Steps to Plan a Bilingual Website for Dubai Customers

Why Bilingual Web Design Matters in Dubai

Dubai is a city where Arabic and English coexist in daily life. Government communications, street signs, menus, and business documents routinely appear in both languages. For a company targeting local customers, a website that works well in Arabic and English is not a luxury, it is a basic expectation. A poorly executed bilingual site confuses visitors, hurts credibility, and drives potential clients to competitors who get it right.

Planning a bilingual website for Dubai customers means thinking about layout, language direction, navigation, and search visibility from the start. Retrofitting a second language later almost always creates technical debt and a clunky user experience. The steps below walk through what to consider at each stage, so the final site feels natural in both languages.

Understand the Audience and Their Language Preferences

Dubai's population includes Emiratis, expatriates from across the Arab world, and a large international workforce. Some users prefer Arabic for official or cultural content but switch to English for technical or commercial information. Others are native English speakers who need access to Arabic content for legal or local context. A bilingual site must serve both groups without assuming one language is primary for everyone.

Decide early whether the site will mirror content exactly in both languages or offer different content tailored to each audience. Full translation works well for straightforward information like services, contact details, and policies. For blog posts or product descriptions, partial localization may be more practical. The key is consistency, a user who switches languages should not find missing pages or broken links.

Choose the Right URL Structure for Each Language

Search engines need clear signals about which version of a page to show in which language. The most common approaches are separate subdirectories (example.com/ar/ and example.com/en/) or separate subdomains (ar.example.com and en.example.com). Subdirectories are simpler to manage and keep link equity consolidated under one domain. Subdomains can work for very large sites with distinct teams for each language, but they split SEO signals.

Whichever structure you pick, implement hreflang tags correctly. These tell Google and other search engines that the Arabic page and the English page are equivalent. Without hreflang, the

site may appear as duplicate content, or the wrong language version may rank in search results. A bilingual site without hreflang is like a shop with no bilingual signs, customers can find it, but they may not know which door to enter.



Design for Right-to-Left Layout from Day One

Arabic is written right to left, which affects everything from text alignment to the order of navigation menus, buttons, and sidebars. A site built only for left-to-right English and then flipped to Arabic often breaks. Buttons overlap, menus reverse direction awkwardly, and images float into the wrong position.

The cleanest solution is a CSS framework that supports both directions natively. Many modern frameworks allow you to set the direction property on the html tag and have the entire layout mirror automatically. Test every component: dropdowns, modals, form fields, and pagination. A simple thing like a search box with the icon on the left in English should have the icon on the right in Arabic. Small details like this signal to users that the site was built for them, not hastily adapted.

Pay Attention to Arabic Typography

Arabic script is cursive and changes shape depending on a letter’s position in a word. Not all fonts support Arabic well, and many web fonts that look clean in English become illegible in Arabic. Choose a typeface that has a complete Arabic character set with proper glyphs for initial, medial, final, and isolated forms. Google Fonts and Adobe Fonts offer several options, but test them at different screen sizes.

Font size also matters. Arabic text often needs to be slightly larger than English to maintain readability, because the script has more detail at small sizes. Line height may need adjustment too. A paragraph that looks spacious in English can feel cramped in Arabic if the line height is too tight. Plan for these differences in your CSS rather than trying to force a single setting for both languages.

Build a Clear Language Switcher

The language switcher is one of the most visible elements of a bilingual site. It should be easy to find, ideally in the same position on every page. Common placements are the top right corner of the header or the top navigation bar. Label the switcher in the target language: “العربية” for Arabic and “English” for English. Avoid flags, because they can be ambiguous, many countries speak Arabic, and using a single flag may alienate users from other regions.

The switcher must remember the user’s choice as they browse. If someone switches to Arabic on the homepage, every subsequent page they visit should stay in Arabic until they switch again. Forgetting this and defaulting back to English on every page creates a frustrating experience. A session cookie or a persistent URL parameter works well.

Translate Metadata and Structured Content

SEO for a bilingual site is not just about page content. Title tags, meta descriptions, alt text for images, and schema markup all need versions in both languages. If the English page has a rich snippet with structured data, the Arabic equivalent should have the same markup with Arabic values. Search engines use this metadata to understand and display the page, so skipping it means losing visibility in Arabic search results.

Translated metadata also helps with social sharing. When someone shares a link to the Arabic version of a page on WhatsApp or Twitter, the preview should show Arabic text. Many content management systems allow you to set Open Graph tags per language. Fill those in during the build, not as an afterthought.

Test with Real Users in Both Languages

Before launch, test the site with native Arabic speakers and native English speakers. Look for broken layout, untranslated strings, misaligned buttons, and confusing navigation. Pay special attention to forms: validation messages, error prompts, and confirmation screens must appear in the correct language. A form that shows an English error message after someone filled it in Arabic undermines trust.

Check the site on mobile devices too. Dubai has one of the highest smartphone penetration rates in the world, and many users browse primarily on their phones. A bilingual site that works

well on desktop but collapses on mobile will lose a significant share of its audience.



Plan for Ongoing Maintenance

A bilingual site is not a one-time project. New pages, blog posts, or product updates need to be added in both languages. If you rely on a translation agency, build a workflow that keeps both versions in sync. If you use machine translation, have a human review the output for accuracy and cultural appropriateness. Automated translation tools have improved, but they still struggle with idioms, brand names, and industry-specific terms.

Consider using a content management system that supports localization workflows. Some platforms let you link translated pages so that when you edit the English version, a notification appears for the Arabic version. This prevents the two sides from drifting apart over time.

A well-planned bilingual website shows respect for the audience and attention to detail. It makes customers feel that the business understands their language and their context. For companies looking to build such a site, working with an experienced partner can save time and avoid common pitfalls. Web Design Company Dubai | NetSoft focuses on exactly this kind of project: fast, secure, bilingual websites with clear ownership and support. Their approach aligns with the practical considerations outlined here, from layout to ongoing maintenance.

When you are ready to start, map out your content in both languages first. Decide which pages are essential, how they connect, and what the user journey looks like in each language. Then work through the technical decisions, URL structure, direction support, typography, and metadata, one by one. The result will be a site that serves Dubai's diverse audience naturally and effectively.