

**SE**  **BYTES**

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# HREFLANG TIPS

August 2024

# I USE LOCAL TLDS

## DO I NEED HREFLANG?

Do you have a .com website or other global top level domain (TLD) as part of your infrastructure?



If the answer is yes, then you need Hreflang.

We often see US companies who target local users with a .com and target non-US users with local TLDs. But the .com site has a “right to rank” globally, so if Google doesn’t understand the relationship between the .com and the local TLDs then the .com will show up in local search results, particularly for branded queries.

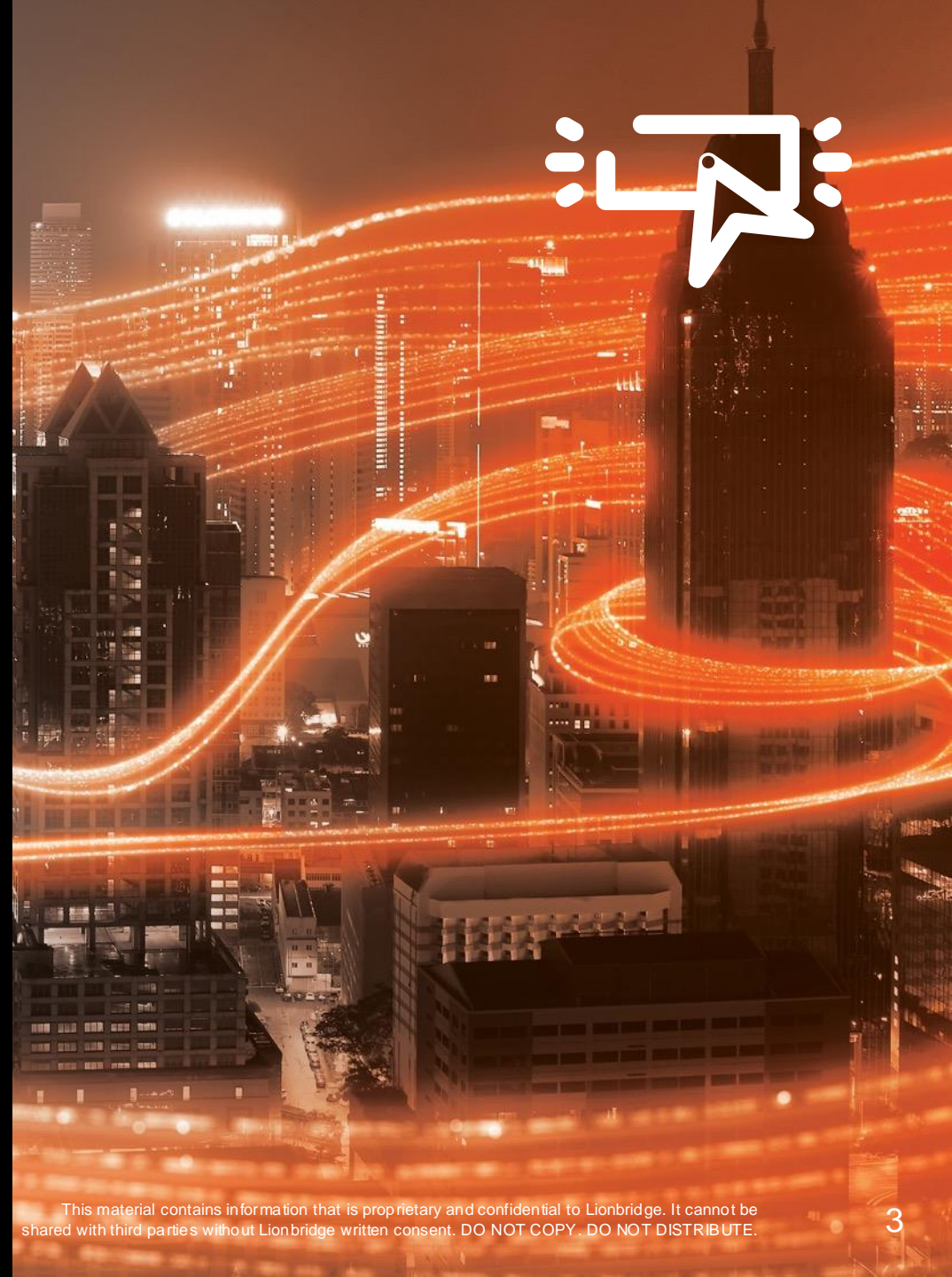
# IS X-DEFAULT ALWAYS NECESSARY?

## WHAT DOES IT DO?

**When you use x-default, you are saying to Google, if the user doesn't conform to any of the other hreflang rules, then send them to the x-default page.**

This is dangerous in a partial implementation of hreflang (not all versions are included), the x-default URL has a right to rank in the regions which have not been included.

If you have a language-region implementation, then x-default can cause problems. If you have a page in Arabic (for example), which is coded with “ar-sa”, and you have an x-default which points to an English page. Then you are telling Google to show non-Saudi Arabian users, who speak Arabic, the English page.





# LANGUAGE LEVEL OF REGIONAL?

USE “EN” OR “EN-US”?

## Match your approach to your localization approach.

If you have a single version of each language, then go language level. If you are targeting 2 or 3 regions with the same language, then you need to be at regional level. But always consider how can you target the widest audience and mix and match the approach, where appropriate.

If you are targeting at regional level, also consider adding in a language level fallback. For example, if you are targeting France (“fr-fr”) and Canada (“fr-ca”) in French, you may want to consider other French users (e.g. Swiss or Belgian) and point them at one of the existing French pages using “fr”.



# SOMETIMES GOOGLE DOESN'T AGREE

## WHAT AM I DOING WRONG?

Sometimes it is hard to work out why a hreflang implementation isn't working. Sometimes Google doesn't agree with the rules you implement, it may feel it knows better.

**For example, a website where the source content is Spanish, using Spanish content as the x-default, but which has English content. Google may override the x-default rule and show the English page to non-Spanish users.**

Is every version of the page included in the solution, has a new version of the page been published but not included in the solution.

Is every website included in the solution, check if a local marketing team has created a new site to target local users.

# HOW DO I TEST HREFLANG?

## WHERE ARE THE TOOLS?

**Google used to have a hreflang tool in Google Search Console, it generated a lot of false positives while the tags were being processed but these usually aged out.**

Semrush site audit reviews hreflang in <head> implementations but also generates a lot of false positives and they won't add in valid codes such as "zh-hans". Screaming Frog will review <head> and sitemap implementations.

It is easy to see if Google is paying attention to your tags. Go into local search (multiple markets) and do a brand search or a product search, for which the site(s) has a strong right to rank. If you see 2 versions of the same page, or pages coming from different regions, for the same query, then hreflang is not working properly.



# HREFLANG NEWS

WHERE GARY GOES, GOOGLE USUALLY GOES, TOO.

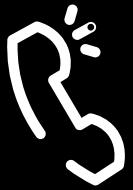
“Gary Illyes, a Google analyst, believes that search engines should rely less on annotations like hreflang and more on automatically learned signals.”

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-may-rely-less-on-hreflang-shift-to-auto-language-detection/523224/>

Gary Illyes is an interesting person to follow, he is excellent at giving hints as to the future of SEO and Google. With so few sites using hreflang, it is essential that Google try to understand sites without it. But in the short to medium terms (maybe even the long term), hreflang is still the best way to tell Google what page to land in each market.







## CONTACT US

BRENDAN WALSH, GLOBAL SEO SME

[BRENDAN.WALSH@LIONBRIDGE.COM](mailto:BRENDAN.WALSH@LIONBRIDGE.COM)

[SEO@LIONBRIDGE.COM](mailto:SEO@LIONBRIDGE.COM)