



Internationalization Errors

How to Go Global Without Losing All of
Your Traffic





Hi, I'm Jackie

I've been lucky to do SEO at some cool places:

- SEO Intel. Lead, Uber
- ASO and SEO Lead, Dropbox
- Sr. SEO and ASO Manager at Square

In a nutshell...internationalization boils down to :

1. Having unique URLs for all versions of content
2. Implementing hreflang between these pages
3. Truly localized content per region

What you'll walk away with:

- The right and wrongs of hreflang
- Common internationalization mistakes to avoid
- How to make a fool-proof template / IA even
Googlebot can't mess up

Hreflang 101

Simple in concept, not implementation

Hreflang is simple, right? *There's documentation.*



But it's not *that* simple



 **John**  
@JohnMu



Replying to @ohgm

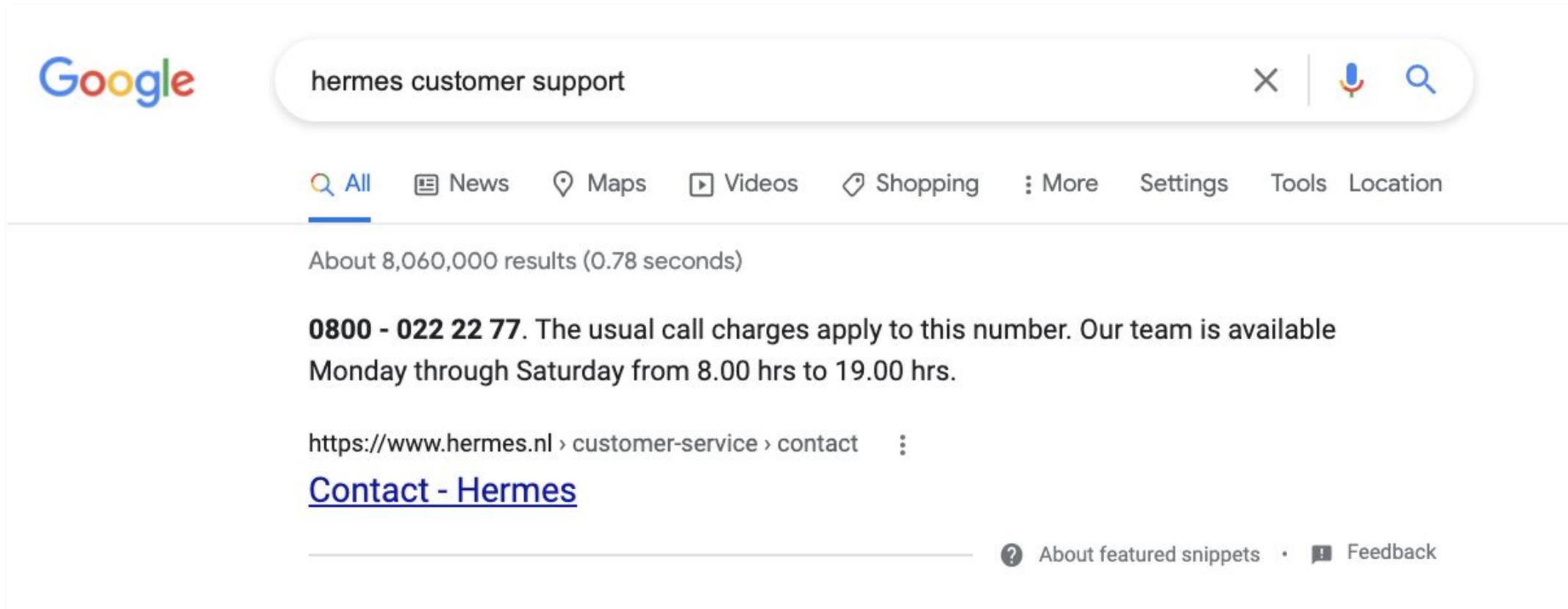
TBH hreflang is one of the most complex aspects of SEO (if not the most complex one). Feels as easy as a meta-tag, but it gets really hard quickly.

12:44 AM · Feb 19, 2018



Copy link to Tweet

Getting it wrong means you can't rank correctly - even for your own keywords



The image shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "hermes customer support". Below the search bar, there are navigation links for "All", "News", "Maps", "Videos", "Shopping", "More", "Settings", "Tools", and "Location". The search results show "About 8,060,000 results (0.78 seconds)". A featured snippet is displayed with the text: "0800 - 022 22 77. The usual call charges apply to this number. Our team is available Monday through Saturday from 8.00 hrs to 19.00 hrs." Below this, there is a breadcrumb trail: "https://www.hermes.nl > customer-service > contact" followed by a vertical ellipsis. A blue link titled "Contact - Hermes" is visible. At the bottom right of the search results, there are links for "About featured snippets" and "Feedback".

The Basics of Hreflang

What is hreflang?

The `rel="alternate" hreflang="x"` link attribute is a HTML meta element. **Hreflang specifies the language and *optional* geographic restrictions for a document.**

Hreflang basics

- **WHAT:** Implement country + lang targeting, or lang only
- **HOW:** Reciprocal links, self-referencing canonical, self-referential hreflang to themselves
- **WHERE:** Can implement in the http headers, on page in the <head> or sitemap (I prefer on page)

So what does the “ideal” hreflang implementation look like? 🤔

Ideal hreflang, for Canadian English

Country + Lang

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-ca"  
href="https://yoursitee.com/ca/en/" />
```

Country + Lang or Lang only?

Language is non-optional

Example	Hreflang Example
<code>yoursite.com/ca/en/</code>	<code>hreflang=en-ca""</code>
<code>yoursite.com/</code>	<code>hreflang="en"</code>
<code>yoursite.com/ca/</code>	<code>hreflang="ca"</code> ❑ can't be only country

Not every site needs to do country targeting, for example:

- Global SaaS sites where there's no difference in features between countries
- Companies where you don't have the bandwidth to differentiate content

Test your hreflang implementation with the following tools:

- Screaming Frog – to check for errors
- Search Console – international targeting report and for geo targeting
- Lighthouse – to check if Google could pick up hreflangs
- And more...

In summary, hreflang should have:

- Consistent and standard URL patterns
- All URLs in the set must canonicalize to themselves, point to each other and have a reciprocal url
- Target either country + lang *or* a global language page

Common Internationalization Mistakes to Avoid

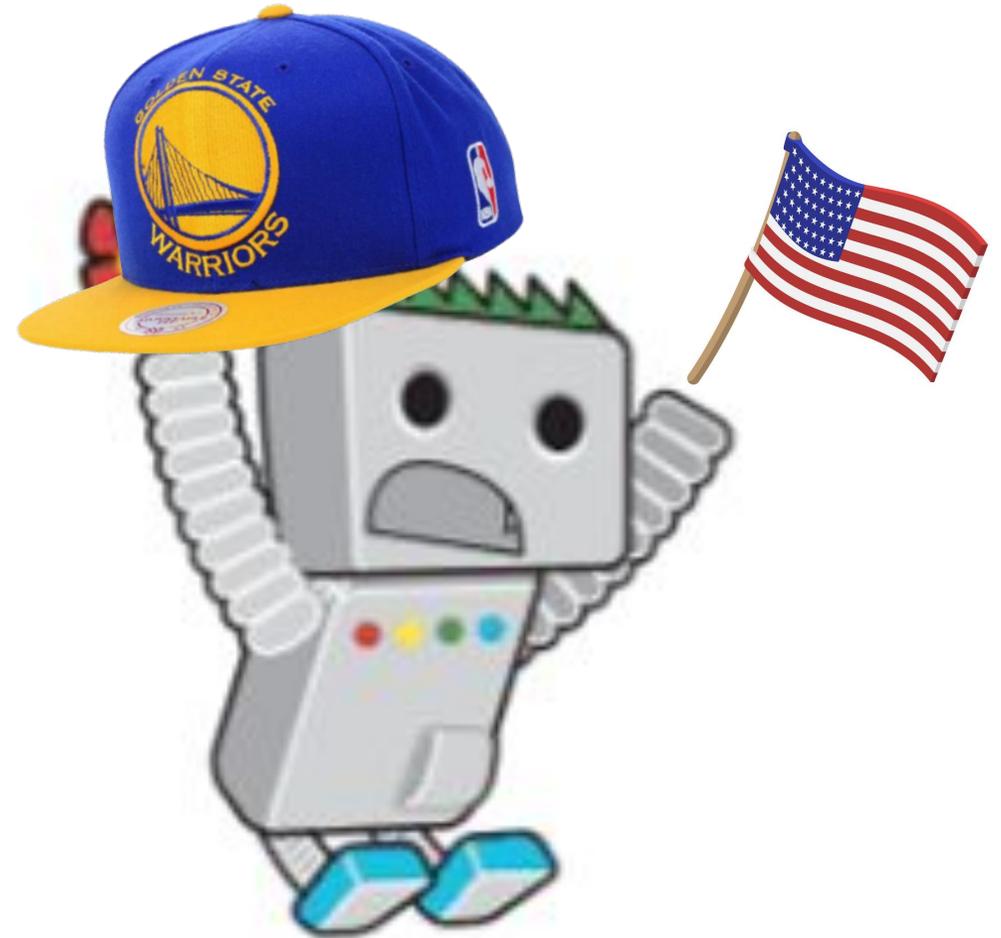
Mistake #1: No unique URLs for content

```
<link rel="alternate" href="https://ca.nextdoor.com/" hreflang="en-ca" />  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://ca.nextdoor.com/" hreflang="fr-ca" />
```

Mistake #1: No unique URLs for content



Googlebot comes
from the US
99.9999%
of the time



Mistake #2: Using 4 letter lang codes

Often caused by micro-optimization or automation errors

```
href="https://stripe.com/fr-ca-ae" hreflang="fr-ca-AE">
```

Mistake #2: Using 4 letter lang codes
Chinese is the exception

面

Simplified

Used in China,
Singapore

麵

Traditional

Used in HK, TW, MO

Chinese is the only recognized 4 letter language code

zh-Hans

Simplified
Used in China
Singapore

zh-Hant

Traditional
Used in HK, TW, MO

Mistake #3: Creating duplicate content issue by not differentiating content

```
<link rel="apple-touch-icon" href="https://images.ctfassets.net/fzn2nlzq965/2E0OpR2mMzqHYB...>  
<link rel="icon" href="https://images.ctfassets.net/fzn2nlzq965/2E0OpR2mMzqHYB...>
```

```
<meta name="description" content="Online payment processing for internet businesses. Stripe is a suite of payment APIs that p...>  
<link rel="canonical" href="https://stripe.com/">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/de-ae" hreflang="de-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/ae" hreflang="en-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-gb-ae" hreflang="en-gb-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-419-ae" hreflang="es-419-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-ae" hreflang="es-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ae" hreflang="fr-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ca-ae" hreflang="fr-ca-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/id-ae" hreflang="id-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/it-ae" hreflang="it-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/ja-ae" hreflang="ja-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/nl-ae" hreflang="nl-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/pt-br-ae" hreflang="pt-br-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/th-ae" hreflang="th-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/zh-cn-ae" hreflang="zh-cn-AE">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/at" hreflang="de-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-at" hreflang="en-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-gb-at" hreflang="en-gb-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-419-at" hreflang="es-419-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-at" hreflang="es-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-at" hreflang="fr-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ca-at" hreflang="fr-ca-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/id-at" hreflang="id-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/it-at" hreflang="it-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/ja-at" hreflang="ja-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/nl-at" hreflang="nl-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/pt-br-at" hreflang="pt-br-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/th-at" hreflang="th-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/zh-cn-at" hreflang="zh-cn-AT">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/de-au" hreflang="de-AU">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-au" hreflang="en-AU">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/au" hreflang="en-gb-AU">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-419-au" hreflang="es-419-AU">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-au" hreflang="es-AU">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-au" hreflang="fr-AU">  
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ca-au" hreflang="fr-ca-AU">
```

82 of these 854 templates are English

```
<link rel="apple-touch-icon" href="https://images.ctfassets.net/fzn2nlzq965/2E0OpI2mMZgHYB...>
<link rel="icon" href="https://images.ctfassets.net/fzn2nlzq965/2E0OpI2mMZgHYB...>

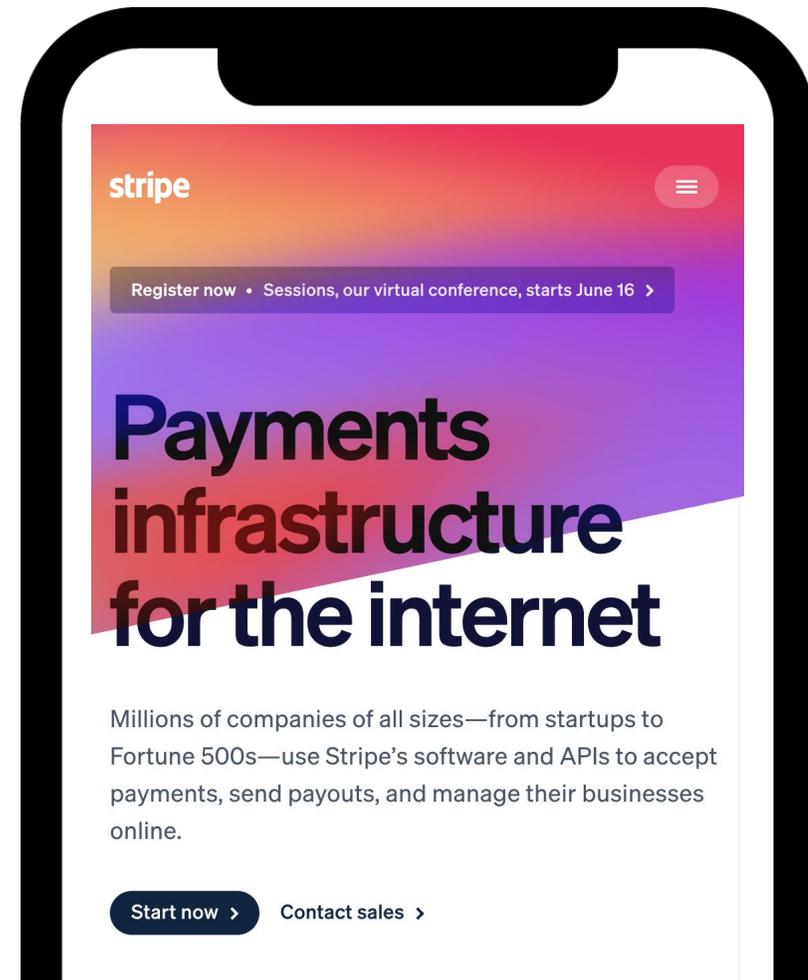
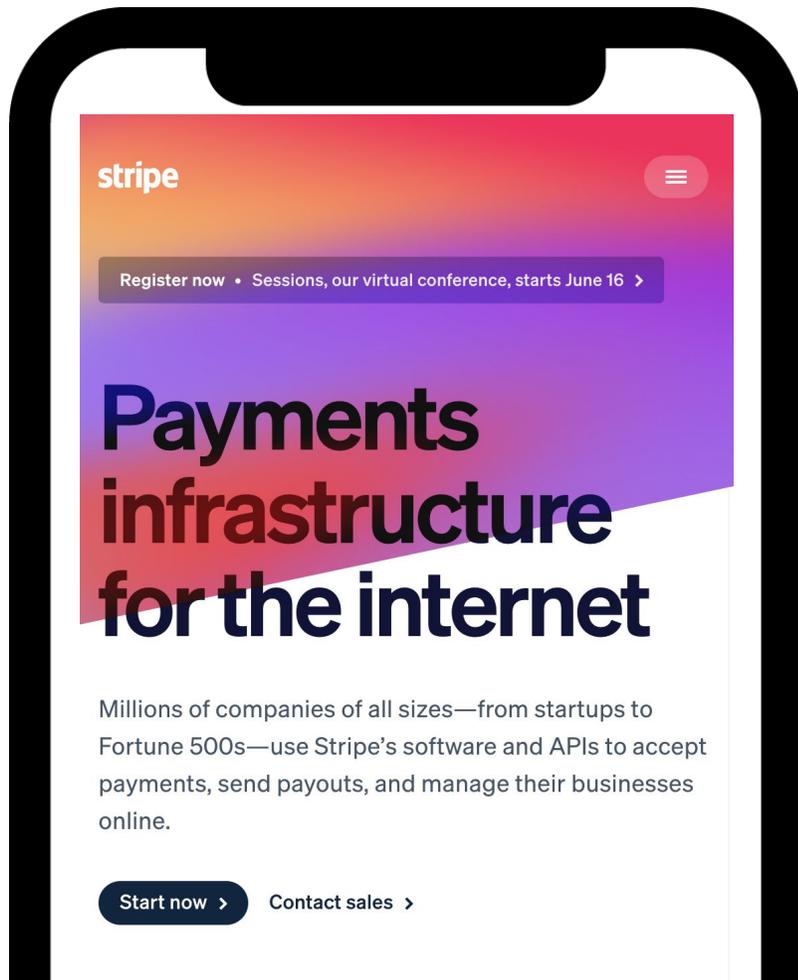
<meta name="description" content="Online payment processing for internet businesses. Stripe is a suite of payment APIs that pow
<link rel="canonical" href="https://stripe.com/">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/de-ae" hreflang="de-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/ae" hreflang="en-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-gb-ae" hreflang="en-gb-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-419-ae" hreflang="es-419-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-ae" hreflang="es-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ae" hreflang="fr-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ca-ae" hreflang="fr-ca-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/id-ae" hreflang="id-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/it-ae" hreflang="it-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/ja-ae" hreflang="ja-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/nl-ae" hreflang="nl-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/pt-br-ae" hreflang="pt-br-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/th-ae" hreflang="th-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/zh-cn-ae" hreflang="zh-cn-AE">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/at" hreflang="de-AT">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-at" hreflang="en-AT">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-gb-at" hreflang="en-gb-AT">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-419-at" hreflang="es-419-AT">
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<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-at" hreflang="fr-AT">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ca-at" hreflang="fr-ca-AT">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/id-at" hreflang="id-AT">
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<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/zh-cn-at" hreflang="zh-cn-AT">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/de-au" hreflang="de-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/en-au" hreflang="en-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/au" hreflang="en-gb-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-419-au" hreflang="es-419-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/es-au" hreflang="es-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-au" hreflang="fr-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/fr-ca-au" hreflang="fr-ca-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/id-au" hreflang="id-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/it-au" hreflang="it-AU">
<link rel="alternate" href="https://stripe.com/ja-au" hreflang="ja-AU">
```



Mistake #4: Optimizing for flavors of languages

```
href="https://stripe.com/en-nz" hreflang="en-NZ">  
href="https://stripe.com/nz" hreflang="en-gb-NZ">
```

And not making pages that are materially different. Let's compare US to AE:

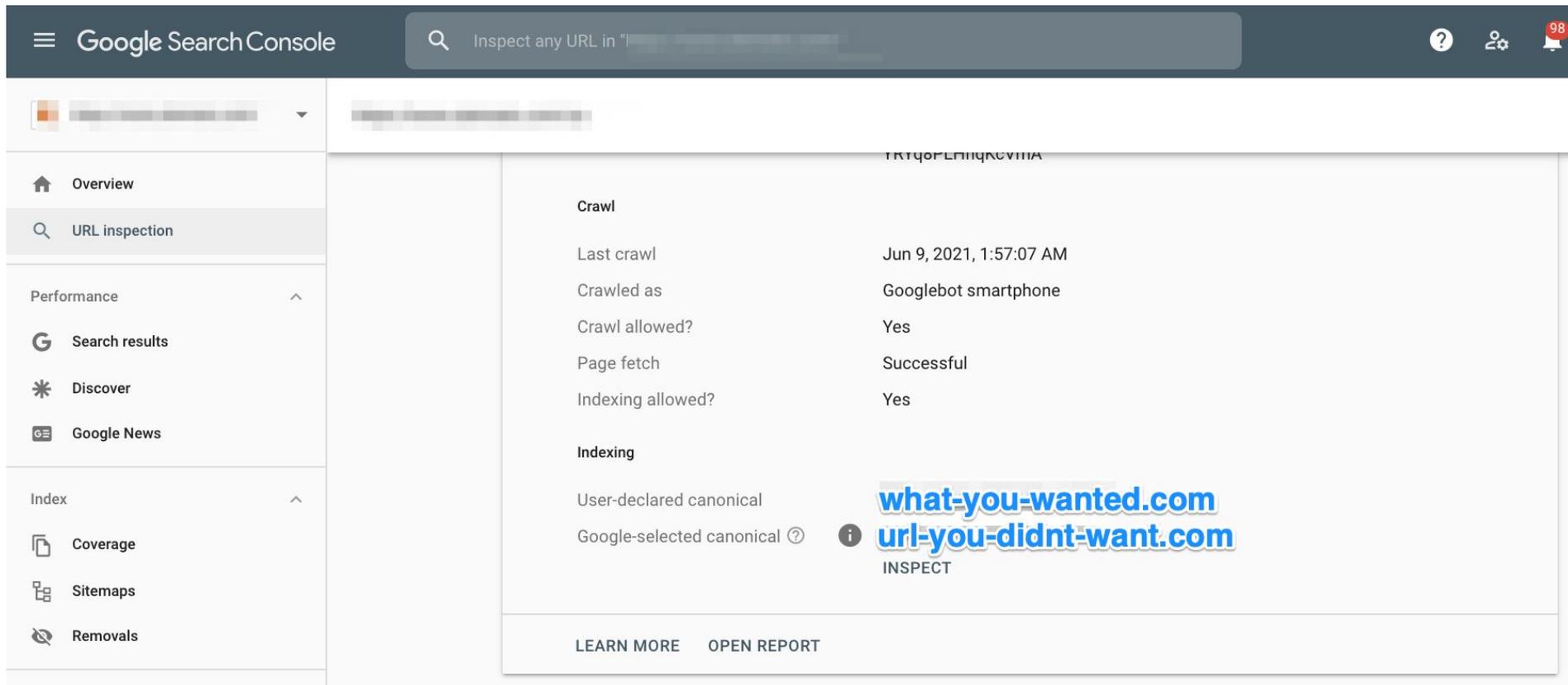


The differences are not compelling – about 96% similar

Payments infrastructure for the internet Payments infrastructure for the internet

Millions of **companies** of all sizes – from startups to **Fortune 500s** – **large enterprises** – use Stripe's software and APIs to accept payments, send payouts, and manage their businesses online.

You'll know you have this problem when Google ignores your canonical in GSC



The screenshot shows the Google Search Console interface. The left sidebar contains navigation options: Overview, URL inspection (selected), Performance, Search results, Discover, Google News, Coverage, Sitemaps, and Removals. The main content area displays the 'URL inspection' results for a specific URL. Under the 'Crawl' section, the following details are shown: Last crawl (Jun 9, 2021, 1:57:07 AM), Crawled as (Googlebot smartphone), Crawl allowed? (Yes), Page fetch (Successful), and Indexing allowed? (Yes). Under the 'Indexing' section, the 'User-declared canonical' is [what-you-wanted.com](#) and the 'Google-selected canonical' is [url-you-didnt-want.com](#), which is highlighted with an information icon and the word 'INSPECT' below it. At the bottom of the main content area, there are two buttons: 'LEARN MORE' and 'OPEN REPORT'.

Ideas to truly differentiate content

Append Country Name to Title Tags

<https://www.disney.com> ⋮

[Disney.com](https://www.disney.com) | The official home for all things Disney

The official website for all things **Disney**: theme parks, resorts, movies, tv programs, characters, games, videos, music, shopping, and more!

<https://disney.co.uk> ⋮

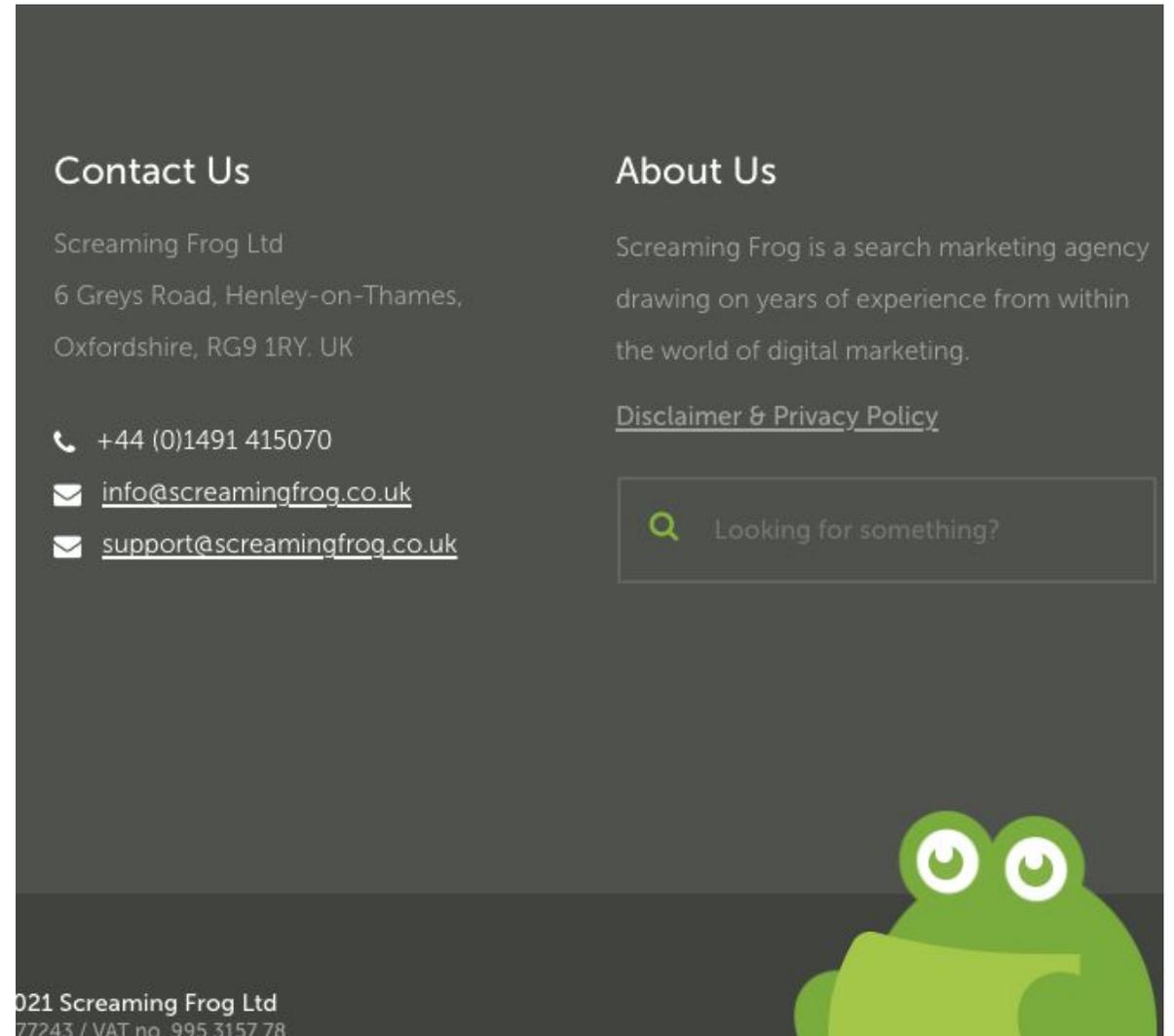
[Disney UK](https://disney.co.uk) | The Official Home for All Things Disney

Discover all you need to know about **Disney**, Marvel, Pixar and Star Wars movies, the Disney+ streaming service and the latest products from shopDisney.

[About Us](#) · [Movies](#) · [Register](#) · [Cruella](#)

Add your NAP (Name, Address, Phone) to the footer

Don't forget social handles
Also add local handles to
social links, if available



The screenshot shows the footer of the Screaming Frog website. It is divided into two columns. The left column is titled 'Contact Us' and contains the company name 'Screaming Frog Ltd', the address '6 Greys Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 1RY. UK', and three contact options: a phone number '+44 (0)1491 415070', an email address 'info@screamingfrog.co.uk', and another email address 'support@screamingfrog.co.uk'. The right column is titled 'About Us' and contains a paragraph: 'Screaming Frog is a search marketing agency drawing on years of experience from within the world of digital marketing.' Below this is a link for 'Disclaimer & Privacy Policy'. At the bottom right of the footer is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon and the text 'Looking for something?'. In the bottom right corner of the footer area is a green cartoon frog character holding a document. At the very bottom left of the footer, there is small text: '021 Screaming Frog Ltd 77243 / VAT no. 995 3157 78'.

Contact Us

Screaming Frog Ltd
6 Greys Road, Henley-on-Thames,
Oxfordshire, RG9 1RY. UK

+44 (0)1491 415070
info@screamingfrog.co.uk
support@screamingfrog.co.uk

About Us

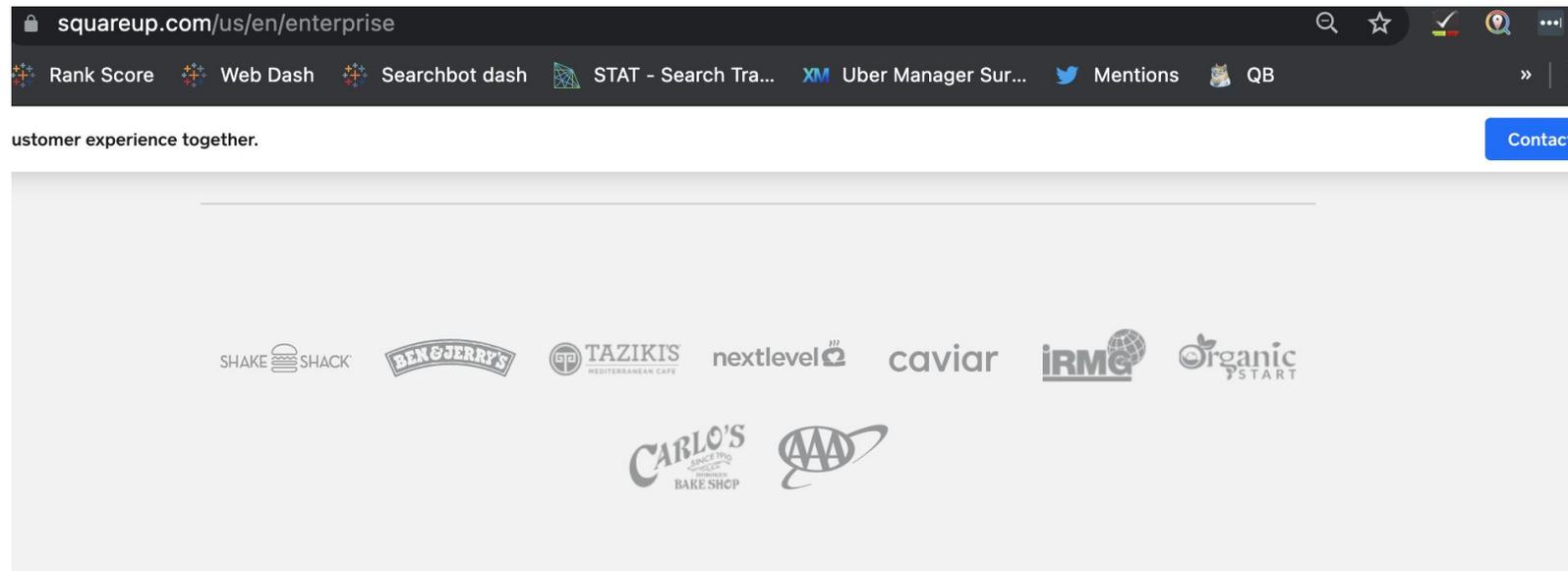
Screaming Frog is a search marketing agency drawing on years of experience from within the world of digital marketing.

[Disclaimer & Privacy Policy](#)

Looking for something?

021 Screaming Frog Ltd
77243 / VAT no. 995 3157 78

Use local vendors and reviews to enrich the page



Powerful data to optimize sales

Data is the currency of great commerce experiences. And integrated systems yield robust data and rich customer insights that support smarter strategies that fuel your business growth.

Our platform helps you connect the dots across all your customer touchpoints, understanding what, where, and when they are buying. It makes that data accessible

The Perfect International IA

Even Googlebot can't screw up

ccTLD, Subfolder or Subdomain?

Option for URLs	Example
ccTLD	yourwebsite.ca
Subfolder	yourwebsite.com/ca/en
Subdomain	ca.yourwebsite.com

ccTLD, Subfolder or Subdomain?

What?	Pros	Cons
ccTLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The domain feels the most endemic to the user	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Expensive to deploy and maintain- Also treated as its own domain, could take awhile to grow
Subfolder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Easiest implementation: one GSC set up, etc.- Doesn't require separate domain registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Inability to fully localize URLs, could hurt CTR in low-trust countries
Subdomain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Also treated as its own domain- Doesn't require separate domain registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Expensive to deploy and maintain- Also treated as its own domain, could take a while to grow

Subfolders are usually the Goldilocks solutions

- Easier to implement
- Only one service to maintain
- Main tradeoff is sometimes the URLs don't feel endemic to the country

Ideal URL structure

- Leads with country folder in slug, if there is one
- Uses ISO codes and follows web norms
- Hyphens, not underscores

Lead with country in the slug

yoursite.com/ca/en/



Country-first!

One or two folders is all good

**yoursite.com/ca/en/ OR
yoursite.com/ca-en/**



Use a hyphen, not
underscore!

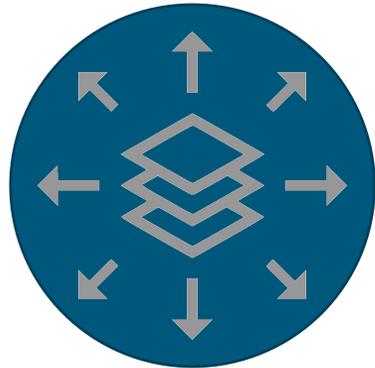
If using language-only targeting, add a subfolder ahead of language

[yoursite.com/lang/en](#)
[yoursite.com/lang/fr](#)

Use ISO - avoid uncommon patterns

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-IE" href="https://www.adobe.com/ie/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="ar-kw" href="https://www.adobe.com/mena_ar/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-IL" href="https://www.adobe.com/il_en/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-IN" href="https://www.adobe.com/in/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-AE" href="https://www.adobe.com/ae_en/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-ZA" href="https://www.adobe.com/africa/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="no-NO" href="https://www.adobe.com/no/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-am" href="https://www.adobe.com/cis_en/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="nl-NL" href="https://www.adobe.com/nl/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="ru-uz" href="https://www.adobe.com/cis_ru/" />  
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-AU" href="https://www.adobe.com/au/" />
```

Delivery and distribution



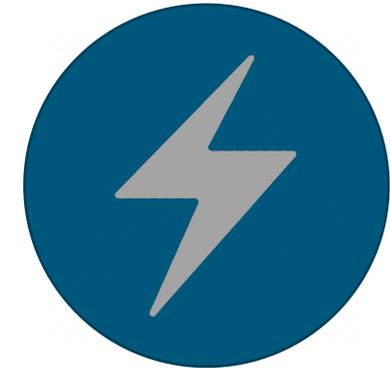
Use a CDN

This is critical for a performant global website



Mobile-first

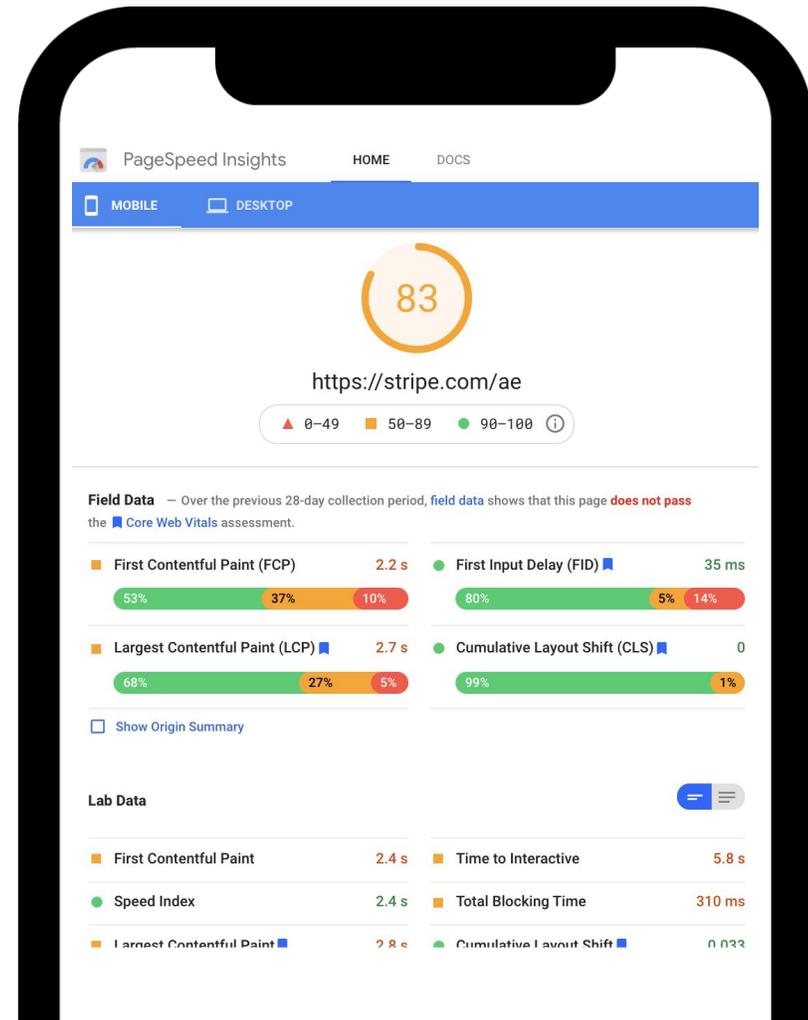
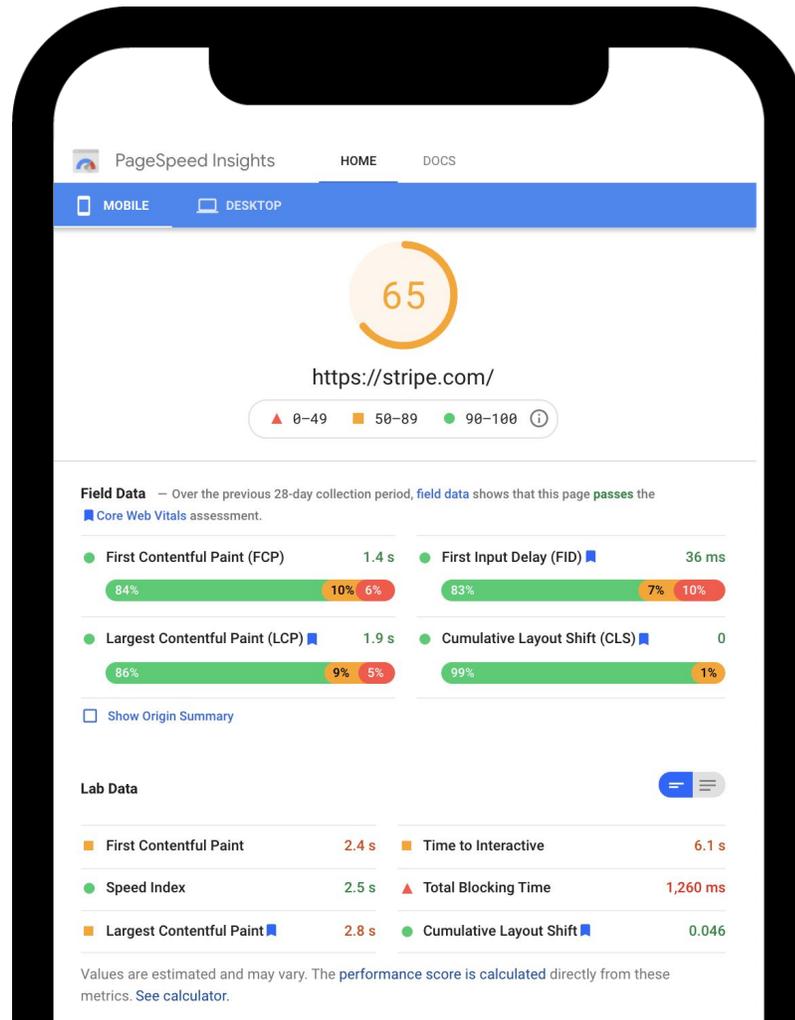
And don't discount the prevalence of Android outside of the USA



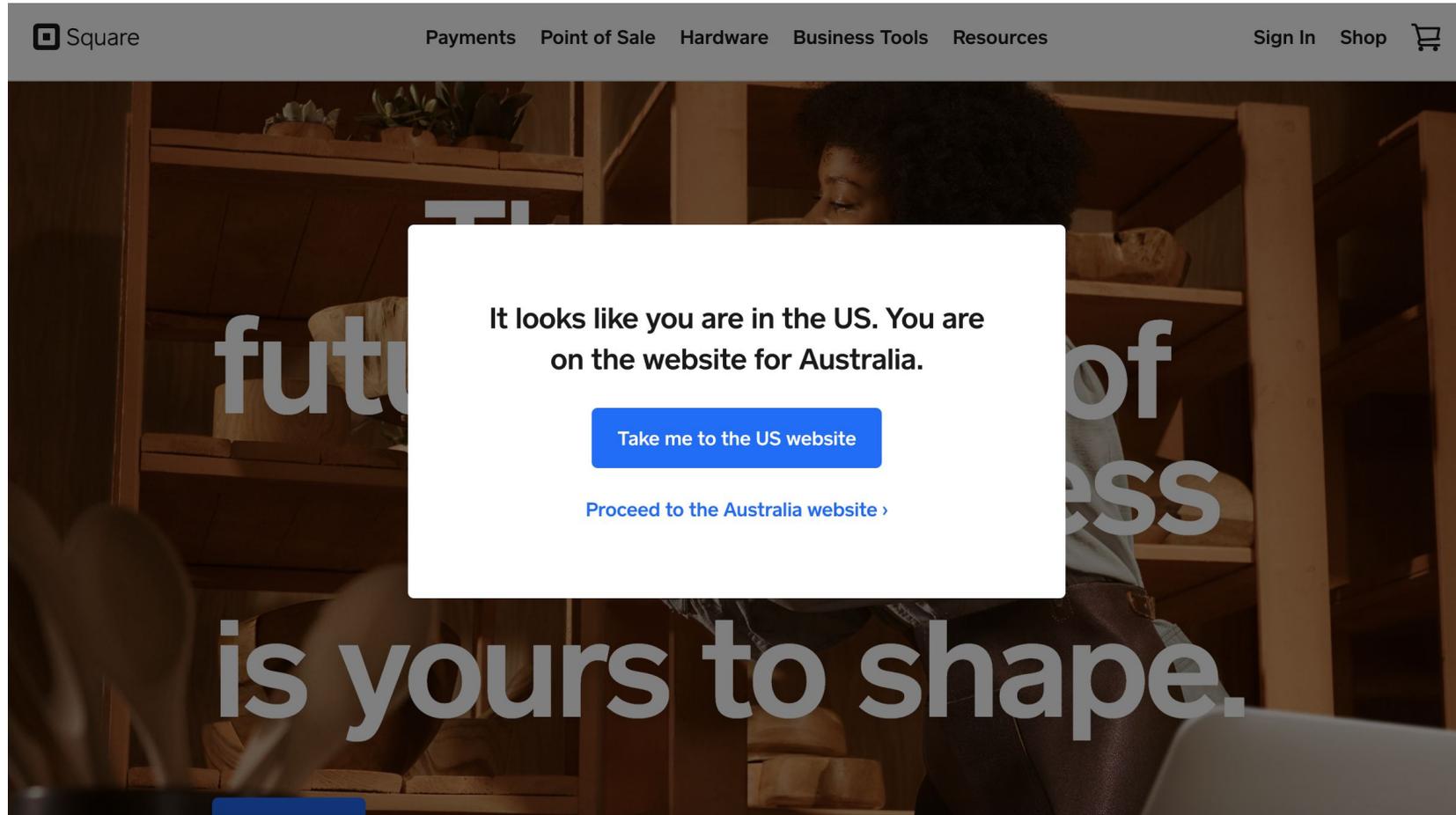
Optimize for your slowest market

Your speed is often determined by your floor, not your ceiling

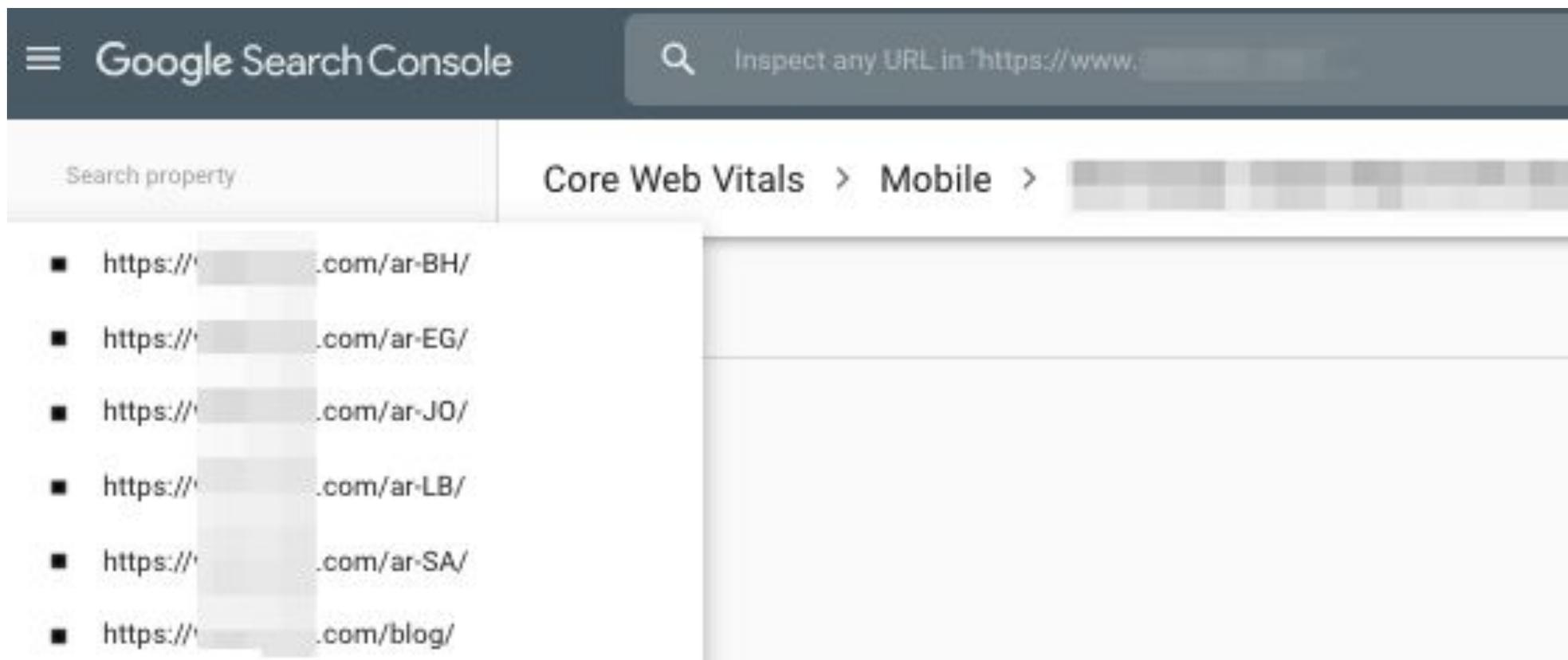
Compare the same page type in 2 geos



Suggest a redirect based on IP- don't force it



Lastly, add all country folders to GSC



And target these in Search Console

- 📍 Page Experience
- 📄 Core Web Vitals
- 📱 Mobile Usability

Security & Manual Actions ▾

Legacy tools and reports ▲

- 📄 International targeting
- 📄 Messages
- 📄 URL parameters
- 📄 Web Tools

[Learn more](#)

Search Console

International Targeting

Language

Country

Target users in: **United States** ▾

Save

Cancel

There's a lot to recap, including:

- Are you a country-agnostic or country-specific site?
- Do your URLs use ISO codes for language and start with country in slug (if applicable?)
- Do your URLs use hyphens?
- Etc..



**Download the
checklist at
bit.ly/jackiemozcon**

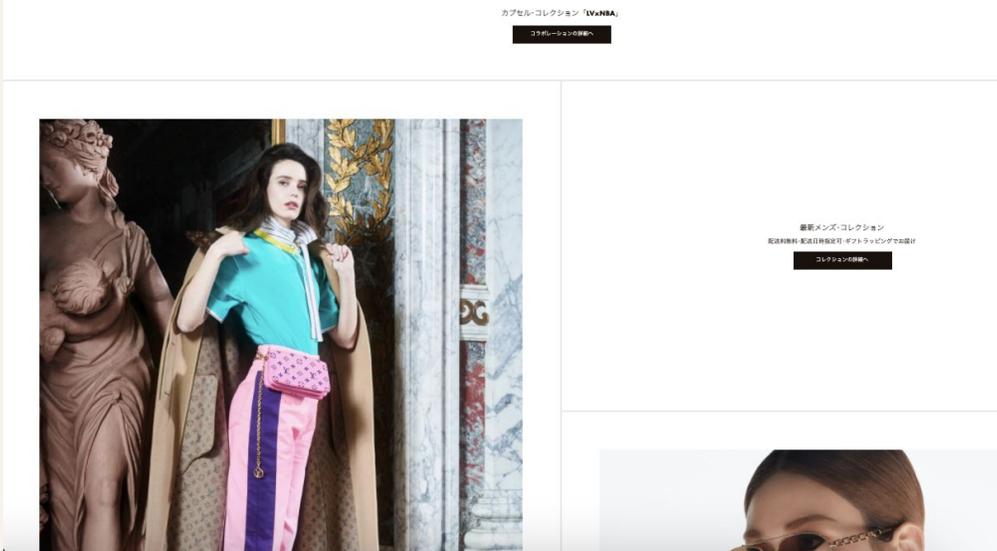
To see all this information
you learned in one place!

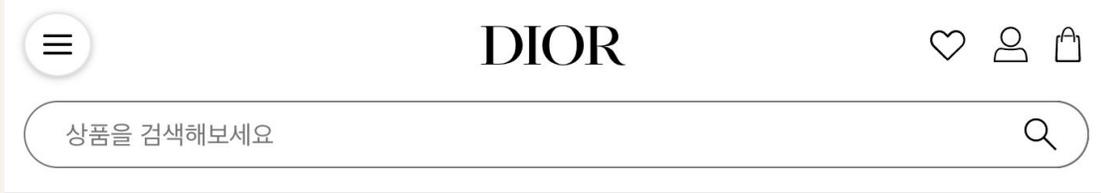
Some last tips



Update and localize photos - especially people!

This improves perception and provides an extra opportunity to localize content





Or just be DIOR

Decline to show anyone
at all!

And don't be afraid of different layouts

WOMEN



シルフィールブラウス

¥1,290

5月13日まで期間限定価格

HOME / WOMEN

WOMEN

Featured

New Arrivals

Sale

Best Sellers

NEW Live Station

Blog

Outerwear

Outerwear and Blazers

Fleece

Down Collection

Ultra Light Down

Hybrid Down

BLOCKTECH

Windproof

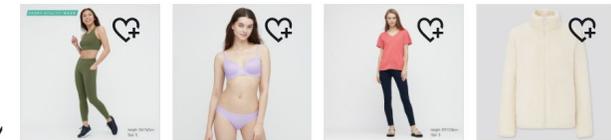


Just Arrived: Roy Lichtenstein

UT brings you the art of Roy Lichtenstein, icon of pop art.

[Shop Now](#)

Recommended For You



Or unique trends in SERPs

The screenshot shows a Google search for 'site:tabelog.com'. The search results are on page 2 of approximately 88,000,000 results, with a search time of 0.19 seconds. The results are filtered by 'All' and include navigation links for Images, News, Shopping, Maps, More, Settings, and Tools.

Page 2 of about 88,000,000 results (0.19 seconds)

<https://tabelog.com> > matome · [Translate this page](#) ⋮

【自由が丘】美味しいケーキを食べたい! おすすめの人気店15 ...
Sep 20, 2019 – スイーツ激戦区の自由が丘には、テイクアウトはもちろん、コーヒーや紅茶と一緒にゆったりケーキを楽しめるお店がたくさん! 行列必至の ...

<https://tabelog.com> > matome · [Translate this page](#) ⋮

どえらい旨いがや! 名古屋市のおすすめラーメン20選 [食べ ...
Oct 26, 2018 – 名古屋市内には「名古屋城」や「ナゴヤドーム」、「名古屋港水族館」など観光スポットが多数あるほか、ご当地グルメも種類豊富豊富。

<https://tabelog.com> > matome · [Translate this page](#) ⋮

大阪で人気の鰻屋さん 10選 [食べログまとめ]
Feb 17, 2016 – 大阪に観光に来られた際、串カツや粉ものも良いですが、機会があれば地焼き鰻を頂いてみては如何でしょうか。お勧め店を10店舗厳選して ...

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【家系総本山】吉村家直系の横浜家系ラーメン店 (全国9店舗+ ...
May 6, 2020 – 2020.05.06画像差し替え※ 横浜家系ラーメンと言えば、云わずと知れた横浜にある「吉村家」が起源。そこで修行、独立し更に正式に認定 (...

Extra credit: translate URLs if possible



Google site:squareup.com/jp

https://squareup.com › press · Translate this page ⋮
プレスリリース - Square
最近お届けした商品、パートナーシップ、Squareのメディアセンターからのプレスリリースについて。

https://squareup.com › security · Translate this page ⋮
最新セキュリティで安全決済 | Square (スクエア)
最先端のセキュリティ完備の決済サービスSquareは、包括代理加盟店として、加盟店様のPCI準拠を全面的にサポートします。

https://careers.squareup.com › ... · Translate this page ⋮
採用情報 | Square (スクエア)
Squareでは、周辺機器から料金構成、お支払いに至るまで、「価値の交換」について再考しています。クリエイティブで協調性があり、起業家精神に溢れた人材 ...

https://squareup.com › affiliate · Translate this page ⋮
Square アフィリエイト・プログラム
Squareの様々なプロダクトの使い方、それらを活用した事業での売り上げの伸ばし方を紹介して、成果報酬を得ませんか？

And my most favorite tip

Google Sheets translation hack

Keyword	Destination Language	End Keywords
Dog	ES	Perro
Cat	ES	
Mom	ES	

Thank You!