

How Facebook hit 500 million users in two years with localisation



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It's no secret that Facebook is a global phenomenon with 1.3 billion active users accounting for almost half of the world's entire internet population of 2.9 billion people.

More than 80% of this activity comes from outside North America, the biggest country on Facebook. With India, Brazil, Indonesia as runners-up it's estimated that at least 40% of Facebook users don't speak any English. Today, you can [access Facebook in more than 70 languages](#).

But how did Facebook manage to become so global so fast, reaching its first 500 million users in just two years? And can other tech companies replicate that level of success? Former Product Manager Andy Johns gave some background on their localisation efforts between 2008 and 2010 in a Quora article that was recently covered in [Forbes](#).

The growth team and action plan

An international growth strategy has to start with the right people. Johns explained that Facebook made a big effort to hire people who had the experience and skillsets they really needed to help the company go global. One of the key developments of the engineers on its growth team was building a tool that allowed users to help crowdsource translation.



Source: [123RF](#)

This leveraged one of Facebook's unique advantages - empowering its built-in base of millions of loyal users worldwide to help create localised content for new users.

Not every business has that kind of user base, but any organisation can take advantage of automation technology when working on a global growth strategy. For example, computer aided translation allows experienced translators to localise huge swathes of websites and collateral all at once.

Stay focused on the prize

Executive support can make or break a localisation campaign. In fact, when it comes to launching any kind of global market strategy, time and again, company culture - and stakeholder buy-in is the most crucial piece of the puzzle.

One of the most interesting aspects of Facebook's growth plan was their approach to building an international culture. That meant hanging flags in the office that reminded employees of the global scope of the growth strategy.

"You walked into a corner of the building and would see flags hanging that represented not only the international nature of the people we hired, but the global adoption Facebook intended to have," Johns writes. Not only that, Facebook executives continually reminded the team that the international growth strategy was a top priority.

Build a passionate culture

It wasn't just that Facebook had a good product - both employees and users were passionate about making that product available in other languages and other countries. They understood that growing the user base internationally was critical to Facebook's continued success.

The real lesson that one can take away from Johns' answers is that the business needs to be invested in the localisation efforts from the top down. Without a culture that proactively pushes for the next global market, translation initiatives are often relegated to silos that can only do so much without the active engagement of other teams.

To get other departments onboard, localisation managers need to clearly outline the benefits of the programme for every stakeholder, from the ROI of translation to case studies of other companies that have successfully localised.

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