

Top 10 Best Practices for Multilingual Websites

1. Language: Online communications must address the language preferences of users. The use of machine or automatic translations is strongly discouraged even if a disclaimer is added. If government agencies decide to use software assisted translation, have the translation reviewed by a qualified language professional before posting it to the website to ensure that the translation correctly communicates the message.

GobiernoUSA.gov, the trusted source for government information in Spanish, offers users a complete experience in the Spanish-language. Content, navigation, and all functionalities and features in GobiernoUSA.gov are in Spanish.

2. Culture: Conduct user research to understand the cultural considerations for your target audience. Regardless of language used, the online experience must be culturally relevant to achieve an emotional connection with the audience.

Although GobiernoUSA.gov and USA.gov, its English-language counterpart, have the same structure and look and feel, the Spanish site offers content, images, and a color scheme that resonates with the Hispanic community.

3. Access: Enable users to find your multilingual website via prominent access on the English site. Access to multilingual websites should be made available on the global navigation on the top right of every English page.

The [Federal Trade Commission](http://FederalTradeCommission.gov) provides the "En español" link as part of their global navigation on their English site.

4. URL Strategy: Use a stand-alone, dedicated URL for marketing and search engine optimization purposes. That URL can then re-direct to another one more in line with your agency URL convention.

The Social Security Administration uses <http://www.segurosocial.gov> to market and drive traffic to their Spanish language site.

5. Comparability and Maintenance: Ensure that your multilingual website provides a comparable user experience to your English site. Plan for regular updates and maintenance to ensure that your multilingual website remains comparable to the English site.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provide a comparable experience on the [English](http://English.cdc.gov) and [Spanish](http://Spanish.cdc.gov) sites through consistent maintenance of site content and experience.

6. Users' expectations: Manage user expectations by providing notice when a user is going to navigate to an English-only area, external website, or require a special program or software to view an application.

EPA.gov's [Spanish site](http://SpanishSite.EPA.gov) denotes English-only content by putting "en inglés" next to links only available in English.

7. Toggle: Enable users to toggle between comparable content or features on the English and multilingual websites if available.

Users on [MedlinePlus](http://MedlinePlus.gov) and [MedlinePlus en español](http://MedlinePlus.espanol.gov) can go back and forth between the English and Spanish sites on a page-by-page basis without having to go through the home page.

8. Online Features and Functionality: Provide interactive features and functionality on multilingual websites.

The [CDC site in Spanish](http://CDC.gov) offers basic features such as Print and Email This Page and gives users the ability to subscribe to email alerts, RSS feeds, podcasts, and more.

9. Integrated Operations and Marketing: Integrate your multilingual website initiatives with internal infrastructure and external consumer touch points, and into your overall online-offline strategy.

GobiernoUSA.gov provides phone and email support in Spanish through 1-(800)-FED-INFO, as well as PSAs and other marketing materials in Spanish. In addition, GobiernoUSA.gov is an integral part of the overall online and offline strategy of the Office of Citizen Services in GSA. This was especially evident in 2007 when a name change and redesign were implemented at the same time for both USA.gov and GobiernoUSA.gov.

10. Online Marketing: Develop and execute a targeted multilingual online marketing program, including social media, and track results.

Many agencies conduct dedicated online outreach for their multilingual sites including GobiernoUSA.gov, [MedlinePlus en español](http://MedlinePlus.espanol.gov), CDC.gov, and EPA.gov, among others. In addition, many of these sites are using social media tools to reach out to Hispanics: EPA's blog [Greenversations](http://Greenversations.gov) has regular bilingual entries; CDC.gov offers RSS and podcasts; and GobiernoUSA.gov has a presence on facebook.com and twitter.com.

<http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/multilingual/best-practices.shtml>