

RIBA
Working Internationally
Internationalising your website





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Introduction

Any practice setting up today will have an online presence of some sort, whether it be a LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook account or a fully functional website. Most practices will choose to present their offering through a website. However, not all will make the most of the opportunities that a website offers, particularly when they are looking to expand into new markets.

How successful your website is at home will be apparent from feedback you receive from your domestic clients and colleagues. However, making a website that is effective overseas requires careful consideration – it requires more than just a translation of your home site.

This guide presents **ten steps to internationalising your website**. It aims to help you use your website to achieve an effective overseas presence. This means both getting your practice noticed abroad and ensuring that your website can support your international activities. This guide will help you ensure that potential overseas clients will be able to find your website and will be able to navigate through it quickly and easily; in so doing, building their confidence in your organisation.

A survey by Forrester Research found that internet users are likely to stay on a website for twice as long, and are three times more likely to interact with it, if it is in their own language.

An international website should:

- include content written in International English or a foreign language
- have plenty of images (e.g. photos and diagrams)
- have contact details that make it easy for international visitors to contact the firm
- make it straightforward for international customers to find the call to action
- be set up so that multilingual content can be added easily.



Ten steps to internationalising your website

This guide presents a ten-step plan for internationalising your practice's website, to ensure that it is promoting your business effectively in overseas markets for architecture and related services. The plan is outlined here, and more detail on each of the steps is presented in the following sections.

The plan is relevant to all practices working internationally, from those embarking on overseas projects for the first time to experienced practices looking to improve their business performance.

Strategy

Is your website helping you to achieve your international strategy?

Does your website communicate a sense of international activity?

Does your website include a catalogue of your international capability?

1. Define the international web strategy
2. Structure pages for international visitors

Research

Do you know from which countries your visitors are coming or via which websites?

3. Research the international markets and web users
4. Monitor international traffic

Grab attention and be trusted

Can someone overseas, looking at your site, quickly and easily find your call to action?

Does your website present a consistent brand image across your target markets?

5. Create clear, internationally appropriate content
6. Localise and translate for overseas markets

Technical and in-office back-up support

Are you able to handle sales or technical enquiries arising from foreign customers?

9. Considerations for an international web presence
10. In-office back-up support

Promotion – be found

Can potential overseas customers find your site through their local search engine using relevant keywords?

Are your potential customers in your target market talking about your practice?

7. Be visible to overseas search engines (on page)
8. Promote the site overseas (off page)





Strategy

Step 1. Define the international web strategy

Be very clear about what role you are expecting the international pages of your website to fulfil for an international visitor. Websites should be more than just a catalogue of recent projects, yet we would not expect an architectural practice to sell their services online.

You should first consider the objectives for an international website.

Purpose – What do you want the website to do?

For example:

- contribute to your corporate positioning strategy by providing, e.g., engaging educational content about your unique specialism (environment, low-energy building, pedestrian and traffic conflicts)
- stimulate client interest in your company
- attract applicants for job vacancies
- impress potential clients
- publicise your practice's attendance at events.

As well as thinking about the purpose of the site, you must address other strategic considerations:

Reach – Targeting your website at all overseas markets is a scattergun strategy. Instead, focus on a specific country, region or number of countries.

Audience – Identify the different customer groups that your website is aimed at – are you targeting the construction industry as a whole, or a segment of the industry, such as retail, airports, hospitals, education, city planners or complementary designers and architects?

Message (call to action) – For each of these target groups, what do you want them to do once they find your website?

Medium – Will your website be viewed mainly on a mobile device, a Mac or a PC?



Step 2. Structure pages for international visitors

Securing an appropriate domain name(s) for your website – one that supports your international strategy – will give the right impression of your company on the web and improve the chances of international customers finding your website.

Typically, your website should have:

- an international landing page, written in International English and hosted on a generic top-level domain, e.g. www.company.com

plus either

- directories developed within the website for each country, region or language (e.g. www.company.com/fr) that enable a particular language or country to be targeted in a relevant search engine's webmaster, or
- a series of localised website domains hosted in the targeted foreign countries (www.company.fr), which could be hosted abroad.

A local domain is the favoured solution where a specific country is being targeted as it gives the added appearance of a local presence in that market, and allows visitors from certain geographic locations to find you more effectively. If you have started to develop an international presence using your domestic market URL, this should now be kept for developing your local market web presence, while other URLs are developed for international target markets. For example, if you are based in the UK, keep your www.company.co.uk domain as your local UK site.

Pages on a country code top-level domain (ccTLD), e.g. www.company.fr, will already be targeted to the specific country, but pages on a generic top-level domain (gTLD), e.g. www.company.com/fr, will need to be targeted so that the search engine knows the country for which the pages are written. You can do this within the search engine's webmaster, e.g. Google Search Console.

Example of an appropriate domain – .com

A gTLD can be used as a starting point for developing an international web presence.

adamarchitecture.com/about/

ADAM ARCHITECTURE

ABOUT US PROJECTS NEWS CONTACT

Our company (About Us)
我们的公司 (About Us)
The Directors
The Team
Awards
Publications
Academic
ADAM Blog
ADAM TV
Recruitment

About Us

ADAM Architecture is a leading UK practice specialising in classical architecture, and contextual urban design.

The practice is run by six directors (left to right) Robert Adam, Nigel Anderson, Paul Hanve George Saumarez Smith. The directors lead their own projects and have their own design expertise in the field of classical and traditional architecture. Through their broad involvement in education, research and writing, the directors have advanced the acceptance of traditional architecture.

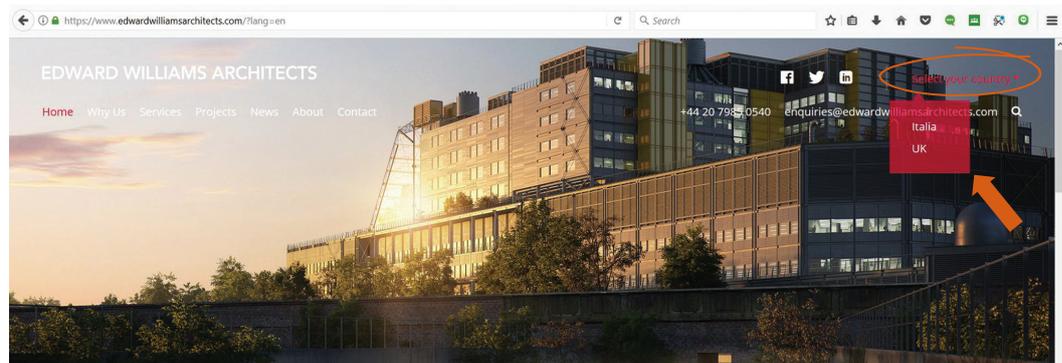
Read more about the directors and see examples of their work.

The Team

The team of around 70 staff across the offices in Winchester and London are highly skilled and experienced architects, technologists, urban designers, an historical researcher, consultants, project managers and administrative support staff. Professor Dan Cruickshank, well known for his publication and television work on historic architecture, acts as the firm's Historic Building Consultant.

Example of use of directories within the website

A simple country drop-down menu enables users to select the pages specific to their country.



This firm has a gTLF with subdirectories (below) and also owns the ccTLD for its target country (www.edwardwilliamsarchitects.it) which redirects to here.





Research

Step 3. Research the international markets and web users

To be an effective international website, your site must be visible to your potential overseas customers. Web users must be able to find your site easily when searching online using a relevant keyword or phrase in their local language. You can test whether a customer entering your service into their search engine would find relevant web pages from your website on the first, second or third page of results.

You should seek to understand how your potential customers are searching for architectural services, and how this varies from country to country. You can then use this information to create content that is relevant, engaging and credible for your target audience. Research the keywords they use and embed those words and phrases into your web content. Google AdWords can help you here. Another way to achieve this is to find a specialist provider in multilingual search engine optimisation to undertake the research necessary to identify appropriate and effective keywords.

Work closely with your overseas partners and associates to research the behaviour and culture of customers in your target markets; ask them to test your website, checking that the page contents and images are appropriate for them. Find out whether the images, symbols, colours and graphics you have chosen are suitable for your intended market, so that they don't mislead or offend in any way. Also, check that the site is described appropriately on the local search engine results page.

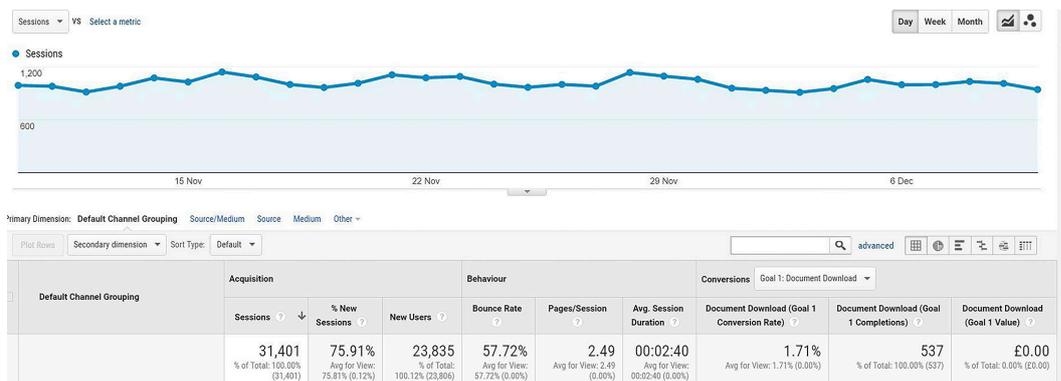
Step 4. Monitor international traffic

With reference to your international web strategy, you should carefully monitor the traffic to your web pages using an analytics program. This will provide valuable information about the visitors to your site – in particular, how they have found your site – as well as useful statistics for tracking performance.

Follow up visitors to your website by asking them about their experience of using the site.

 Short introductory videos on different aspects of Google Analytics can be found at:

- video 1 on Google Analytics (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ebh-aAAv66o>)
- video 2 on Google Analytics (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WC3ONXJn9FQ>).



Example of the detail that can be accessed using Google Analytics, such as the time visitors spend on a site, how they found the site and what actions they have taken.

Grab attention and be trusted

Step 5. Create clear, internationally appropriate content

Prospects visiting your website should immediately recognise that they have come to the appropriate place.

The landing page needs to grab their attention and encourage them to explore more of the site by giving clear, simple and straightforward instructions regarding navigation. It should contain your branding and a relevant strapline describing what you do, and position your practice as an international company – one that is interested in doing business in places other than your domestic market.

The page need to be written in a way that a potential client can understand quickly. One way of achieving this is by using International English, which is designed to be universally and easily understood across the world. To ensure that the language is as easy as possible for a non-native English speaker to read:

- avoid complex sentences
- use bullet points, headings and numbers
- use visuals and diagrams and include explanations
- add captions to photos.

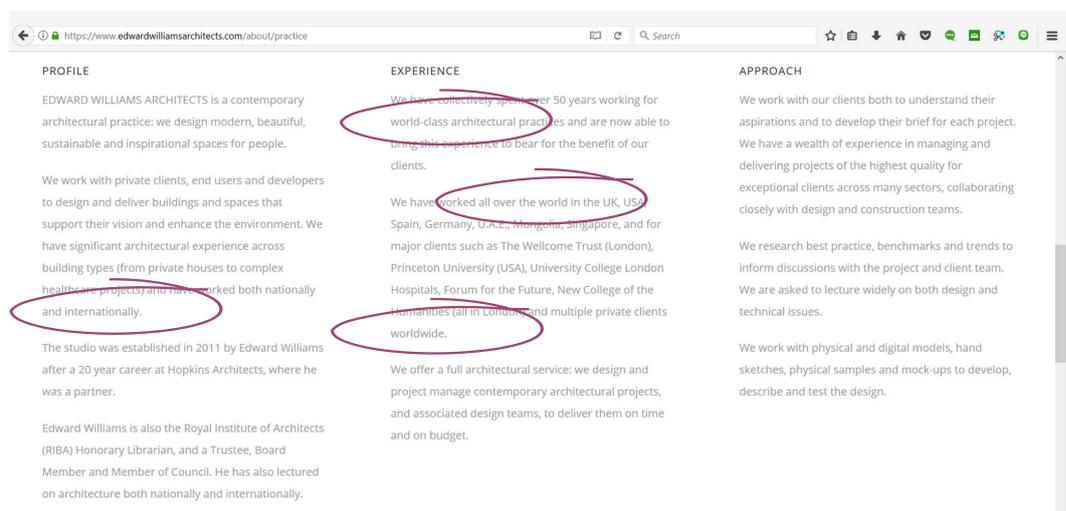
The Plain English campaign has some entertaining examples of how wording can be improved at <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/campaigning/examples/before-and-after.html>

These principles should also help improve your domestic market web presence – a clear message is vital for all website visitors, regardless of their nationality – and should help your website to achieve what you want from it. Your message must be clear and easy to understand and your content must be interesting and engaging.

Include references to memberships and accreditations on your website, to demonstrate your practice's credibility. Include the fact that you are a RIBA member or that the practice is part of the RIBA International Chartered Practice Scheme.

Examples of demonstrating international experience

This practice's international experience is integrated into its 'about the practice' page.



The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the 'about the practice' page for Edward Williams Architects. The page is divided into three columns: PROFILE, EXPERIENCE, and APPROACH.

PROFILE: EDWARD WILLIAMS ARCHITECTS is a contemporary architectural practice: we design modern, beautiful, sustainable and inspirational spaces for people. We work with private clients, end users and developers to design and deliver buildings and spaces that support their vision and enhance the environment. We have significant architectural experience across building types (from private houses to complex healthcare projects) and have worked both nationally and internationally. The studio was established in 2011 by Edward Williams after a 20 year career at Hopkins Architects, where he was a partner. Edward Williams is also the Royal Institute of Architects (RIBA) Honorary Librarian, and a Trustee, Board Member and Member of Council. He has also lectured on architecture both nationally and internationally.

EXPERIENCE: We have collectively spent over 50 years working for world-class architectural practices and are now able to bring this experience to bear for the benefit of our clients. We have worked all over the world in the UK, USA, Spain, Germany, UAE, Mongolia, Singapore, and for major clients such as The Wellcome Trust (London), Princeton University (USA), University College London Hospitals, Forum for the Future, New College of the Humanities (all in London), and multiple private clients worldwide. We offer a full architectural service: we design and project manage contemporary architectural projects, and associated design teams, to deliver them on time and on budget.

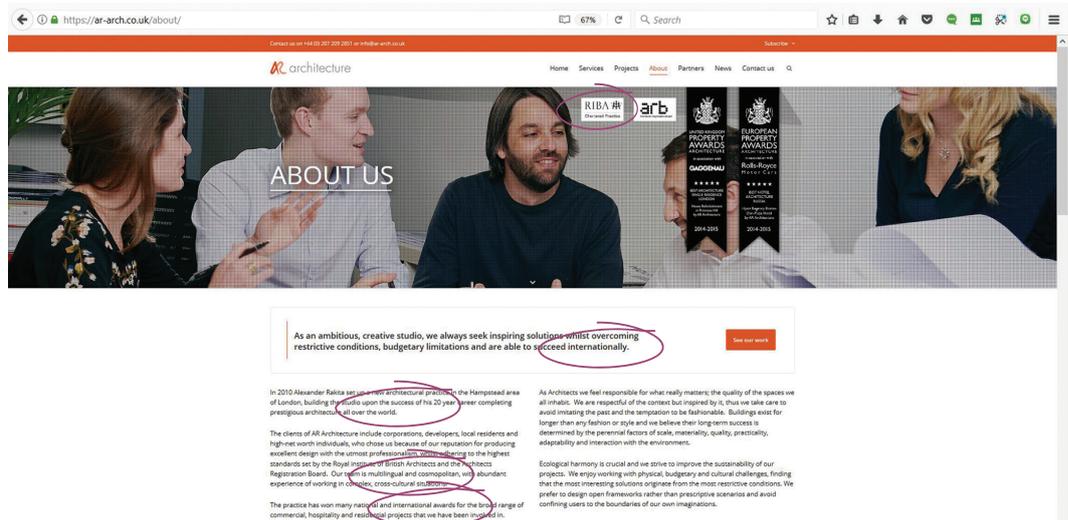
APPROACH: We work with our clients both to understand their aspirations and to develop their brief for each project. We have a wealth of experience in managing and delivering projects of the highest quality for exceptional clients across many sectors, collaborating closely with design and construction teams. We research best practice, benchmarks and trends to inform discussions with the project and client team. We are asked to lecture widely on both design and technical issues. We work with physical and digital models, hand sketches, physical samples and mock-ups to develop, describe and test the design.

Red circles in the Experience section highlight the following phrases: "We have collectively spent over 50 years working for world-class architectural practices and are now able to bring this experience to bear for the benefit of our clients.", "We have worked all over the world in the UK, USA, Spain, Germany, UAE, Mongolia, Singapore, and for major clients such as The Wellcome Trust (London), Princeton University (USA), University College London Hospitals, Forum for the Future, New College of the Humanities (all in London), and multiple private clients worldwide.", and "We offer a full architectural service: we design and project manage contemporary architectural projects, and associated design teams, to deliver them on time and on budget."

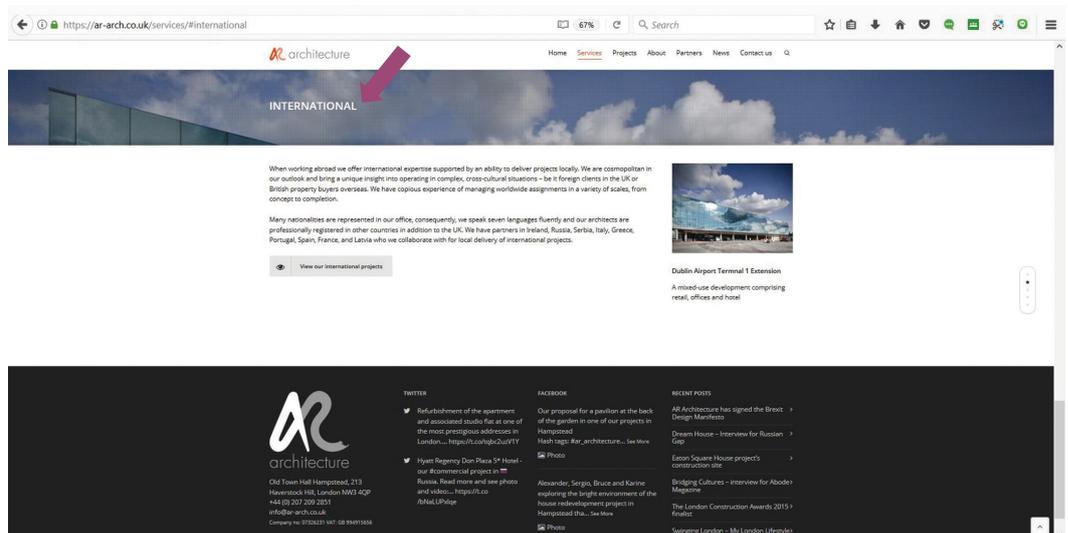


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International experience and RIBA Chartered Practice status are clearly displayed on this practice's 'about' page.



Building credibility: This practice includes references to language skills, international experience and partnerships, demonstrating that projects can be delivered.



Step 6. Localise and translate for overseas markets

To appeal to prospects from around the world, the content of your website should be localised for visitors from different countries.

Can people quickly find the relevant pages?

A visitor accessing your website from Australia, for example, would expect to see content relevant to Australia, such as news, trade shows, conferences, local award ceremonies, membership of Australian industry bodies, events and local contact details.

You should ideally have a different landing page for each market you aim to work in. You should also check that the landing pages load up quickly when viewed in the target countries.

Are the pages completely localised and translated professionally (including menus, image descriptors and popups) and are the contact details localised?

A potential customer may lose trust in a website and leave it at any stage. Presenting relevant content in the local language on a ccTLD (e.g. www.company.fr) will give international visitors confidence that your firm is operating in their market and has a local presence.

Work with your local contacts to create the landing pages. If necessary, start again from scratch. Creating content in local languages demonstrates a sensitivity to cultural differences and a commitment to working within those markets for the long term.

You should always use professional translation services, to ensure that you give the correct impression of your firm in another country. If possible, ask a local partner or an architectural contact to proofread the final pages before they are published.

With reference to the research conducted at step 3, make sure that any images, symbols, colours and graphics you have selected are suitable for the intended market.



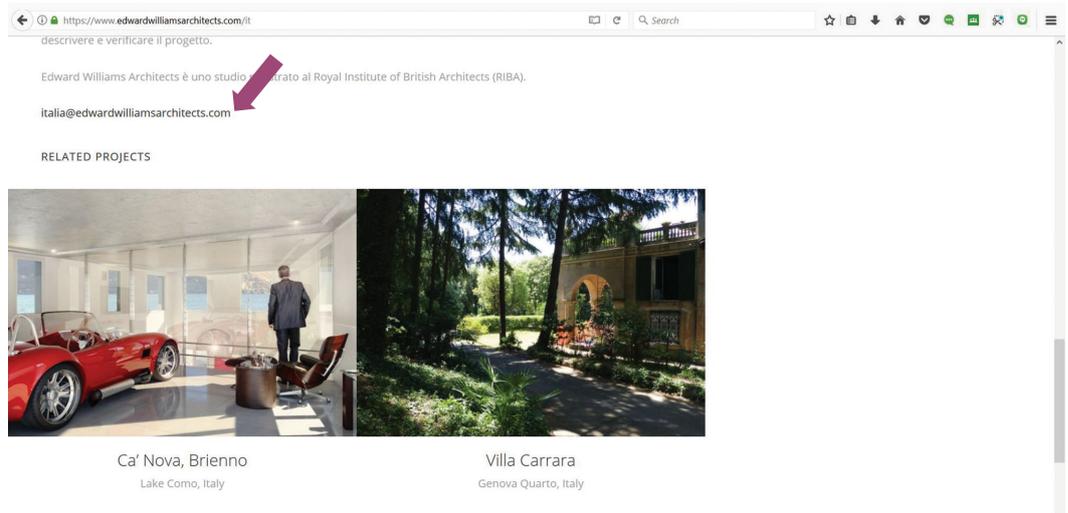
Example of a culturally appropriate image – a park and shopping centre in Abu Dhabi.
Source: www.benoy.com/news



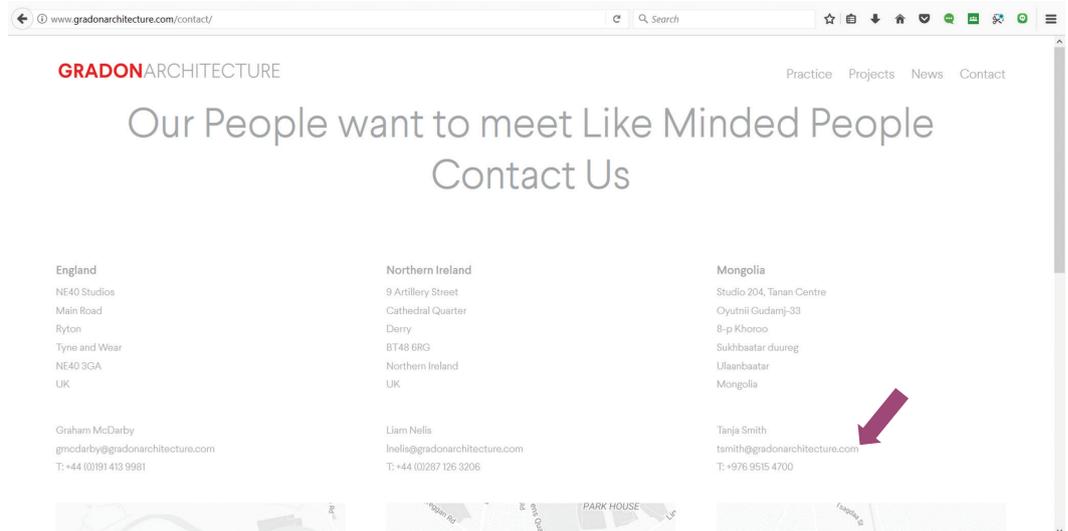
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Examples of localised content

Local email address (to keep enquiries separate), local projects and professionally translated content.



Localised contact details.





Promotion – be found

Step 7. Be visible to overseas search engines (on page)

There are two main ways to attract a target audience to your website:

1. **International paid search** – A search engine company is paid to give a webpage a favourable position within its search engine results page (SERP).

You can use paid search to advertise your website on search engines and other online networks. This allows you to target those people searching for your particular service. Essentially, you will be bidding against other practices to appear in a certain position on a SERP, but will only pay if somebody clicks through to your website.

People in non-English-speaking markets tend to search in their own language. Therefore, conducting a targeted campaign in the local language could be a good way to generate new leads and increase your visibility as a newcomer to a particular market. Paid search in other languages is often less competitive – and therefore cheaper – than in English.

A paid search can be set up to be very specific about who, where and when you target, limiting your payments to specific types of customers, countries, regions, cities, language and, even, times of day.



An introductory video on paid links can be found at:

- What is a “paid link”? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuplbMyMfBI>).

and/or

2. **International Search Engine Optimisation** (natural or organic SEO) – Specific keywords are included within the pages of a site so that local search engines will present these pages to a customer searching for that keyword.

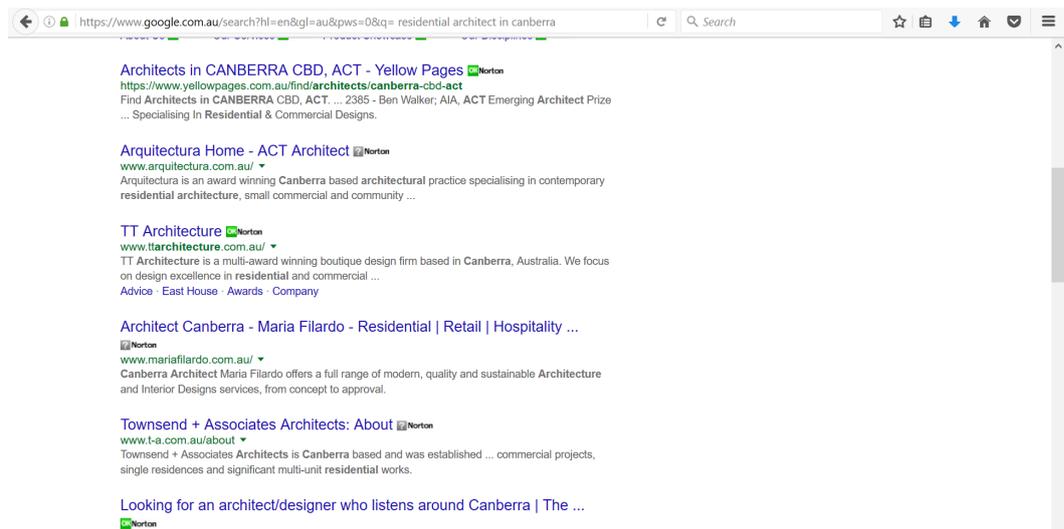
The search engine results displayed in the UK for a specific keyword will be different to those displayed for the same keyword in, say, Australia, and different again from those shown for the translated keyword in France. You will therefore have to be aware of the best keywords to use in each of the languages you are using on your website.

See **Step 3** (page 8) regarding researching keywords.



Example search page

Simulated search as an Australian looking for a 'residential architect in Canberra'.



Step 8. Promote the site overseas (off page)

You should supplement any paid search campaigns and search engine optimisation with additional promotional activities, outside of the website itself. Examples of actions you should consider in addition to developing the website include:

- content marketing – using original and engaging material (blogs or video) to attract interest on social media and direct to your website
- posting on **Facebook**, **LinkedIn**, **Twitter** and **Pinterest**
- subscribing to relevant foreign online directories
- targeting customers by email in their home countries
- establishing reciprocal relationships to increase the number and quality of links into your site.

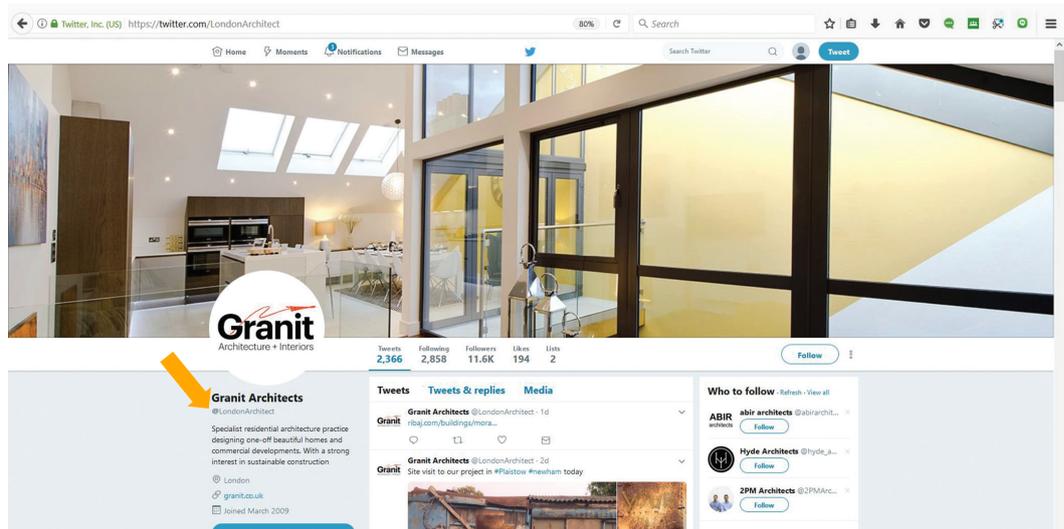




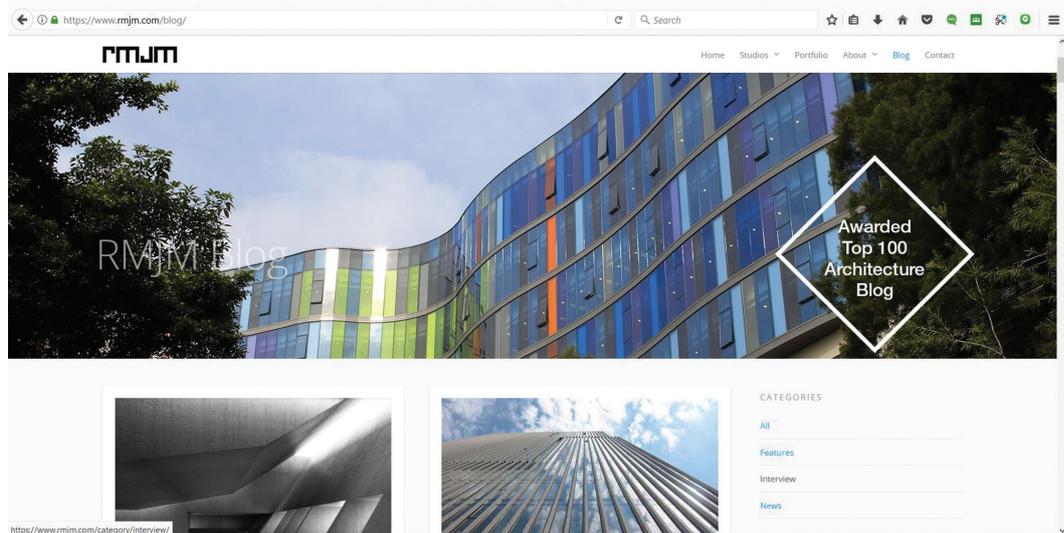
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Examples of off-page promotion

A Twitter handle is valuable for promoting a practice internationally.



Blogs are an ideal way to attract interest in your practice.





Technical and in-office back-up support

Step 9. Technical considerations for an international web presence

You must make sure that the technical aspects of your website have been properly developed to support its international use.

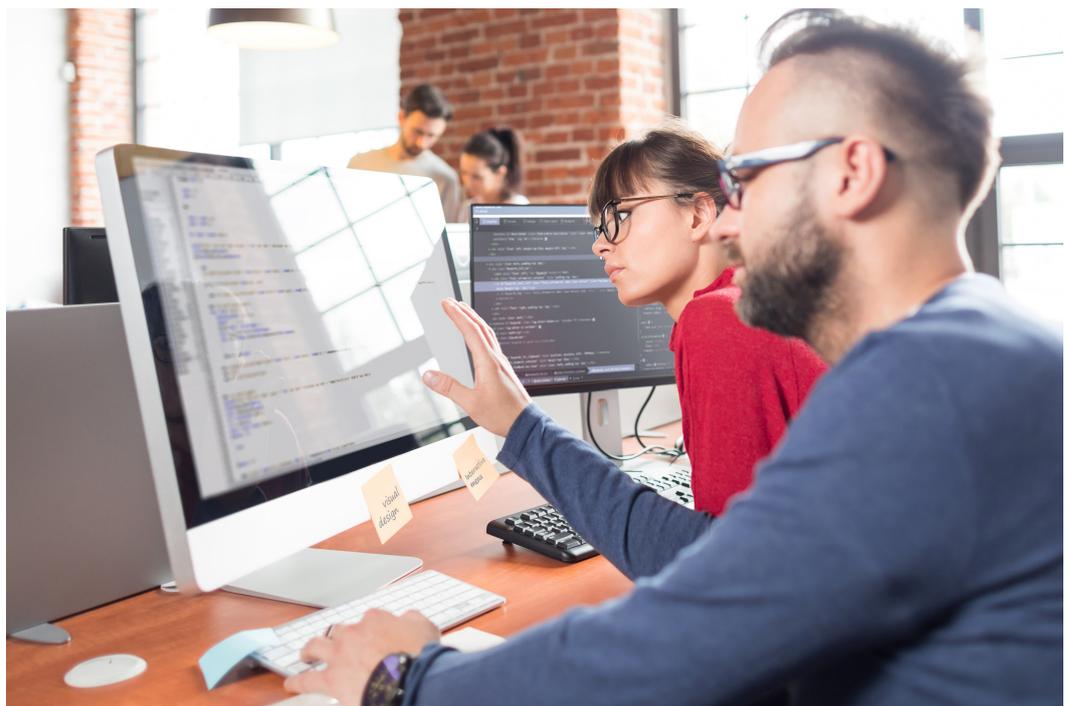
Many small businesses do not have the skills in-house to create a website that is ready to go international (from a technical point of view). In this case, you should work with a web developer.

You may wish to refer your web designer to the W3 Consortium, an international group that develops standards for many areas of web development, including international aspects. The W3 Consortium is globally recognised as the organisation that establishes web standards and guidelines. One of its key principles is to make the World Wide Web available to all.

When creating forms to collect information about customers enquiring about your practice, be aware that some cultures and languages require larger fields to collect the relevant information. Be flexible on the address, telephone and county fields and be sure to collect the country of origin. Ensure that your forms can gather data in different scripts.

Step 10. In-office back-up support

Before going live with a foreign language on the website or targeting a specific non-English-speaking market, you should ensure that you have systems in place to deal effectively with any enquiries that might arise. This could be through employing a linguist in-house or by forming a relationship with a translation agency. You never know which enquiries might turn out to be valuable future opportunities.





Who can help?

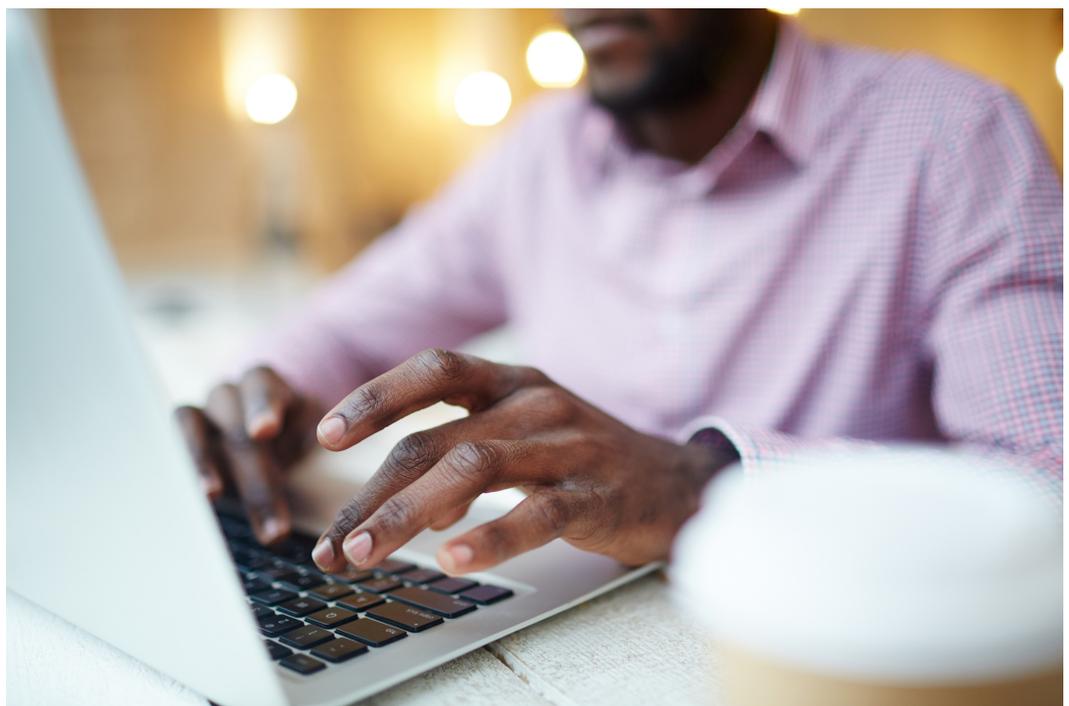
All practices

- **W3 Consortium** – for detailed technical guidelines, see the W3 Consortium's Internationalisation pages, at:
 - www.w3.org/International/getting-started/
- Specialist web developers can be found by looking on:
 - Yellow Pages
 - search engines
 - <https://econsultancy.com/directories/suppliers/>

UK practices

In addition to the resources above, the following links and organisations might be worth exploring:

- **Department for International Trade (DIT)** – works with UK-based businesses to ensure their success in international markets through exports. DIT has a network of professional advisers around the UK and across more than 100 countries overseas. For more information and help visit www.exportingisgreat.gov.uk
- **UK Web Design Association** – has a simple database of web developers, searchable by UK location. The database can be found at www.ukwda.org
- **I-CAN Global** – a network of experienced communication consultants who can review your firm's website against best practice and make recommendations for improvement and internationalisation. Visit www.i-can.global





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