

Digital Language Solutions: Your Route to Business Growth in **POST-BREXIT COVID BRITAIN**

WORD360



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INTRODUCTION

“Obstacles aren’t roadblocks, they’re steppingstones” – Jeffery Benjamin

The sheer weirdness of 2020 is something none of us will have experienced before, and while many things summarise this, the fact that the Merriam Webster dictionary now features ‘socially distance’ as a verb is one of the most succinct. This year has been a challenging one for all aspects of our lives, as we’ve had to refrain from seeing family and friends, adjust to new ways of working, and, in many cases, carry a business through a pandemic and ongoing Brexit uncertainty.

This double-whammy of worst-case scenarios has made life harder for business throughout the UK and indeed the world, with COVID-19 having a profound and ongoing effect on our economies and uncertainty surrounding Brexit serving to compound things yet further.

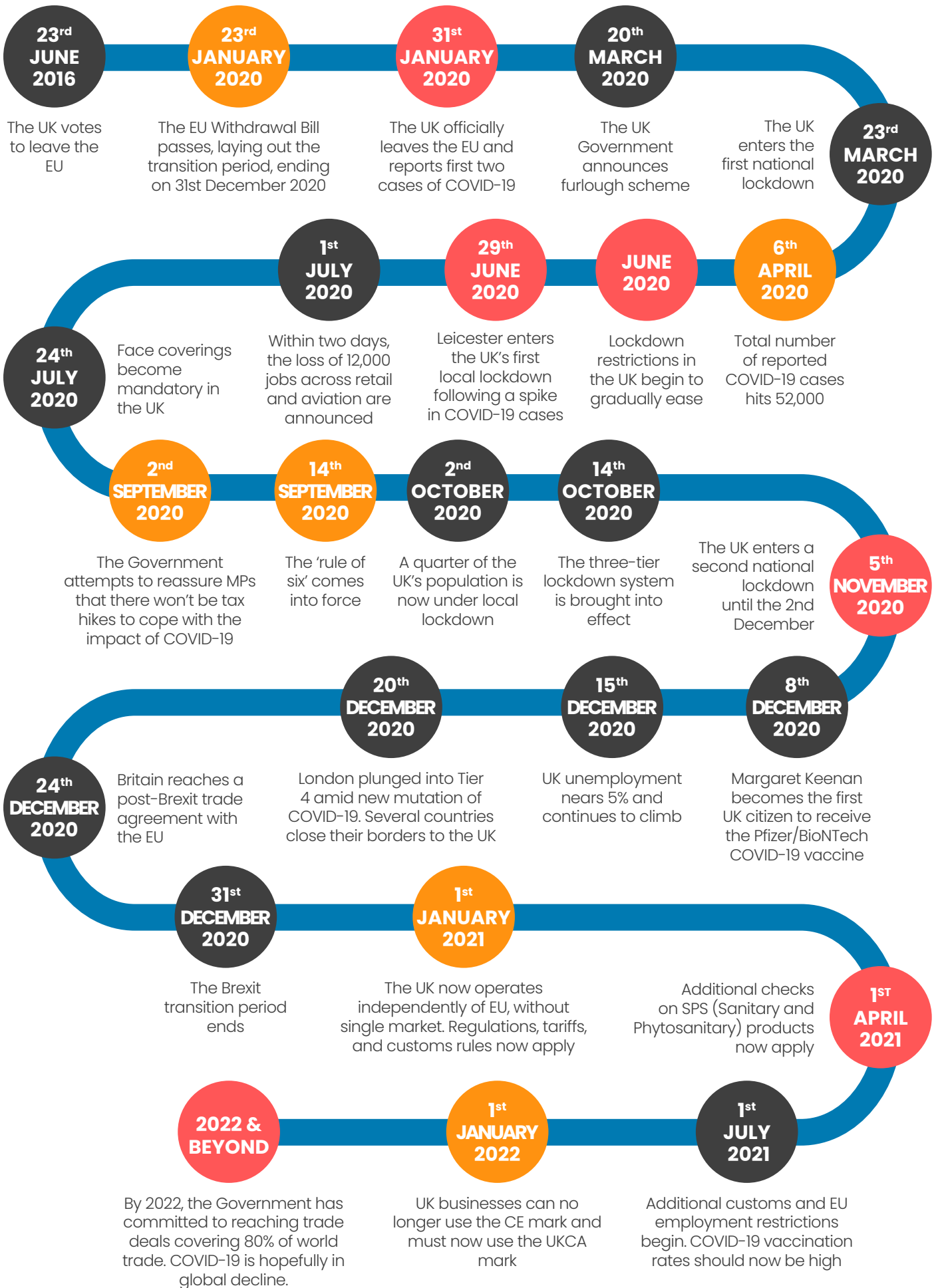
However, every challenge is a new opportunity in disguise, and there are roads to strength for those who can identify them. In Brexit, comes a roster of new markets and new potential trading partners, and in COVID-19 comes an opportunity to get ahead through digitisation and making the best of the new agreements fostered as a result of leaving the EU.

When viewed in a new way, this double dose of hardship becomes a steppingstone to growth. Using the latest technology twinned with a fresh take on globalisation, businesses can adapt, survive, and better yet, thrive throughout current hardships, and beyond. These adaptations and evolutions will likely even set you and your business in good stead for future threats.

With this guide, we will discuss the challenges facing businesses, identifying points of harm, and how you can ensure that they become little more than rungs on a ladder to the top.



BREXIT & COVID-19: A TIMELINE



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BUSINESSES

The effects of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis on business in the UK and around the world have been profound. Global economies have felt the strain of downturns caused by lockdowns and subsequent wage squeezes. New ways of working have become necessary, both to comply with legislation and to keep staff safe, protecting workflows. In turn, businesses of all kinds have been forced to digitise at a dramatically accelerated pace.

AN ECONOMY UNDER STRESS

In the first three months of 2020, the Dow and FTSE saw their **biggest quarterly drop** since 1987. For those of us old enough and wise enough to remember that period in Britain's history, those kinds of statements will likely make you more than a little nervous.

The pandemic has **limited consumers' ability to earn** and therefore to spend, as well as made them hesitant to do so. This means that profit margins for businesses in almost all sectors are falling as a result, and so on throughout supply chains. Because capitalism is a cyclical system, any slowing at one point in the cycle results in a slowing and contracting throughout.

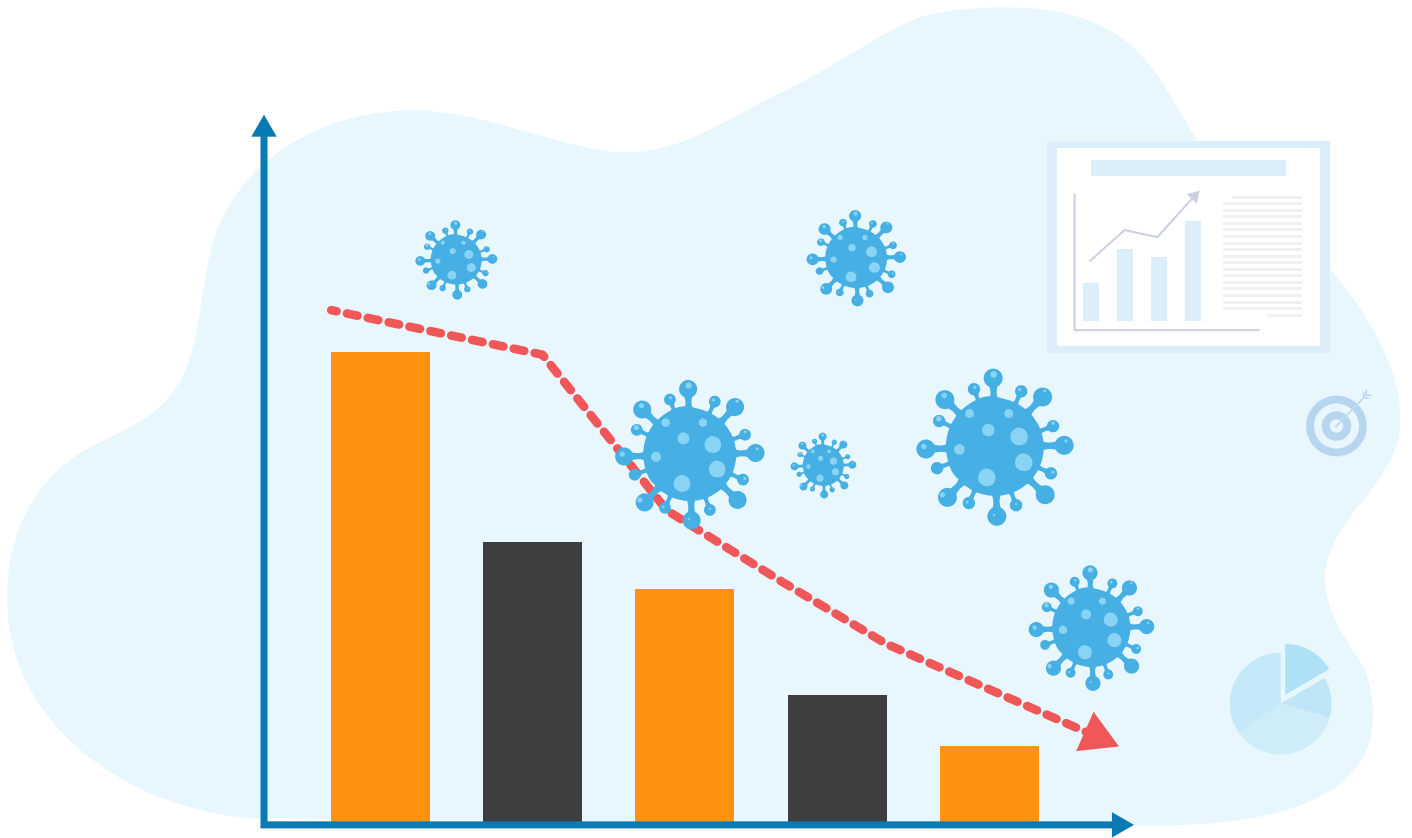
What this often-forgotten fundamental feature of our economic reality also entails, however, is that the route out of a contraction is an expansion. For example, spending at another point in the cycle feeds the rest of the cycle, and so on. What this means is that if those with spending power and determination invest their money in growth-orientated projects, not only will that business likely get a leg-up on the competition, but the economy as a whole will also benefit.

'WORK FROM HOME WHERE POSSIBLE'

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, the Government has instructed employers and employees to work from home where possible and to only travel to communal places of work when absolutely necessary. What this has meant is a paradigm shift for many, working from home offices, sofas, and kitchen tables with the help of video conferencing software.

By March of 2020, Zoom had **added more new members** than it did throughout the entirety of 2019. The shift was a major and sudden administrative task for many employers and managers, but needs must. This new, remote method of working, while alien to many, has brought its share of benefits, including those to the environment, as many will remember shots of the canals in Venice under lockdown, once again populated with fish and even cormorants.

At Word360, we have experienced a dramatic rise in the use of our telephone and video interpreting services, especially among the medical and healthcare community. In fact, the use of remote interpreting has risen by 75% and those firms that have invested in interpreting technology have seen profit increases of 20-25%.

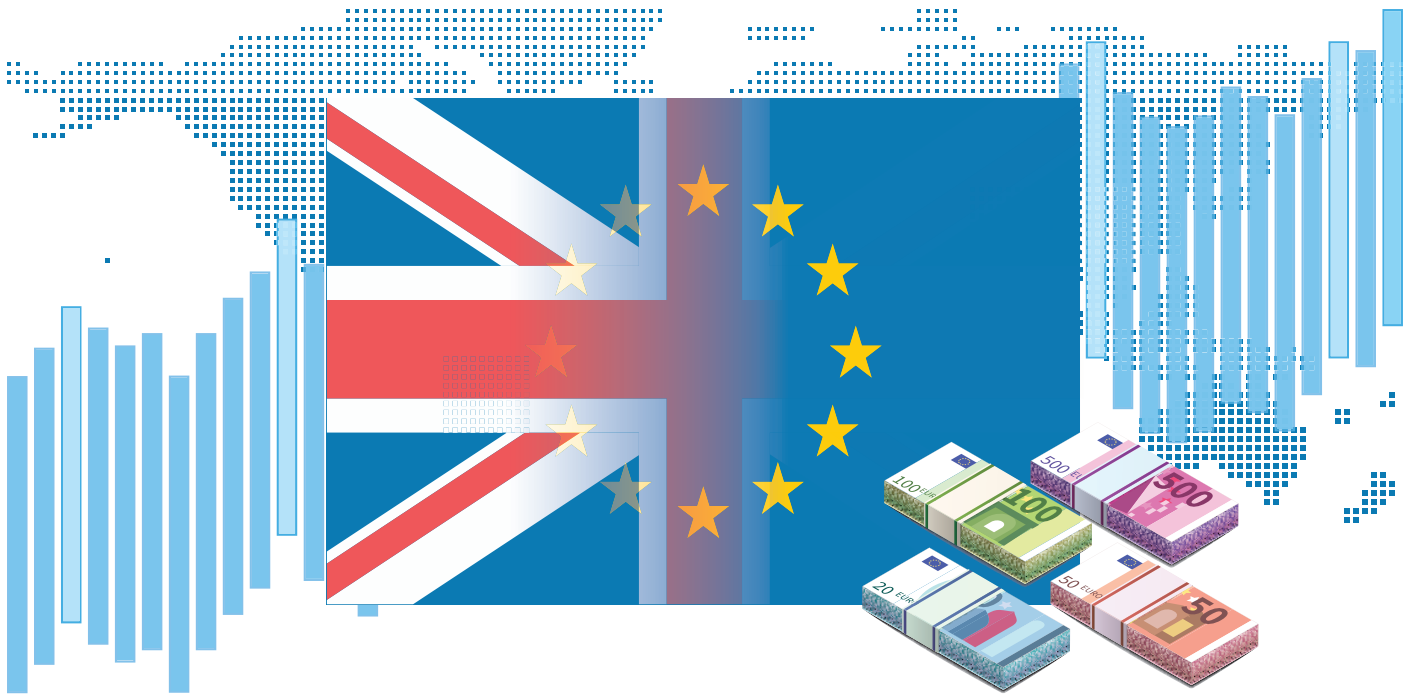


DIGITISATION ACCELERATED

Digitisation is a subject that will likely have been in the minds of many business leaders for some years now, however, the pandemic and our new remote methods of working have driven a sharp acceleration in the uptake of digital solutions.

This extends beyond simply a matter of remote working and into the almost revolutionised ways in which consumers interact with brands. Digital has been the solution to our increasingly distant world, and has moved from being simply a platform to being the platform.

Additionally, using smart, automated technologies will allow businesses to improve efficiencies at such a crucial time. Those businesses which can adopt digital, and adopt it intelligently, stand to get ahead of their competition. Word360 has moved to strengthen its bespoke Wordskii software platform in the wake of increased demand and a new version is due in 2021, advancing the digitisation possible in translation and interpreting services.



THE IMPACT OF BREXIT ON BUSINESSES

Underlining and often compounding the issues caused by Coronavirus has been our march towards the end of the Brexit transition period throughout 2020. For most of this transition, it seemed reasonable to assume that we could leave without a deal, something frequently repeated by the Government. Nonetheless, a trade deal with the EU has been struck, and marks the beginning of a new relationship with the Continent. Additionally, we now have new partnerships and new markets to look to as we move on from 2020.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

One of the most oft quoted phrases from the past 4 years has been 'Brexit uncertainty'. While it's probably white noise to most at this point, it's arguable that one of the most damaging effects of the Brexit vote to date has been the uncertainty it's caused. With trade talks having run [down to the wire on Christmas Eve](#), no one has known what the UK's future outside of the EU looks like, and in many ways, we still don't.

The UK has not been outside of the EU since 1973, and the world has changed somewhat since then. A trade deal with the EU is a major step in the right direction but uncertainty still looms large over the world of business. This has made consumers and investors alike shy about parting with their cash.

OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONTINENT

On Christmas Eve 2020, a post-Brexit deal was agreed in principle with the EU. This agreement sets out our new relationship with our Continental neighbours and dictates the way we will do trade with one of the world's largest trading blocs.

Agreement or not, Brexit is a paradigm shift for the UK. It will mean more restrictions on trade, travel, and communications. The deal does provide us with some protections on issues such as a 'level playing field' for businesses on both sides of the Channel, as well as agreed smoothing over of conformity assessments for some products.

The larger picture, though, is that **new barriers will exist** in almost every facet of business with the EU, from imports and exports to travel. The deal should be viewed more as a mitigator of these barriers, not a removal.

THE NEW PARADIGM OF TRADE

What our distancing from the EU does allow for, however, is trade deals with previously restricted new markets, meaning a shift of focus for our relationships. This new paradigm of trade places us in the world market for the first time since the '70s.

Our new arena will likely be a challenge that some fail but will allow others to thrive in ways they would not otherwise have been able to. The key will be understanding how to make the most of our new agreements and appreciating what they have to offer, as well as what we can offer them.



GLOBALISATION AS A MEANS OF SURVIVAL AND GROWTH

90% of the world's trade occurs outside of the EU, and we now sit in this 90% bracket. This is potentially daunting, but the solution is simple, in principle; we are now operating in a global arena so in order to survive and flourish, UK businesses must globalise in turn. In view of COVID-19, globalisation can also be a route to short-term survival as well as a long-term growth plan.

NEW MARKETS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

By 2022, the Government has committed to making arrangements to cover 80% of our global trade. These arrangements are of such importance because without them, we would be trading under World Trade Organisation terms. WTO terms offer some base protections but do not provide anywhere near the level of frictionless trade which we'll need in order to maintain our standing as the **5th largest exporter of tech services**, for example.

New agreements have already been struck with major and growing economies including Japan and Mexico, with Mexico alone providing UK businesses with access to some 130 million consumers. Making the best of these opportunities will require some adaptations and flexibility, but the markets and consumers are there for those with the drive and know-how to act.

SURVIVE AND FLOURISH

As we've noted earlier in this guide, the compound effects of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused economies around the world to shrink, and the UK is obviously no exception. However, by stepping outside of one now smaller market and into a number of others, it's possible to mitigate the effects of shrinking in any one market.

Businesses could recoup lost income in one country by earning a segment of the market in others, providing a short-term survival strategy throughout the economic woes brought on by Coronavirus. Looking beyond the pandemic, having already established yourself in new markets will set you ahead of the competition.

As the world takes a breath and recovers from the havoc wreaked by COVID-19, economies and markets will begin to recover, and because you're already operational in these markets, you'll be poised to reap the rewards as they arrive. As such, globalisation should be viewed as a COVID-19 survival strategy and a long-term investment simultaneously.

BE PANDEMIC-PROOF

The outbreak of COVID-19 has shown this generation the destructive capabilities of pandemics; how quickly and how easily they can bring our way of life to a halt, as well as just how long their effects can persist.

Despite how damaging COVID-19 has been, and as we begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel, the World Health Organisation is doing its best to remind us that as populations continue to grow, pandemics will begin to become more common-place. Dr. Michael Ryan, executive director of the WHO's health emergencies programme, has [warned that COVID-19 "is not necessarily the big one"](#), and should serve as a wake-up call.

This call should resonate beyond a government and medical level and into the business world, encouraging leaders to prepare their businesses and employees for whatever comes next. By establishing yourself on a global stage, you place your business in a better position should the economy-shrinking effects of a pandemic come to visit once more.



USING LANGUAGE TO GLOBALISE

A major aspect of working across borders is factoring in regional variations such as language. Used correctly, language can be a tool for globalisation, allowing you to sell to people in their own languages. While this may seem daunting, making use of digital technology can remove barriers and enable globalisation on an unprecedented scale.

SELL TO PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES

If a brand presents its information to you in a format that is difficult to understand, you'll be less likely to buy from them, right? The same is true of your potential customers, in fact, in a 10-country survey, 60% of respondents said they would rarely or never buy from English language sites.

In your mission to globalise, survive, and thrive, you should invest in translations along the way to ensure that you're speaking to people in their own languages, building an extra bond of trust with your audience.

MACHINE TRANSLATION: FORGET GOOGLE

Your route to globalisation lies in the efficiencies made possible by Machine Translation. Machine Translation is making use of advancements in machine learning to generate an artificial intelligence capable of translating large swathes of text. This is vital to mass globalisation efforts because of the leaps and bounds it allows with regards to efficiencies.

It's vital here, that we create a distinction between Machine Translation software and platforms such as Google Translate. Google's conversational translation tool is great for a number of things, but its ability to translate complex or nuanced documents is far from proven. Many of you will be aware of the [comical outcomes possible](#) when using Google Translate, but the tools used by Machine Translation professionals are designed with a much more profound level of sophistication in mind, as well as a different purpose altogether.

As sophisticated as machine translators have become, however, they're not novelists, not yet anyway. What they are, however, is quick. Using their highly refined banks of learned words, phrases, and sentences, machine translators are capable of translating huge bodies of texts in seconds with increasing accuracy.

Because translating is often a repetitive and labour-intensive process, translators would otherwise spend hours translating the same words and phrases over and over; imagine, for instance, how many times a translator would have repeat the word 'translation' in this text. This means that the role of the human translator has evolved.

The human element of translation now extends to proofing and perfecting content, rather than almost recreating it at the considerable expense of time and cost. Consequently, translations are now available on a large scale faster, better, and more cost-efficiently than ever before.

In turn, this allows for a process of mass-globalisation using language as a tool. It means you're able to translate all of your written consumer-facing content quickly and efficiently and sell to new markets with relative ease. Once demand has been established in any given market, you're then able to make a data-driven, informed decision as to whether to commit additional resources to this market, such as more refined, human-orientated translations of key content.

This intelligent and efficient allocation of resources is your key to non-English speaking markets around the world that could offer you and your business fresh opportunities to survive and flourish as we navigate our post-Brexit journey through COVID-19 and beyond.

KEEP WORKING WITH REMOTE INTERPRETING

Our compound world affecters have meant and will mean changes to way that business relationships are forged and maintained on a global scale. Brexit will make travelling more costly and more arduous, and COVID-19 has already made it much more dangerous. However, the solution lies in the remote technology we have all already adopted in order to keep working.

With the use of telephone and video communications, businesses and, crucially, public sector organisations, can continue to provide services and solutions to non-English speakers. Interpreters are able to facilitate communications with the use of remote technology, meaning that businesses can still undertake meetings and crucial conferences and the public sector can maintain its vital levels of accessibility.

These services are indispensable in the current climate, and businesses that have invested in remote interpreting technology have seen profit increases of 20–25%, with a 75% rise in the uptake of remote interpreting. At Word360, we have been on the forefront of this paradigm shift, and have been making use of our bespoke software offering, Wordskii, to ensure that businesses and the public sector alike have access to expert interpreters as and when they need them.



CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing global emergency, and has affected every aspect of our lives, with businesses far from exempt. Its destructive power has caused economies to wither the world over and has brought with it a warning of what the consequences would likely be should we encounter another such disease.

In the UK, this has been set against the backdrop of Brexit and the profound uncertainty it has brought, with an EU deal only being agreed at the last minute. Now though, the road to survival and prosperity is paved with adaptation, the way in which British businesses view themselves and the world around them must evolve.

Cutting ties with the EU complicates our cross-Channel relationships but opens us to the rest of the world; a forum in which 90% of global trade occurs. It's important now for us to stake our claim in this larger arena and embrace our new partnerships and the renewed opportunities they present.

The impetus, now more than ever, is on British businesses to look to the world stage, not only to survive but to flourish too. The route to this invigorated globalisation is made clear, in a large part, by the efficiencies offered by Machine Translation. Businesses are now able to translate large quantities of text quickly, accurately, and cost-efficiently, meaning they can sell to new customers in their own languages.

This is reinforced by the cross-language conversational capabilities offered by remote interpreting services, via telephone and video, which have already seen dramatic rises in usage since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At Word360, we understand the challenges and, perhaps most importantly, opportunities in front of businesses and the public sector. We also understand how to overcome these challenges and make the most of opportunities, using bespoke software-orientated language services as our primary tool. Developed in-house, Wordskii is our industry-leading software platform, allowing integrated access to our complete roster of services, as well as providing vital usage data.

As a result, we have been at the forefront of helping businesses and the public sector alike find ways to maintain strength, even now, and to plan for future growth in post-Brexit COVID Britain.

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Celebrating 30 years in business, Word360 is the Midlands' leading translations and interpreting agency, working with major global clients to help remove language barriers where it matters most. Operational in over 55 countries through a network of more than 9,800 specialised linguists, they enable global conversations and provide award-winning support across multiple industries and sectors.