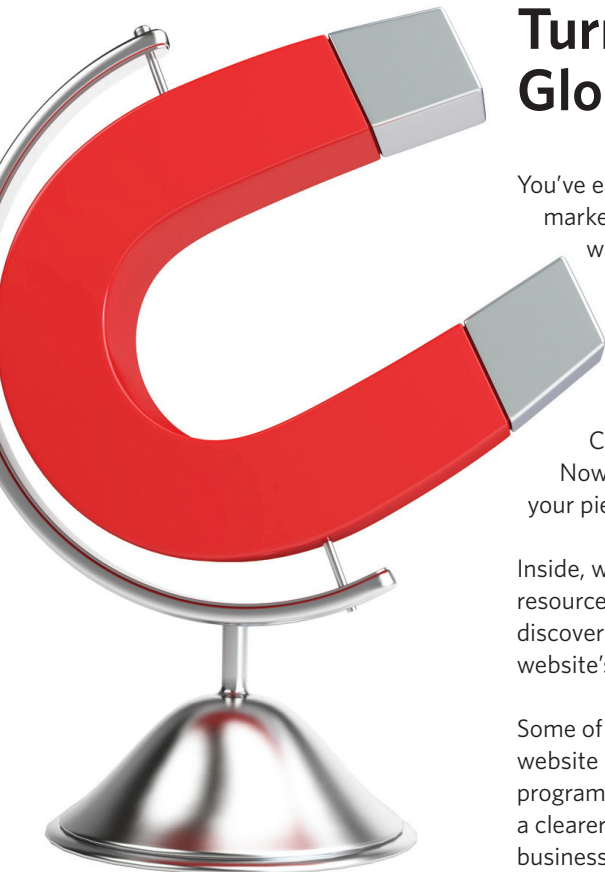# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

## to local, international & lifestyle real estate

December 2012

## ▶ BUILD A BETTER WEBSITE

## Turn Your Website into a Global Business Magnet

You've earned your CIPS designation. Congratulations! Now, it's time to ramp up your marketing efforts to pull in expat clients, overseas clients, and/or local individuals who want to own property in other countries. Is your existing website optimized to help you secure this new business?

Like any new business venture, success requires a strategic plan and extra work. As Albert Einstein said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. You've taken the first step by earning the CIPS designation, which provided essential training and access to valuable resources. Now it's time to take what you have learned and put it into practice, and proactively grab your piece of the global real estate market.

Inside, we'll show you how your website can support your efforts, by offering specific tips and resources that will help attract the global clients you want. We want you to succeed! You'll discover numerous content considerations and design decisions that can greatly enhance your website's performance with global buyers and sellers.

Some of our suggestions may sound "foreign" if you've never dug into the technical side of website programming. Never fear! You only need to understand the general concepts and let your programmer deal with the details. After reviewing our recommendations, we hope you'll have a clearer picture of the many steps you can take to turn your website into a global real estate business magnet. **GP**

# CONTENT
# CONSIDERATIONS

Back in 1996, Bill Gates first coined the term, "content is king." Ever since, online marketers have debated the role of content in attracting website traffic. In recent times, however, changes to Google's all-important ranking algorithms, along with the growing importance of mobile devices, have triggered renewed emphasis on the role of website content. And why not? Aren't words the primary way humans communicate with one another? As a global agent, what steps can you take to make sure your site's content is connecting with visitors?

## Focus Your Home (Index) and About Pages

You probably do more than just global real estate, so your website will need to reflect all of your service offerings. However, to capture the global market, that aspect of your services should appear on your home page. Select no more than your top three service offerings to highlight on the first page your visitors will see, making sure your global niche is one of them.

You will not gain more traffic by splintering your focus. Trying to appeal to everyone will only make you look like a generalist. Don't wax poetic about all your offerings on the home page—you can use secondary pages to address those. Designations you hold that are NOT related to your primary area(s) of focus belong on your About page, where you can show your breadth of knowledge. Remember, target marketing doesn't eliminate potential clients; it focuses on attracting those client types you prefer. Your index page is precious. Treat it as such and dedicate it to the types of clients you are most anxious to attract.

On your About page—often the most-visited page after the Home page—be sure to highlight your global credentials, including your CIPS designation, your membership in globally-focused organizations, and testimonials from past international clients. Doing this will demonstrate prior experience serving global customers and help build credibility with visitors.

## Crafting Content for Clients

Periodically, Google changes its formulas for ranking content in search results. The latest algorithms—called Penguin and Panda—were instituted earlier this year and make it extremely important to ensure that you

have original, quality content (a Panda requirement) and that any incoming links aren't webspam or low-quality, suspect links (a Penguin "gottcha").

On the human side of the equation, you need to ensure your content is delivering what visitors want in an easy-to-digest format:

- **Employ short sentences and use text links** to escort your visitors to pages with more in-depth information about any important topic they may want to explore.

- **Use proper grammar!** Not only is poor grammar annoying to natives, it also makes comprehension more difficult for those who struggle with English as a second language, and it confuses machine translation software. (There's some evidence that even Google prefers good grammar!)

- **Watch word selection and sentence structures** to ensure global clients don't have to wrestle with your text to understand the information.

- **Use bullets** to convey information for easy scanning and quick absorption of information. This will also make it easier for visitors on mobile devices to digest your content.

- **Keep your pages short** to avoid too much scrolling, especially on small screens.

## Text Links Done Right

Text links make it easy for visitors to gain more information and dig deeper into your site, learning more about what interests them most. So make sure you take advantage of text links wherever logical. Don't forget to link images too.

Text and image links are especially important for mobile browsing, since it's easier to touch a link than to type in search queries or scroll around a page looking for additional information. Effective use of text links will permit visitors to quickly skim over the words they don't want to learn more about, and learn more about topics that do interest them with a single touch.

The more information you provide on the topics they seek, the more likely they'll call you to help with their global real estate needs. Properly crafted links will provide all the information they want, while keeping your site clean, uncluttered and easy to navigate.

## What About Tools and Widgets?

There are many useful website widgets available for individuals doing business internationally. You may want to add a currency converter tool, a language translation widget *(see page five)*, or a mapping tool to your site. If you do, be sure the widget(s) you select don't negatively impact your site with slow load times or poor rendering in mobile environments. (For example, widgets using Javascript or Flash should be avoided.) Talk with your webmaster before making these decisions if you aren't able to test the impact of widgets yourself.

One of your CIPS benefits is the CIPS Widget, which offers language translation, international holidays, and conversion tools for currency, area/measurement, and time. Visit the CIPS Personal Marketing Materials page (for CIPS designees only!) on **realtor.org/global** to obtain the code to embed on your site.

## Blogging – Just Do It!

Blogs are a great way to niche your global real estate services, keep your content fresh, improve your online marketing efforts, and reach clients who might otherwise never find you. The world is a big place; carving out your niche in this market is essential. Blogging is the best way to do that.
*Note: If blogging intimidates you, never*

*fear! We will cover blogging for the global marketplace, the importance of original content, ways to develop content that will drive traffic to your site, and how to tap into social networking with your blog in the next issue of* Global Perspectives*!*

## Make Your Site Sticky

How do you keep potential clients on your site? In addition to text links, make it easy for them to discover more about topics that interest them while showcasing your depth of knowledge. You can do this by adding related posts at the bottom of each blog page that feature other blog entries and pages from your site with similar content. When people find your site via a search, they will be more likely to stay and read more (and will see more of your expertise) when related content is only a click away.

Helping people find your site also involves knowing what words and phrases they are most likely to employ while searching. You can investigate possible keywords by using a free online keyword research tool (Google's is most popular, at **googlekeywordtool.com**). Also examine your site's analytics to determine which keywords are currently generating traffic to your site.

## Pulling It All Together

Good content for websites doesn't happen easily. Your written content must be strong, but to communicate effectively in our wired world many other considerations are also at play, including keywords, text links and more. To better understand how to pull all these considerations together, review the case example on page four. By employing a similar approach throughout your site, you'll score higher points with visitors and search engines alike. **GP**

# Describing Your Global Services

## Case in Point

You may want to "go global" on your home page, or you may prefer to use a primary web page (in the main navigation of your website) that says more about your global real estate services.

Most of your potential clients won't know the CIPS acronym, so you should educate them on your training and special skills and how you can help them achieve their goals. Utilize terms they recognize and use when searching for the services you offer. Consider the particular phrases and words they will probably use to ask questions—or enter into Google or another search engine.

**To the right is an example of "general" global real estate copy for an index page or linked primary page.** (You, of course, will need to focus your own version on your specific areas of expertise with the related keywords and keyword phrases.)

Notice how this list uses many of the key terms you are going to want to "hit" on your website? In this example, the keywords/phrases include: USA, real estate, state, international citizen living in the USA, different country, United States Citizen, overseas, United States of America, globe, global real estate, global relocation, global relocation expert, residential property, international, international citizen, retire, retirement, travel, CIPS, Certified International Property Specialist, REALTOR®, relocate, expat.

Gain extra strength with search engines by linking (the words in bold) to pages or articles on your site that offer more information on each topic—and repeat the key terms on those pages too.

### EXAMPLE

**Moving to the USA?** Need help finding real estate in the United States? I can help you locate and purchase the residential property you need.

**Are you an international citizen living in the USA who needs to move to a new area?** I can help you relocate to a new area, a different state, or even a different country.

**Are you a United States Citizen looking for property overseas?** Do you want a global relocation expert? Let me help you find the perfect place to call home.

**Do you want to invest in property inside the United States of America or across the globe?** I can help you with all your global real estate needs.

**Planning to retire?** Want to travel and eventually settle down and enjoy your retirement years overseas? As a REALTOR® with the Certified International Property Specialists (CIPS) designation, I can help you navigate the process, help you relocate and settle in, and answer your questions about being an expat along the way.

*Note: Although this text is offered for your consideration, please do not copy it verbatim and post it to your website. (Doing so will cause your site to contain identical content to others who may do the same thing, which will hurt rather than help your rankings.) Do use it as an example of how to construct your own bulleted list of services using terms specific to your global business niche.*

# Language Translation Tools

There are many machine translation applications available on the market today. The one best suited to your needs depends on the translation method you prefer and the languages you need to translate. Here are two cross platform, web-based applications you can add to your site:

**Google Translate** – Still in beta version, this tool is based on statistical translations, which can cause errors ranging from the merely comical to exactly reversed meanings. Google Translate does offer the greatest number of translating languages, with 65 so far. Originally slated to be shut down last year, Google's free service was extended... with a paid version surfacing.

Right now, you can go to **translate.google.com** and click on "web translator" in the lower navigation bar to access their free website translator plugin for your site. Select your options and Google will provide the code you need. (Unless you are a techie, pass this information to your web programmer – or simply ask them to add Google translate to your site.)

**Bing Translator** – In its final version, Bing offers free translation for 38 languages utilizing Microsoft's linguistically informed statistical machine translation system, which tends to be a little more accurate than a purely statistical method. (**bing.com/translator**)

Website owners can add a widget for translation using HTML code. Design your widget by visiting **microsofttranslator.com/widget** or ask your web guru to work their magic to get it installed. Some, but not all languages, can utilize the text-to-speech option to speak the translation.

Check your site analytics to see which languages/ countries are currently represented by your website visitors. Make sure you select these and any common languages in the client demographic you are trying to reach. If you add a translator widget to your website, do not clutter it up with 30+ different and unnecessary languages. Keep it simple, clean and targeted.

**More options** – There are also mobile apps available for on-the-go translations for a limited number of languages. The iOS (iPhone) version was released in 2008 and an Android app followed in 2010. You may want to investigate the "conversation" mode, which allows the user to speak for translation instead of just using text.

Finally, if your site includes video, consider expanding your reach to clients who speak other languages by using YouTube's free Captions and Subtitles features, which can be paired with YouTube Translation to provide automatically-translated subtitles.

*Note: Please remember that no automated translation tool should be used for legal documents; it is merely a way to facilitate communication in a pinch and to make your site more welcoming to non-native speaking visitors. In the United States, check with your local or state association. Many of them have sample translated documents. While the final, signed document must be in English, you can use this to help communicate the contents of the document.*

# DESIGN

## DECISIONS ▼

If a website is visually attractive, most people will say it is well-designed. But in the world of website design, good looks are just a small part of the story. Visitors also want a good experience, meaning they don't want to get frustrated finding or viewing whatever they came for.

To help them along, a site needs to be well-designed in terms of the way it is organized and the way programming decisions are made—details that can make or break a visitor's experience and a site's performance with search engines. Follow these design recommendations to make your website shine on a global stage.

## Keep it Simple and Mobile Friendly

The best website design employs a minimalist approach. That does not mean your site needs to be black and white, devoid of images, and gray with text. It shouldn't be boring, but it should be well-designed. Good design doesn't just happen; you have to plan it.

Remember, many visitors will be accessing your site from a tablet or a smart phone. The number of mobile devices used to access the web is growing at an astounding rate and is expected to overtake desktop visits as early as 2014. In many countries outside the U.S., the pace of mobile adoption is even faster.

Design your site with this in mind. If your site's navigation and content can't easily be scanned, you are going to lose potential clients. Some experts go so far as to say that NOT having a mobile-friendly site will ultimately cost you points with the major search engines. (To read more about Google's GoMo initiative, visit **howtogomo.com**.)

Using the following design tips will improve your site for access from desktop and laptop computers, while making it more welcoming and accessible when clients are "on the go" with their mobile devices.

## Highly Recommended: WordPress

If you are designing a new site (or redesigning an old one) WordPress is your best option for a web software design tool. Google adores the clean code in this particular content management system and updates can be set to automatically ping search services to say "Come index me!" Can you say "improved search engine optimization and marketing"?

Once it's set up, WordPress makes it easy for you to go into your site and update content or make changes on your own—without waiting for a webmaster to fit you into their schedule. This saves you money and hassle and encourages you to keep your content fresh (another way to woo Google).

With WordPress, blogging is not an "add-on" to your website, it's an integral part of it. Its blogging-based platform can be used to construct your entire site by employing a combination of Pages (think standard web pages) and Posts (think blog posts). Pages can have additional secondary pages linked "below" them. A wide variety of templates are available, or you can hire a designer/ programmer to create a custom WordPress site.

Even though a WordPress site doesn't HAVE to include a blog, don't hesitate to leverage the benefits of blogging. You'll greatly expand your reach and attract more clients to your site.

Make sure your WordPress template looks good on mobile devices. Test it on several screen sizes and devices to be sure: large tablets, small tablets, and smartphones of all flavors. If your template is not particularly mobile friendly, utilize a mobile conversion WordPress plugin like WP Touch Plugin, MobilePress Plugin or the WordPress Mobile Pack Plugin to automatically "mobilize" your site for you.

## Employ Hard-Working Visuals

Don't skip photos. Instead, keep them to a minimum and optimize them for the web to improve load times. Always include at least one appropriate image on each page and blog entry to help convey your message and keep your site visually appealing. Proper alt tags will also leverage images to boost your online marketing efforts.

For video content, avoid using Javascript and Flash animations since many mobile devices don't translate these well. You want all the features of your site to be available on all platforms. Consider the extra marketing punch of uploading your video content to YouTube for an expanded audience. Then embed the uploaded YouTube video on your website. Most mobile devices will automatically launch YouTube videos in a mobile-friendly app without snags.

## Make Contacting You "Automatic"

If you want people to call you, make it easy for them to do it. Every page on your site should have your email address and your phone number. If you use the proper HTML code, these bits of information can be linked in a way that will automatically launch the correct application on mobile devices. Your email address will launch the user's email program of choice and your phone number will be linked to dial your number with a touch. (Many non-mobile devices will offer a prompt to add your telephone number to their contacts.)

Pass these details along to your webmaster so he or she can tweak your site's design and make it easy for people to reach you:

### HTML Code to Launch Email:
Some operating systems will automatically detect email addresses (and phone numbers) in text to launch the appropriate program or app. If you don't want to display your email address, a snippet of code like this will still enable email with a touch or a click:
`<a href="mailto:email@yoursite.com">email me!</a>`

### HTML Code to Launch a Dialer:
Be sure to add the code using the international format (plus sign, country code, local area code, then the number):
`<a href="tel:+18001234567">Call Me: 1-800-123-4567</a>`

## Encourage Social Interaction

Social networking is an important aspect of your online marketing. Make sure your visitors can follow you on your Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and other social networking sites. Using "at-a-glance" graphics that visitors can touch (or click) to follow you makes it simple for them to add you to their newsfeed. Once added, your name and activities will be on their radar and you will begin to build social relationships and a healthy client base.

## Additions, Maintenance, and Check-Ups

If a potential client finds your site, but can't find the information they need or becomes frustrated trying to navigate your site...you will lose the client. Ways to prevent this:

• Don't add widgets and graphics unless they improve the usefulness of your site.

• Regularly test your site on new devices, platforms, and browser versions as they are released.

• Immediately make adjustments to keep your site working smoothly, including version updates on WordPress and any plugins you are using.

Add new content on a regular basis, but be sure you have the client in mind. Don't clutter your site with information that will not benefit them. Opt for quality information and avoid anything that could be considered spam or gives the appearance that your priority is loading up on keywords instead of being helpful and conversational.

Write for the reader and design for easy use and your website will draw the global real estate clients you want! **GP**

## Attracting Buyers through **Realtor.com®International**

Buyers from all over the world can browse U.S. listings in their own language, currency, and units of measurement...for free! This time last year, the Realtor.com® International site launched and it now attracts nearly one million unique international visitors each month. Linking to your listings on **realtor.com/international** is an excellent way to globalize your web site and allow these buyers the ease of browsing in the language most comfortable to them.

## Have You Renewed Your CIPS Membership?

*Don't miss out on future issues of* **Global Perspectives** *in 2013!* Maintain your CIPS designation to continue receiving this newsletter, which will be packed with content to help you continue globalizing your business in 2013 and beyond. Next year's topics include blogging for global business, a special focus on Brazil and its real estate opportunities, expats retiring abroad, global investment markets, networking through global real estate organizations, and how university-related housing for overseas students presents an opportunity.

**Renew your CIPS membership online by December 31 and save 10%.** Renewing allows you to continue using all your CIPS member benefits like customizable print and electronic marketing materials, the CIPS smartphone app, featured listing in the online CIPS directory, and use of the prestigious and internationally-recognized CIPS logo. *Note: Renewals received after January 31, 2013 will be assessed a US$50 activation fee.*

If you have not already renewed your membership you can do so by visiting **realtor.org/cipsdues**.

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