

Presenting Drupal Content in Multiple Languages

Drupal-based websites provide an exceptional structure for displaying content in more than one language. However, the process must be streamlined and handled with care as there are various methods that produce seemingly identical results. Each translation technique comes with its own strengths and weaknesses, but it ultimately comes down to designing an efficient workflow model. The Drupal core includes the Locale module, which enables text strings to be translated with gettext tools; this makes it easy to build a site in a single language. But to create a site that has multiple translations, one will need additional software and Internationalization/Localization module integration.

Balboa Park Online Collaborative (BPOC) built and continues to manage The Japanese Friendship Garden (Niwa.org) Drupal website. It's the goal of the BPOC to facilitate and execute a fundamental change in the way museums, cultural arts, and science institutions in Balboa Park use online technology to fulfill their missions, interact with patrons, and collaborate. These initiatives are designed to improve technological capabilities, while reducing costs by bringing together organizations with similar needs on mutually beneficial projects. This would allow smaller institutions to benefit from the technological advancement used by larger organizations that, in turn, would benefit from streamlined expenditures.

Successful translation techniques begin with Internationalization (I18n). This simply presents the functionality for one piece of content to be replaced by its counterpart in another language. Internationalization is followed by Localization (L10n), which defines the actual process of translating content.

Web content found on Niwa.org is presented in three languages: English, Japanese, and Spanish. They consulted with Achieve about three concerns: 1) Much of what they translated, via volunteers, did not include a clear and simple workflow, which inevitably made it prone to mistakes and accidents; 2) The default translation methodology of only presenting translated content, menus, sub-menus, and footer content was creating visitor confusion. They wanted all menus and content to appear in English if no other translation was available. So if a translation is available—present that. If no translation is available—present English as the default language; 3) There were some anomalies occurring on the site. For example, some navigation menu content might appear in Japanese, but the English version would appear directly below it. There were also instances of missing content all together, which confused the team at BPOC because it was evident those pieces had already been translated. It became clear that the system of populating fresh, translated content had become corrupt at some point during development.

Upon investigation, Achieve discovered that the previous developers had used three separate and distinct instances of the primary menu (one in each language). From a best practices standpoint, using only one primary menu provides for better workflow and post-development site management. They also used an independent container menu whereas they would have been better served using multiple containers.

To remedy the situation, Achieve reconfigured the I18n module to streamline the nodes, blocks, menus, and taxonomy. More specifically, Achieve identified the language for each node and configured blocks by language. Achieve then created language-specific versions of each menu entry and put in place a more intuitive system of taxonomy.

Serving as an information and operations consultant, Achieve provided for a smooth transition from a corrupt workflow to a workflow designed for complex language-population control. This new system was specifically tailored and ideal for a company using remote translators such as the Japanese Friendship Garden Museum. Achieve also improved workflow using the ICanLocalize Translation Management (SP) module, which allowed for a translation editor to login and then see only their individual language tasks.

Development summary:

- Designed an efficient workflow model
- Integrated the Internationalization/Localization module
- Resolved issues with the navigation menu content
- Streamlined the nodes, blocks, menus, and taxonomy

BPOC benefits:

- Improved technological capabilities
- Eliminated user confusion
- Reduced costs
- Allowed smaller institutions to benefit from streamlined expenditures

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