Web-Based Business - Websites of Indian Companies Must Have A Global Look With Local Flavour to be Competitive Globally & Locally

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Abstract

Twentieth century began with a revolutionary technology namely the computer technology that eventually led to development of Internet and modernized communication. The development & growth of Internet and communication technologies transformed the way organizations conduct their businesses. E-commerce - the application of Internet technologies in business environment has gained importance, web as a medium to do business today is an accepted reality. The Internet commerce over the years has been accepted as another medium through which business can be conducted effortlessly and without any limitations of geography or time constraints. Any time and from anywhere business is truly global in nature.

The remarkable developments have made e-commerce a subject of great importance for economic, social and cultural reasons.

Many companies across the world have made their presence in the cyber space through their websites. Companies located in any part of the world are easily accessible through Internet because of their web presence. Internet Technologies are making the world look like a small village inter connected with each other. The net worked global world offers tremendous opportunities for even small & medium companies to reach a large customer base transgressing the national boundaries. Thus the electronic commerce on Internet is the closest thing to a global free market where the barriers for entry are low, with several untapped business opportunities on the net, revenue sources are many and access being universal there is room for successful players. According to former US President & Vice President (Bill Clinton & Al Gore) who stated way back in 1997 that – Electronic Commerce could become a significant global economic element in 21ST century.

This Internet revolution is not confined to a few countries that are technologically advanced compared to other many other countries. Internet provides a cost effective platform for many companies located in different parts of the world be they developed or developing countries to take advantage of the technology to form strategic alliances with customers, suppliers and even competitors – In fact Internet enables global alliances of business partners to be quickly formed to take advantage of market opportunities.

Many Business establishments in India are also making use of Internet to leverage the benefits this technology offers them in conduct of business that includes large and medium enterprises. The cyber presence of the companies gives them the advantage of a global reach. The companies can now look for customers as well as for suppliers from any where across the globe. This transnational presence for companies through cyber space offers global presence with minimal effort. The companies with lesser capital and smaller budgets can also take the advantage of this evolutionary technology to increase their customer base with little investment.

However the websites that provide a platform to reach the company through cyber media must give the companies the distinct advantage of its presence. The company's uniqueness is communicated to the world through the website. The website should act as a gateway not only for knowing about the company's products/services and its distinctiveness but also for its ability to adapt to local environment. Thus there is a need for global presence using cyber space with a

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local flavour. Localization of the web pages helps the company to survive in the local market and bridge the cultural gaps that may impede the prospects for business growth. In order to give a local look to the web pages the business houses should understand the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the region and recreate a similar environment in the cyber space as well.

The Internet being ubiquitous helps in playing a vital role in simulating the cultural reality of the local region. Today Web as a medium that provides information about any aspect of social, political, economic and cultural aspects is recognized. Buyers often use web as a pre purchase information medium. Revenue generated through web-based business is growing remarkably. Therefore companies must realize the importance of web in product promotion, enhancing the product quality, building long-term customer relationship, and sustaining competitive advantage. The websites of the companies showcase to outside world the capabilities in a form that can induce the buyers to shop online. So this digital gateway for business opportunities can be well exploited by the business organizations to give localized content to make it more visible and increase the revenue for the companies using this highly interactive and easy to install media.

As the Internet users club grows – A Global electronic market place ensures that cyber space is the ideal market place where there is flood of buyers and sellers.

The present paper attempts to explore the need for business establishments in India big or small to focus on the content layout of their websites to convey the message that they serve their online customers with the punch line Global Look with a Local Flavour.
Keywords: Web-based Business, Websites, Global, And Local Flavour

1 WEB-BASED BUSINESS

E-Commerce or web-based business is fast becoming an accepted mode of business by many companies. Though conducting business using electronic media is not a new phenomenon, but using Internet to commerce using open standards is relatively new – this has given the way for globalization of the business and increasing the scope of conducting the business with the expansion in the number of users and wide range of application relevant to the industry.
The Internet commerce provides low cost platform to reach out to global markets and one which defies geographical boundaries and time zones to enable businesses to stay connected with the rest of the world 24 hours and 7 days.
With the growing penetration of PC's and increased bandwidth and cheaper leased lines it will not be too late when e-market place is crowded with virtual buyers and sellers.
Across the platform both B2B as well as B2C commerce have been witnessing increased revenue generation. The growth pattern of mobile communication devices offers new form of electronic commerce that is mobile commerce that can radically change the existing business models. In all such cases the websites will play a crucial role in inducing the customers to come to web to do shopping – using web for pre-purchase (WPP) and web for purchase (WFP) will be come the order of the day in near future. The websites will also play a prominent role in post purchase/ after sales service as well to address customer's post sales grievances –web for post sales service (WPSS). These business models can bridge the dearth of physical interaction and can attract customers from all parts of the world. Thus web business enables all players in the business to be connected 24 hrs all 7 days to ensure seamless flow of information to all.
To be in sync with the global reality the Indian companies must have to redesign and reorient their websites to provide a feeling of local flavour with a global look. The socio-cultural values of region or the country must get reflected in the website.

2. E-COMMERCE – A GLOBAL COMMERCE

Increasingly the world is becoming a small inter connected place often referred to as the global village. The technology is playing the role of an enabler in bringing about this network. Today being-connected is a common phrase in corporate circles. The corporate establishment have long realised this and the immense potential the Internet technology has in creating a new channel for conducting business. The Internet technologies have opened new frontiers for business establishments by enabling them to do business from anywhere to anywhere. Companies especially in automotive, telecommunication, software services, financial services, knowledge based services, agro-based industries etc are realizing the potential networked economy offers them. E-commerce offers cost effective and globally reachable business. Thus e-commerce is increasingly viewed by business organizations as a global business phenomenon where even small and less developed countries can get wired through the technology and gain immensely. This phenomenon can play an even role for developed, and developing countries if they are able to leverage the technology and bring about prosperity for their countries.
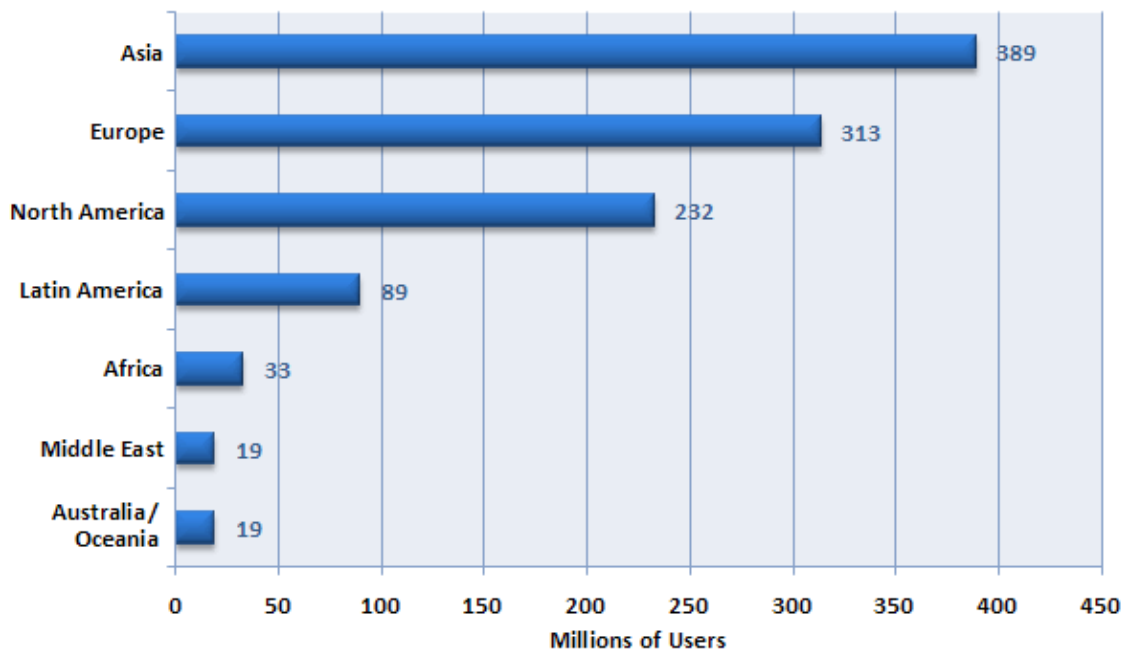
Though the Indian corporate had missed the earlier bus to be a part of competitive global business environment This time around the Indian companies should not (cannot afford) to miss this bus and rightly so why should they, as leaders in software services the capabilities of Indian people are known all over the world. We have the potential to be and lead in certain sectors of industry. For this to happen the Indian industry need to strategize its business polices, rules and activities to board the new global bus rather early.

The Internet and Internet commerce across the world shows that the future businesses have to evolve strategies to remain, sustain and be competitive in the global world that would largely be driven by cyber media and of course do business in cyber space.

The Internet usage across the world is growing Online shopping is being increasingly used by young people, working people and woman.
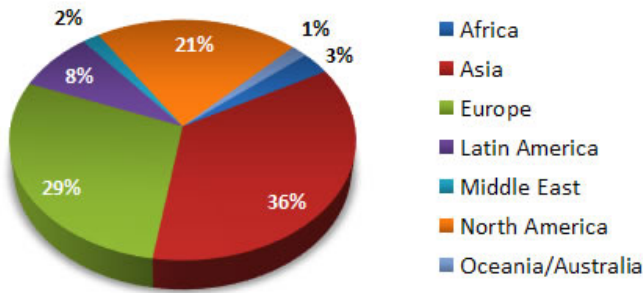
The following tables show Internet usage pattern across different regions of the world.

Internet Users by World Region

Region	Millions of Users
Asia	389
Europe	313
North America	232
Latin America	89
Africa	33
Middle East	19
Australia/Oceania	19

World Internet Users

Legend:
- Africa
- Asia
- Europe
- Latin America
- Middle East
- North America
- Oceania/Australia

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The above graph shows that Internet usage in Asia is growing and is higher than other regions of the world. The rise in Internet usage is a positive indication. Today a variety of applications are run using Internet. Web will become access point for many users for using many different types services including business services. Therefore the businesses need to have a re look into the layout, content and language that should be visible on a website as websites in today's world act as an International gateway for corporates to move into wider arena of global business.

Internet Usage Growth
1995 - 2006
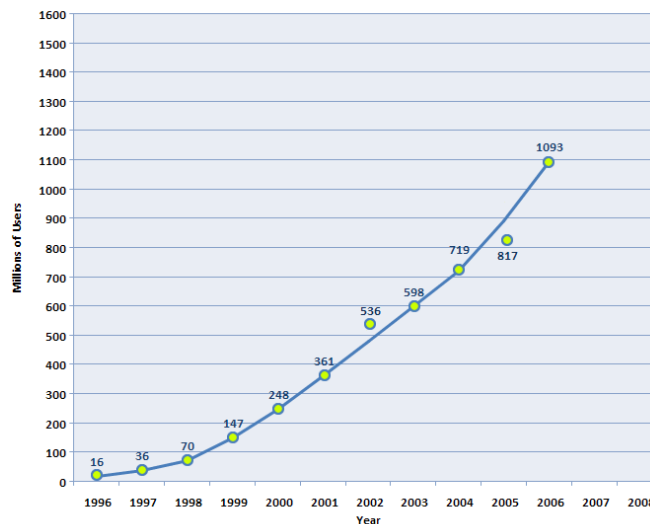
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The above graph indicates that there is gradual increase in Internet usage from 1995 to 2006

3. WEBSITES – GATEWAY FOR E-COMMERCE

Internet or interconnected networks are paving the way for easy transmission of data and communication across the world. The corporates throughout the world are leveraging Internet technology to offer best services/products to customers, to efficiently and effectively manage their supply chains and enhance their customer relationships. While computer networks act as enablers in providing the above services the importance of effective communication through a good interface cannot be undermined. In today's wired world the Interface is very likely to be a website. The websites of the companies are virtual faces, which convey the business aspirations of the companies to the outside world. This virtual gateway provides a platform for the companies to build a global network of suppliers, customers without even having the need for a face-to-face interaction. The website acts as virtual communicator for the company. Some Popular global websites in the world are:

Properties	Unique Visitors (000)
Worldwide total	746,934
Microsoft	510,320
Google	502,464
Yahoo	467,832
Time Warner network	262,413
EBay	248,854
Wikipedia.com	189,003
Amazon.com	149,817
Fox Interactive Media	139,821
CNET Networks	118,717
Apple Computer	116,520
Ask.com	108,870
Adobe	101,810
Lycos	90,208
Viacom Digital	76,389
New York Times Digital	72,180
Properties	Unique Visitors (000)
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New York Times Digital	72,180

Source: www.clickz.com

Web-based business services have increased in terms of variety and quality. Today a number of services are offered to customers all over the world using the medium of web. Some of which are, Online Job recruitments, matrimonial services, travel etc. there are global as well as Indian companies operating in these areas also. The Indian companies are playing prominent role in

services and hospitality industry. They are teaming with MNC's[i] to provide quality services to customers from all the world. Some examples in this category is proposed tieup between Appllo group of Hospitals and IBM[ii] to establish Health super highway by connecting 150 hospitals in the country. The Group also in association with nine other well known hospitals in the country plan to connect 52 African countries through telemedicine which is in need of good health services to reach its rural areas.[ref 2]

The website interaction has become such a popular phenomenon and vital mode in business conduct that the concept of web statistics is gaining prominence. Eyeball contacts with websites are measured to know the popularity. Thus the role of websites as new medium for business interaction and communication can never be under played. Thus localization of web content is the need of the hour to make this medium effective in communicating to the target customer.

4. NEED FOR LOCALISATION OF CONTENTS IN WEBSITES

To reach the target customer, content, language and feel should be localized as this can communicate and convey what the company wants to say to customer very effectively. Several researches have impressed upon the need for web business of the companies to organize their strategies around the theme Global Look with Local Flavour. According to EFFY OZ of Penn State University who states - Organizations wishing to do business globally through their websites must be sensitive to local audiences. Thus Websites should be tailored to the audiences they are meant to reach. A majority of web users prefer to access web using a language other than English, so organizations must provide their online information and services in other languages, as well as English. So Organizations must plan and carefully design their global sites so that they also cater to local needs and preferences, a process sometimes called glocalization. [Ref *4*]
 Mr. OZ identifies certain prerequisites while designing websites to international audience, which are summarized as follows: -
A site for an international audience requires greater planning than for a national one.
Each local site should be tailored in way in which local people prefer to shop, buy or sell. For this he must study the cultural preferences and differences, legal and ethical issues.
Use of Experienced Local translators to effectively translate to local language to avoid misunderstandings if that could arise due to poor translators
Do not allow the audience feel as if they are less important than other audiences.
Avoid Cultural imperialism by not using a word or a picture those of one's own country. Give the local audience a homey experience.
Neglecting to pay attention to such issues such as different cultures, language nuances, conflicting national laws, and different standards can hurt the business reputation and cause loss of revenue.

Several Multinational companies have redesigned their websites with country specific strategy. Big Companies like Coca Cola, Nokia, GE, Microsoft etc. are some examples to quote. Many business analysts emphasized the need for country-specific web content as early as 2003.

According to Alan K'necht who in his article titled- Think Beyond – Think Global writes Thanks in part to Tim Berners-Lee and the invention of the World Wide Web, the world is a much smaller place today than it otherwise would have been. Yet very few businesses throughout the world have taken advantage of this. They continue to see things as they were and don't look beyond what they know. Instead of leveraging the technology to expand their business prospects throughout the world, they merely focus on servicing the markets they already have and know. The reason for this is simple—it's far easier and safer to build Web sites with what we know and

for whom we know. Is this, however, what the business needs to improve its bottom-line or merely what it's comfortable with? I'm talking about building sites that go beyond the culture or language that the business is familiar with. I'm talking about building internationally-friendly, multilingual and multi-cultural Web sites.[ref 1]

He further tries to emphasize the fact that while mnlti lingual sites are good for communicating to local audience in a regional language care should be taken in translation, right set of people who are aware of the cultural, regional idioms most preferably local translators must be involved. To illustrate his thought he gives the example of BBC's website -A superior example of this is BBC World Service. The BBC offers its news service in forty-three different languages. When a user clicks on a specific language, they are taken to slightly different content, which is regionally-targeted to the country and/or region from which the language originates. They've gone beyond simply translating their content to providing regional news and information to the specific regions in addition to the staple of international news.

Alan K'necht ends his note of analysis by saying -If you're prepared to think beyond, to a global marketplace for your site, you can reap many rewards. However, if you don't do your homework, you are most likely going to fail in your efforts.

Similarly, Yan Tian in his article Communicating with local publics: a case study of Coca-Cola's Chinese web site says Coca-Cola is practicing a "glocal" strategy, which integrates the ethnocentric and polycentric model in international public relations, to communicate with the Chinese publics through its Chinese web site.[ref 5]

The above examples are few to explain the urgency with which the Indian companies need to act to strategise the web to be a part of global competitive economy. There several companies & corporations in India in both public as well as private sector who have realized this reality and have designed their websites to increase their revenues. The perfect example is the website of Kerala State Tourism as well as KTDC[iii]. The State of Kerala often referred to as God's Own country has been endowed with beautiful landscape laden with its picturseque beaches is an ideal place that attracts tourists from all over the world. The Kerala Tourisim realizing the immense potential the tourism can generate in terms of revenue for the state, has developed the website that provides valuable information to tourists not just from India but for tourists from different parts of world as well the website has language translation facilities for French, Dutch, German and Spanish.

Another example is our own Indian Multinational Tata Consulting Services (TCS) which operates in many countries of the world such as Asia-pacific, China, Europe, Latin America-Spain-Portugal, Japan, Korea, Middle East, South Afica, UK and Ireland, US and Canada has region specific websites in regional language in addition to English. The TCS websites for Chinese is in Chinese in addition to English similarly in Japan in Japanese, in Spanish for Latin America, Spain and Portugal. In addition to language they also provide a feel of regional flavours.

Infosys also operates in many countries through its websites designed and layed out with content and flavour to specifically suit the regions in which they do business.

Thus the companies, which wants to do business globally and use web to do business must learn cultural differences and design their sites accordingly.

5. Conclusions

The above paper analysis the importance of web design in web-based business. This is because Indian Corporate looking for footage in globally competitive and networked economy must realize that web is a powerful medium that can play a very important role in translating the ideas and communicating effectively to the targeted audience. The web as a medium to become effective communicator the companies should take great care in planning the content, language and flavour to reach the right audience by understanding the social, legal, cultural and political environment of the region with the theme Global look with a Local Flavour or Glocal.

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[i] MNC – Multinational Corporations
[ii] IBM- International Business Machines.
[iii] KTDC- Kerala Tourism Development Corporation

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