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The huge dependency on the web world for almost everything in this modern world demands that websites to serve content to vastly diverse audiences. Depending on this demand Drupal's language support has become the major key to sites that require internationalization. This is because of Drupal's robust API and wide variety of contributed modules.

In this article we will look at some of the tools used to create Drupal 7 multilingual sites, provide implementation recommendations, and give you a bit of a preview as far as what is in store in the upcoming major release of Drupal 8.

Presently, the localization and internationalization requirements in Drupal 7 are handled by a number of different modules. Almost all of these needs are supported by the Locale and Content Translation modules, which has become a part of the Drupal core, but more frequently they are required to be complemented by the other modules like Localization Update, Admin Language, Internationalization, Title, Entity Translation, Translation Overview and many more.

Language Support

Drupal's language support can be used in many ways. One of the use cases is when developing a website that is only shown in one language, containing no text or translation support. An example of this is a French website with no English text or translation. Another use case is when developing a site supporting content written in several languages, again with no translation support. A yet another use case is when creating a website in one or more languages with translatable content included. Thus, whatever your multilingual site's needs be, Drupal has the capability to handle the task.

Drupal has a varied range of modules providing language support and it can rather become puzzling if the user is not aware of a module's specific purpose. Fortunately, these modules can be classified according to functionality in four major groups. Those are as follows:

- a) Interface translation
- b) Content language / translation
- c) Configuration language / translation
- d) Base language functionality and APIs

The illustration below shows the vast array of use-cases for multilingual support within Drupal.

As seen in the image, when creating Drupal sites that will only have one language (different than English) the only two elements you need to be concerned about are language and interface. When you are creating a website that will have content in more than one language, but different pieces of content for each language audience, you should concentrate on the language, each language's interface as well as defining the language negotiation and content selection rules. The final complexity comes when you have a full multilingual site; that is a site that will have English as the base language as well as translated copies of each piece of content.

Interface Translation

These modules will help you in offering a localized version of any text that you see on your interface, including buttons and labels, excluding user generated content such as blog posts, pages or articles.

Content Language / Translation

These modules will let you to take a present piece of user generated content (node) and identify the language in which it was written. These modules also allow you to translate the node by creating a matching node in a different language while maintaining the relationship between them.

Configuration Language / Translation

These modules will give you the means to override system configuration variables depending on the language being displayed. When you look at it deeply, Drupal is managed and driven by a significant amount of configuration variables. A small example of this is the variable that defines what the home page location is. If you want different pages to show up depending on the visitor's preferred language, then these modules will provide the administrative screens to be able to choose a different landing page for each language.

Base Language Functionality and APIs

These modules are liable for the language selection, language negotiation and more significantly providing an API that will allow other modules to interact with these processes. These modules make Drupal's language support robust and extensible.

How Many Multilingual Modules Are There?

Drupal 7 contains various modules for language support. There are well over 50 generally used modules to support your multilingual requirements. The purpose of this blog post is to provide a helpful overview of what is required to make your site multilingual.

A few tips from our end

Now, let us look at a few tips that we came to learn from years of experience at building multilingual sites in Drupal. The following are some questions that you should ask yourself before you even start building your website, and build it precisely depending on your well-thought answers:

UX and URL aesthetics: What should you be using, a separate domain, a sub domain or a directory to identify each language?

Do you need translations of all content in all languages?

Will the navigation change from language to language?

Will the layout change from language to language?

Should the source content be shown when a translation isn't available?

Do you have special needs around e-commerce? For instance how will you deal with taxes, currencies, and measuring units?

Should the administrative screens have a different default language from the publicly available pages?

Are you planning to support Right-to-Left (RTL) languages and if so have you planned for it and estimated additional time for theming of these pages?

Has the core Drupal UI been translated for the languages you have chosen? You can check the overall progress of each language at <http://localize.drupal.org/translate/languages>

Can you and your team handle the translations in-house making the translation efforts sustainable?

A final advise:

Don't forget to keep your SEO in mind: Use modules like Global Redirect, Meta Tags, Meta Tags Quick, Page Title, Pathauto, Redirect, Translation Redirect and Transliteration for a better i18n user experience and better SEO.

Drupal is really improving to become even better with each release and its multilingual support is obviously improving with it. There are many considerations that one must make before developing a multilingual website. Expectantly we'll all have a far better multilingual experience in the next most awaited release of Drupal.

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