

E-Business - Going Global

By Deborah Collier



The evolution of the Internet and lowering costs of collaborative e-commerce and online meeting technologies, have given every business an easier access to a global markets. Never before has it been so easy to enhance the value of a brand, expand sources of revenue and increase return investment made in technology, resources and know-how. E-business strategist Deborah Collier of Echo E-Business looks at how small businesses can go global without breaking their bank balance.

E-Commerce, which is the element of e-business focused on the sale of goods and services over the Internet, has for many years allowed businesses to sell products and services to any country where legislation and tax rulings allow. The biggest challenge aside from delivery costs, language, tax and cross-border trade regulations has been global marketing. Until more recently the cost of international marketing has not been affordable to the average small business or start-up.

We are living in a wonderful digital age, where technology is growing at a monumental rate. Virtually anything and everything is possible. Technologies, which were available ten years ago only to those with money to invest, are now at the fingertips of virtually any organisation with even the smallest of marketing budgets.

The three biggest enabling technologies of today, aside from the search engines, are social media, web conferencing and online press applications. Social media which includes online video and audio networks, blogs, interactive press releases, business and social networks, is one of the most powerful channels for anybody who knows how to deploy and utilise it effectively. If done well, you can post your announcements, thoughts and ideas for next to nothing, and then let your global advocates spread the word for you.

Web conferencing has become ever more affordable, and is enabling SME's to demonstrate their products, services and know-how to a global audience at an affordable price. The evolution of these tools to enable interaction and collaboration, are allowing us to engage our audiences around the globe, and generate business and strategic relationships.

We are living in a global world, which is getting smaller and smaller day-by-day, with every new technology evolving in the digital explosion we are all part of. What about you and your business? How can online business enable you to reach untapped markets?

Here are my 5 top tips for going global:

E-Lesson 1: Publicise that you are Global

The web by its very nature is a global medium, accessible to any individual in any country with an Internet connection. Have you ever looked at your web site statistics and found that the majority of your visitors come from abroad? That means that any number of global visitors could be a potential buyer. It's important to advertise that you service international clients via your homepage, about, and contact page, or via a countries or regions section on your navigation. Depending on the product or service you provide, you may not need a contact address or phone number in each country, but it helps to have international local rate phone numbers, easily affordable through technologies such as 'Skype'.

You can also issue online press releases about your products and services to sites with a global audience. Ensure that you place some search engine optimized links within, if you can, as that will help boost your search engine rankings.

E-Lesson 2: Investigate Localisation

Localisation, in Internet terms means providing web content in the language of your audience. In financial terms it means offering multi-currency payments. Depending on what products or services you are offering, it can be an immense business challenge and expense to offer multi-lingual content on your web site, intranet or client portal. You need to consider whether the multi-lingual content is necessary, but also whether it will attract clients who will need sales and customer service support in their own language. When it comes to currency, assess the additional costs of offering multi-currency payments to your customers. Online currency converters are readily available to help the sales process if you choose to stick with one currency.

E-Lesson 3: Use Social Media to Foster Advocates in Your Target Countries

Social media has enabled us to raise brand awareness, drive traffic to our web sites and increase our search engine rankings. More importantly it has given us the ability to build relationships not only within our country but externally also. By it's own nature, social media is viral and helps spread the word about who we are, our values and how we can support people, which in turn helps to generate advocacy. Advocacy and referral are the oldest and most successful vehicles for business and lead generation in history. It's not only potential clients that we want to meet using social media, but those who may help us build relationships in their territory or industry, and who will promote what we do, simply because they believe in it.

E-Lesson 4: Plan for International Shipping and Taxation

When selling over the Internet, if you are shipping products, ensure that any e-commerce systems you have in place are sufficiently equipped to deal with a variety of international shipping prices and choices. Continually evaluate your audience base by location, and assess where you might ship your products from. Will it really be cost-effective to ship large items from London to Japan, for example, and will your customers pay the shipping costs? Consider taxation also. In the UK, VAT registered companies can only charge 17.5% taxes to those countries in the EU. This has an implication for your e-commerce systems, and should be thoroughly investigated.

E-Lesson 5: Embrace Online Collaboration and Conferencing Tools

Once you have access to your audience, you will need the tools to interact and engage with them. You should maximise your web site and make use of traditional methods such as phone and personal email. However, it's important to look at ways to reduce your meeting costs, present your products and services to a global audience personally and make it easy for your customers to come to you. You now have affordable technologies such as *'Skype'* and *'Gotomeeting'* for low-cost international calls, conferencing, and workspace sharing. If you are selling an advisory or training service, you can directly leverage these technologies to deliver abroad. As an example, through our training brand *Learnebusiness.com*, technology has allowed us to offer social media and e-business start-up training face-to-face live online with web cams, shared workspaces, voice and chat. We can also deliver large conferences and presentations to a global audience, all at an affordable cost to our business. This is just one example, of how you might leverage today's cutting edge technologies.

Globalising your business is no longer a physical challenge, but an opportunity waiting to be tapped into. Businesses seeking rewards internationally can successfully build their empire, by employing

clever e-business strategies and nurturing relationships using the suite of wonderful tools available to them on the Internet.

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A note from Echo E-Business

If you would like help with any area of your e-business strategy, professional marketing services or e-business training needs, please contact us on:

UK: 0845 838 4869

North America: (+1) 91 176753479

International: +44 208 123 6357

Or contact us via www.echoebusiness.com