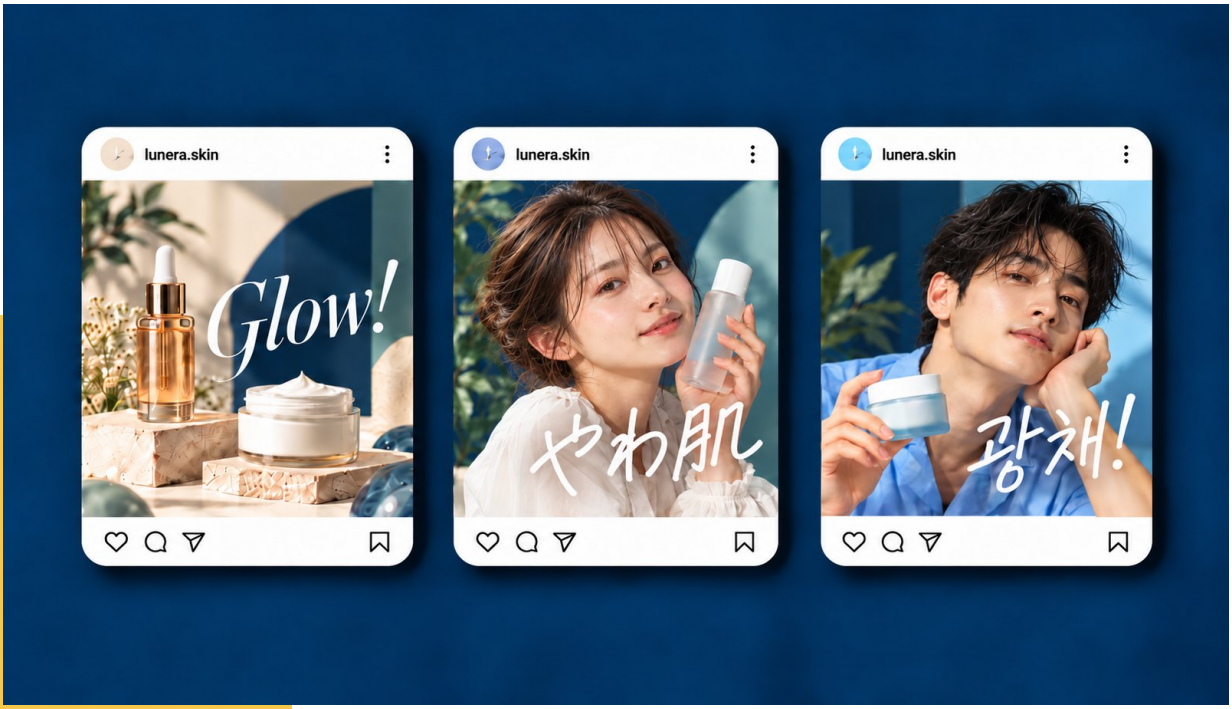


LOCALISATION

Why your ads underperform overseas

And why translation isn’t localization

By Aleksandra Olenkova, Head of Paid Media · Aditiser Marketing Limited

When you take your business into a new market it is tempting to run your existing campaigns through a translator, be it AI or human, and call the job done, but the results are rarely what you were hoping for.

Would you promote a Black Friday event in the MENA region? Are your Easter sale dates the same in Poland as they are in Greece? Are you skipping Singles' Day in China this year? If any of those questions gave you pause, you are already in localization territory, and translation on its own will not get you out of it. These are international marketing decisions before they are language ones.

This article covers what marketing localization actually spans, how it changes each paid channel, and why local market adaptation is an ongoing capability rather than a project with an end date.

What marketing localization covers

Even with a human translator, you can end up with marketing that has been translated but not localized, and that gap between localization versus translation is where most multilingual marketing underperforms. Translation answers one question: what do these words say in another language? Localization answers a harder one: what would persuade someone in this market to buy?

Language and tone of voice

Different cultures expect different levels of formality and directness in ad copy, and within Europe alone the same message may need to sound warmer in English, more direct in German and more editorial in French. Some languages carry multiple formal and informal forms of "you", and it pays to pick one register and hold it throughout, while some markets react badly to standard calls to action such as "Buy now", which can read as pushy.

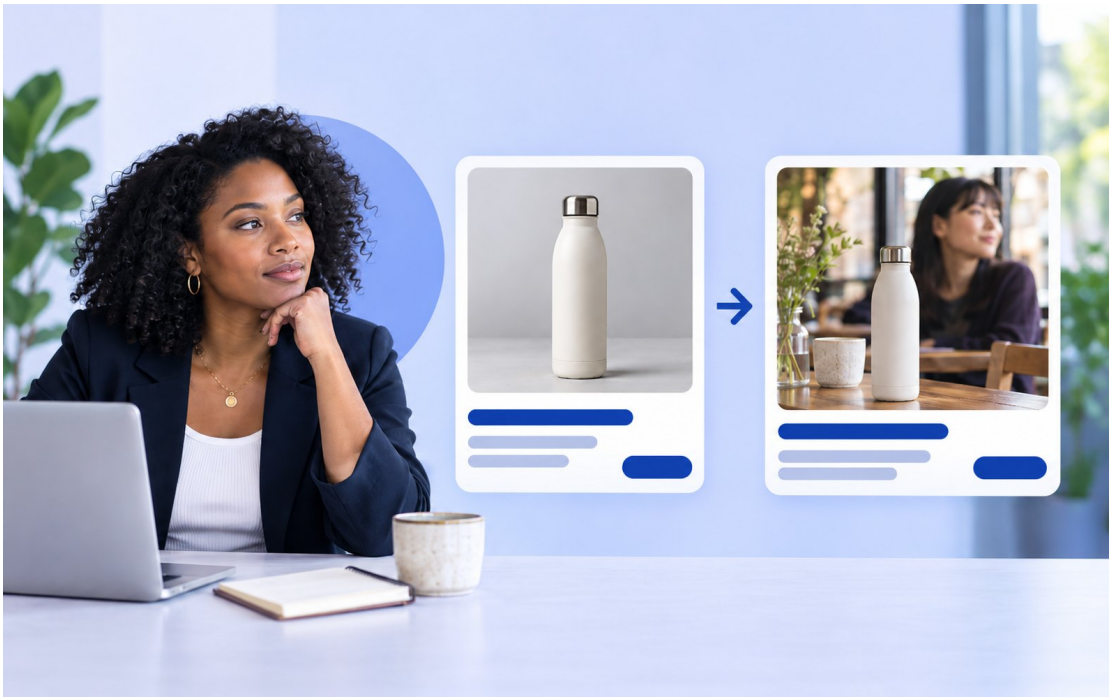
Search behaviour and keyword research

Translating a keyword list often produces terms that are grammatically correct and commercially wrong, and if your Search campaigns are built on straight translations of your English list, your CTR and CVR will be below what you expected.

Each language you work with will bring its own unique challenges that you need to account for. Languages that use non-Latin scripts tend to mix original product names with transliterated variants, compound-noun languages such as German produce long single-word search terms that behave very differently in match types and search term reports, and Japanese search mixes three scripts, with different intent behind a product searched in katakana, kanji or Latin characters. Negative keyword lists should be built from scratch in every language, because most of a translated negative list will be useless.

Consumer intent and the buying stage

Product categories sit at different stages of maturity in different markets, and your marketing needs to reflect that. New Zealand and Australian audiences are shopping for the best mānuka honey their money can buy, while audiences elsewhere may still need to know what it is and what it is used for, which means bidding on broader terms to begin with.



Imagery and creative

Creative often has to vary a great deal from market to market, because housing, models, streets and clothing all signal to customers whether a product is meant for them, which is why localized advertising creatives are key to success in a new market. The expected density of information and the amount of on-image text differ too. Japanese audiences will accept far more text on a creative than a Canadian audience will tolerate.

Promotional messaging and offers

Aggressive percentage-off messaging is welcome in some markets and reads as a quality problem in others. The shape of the offer matters as much as its size: some markets respond to a straight price cut, others to bundles, loyalty points or a free shipping threshold. Free returns are an expectation in parts of Europe but a genuine differentiator elsewhere.

The seasonal calendar

As Kiwis and Aussies we know how often businesses run a Northern Hemisphere seasonal calendar down under without adjusting the messaging for us, and it is easy to make the same mistake in reverse. Black Friday now travels widely, but may be named differently or run to a different length, and other local peaks include Golden Week in Japan, the sales periods governed by regulation in France, Singles' Day in parts of Asia and pre-Ramadan trading in Muslim markets.

Platform preference by market

Your channel mix has to vary market to market or you will waste both budget and opportunity, and marketplace share is the biggest variable. In some markets a category is effectively owned by one or two marketplaces and your own site functions as a brochure, while in others buying direct is normal. Social platform preference varies by country and by age group as well, and in some markets customers pass through several price comparison and voucher code sites before they reach you, which affects both what your attribution shows you and the terms you need in your affiliate program.

Payment and checkout expectations

It may seem obvious, but the payment methods you offer matter: local card penetration, and how comfortable people are entering card details online, can stop customers completing a purchase outright. Consider whether your customers rely on BNPL schemes, whether you offer the one they prefer, and whether bank transfer or invoicing is expected.

Regulation and claim rules

Advertising rules vary market to market: claim substantiation, comparative advertising, price display, discount reference-price rules, influencer disclosure and data consent requirements all differ. In Japan, for example, health claims on supplements are tightly controlled, and a product like vitamin C generally cannot be advertised as immune support.

How localization changes each channel

Multilingual paid media is not one job repeated in four languages, because each channel breaks in its own way.

Paid search

Keyword research, match types, negative lists, ad extensions and the feed content behind Shopping and Performance Max all need local treatment, so structured Google Ads and Shopping management in a new market usually means rebuilding the account around local demand rather than merely duplicating your home-market structure.

Paid social

Creative is everything, so local settings, on-image text volume and hook style all change performance and the same static asset rarely carries across markets. Effective Meta and paid social campaigns in a new market need a locally produced creative pool, not a translated one.

Affiliate

Cashback, voucher, comparison and content publishers hold different shares of each market, commission expectations vary, and the partners driving incremental revenue at home may not operate where you are going, so building an affiliate program in a new market means recruiting local publishers and setting local commercial terms.

Influencer

Creator credibility is local, disclosure rules differ by country, and a brief that works in one market can produce stilted content in another, which is why cross-market influencer campaigns work best when creators are briefed on the proposition and left to express it in their own register.

Localization is not a pre-launch project

Competitors, customers and regulations change every year in every market you operate in, so localization is an ongoing process rather than just a pre-launch checklist, and your global marketing strategy needs revisiting on a schedule rather than signing off once. Check in with your market specialists regularly, and to keep those updates straightforward, invest in an operational structure that is tidy and consistent from the start, because consistent naming, clear campaign governance and reliable reporting are what make cross-market marketing possible at all. Managing paid media at scale across markets depends on that structure far more than on any single creative decision.

Working out where you stand

If you are planning an expansion, or already running campaigns across several markets and wondering why the numbers look nothing like they do at home, the cause is more often localization than budget. Our international growth and localization work covers market selection, search intent research for local keyword sets, creative and messaging adaptation, and reporting split properly by market and language. Get in touch and we can talk through which markets are worth the effort and what it would take to do them properly.

Planning a launch in a new market?

Talk to our team →

Contact

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