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Introducing

Export**Perfect**™

Giving your products and services the platform they deserve

A **White Paper** on how to enhance your reputation and create instant customer confidence in a global marketplace.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proliferation of guidance, strategies and tools for improving website performance is testament to how important it is to have a strong and agile online presence. Design, SEO and UX dominate. Frequently, though, a core foundation stone is missing.

Well written website content will seamlessly enhance the reputation and credibility of a business. Principles and values are conveyed clearly, and the business culture is firmly established in the eyes of customers and clients.

Poor English, on the other hand, has the power to destroy reputations and irreparably damage credibility. Research shows that it is no exaggeration to say that spelling, grammar and phrasing errors suggests a lack of competence, a lack of effort and other unwanted negative associations.

Statistics show that visitors leave these websites quickly, and with a lasting impression of untrustworthiness.

This White Paper guides you through this research, and includes the following:

- when and why visitors leave websites
- the psychological effect of seeing a spelling or grammar mistake
- the opinions of leading figures in online marketing
- a case study of e-commerce issues
- the quantifiable results of bad grammar
- your reputation and the implications of website errors for Google rankings

We will also propose our solution to this problem.

2 THE PROBLEM

There are many ways in which the quality of websites is measured: **SEO** tells us how visible our site is to the major Search Engines. **UX** indicates ease of navigation, and the speed at which the user can find whatever it is they were looking for. The **aesthetics** of our site suggests a level of sophistication, or contemporary awareness of trends.

But there's something missing from this list. What if each visitor to your site, instead of having a clear path to their end goal, was faced with a hurdle? Or a brick wall? Or perhaps that path is so littered with potholes that you'd rather give up and move on to a competitor's site?

The quality of a website actually rests on something much more fundamental than aesthetics or back-end functionality. Something more centrally important to the very core of what your business stands for, which makes SEO and UX look like window-dressing.

The written English on your website has the power to make it fly, or to stop it dead in its tracks.

But first: when and why do people leave websites?

VISITORS WILL LEAVE YOUR WEBSITE. HAVE SOME SAY OVER WHEN.

Websites have a very small window of opportunity to create a positive impression on visitors. Statistics for this vary wildly and can seem more creative than scientific – from the time it takes to "blink", or anything from 3 seconds up to 59 seconds. Thankfully, more reliable data does exist. Researchers working with **Microsoft** have been able to mathematically model how we behave when visiting websites.

According to Microsoft, you have between **5 and 10 seconds** to make a positive impression on visitors to your site.[1]

The researchers found that website visits follow a Weibull distribution. What does this mean? Originally a formula used in reliability engineering to predict the lifespan of component parts, when applied to website analysis a Weibull distribution predicts how long a visitor is likely to remain on a website, having already stayed there for a certain length of time. In other words, a visitor will "test" the quality of a website depending on their own preferences and requirements, and will then stay on that site after an initial "critical period", when the crucial "first impression" is formed.
The graph of this behaviour can be seen in figure 1 below.

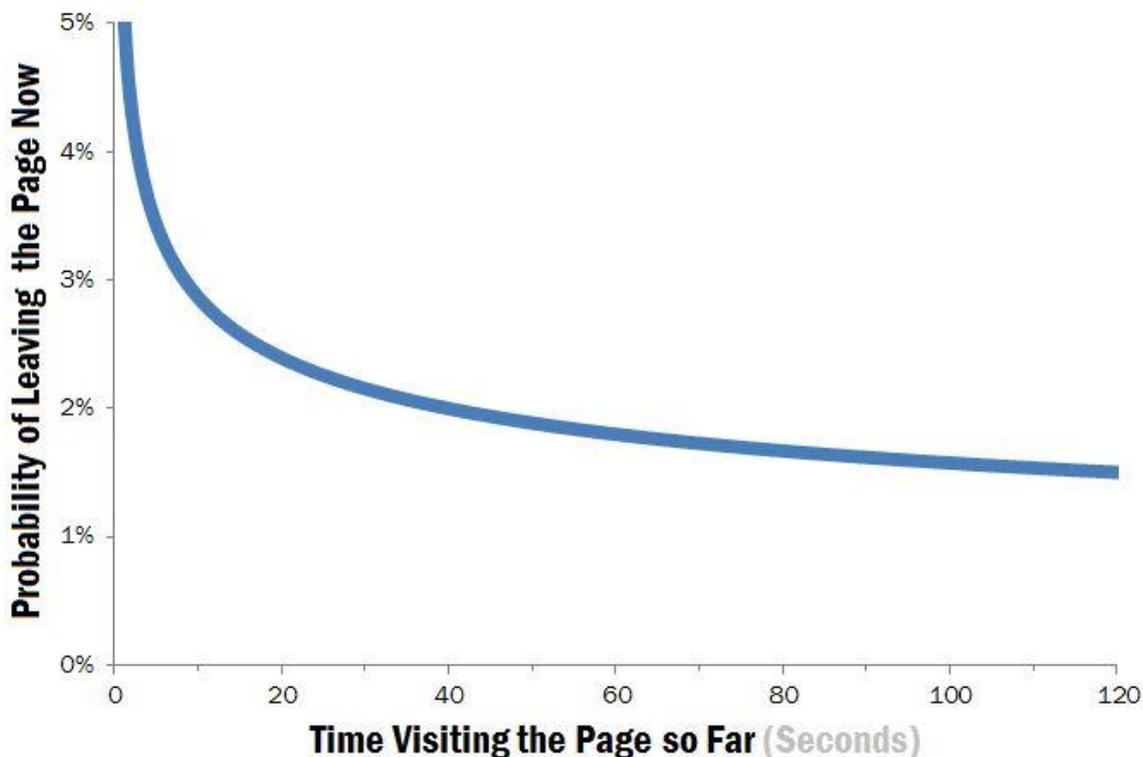[1] Source: Microsoft Research 2011

Figure 1. The Weibull distribution applied to website visitors.

The extremely sensitive first 10 seconds is explained as a symptom of the ingrained scepticism of website visitors. People expect to come across a certain quota of sub-standard websites, and when they find one it confirms their suspicions. Find a signifier of bad quality during this brief window, and they will leave.

The curve is almost equally steep for the next 20 seconds. Get past this, and the likelihood that the customer/client will stay to hear your message, or give serious consideration to your product or service, increases significantly.

After this 30 second zone, visitors will stay for up to 2 minutes or longer. In the world of analytics and micro-slices of time and micro-manipulation of behaviour, **this is a long time**.

Of course, **if visitors can be persuaded to stay for longer, they will read more**. This means that all of your content needs to be flawless. Not only this, it needs to flow smoothly, cohere and convey values and culture consistently from the first to the very last word. If not, the Weibull curve is going to get an unwelcome spike.

WHY EXCELLENT ENGLISH IS DEMANDED BY YOUR VISITORS: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF SEEING A SPELLING OR GRAMMAR MISTAKE

Neuroscientists have known for some time that **the human brain reacts physically to grammatical errors**.[2]. Our brains are so hard-wired to detect anomalies in what we read that when presented with something incorrect it causes a physical, neurological response. **Spelling and grammar mistakes cause a chemical imbalance in our brains**. In other words, they matter to us on a *biological* level.

In an important study, scientists were able to demonstrate a noticeable difference between the time we take to notice syntax errors (shorter) and the time we take to notice semantic errors (longer).

Both cause spikes in neural activity, meaning that we react to a range of errors, regardless of "type" of error.
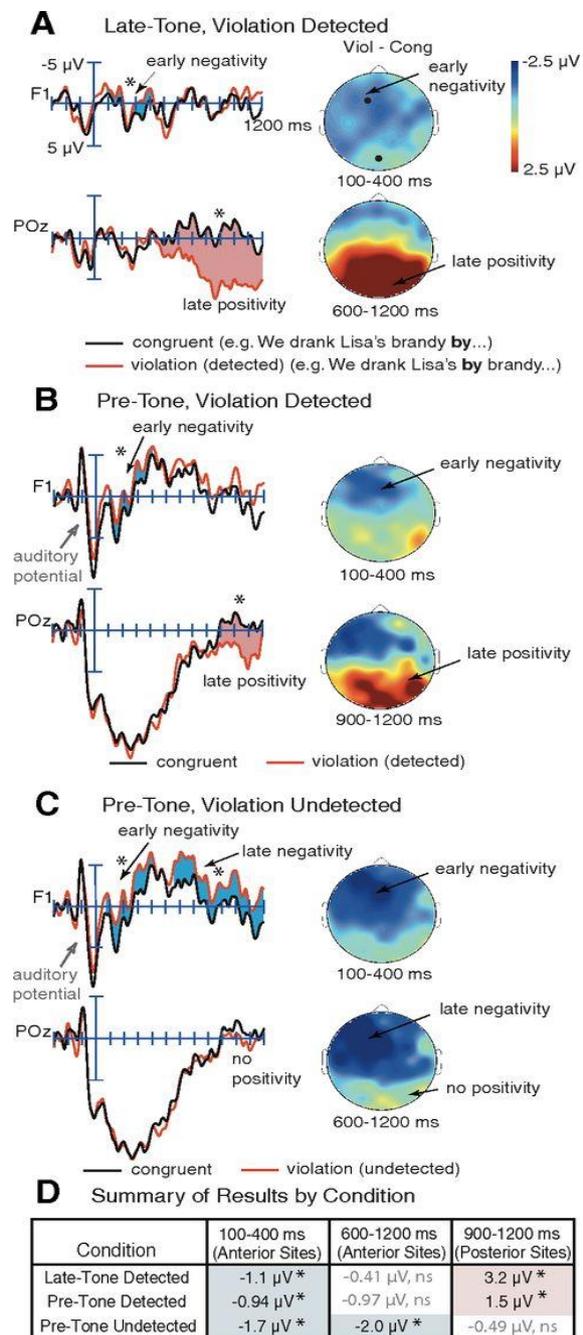

Figure 2. Showing the brainwave patterns experienced by subjects exposed to "violations" in grammar during tests undertaken at the University of Oregon.

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[2] See, for example: Friederici, A.D, Pfeifer, E and Hahne, A. (1993) "Event related brain potentials during natural speech processing: effects of semantic, morphological and syntactic violations" Cognitive Brain Research, vol. 1 (3); Hagoort, P. (2003) "Interplay between syntax and semantics during sentence comprehension: ERP effects of combining syntactic and semantic violations" Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience, vol. 15 (6): Batterink, L & Neville, H.J. (2013) "The Human Brain Processes Syntax in the Absence of Conscious Awareness" Journal of Neuroscience, vol. 33 (19)

What does this mean?

When a spelling or grammar mistake makes us stumble across a sentence, or stops us completely, this reaction isn't just a behavioural choice. Our brains automatically respond. In other words, regardless of the extent to which we think we care about mistakes, the activity in our brains tells us otherwise. **We care at a fundamental level.**

The same applies to semantic or "meaning" errors. This is the tone or phrasing of words and sentences. Get this wrong – which can often involve a misapprehension of cultural norms and conventions – and our brains respond in exactly the same way.

Why are "negative neural responses" important to website owners?

This can be broken down further into two outcomes:
- the impact of leaving the website prematurely (before a sale is made, or before a key message has been communicated)
- the damage caused to the reputation and credibility of the business.

WHAT TWO KEY SOURCES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT SPELLING AND GRAMMAR MISTAKES

1. https://econsultancy.com

"*Typos and poor grammar do not send the right signals to the visitor. **There are literally no excuses**. This is about attention to detail, as much as anything. If you're not bothered about that kind of thing then what kind of message does it give out?*"

2. Duane Forrester, Senior Product Manager, Bing (blogs.bing.com)

"*Many errors are common; like using the incorrect word or phrase in a given situation.*"

"*Some errors come from misunderstanding a topic, a lack of grammatical understanding, speed or a series of other decisions. Things like sentence structure (run-on sentences, lack of punctuation, over punctuation, etc.). Things like turning off spell checkers. Rushing or skipping your proofreading. All can and do happen.*"

"*So today, as you scan the newspaper, or read something online, it's patently obvious to you when you encounter a typo, or a sentence just doesn't read correctly. Again, most times we simply scan past it and keep reading, but **in some cases, it's a show stopper**. The point becomes lost as **your focus shifts to seeking out errors**. You can begin to see all future work from this author in a negative light, as typos become commonplace in their writing.*"

More on search engines below.

CASE STUDY: E-COMMERCE SITES

A recent (2016) review of 34 major shopping cart abandonment rate studies (including IBM and Forrester) showed an average abandonment rate of 68.81%.[3]

The key metric for us is why? What were the reasons for cart abandonment?

There are the "unavoidable" reasons: "*many users will be doing window shopping, price comparison, saving items for later, exploring gift options, etc.*"[4] These are the reasons that can affect any website at any time – they are constant variables, measurable and predictable. The playing field, at this point, is still level. All e-commerce sites are subject to this kind of behaviour, so conversion rates are levelled out across the sector.

Our interest lies elsewhere – with the "avoidable" reasons for visitors choosing to leave your site.

The same source provides us with a telling statistic**:**

22% of respondents to a survey asking why shoppers abandon shopping carts give the reason that the "website had errors."

Let's look more closely at this statement. The reason given is that *the website had errors*. Not just the shopping cart, not the checkout page, but the website. This means that 1 in 5 shoppers abandon their shopping cart because of an error somewhere within the entire website.

These are avoidable errors.

What would it mean to you to increase your turnover by 22%? Imagine if a bricks-and-mortar retailer lost over one-fifth of its custom because of badly worded signage. Would a logical business decision be to change the signage?

The Baymard Institute have calculated, taking figures over a 7-year period, that by adjusting the checkout process, $260 billion worth of lost orders are recoverable each year in the US and EU This is calculated based on e-commerce sites achieving a 35.26% increase in conversion rate against total online sales of $738 billion in the US and EU in 2015.

Looking at Figure 3 below, if we take an ultra-conservative estimate that website errors account for

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3   Source: http://baymard.com/lists/cart-abandonment-rate
4   Ibid.

between 1-5% of cart abandonments, **that's an avoidable, recoverable amount of up to $36.9 billion each year.**

Reasons for abandonments during checkout

1,044 responses · US adults · 2016 · © baymard.com/checkout-usability

"Have you abandoned any online purchases during the checkout process in the past 3 months? If so, for what reasons?"
Answers normalized without the 'I was just browsing' option

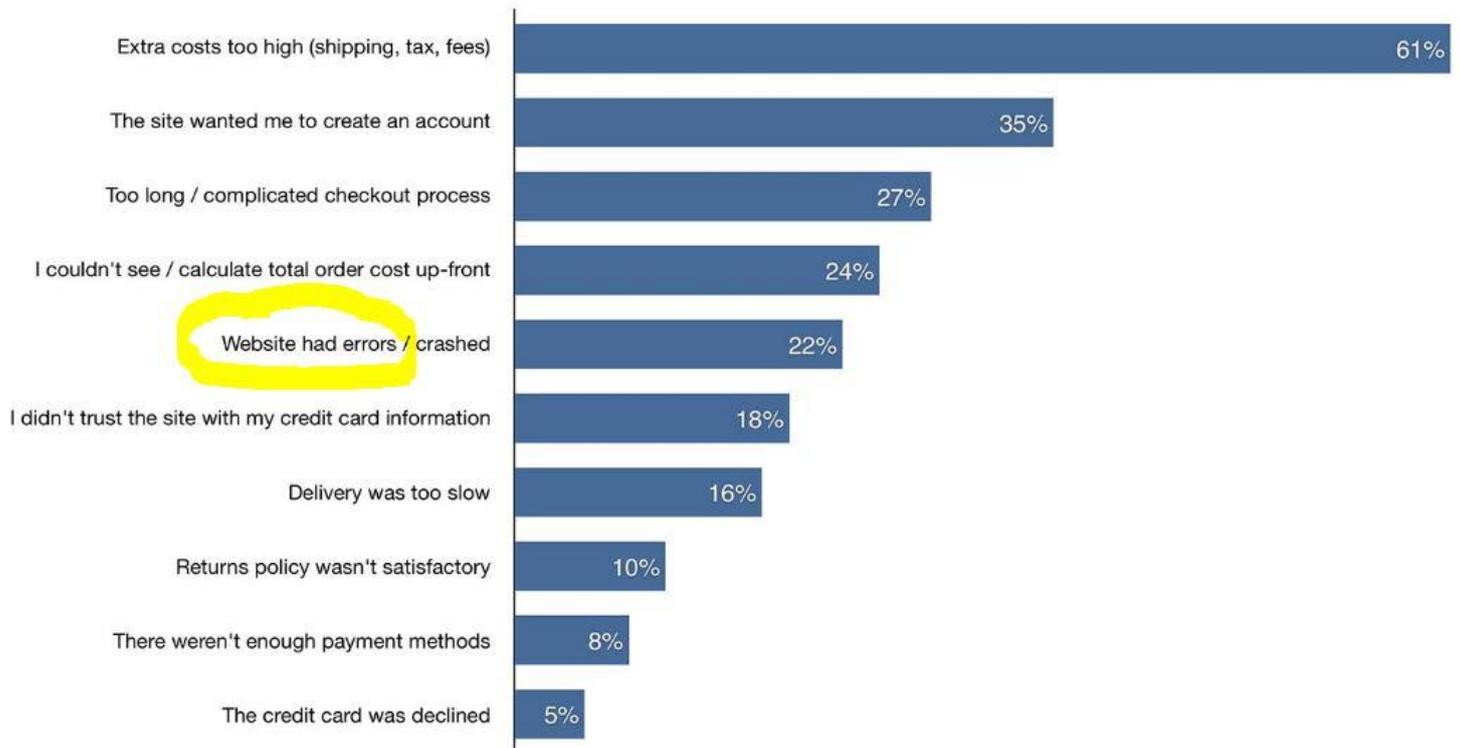| Reason	%
Extra costs too high (shipping, tax, fees)	61%
The site wanted me to create an account	35%
Too long / complicated checkout process	27%
I couldn't see / calculate total order cost up-front	24%
Website had errors / crashed	22%
I didn't trust the site with my credit card information	18%
Delivery was too slow	16%
Returns policy wasn't satisfactory	10%
There weren't enough payment methods	8%
The credit card was declined	5%

Figure 3. Showing the reasons for cart abandonment during checkout, highlighting general website errors as a cause of this behaviour.

MORE ON THE QUANTIFIABLE RESULT OF BAD GRAMMAR (IT GETS WORSE)

Much of the analysis of how visitors to websites interact with the design and layout rests on conscious decisions made by the designers and business owners. The positioning of information, images, links and calls to action can be drafted, re-arranged and incrementally improved as a response to visitor preferences.

Grammatical errors are not consciously planned by business owners, nor are they controlled by website designers. The only control is exercised by visitors who choose to leave when they encounter bad grammar.

How many people will leave a website as a direct result of seeing one or more examples of bad grammar?

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According to realbusiness.co.uk, 59% of visitors will leave a website because of poor grammar.[5]

So, **for every 10 visitors to your website, 6 will leave because of something entirely within your contro**l. There are a few metrics to consider here. How much more marketing budget would you need to spend to attract 60% more visitors to your website? By keeping 60% more visitors to your website browsing for longer, what impact would this have on turnover?

When visitors leave a website due to reasons of their own (detailed above) or because of design flaws, immediate sales and engagement levels are impacted, but these are measurable, and the effects can be mitigated by design tweaks.

When visitors leave a website due to flawed English, this impacts upon your brand at a deeper level. **Bad English impacts upon your credibility and your reputation, and it seriously erodes trust.**

Think, for a moment, of how bad spelling or grammar on a business website makes you feel. The perception is that poor English is lazy, indicative of low standards, or worse – incompetence. These are qualities that most businesses would not want to be associated with.

But don't just take our word for it.

GOOGLE, SEO AND THE PANDA SEARCH ALGORITHM

Google's "Panda" search algorithm update punishes sites with poor writing. According to its own blog, Google is now prioritizing what it calls "high-quality websites".[6]

Their advice is to "focus on the best possible user experience", so what does this mean?

Here, only minimally edited by us to keep it to a manageable length, is Google's search philosophy, specifying what distinguishes a "high quality" site from a "poor quality" site. We believe that every one of these points is relevant to the issue of how well a website conveys its message in crystal clear English:

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5   Source: www.realbusiness.co.uk 2013
6   Source: webmasters.googleblog.com 2016

What counts as a high-quality site?

Our site quality algorithms are aimed at helping people find "high-quality" sites by reducing the rankings of low-quality content. The recent "Panda" change tackles the difficult task of algorithmically assessing website quality. Taking a step back, we wanted to explain some of the ideas and research that drive the development of our algorithms.

Below are some questions that one could use to assess the "quality" of a page or an article. These are the kinds of questions we ask ourselves as we write algorithms that attempt to assess site quality. Think of it as our take at encoding what we think our users want.

Of course, we aren't disclosing the actual ranking signals used in our algorithms because we don't want folks to game our search results; but if you want to step into Google's mindset, the questions below provide some guidance on how we've been looking at the issue:

- Would you trust the information presented in this article?

- Is this article written by an expert or enthusiast who knows the topic well, or is it more shallow in nature?

- Does the site have duplicate, overlapping, or redundant articles on the same or similar topics with slightly different keyword variations?

- Would you be comfortable giving your credit card information to this site?

- Does this article have spelling, stylistic, or factual errors?

- Does the article provide original content or information, original reporting, original research, or original analysis?

- How much quality control is done on content?

- Is the site a recognized authority on its topic?

- Is the content mass-produced by or outsourced to a large number of creators, or spread across a large network of sites, so that individual pages or sites don't get as much attention or care?

- Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?

- For a health related query, would you trust information from this site?

- Would you recognize this site as an authoritative source when mentioned by name?

- Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?

- Is this the sort of page you'd want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?

- Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopaedia or book?

- Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?

- Are the pages produced with great care and attention to detail vs. less attention to detail?

- Would users complain when they see pages from this site?

What does this mean?

Google are promoting "high quality" sites that must have rigorous standards. Highly articulate, clear and meaningful English is now not just a luxury or a secondary SEO concern. **It is an absolute must for any business serious about online presence and growth.**

It means that marketing budgets will have to be re-designed to allow for English Language reviews, analyses and overhauls.

The great beauty of this problem, though, is that the solution to it is attainable and in itself requires no speculation or best guesses about the sometimes confusing and often unpredictable ROI of most SEO "fixes". And it is also attainable for a fraction of most business's weekly turnover.

3 THE SOLUTION

Clearly, website visitors are demanding, and with good reason. The competition for their custom is fierce, and the marketplace is global. Businesses face an unprecedented challenge to not only deliver excellent products and services, but to be able to communicate what they do in **flawless, crystal clear English**.

This White Paper outlines why websites need to aim for, and attain, the highest quality. If these standards are not met, potential customers or clients will leave within seconds. Search technology has evolved and Google will rank these websites below their direct competitors.

Businesses put a large percentage of their marketing budgets into the many aspects of SEO. Much of what they do to climb search engine rankings will be tested and re-tested. **Not getting the English right is like fighting a war of attrition wearing a blindfold.**

The missing component for many is a commitment to ensure that their values and culture are expressed clearly, articulately, and with the personality of the brand/company. Routinely, five or six figures are spent doing everything possible to draw desirable visitors in (those likely to buy or connect with the business goals), but content – what visitors read when they get there – is poorly executed. The question is, are businesses 100% confident that their website content is spreading the right message, in the right way?

This White Paper has taken us through several steps which can be summarized as follows:

- Website visitors rarely stay for long
- Website visitors definitely will not stay for long if they detect poor quality
- "Poor quality" elicits a deep and significant biological response
- If visitors choose to stay, then the longer they do, the stronger the likelihood of a positive outcome for the business in question
- A range of factors indicate a poor-quality website to visitors
- One key factor is spelling and grammar, and the tone and phrasing of content
- Google will demote websites deemed to be of poor quality

The core issue here is that if the business website is perceived to be poor because of the standard of English, it will only ever achieve a low Google ranking, and when customers/clients do find it, they will leave almost immediately because they are **physically compelled** to do so.

Online/automated grammar checkers typically **only find 6 or 7 out of every 20 errors**, they then often **offer the wrong advice**, and they have **not improved their performance since the mid-1990s**[7]

The solution to this problem goes far beyond mere proofreading and copy editing. It requires a full-service package which is capable of incorporating the culture and values of the business, alongside the spelling, grammar and phrasing issues that will be most obvious to visitors on first inspection.

The ideal solution will also include an industry breakdown, identifying example competitors and analysing their relative strengths and weaknesses. It will also include a user-friendly guide for non-native English speakers to help identify and prevent common linguistic pitfalls. All of this would be carried out by culture and linguistic professionals (preferably PhDs).

Export**Perfect**™

At Northrey Consulting we have this solution, and we call it **ExportPerfect**. This is a packaged service tailored to the precise and unique individual needs of every business, but one that also contains a number of universal core features. It is an analytical review performed by experts that has a tangible outcome, and which is supported by further resources.

For full information, please contact us via:

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www.northreyconsulting.com/export-services

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[7]   Source: www.editorsoftware.com 2013