search engines and usability?

Let's say my site is www.example.com, and I'm translating into French and Spanish. What is best for usability and SEO?

Directory option:

<http://www.example.com/sample.html>
<http://www.example.com/fr/sample.html>
<http://www.example.com/es/sample.html>

Subdomain option:

<http://www.example.com/sample.html>
<http://fr.example.com/sample.html>
<http://es.example.com/sample.html>

Filename option:

<http://www.example.com/sample.html>
<http://www.example.com/sample.fr.html>
<http://www.example.com/sample.es.html>

Accept-Language header:

Or should I simply parse the Accept-Language header and generate content server-side to suit that header?

Is there another way to do this? If the different language versions don't have different urls, what do I do about the search engines?

UPDATE 2011-12-06

Google has new recommendations for [meta](#) tags for explicitly pointing to other language content: [New markup for multilingual content](#).

UPDATE 2012-05-25

Related but not precisely: [Multilingual and multinational site annotations in Sitemaps](#)

UPDATE 2013-06-12 [Targeting site content to a specific country](#) includes discussion of several URL schemes directly relevant to the question.



There are many acceptable ways to structure your site for both SEO and internationalization. Each have advantages and disadvantages.

Top Level Domains

Buy the same domain name at multiple top level country domains like `example.com` , `example.es` and `example.de` .

Advantages

- Fully supported by Google. You can add the sites to where there are options to tell Google about how they are targeted.
- Often preferred by users who tend to like content published on the TLD for their country
- The domain name itself can be localized. Many international users may react badly to English words or an English sounding domain name. This can be especially important for languages that do not use a Latin alphabet.
- Supports localization by country. You can have separate sites like `example.co.uk` and `example.com.au` targeted at audiences in different countries. The sites may have duplicate content with slight spelling differences and still rank well. In fact, multiple well localized sites in the same language may rank better than a single site in that language.
- Hosting can be localized by pointing DNS to a web server in the country being targeted.

Disadvantages

- Expensive and time consuming to buy many domains. Especially if you have to deal with squatters.
- Cookies cannot be shared across multiple locales, meaning that users have to log in separately to each site.
- No good option for localizing only by language since many languages have multiple countries and no country TLD may be the language code. Even in cases where the TLD does match the language code like `es` , search engines may assume that the site is only appropriate for users from Spain, not for all Spanish speakers.

Sub-domains

Buy a single domain, and use sub-domains such as `en.example.com` , and `es.example.com`

Advantages

- Supports localization by country *or* by language.
- Hosting can be localized by pointing DNS to a web server located close to users.
- Easy and cheap to implement compared to buying multiple domains.
- Cookies can be shared across all locales, enabling single sign on for a more seamless user experience.

Disadvantages

- No opportunity to localize the domain name itself
- May look less local to users compared to a top level domain.

Sub-directories

Buy a single domain, and use sub-directories such as `example.com/en/` , and `example.com/es/`

Advantages and Disadvantages

The same as sub-domains, except that there is one DNS entry which precludes hosting your site in multiple countries for different locales.

Techniques that are **NOT** recommended

- **File Names:** Using different file names such as `index_en.html` and `index_de.html` . This technique is not fully supported by Google. For example, there is no way to set targeting in webmaster tools.
- **URL Parameters:** Using URL parameters such as `lang=en` . It is not recommended for the same reason that different file names are not recommended.
- **Accept Language Header:** Automatically switching the language based on the `Accept-Language` header.
 - Many users do not have this header set correctly. This is especially true for users traveling abroad that may be using a friend's computer, or an internet cafe. It is also often true for international users that install an English web browser and know enough English to be get around, but would prefer content in a different language.
 - Google just announced that Googlebot will send the Accept-Language header and crawl from different geographic locations. However, Google still recommends that you have separate URLs for content in different languages.
 - You may use the `Accept-Language` header to suggest that users might prefer a different version of the site by displaying a message when the site they are visiting does not match the `Accept-Language` header.
- **Geographic IP Addresses:** Automatically switching the language based where the IP address is geographically located.
 - Geo-ip databases are inaccurate. Up to 10% of visitors may be assigned to the incorrect country.

- Some countries (like Canada) use more than one language
- You may use the IP address country to suggest a language or languages that a user may be interested in.

On-page Markup

When supporting multiple languages, you should clearly mark up with language meta-data.

Use the lang attribute in the `html` tag:

```
<html lang="en">
```

Use rel alternate links to the same page in other languages as :

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="es" href="http://www.example.com/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="es-ES" href="http://es-es.example.com/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="es-MX" href="http://es-mx.example.com/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en" href="http://en.example.com/" />
```

Alternately, this information can be put into sitemap files.

You should add each language (or locale) of your site to `.` This can be done for top level domains, for sub- domains, or for sub-directories.

If your site is targeted by country, you should use webmaster tools to set the site targeting. Navigate to "Configuration" -> "Settings" -> "Geographic target" and choose to target the correct country from the drop down list.

22

Answering a question similar to yours on his blog, Matt Cutts suggests:

If you have sites with say French and German versions for a business, my preferences would be:

1. ccTLDs such as `example.fr` or `example.de`
2. After that, subdomains such as `fr.example.com` or `de.example.com`.
3. If that's not possible, I'd use subdirectories such as `example.com/fr/` or `example.com/de/`

answered Jul 19 '10 at 6:55

T4

[mvark](#)

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As a German user I hate it when a website won't let me on the English page because it's think it knows better what I want. It might be hard for Americans to understand but there are actually people who speak more than one language.

Sometimes I might want to view the German websites and sometimes I might want to view the English one.

Simply parsing the `Accept-Language` header might drive me mad.

That especially true if your German page is a cheap translation of your English page.

To make it easy for your user the English version should also have localisation such as `domain.com/en/` or `en.domain.com` .

When I type `domain.com` you get one guess to give me the English or the German page based on my `Accept-Language` header. If I however don't like your choice, I should be able to simply exchange the language in the domain name.

Extra hint: If you have the language in front of the domain name both typing `ger.domain.com` and `de.domain.com` should bring me to the German website.

15

In my opinion, you should use either the folder or subdomain approach, because they are more intuitive to the user. Which one is a matter of personal taste, I personally find the folder approach clearer. The filename option is far less intuitive.

Parsing the `Accept-Language` header for directing the user to the correct content on his first visit is a good idea, but you should only do it to redirect on the folder or subdomain url. Otherwise, it would be impossible to link to content in a specific language, and the indexing of your website will be a mess.

answered Jul 9 '10 at 4:42



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Use subdomain option if you use localized versions (i.e. France != French). Use subdomains, but I think it's better use directories if this country uses diferent languages. For example:

us.domain.com (USA)
us.domain.com/en/sample.html (USA - english)
us.domain.com/es/ejemplo.html (USA - spanish)
es.domain.com (Spain)
es.domain.com/es/ejemplo.html (Spain - spanish)
es.domain.com/ca/exemple.html (Spain - catalan)

Bing relies on geo-meta tags, but for Google you have to use Google Webmaster Tools.

If you want to target global markets use `www.domain.com` with a preferred user language (browser give language priorities on `Accept-Language` header) when you have it or with your key market language when you don't have it.

answered Nov 27 '11 at 20:44



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5

This is the same question I asked on [Stack Overflow](#). And I got a resource for it, which I'll post as an answer here.

I have found a nice on the choices you can make. There is a section with pros and cons of each method you can use.

I have been struggling with multi-lingual websites for a while now. There are definitely some points in the article that are not mentioned in the answers mentioned. That why I felt the need to post this as an answer. I hope this helps someone out.

answered Jul 19 '10 at 9:19



Saif Bechan
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3

I would not use subdomains. In terms of SEO it's less helpful: <http://www.hobo-web.co.uk/seo-blog/index.php/blog-subdomain-or-subfolder-which-is-best/>.

Similar talk here: [Subdomain versus subdirectory](#).

If you look at big sites, the most often use subdomains.

It also depends if your business is more of a global or local nature. We are a copyrighting agency, so for use its more local business. Therefore Top Level Domains are better than running everything on `.com` .

Filename is a concept I have not seen yet.

answered Jul 19 '10 at 8:15



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The latest adoption into this direction like Single Page Application (SPA) for SAAS based products -

1. Using different websites for different countries will be lose link juice that would otherwise go towards our main branding domain. Eg: - <https://www.example.in/> , <https://www.example.fr/> etc. (Amazon, the big e-commerce giant made this mistake in his past.)
2. Using the same domain with SPA & redirecting all visitors towards it will be fine but we will only be able to target to one language in this case. There will be bad user experience due to different countries needing different languages.
3. There are a lot of best example into this case (Eg- Microsoft & Uber) I have personally like what they are doing and believe that they are using the best SEO practices.

When Lang - English with Different Countries.

- <https://www.example.com/en-in> (For India)
- <https://www.example.com/en-au/> (For Australia)
- etc.

or

- <https://www.uber.com/en/in/> (For India),
- <https://www.uber.com/en/au/> (For Australia)
- <https://www.uber.com/fr/> (For France)
- etc.

When Lang & Country are same -

- <https://www.example.com/fr-fr/> or <https://www.example.com/fr/fr/> (For France)
- <https://www.example.com/ru-ru/> or [https://www.example\[dot\]com/ru/ru/](https://www.example[dot]com/ru/ru/) (For Russia)
- etc.

For more clarity, please see [Google Search Console Help: Managing multi-regional and multilingual sites](#)

protected by John Conde ♦ Jun 26 '13 at 0:48

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