# MULTILINGUAL PROPERTY WEBSITES IN SPAIN 2018

An analysis of real international real estate agent websites and competitive opportunities

ABSTRACT

This white paper analyses 907 international real estate websites marketing property in Spain, correlating official property purchase statistics to identify the market opportunities for estate agents in 2018. The report is an invaluable guide to marketing strategy for estate agents, website designers and marketing agencies working in the Spanish international property sector.

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# Introduction

There has never been a better time to sell Spanish property to foreign markets. This is the first of a series of white papers produced by analysts at Respacio providing intelligence to estate agents and marketing companies dealing with foreign buyers in Spain.

Multilingual property websites in Spain 2018 is the largest survey and report on Spanish real estate marketing online that has ever been published and is a unique and valuable competitor analysis which we hope will help estate agents in Spain to make informed decisions about their online marketing strategies.

We analysed a sample of 907 websites of estate agents selling Spanish properties to foreign markets, constituting approximately 10% of the total number of companies targeting these buyers and cross referenced this data with official statistics showing the patterns of foreign buyers across Spain.

In this paper we examine real estate website marketing and assess the effectiveness of estate agent websites in attracting foreign buyers to Spanish property.  In doing so, we identify the market gaps that are ripe for exploitation.

We uncover surprising weaknesses and in doing so reveal the marketing opportunities in the Spanish real estate industry.

With a growing foreign market of Spanish property buyers, now is the time to invest in capturing new clients and estate agent websites are the most cost effective way of doing so.

At the same time as highlighting the problems and weaknesses in the way properties are marketed online to an international audience, we make no secret of providing the solution.

The Respacio real estate CRM, website theme and plugins are newly developed and only now available.  Built from the ground up, this is the most modern system for Spanish real estate agents available and has been designed and has been designed with the singular purpose of beating the competition by raising the benchmarks of marketing quality and levels of service to clients.

We invite you to also take a look at the Respacio website and discover more about the features and the competitive advantages the system will bring you.

# Foreign buyers in Spain

The market for foreign buyers in Spain has been rapidly evolving. In 2016, 13.25% of all residential property purchases in Spain were by foreign buyers, the highest percentage ever recorded. Though the official totals for 2017 have yet to be published, quarterly results show that this proportion continues to rise, reaching 13.64% in the final quarter of last year.
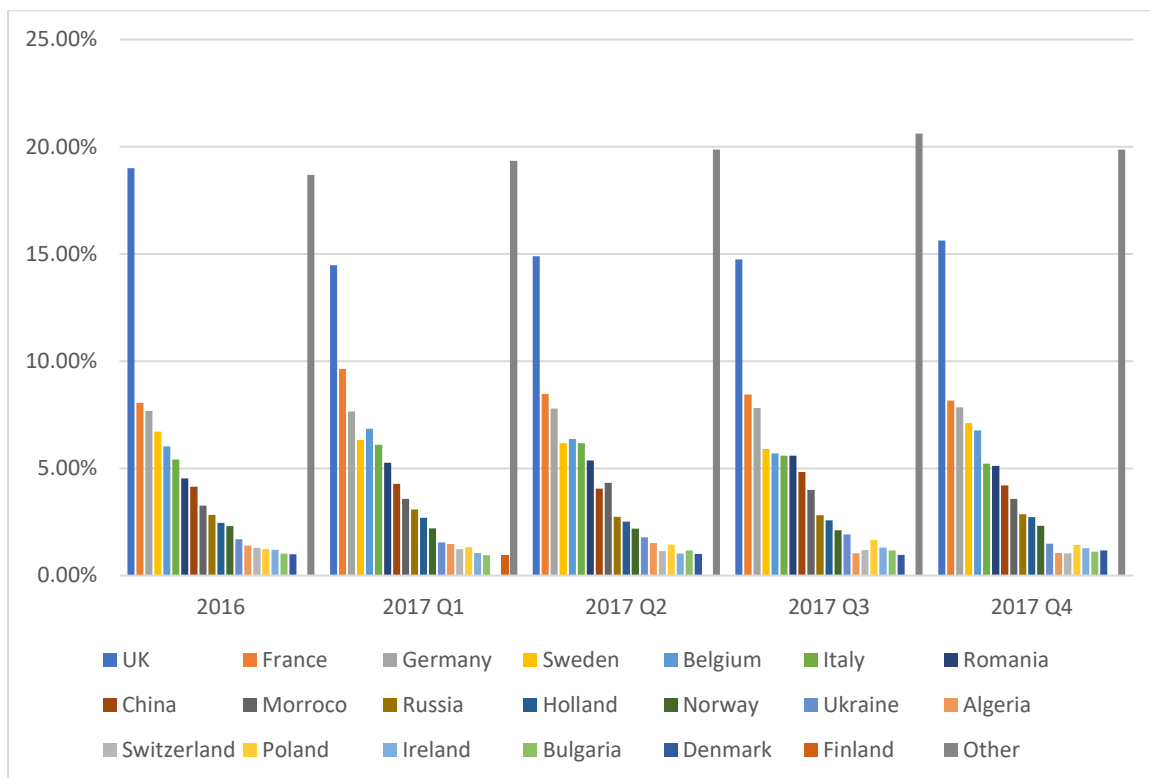


As the total number of buyers rises, the share of the market has been changing, with a notable drop in UK buyers who represented 19% of the market in 2016 but dropped to a quarterly average of less than 15% in 2017.

The drop in UK buyers has been more than compensated by the increase in purchasers from other countries and estate agents should be planning for this trend to continue by ensuring they are prepared for these new marketing opportunities.

# How well do estate agent websites display languages?

In marketing to the various nationals from the countries that purchase Spanish properties, estate agent websites should present versions of their pages in the buyer's language. A buyer needs to be able to read property details that they understand, but before they can do that, they need to be able to find the website on their local search engine.

## Auto-translation software

From our sample of 907 websites, 228 of them used auto translation software such as Google Translate or Microsoft Translator to create their foreign language pages. Although these are convenient and simple to implement, Google and other search engines will detect them and downgrade a website if they find auto-translated content.  Translated pages created by this type of software are never indexed by Google and will not appear on search results. With 25% of our sample disqualified from the outset, we analysed the remaining 679 estate agent websites for how well they dealt with foreign languages.

## Language tagging

A buyer in France is most likely to be using the French version of Google, likewise a buyer from Germany will be using Google.de.  These local search engines use a tag called hreflang embedded in the code of the website page or sitemap to determine if there is another language to add to their index.  Google, Yandex and other search engines cannot see the pictures of flags on a website, they use hreflang tags.  If your site does not have these tags, research shows that it may appear lower in search results than if it had.  From our remaining 679 websites that were not auto-translating, 206 showed no hreflang language tags at all and 40 websites had errors in their tags.

## Multilingual site structures

91 of the 679 sites showed just one language. 62 were only in English so we can assume that sales are diminishing for these estate agents and will continue to do so in line with the reducing number of British buyers. 15 websites were only in Spanish yet advertised to foreign markets through property portals. This leaves 588 websites that display multiple languages.

There are three correct ways to display multiple languages on websites which can be compared from Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and branding perspectives. 34 of the 588 sites that had more than one language did not use any of these three possibilities, choosing their own unique way of displaying languages, and consequently they would be unlikely to ever show in a search result.

### Subdirectory (eg example.com/de/, example.com/fr/)

This method is used by 538 of the 588 websites that displayed more than one language because it is the easiest, though least beneficial method of structuring websites.  Using subdirectories indicates little to users about targeting. Search engines require Search Console geotargeting and all sites are hosted on the same server, hindering SEO improvements.

*Subdomain (eg de.example.com, fr.example.com)*

Slightly better, subdomains are used by 11 estate agents, indicating to users that the website is targeted to a specific country, although search engines require Search Console geotargeting. Using this structure, in theory each website can be hosted in country to improve SEO however in practice, server IP addresses showed that all of these agents hosted their sites on the same server.

*Country Code Top Level Domain (eg example.de, example.fr)*

A ccTLD for each language is the best way to present alternate language versions of a website, but only 5 companies use it. No other method sends a more powerful message in terms of a local market presence. According to Google, a ccTLD provides the strongest signal that a website is targeting a specific country and provides SEO benefit for that market. Research shows that in many countries, users are more likely to trust a website using the ccTLD. Each website can be hosted in country to further improve multilingual SEO and increase site load speed. It's worth noting that Google itself uses a ccTLD structure.

## Contact Management Systems and Multilingual websites

Amongst the total 907 estate agent websites analysed, 36 different types of CRM are used to create and manage hundreds of these sites.

Although almost all of these contact management systems are able to manage websites in multiple languages, none natively managed site structures based on ccTLDs with servers in different countries, which is the ideal way to present alternate language site versions.

The Respacio real estate CRM is unique in its ability manage data flow to multiple websites in different languages across different domains located on servers in different countries.

This functionality provides a distinct SEO advantage for estate agents and property developers, allowing the use of ccTLDs.

Basing a website on a server in the user's country also allows the website to load faster, improving the user experience and keeping them on the site longer.

ccTLDs also provide a stronger branding message to users.

Research shows that in many countries, users favour websites which have their own extension, e.g. a French user is more likely to click example.fr than example.com.

# How well optimised are your competitors' websites?

Having established the weakness in real estate websites for marketing alternative languages in search results, we now turn our attention to the main domain of each agent and measure how well estate agents have optimised their websites and the amount of effort they are putting into their SEO.

## Backlinks

The quality and number of links back to a website from other sites is key to search engine ranking of a website in their results. We used the ahref domain rating, probably the most reliable and accurate tool to measure the quality of links coming from other websites to rate the backlink structure of each of the 907 websites sampled.

This rating gives a score out of 100, and a result over 30 could be described as good.  Out of 907 websites, only 53 exceeded this score indicating that very few estate agents in Spain are putting any effort into SEO.

Overall, brand awareness was also weak, with 238 websites getting less than 10 mentions on Facebook and only 81 with more than 500 mentions.

## Website content

Website content is also an important indicator of the likelihood of a site achieving high placement in search results, and although 369 websites had some form of blog section, less than 5% had added any new articles in the past three months.  247 offered a newsletter subscription, and although we did not check to see how many of these actually sent out a newsletter, we can infer from the lack of blog articles that those that did were only sending selections of their latest properties.  We noted that most property descriptions were less than 250 words, which Google would consider slim content to rank these pages, and many were based on repetitive lists of keywords.
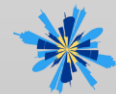
Blogs and newsletter subscriptions are standard features on Respacio websites. Beautiful newsletters can be designed and sent easily from the CRM to niched groups or the whole subscriber list, synchronised with services such as Mailgun or your own SMTP servers.

## Website load speed

Google also places importance on website speed, measuring both mobile and desktop browser speeds.  We discovered that a staggering 566 of the 907 websites had desktop speeds rated as bad and only 106 were good. On mobiles, 717 were bad and just 32 were good.  With an increasing number of searches for property conducted on mobiles, the bad performers will have difficulty in being shown on Google's results.

Respacio websites are built for speed, achieving excellent scores on Google speed tests and are responsive, so look great on desktop or mobile.

## Fear of SEO

Search engines are by far the most powerful drivers of visitors to websites, yet the levels of optimisation of estate agent websites in Spain is incredibly low.  There are a

number of reasons for this which we look at in a separate article looking at estate agent website SEO in Spain.  The article concludes that there is a fear of SEO amongst estate agents for historical reasons and the aversion to investment in search engine optimisation has been encouraged by the major suppliers of marketing services to the industry.

Abandonment of SEO by an estate agent is a strategic marketing error of judgement.  There is no shortage of studies showing that SEO provides a better ROI (Return on Investment) than paid advertising. An estate agent planning for the future should consider SEO a fundamentally important part of the marketing mix. Property portals and advertising have their place, but they are not a replacement for search engine optimisation.  Good SEO provides stabilised rankings on search results, yielding constant traffic to convert into leads as opposed to the short-term results from other paid sources.

Respacio websites can be completely optimised for every parameter that Search Engines favour providing you with the best SEO advantage possible.

Brand importance is also a key factor in ranking well on search results. High placement gives credibility to a brand for both buyer and seller. If a business plans to expand and scale up, search is the way to do it.

A lack of investment by estate agents in this most important of all marketing channels is now the weakest marketing link in the Spanish international real estate industry, and one that is open to exploitation by any agent now investing in search engine optimisation.

With the levels of SEO competition at their current sorry state amongst estate agents promoting property to foreign markets, now is the time to realise the best returns on investment in this form of marketing.

The most efficient way of populating a real estate website with properties is a direct link to the software that an estate agent uses to manage their contacts and properties so that there is no wasted time in duplicating workload. There are many contact management systems designed to be used in the Spanish property market and all of them provide websites in the package. Almost all of these systems were written and coded many years ago and the websites they offer lack flexibility, offering "one size fits all" sites to agents with very different requirements. Worse still, their SEO compliance to the rapidly evolving algorithms of Google and other search engines is virtually non-existent.  At Respacio, we have solved these issues with our Wordpress theme and plugins which are future proofed to these changes. Every Respacio website is unique due to the drag and drop flexible page builder and integration with thousands of available plugins within the Wordpress ecosystem.

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# Geographical demand of foreign buyers in Spain

In planning a marketing strategy, it is important to analyse the areas in which foreign nationalities are purchasing homes. None of the estate agents focused at the foreign markets have a national coverage of Spain, and they are geographically concentrated along the coasts and islands. This correlates with the areas popular foreign buyers.

*Percentage of properties purchased by foreign nationals by area*



| | |
|---|---|
| Balearics | 32.90% |
| Canary Islands | 30.49% |
| Com. Valencia | 26.66% |
| Murcia | 18.57% |
| Andalusia | 15.06% |
| Catalonia | 12.80% |
| Aragon | 6.18% |
| Com. Madrid | 5.26% |
| Rioja | 4.03% |
| Cantabria | 3.66% |
| Castilla La Mancha | 3.29% |
| Navarre | 3.24% |
| Castilla Y León | 2.31% |
| Basque Country | 2.16% |
| Asturias | 1.94% |
| Estremadura | 1.12% |
| Galicia | 0.79% |

These overall figures give a good indication of the areas of Spain popular with foreign buyers, but there are regional differences that need to be taken into account in any strategic marketing planning. Statistics indicate that certain areas are more popular with nationals from specific countries.

In the top six areas for foreign purchases, there was a predominance of Western European buyers, but the national landscapes change as we move away from them. For example, in Aragon which ranked as the seventh most popular area, Romanians (38.79%), Chinese (13.08%) and Moroccans (7.63%) comprise the largest proportion of foreign property buyers with the British and Germans not even featuring in the top 10. We concentrate our research in the six areas where foreign buyers and estate agents dealing with them are most likely to be found.

The vast majority of estate agents work in the areas of the Balaerics, Canary Islands, Valencia, Murcia, Andalusia and Catalonia so these general language results in Spain need to be filtered to see the nationalities buying in these respective areas.

# The six most popular areas for foreign property buyers

| Andalusia | |
|---|---|
| UK | 26.82% |
| Sweden | 11.21% |
| Belgium | 7.72% |
| France | 4.76% |
| Germany | 4.61% |
| Morocco | 3.46% |
| Holland | 3.06% |
| Denmark | 2.73% |
| Norway | 2.51% |
| Russia | 2.13% |
| Others | 30.99% |

| Balaerics | |
|---|---|
| Germany | 36.04% |
| UK | 18.75% |
| Sweden | 5.87% |
| Italy | 5.51% |
| France | 4.76% |
| Switzerland | 3.09% |
| Holland | 2.01% |
| Austria | 1.90% |
| China | 1.87% |
| Belgium | 1.39% |
| Others | 18.81% |

| Canary Islands | |
|---|---|
| Italy | 22.46% |
| UK | 20.42% |
| Germany | 13.18% |
| Belgium | 8.73% |
| France | 3.48% |
| Sweden | 2.44% |
| Poland | 2.41% |
| Russia | 2.16% |
| China | 2.10% |
| Ireland | 1.81% |
| Others | 20.81% |

| Catalonia | |
|---|---|
| France | 22.60% |
| China | 8.09% |
| Italy | 5.42% |
| Morocco | 4.91% |
| Russia | 4.43% |
| UK | 4.38% |
| Romania | 4.17% |
| Germany | 3.85% |
| Belgium | 3.40% |
| Ukraine | 2.09% |
| Others | 36.66% |

| Murcia | |
|---|---|
| UK | 47.85% |
| Morocco | 12.56% |
| Belgium | 5.22% |
| Germany | 3.37% |
| France | 2.91% |
| Sweden | 2.45% |
| Holland | 1.94% |
| Romania | 1.85% |
| Norway | 1.57% |
| Ukraine | 1.52% |
| Others | 18.76% |

| Com. Valencia | |
|---|---|
| UK | 21.25% |
| Sweden | 10.88% |
| Belgium | 8.16% |
| France | 7.29% |
| Norway | 5.14% |
| Russia | 4.24% |
| Algeria | 4.23% |
| Germany | 4.00% |
| Holland | 3.59% |
| Romania | 3.07% |
| Others | 28.15% |



Murcia 4%
Balaerics 9%
Canary Islands 13%
Catalonia 18%
Andalusia 24%
Valencia 32%
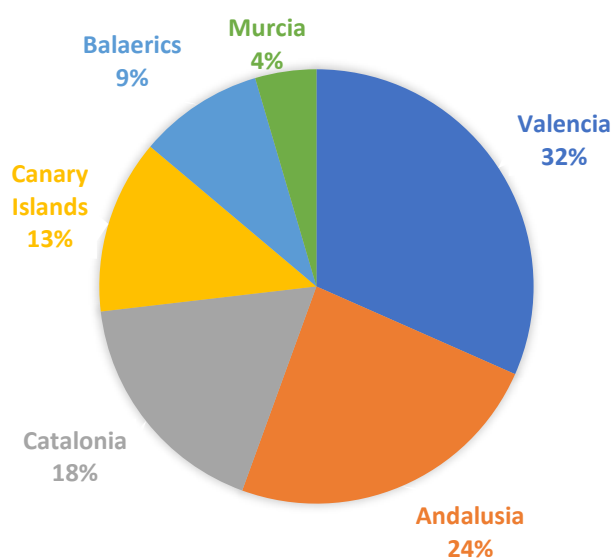
Across these six communities, a total of 48,993 properties were purchased by foreign nationals.

| Valencia | 15433 |
|---|---|
| Andalusia | 11684 |
| Catalonia | 8592 |
| Canary Islands | 6336 |
| Balaerics | 4544 |
| Murcia | 2223 |

# Where are the marketing opportunities?

In the six primary areas of foreign property purchases, 14 are languages spoken by nationals that make up the top ten buying groups in each area. These 14 languages should be considered the most important for estate agents selling property to foreign markets.

In the table below, we list the total number of properties purchased by each sector and the number websites serving each of these languages taken from the 650 websites with that could be found by search engines in foreign countries (ie not using translation software) and that displayed at least one (non-Spanish) foreign language.

| Language | Properties | Websites | Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|
| Romanian | 873 | 0 | ∞ |
| Arabic | 1485 | 1 | 1485 |
| Flemish | 1920 | 22 | 87 |
| Italian | 2167 | 65 | 33 |
| Swedish | 3485 | 108 | 32 |
| Chinese | 913 | 29 | 31 |
| French | 5441 | 294 | 19 |
| Norwegian | 1126 | 67 | 17 |
| English | 10162 | 630 | 16 |
| German | 4213 | 344 | 12 |
| Danish | 324 | 30 | 11 |
| Russian | 1638 | 159 | 10 |
| Polish | 153 | 21 | 7 |
| Dutch | 1052 | 200 | 5 |

The table is ordered by the ratio of property buyer to website and shows clearly where marketing opportunities exist.

There were 873 property purchases by Romanian nationals, these were in the areas of Catalonia, Murcia and Valencia, yet there are no websites translated into their language.

Arabic speaking buyers, constituting nationals from Morocco and Algeria purchased 1,485 properties in Andalusia, Catalonia and Valencia and amongst the websites surveyed, only one is in their language.

The number of Flemish buyers, calculated at 60% of all Belgian nationals (see notes at the end of the paper) have only 22 websites focused at their language (the majority of sites choose to aim at the Dutch language from Holland). Although the Belgians buy far more property than nationals from Holland, the result is that competition for search result placements in Google.be is incredibly light with a ratio of 87 buyers for each of the 22 websites, compared to Google.nl which is overcrowded with a ratio of 5 buyers for every site!

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The Italians were the largest group of property buyers in the Canaries and feature in three of the six areas, yet only 65 estate agents in our sample cater for the 2,167 properties they purchased.

The Swedish market features in five of the six areas identified, yet with a ratio of 32 buyers to every website and only 108 sites targeting them, there are huge opportunities for any company looking for a slice of the 3,485 properties they purchased.

Respacio allows you to respond quickly to market changes, adding languages to the CRM and launching websites in those languages. It doesn't take months of planning and high costs.

The Chinese market is predicted to grow over the coming years and now is the time to invest in a website to gain maturity in Google's rankings and capitalise on their future growth, as well as take a share of their current purchasing power, which at 913 properties is not inconsiderable, yet only 29 estate agents have identified this opportunity.

The French appear in the top ten buyers in two thirds of the areas, and at a ratio of 19 buyers for every website, the field starts to get competitive at this point.

Though there are only 67 websites shown in Norwegian languages, their total property purchases are low, buying just 1126 homes across the six areas so competition is high at a ratio of 17 buyers per website.

This contrasts with the English speaking market with over 100,000 purchases and although a similar ratio of 16:1, it has a much larger sector to share out.  Despite the strong competition, the weakness in SEO of the majority of these competitors means that even new websites can find opportunities, particularly in optimising for longer tailed keywords and niche sectors in the real estate market.

The quality of SEO in websites is key to the number of visitors they will receive, and even in the most competitive areas such as German, opportunities remain and given the number of properties purchased by this sector, investment in optimisation is certainly a viable proposition.

Where property purchase numbers are low, as with the Danish and Polish markets, only specific regional competitor analysis would determine if these niches would justify investment.  However, it should be noted that 47% of all properties purchased by the Danish are in excess of 100m2, the highest proportion of all nationalities to buy larger homes, indicating that sales to this sector are likely to yield the highest commissions.

The property value purchased by nationals is a relevant factor in assessing the viability of SEO investment. The "golden visa", for example is available to owners of properties valued at over €500,000 which may justify investment in the competitive Russian market to some extent, however as only half the properties purchased by this group are less than 80m2 it may be difficult to find the diamonds in the rough.
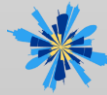
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## Targeting website content at nationalities

In analysing estate agent websites in Spain, it became obvious that sites tended to replicate their content and design across each language with no consideration of the types of properties that each group of buyers tended to favour.

For example, 28% of Norwegians and 25% of Belgians purchased newly built properties, constituting by far the highest proportion of new build buyers of all nationalities. Websites displayed in these languages did not take account of these tendencies and did not display new developments more prominently on their home pages than their counterparts in other languages. The home pages were exactly the same as those displayed in French whose purchases of new properties was only 11%.

Respacio websites do not limit you to one design per language. Create home pages and content specific to each market and improve your conversion ratios with A/B split testing plugins.

44% of homes purchased by Italians were less than 60m2, yet in websites focused at this market, we still saw the same home pages often highlighting large villas which would be interesting to only a small proportion of buyers from Italy.

We had expected to see that the home pages of each language might highlight the types of properties that each nation group tended to purchase, however this was not the case.

The contact management systems that powered the databases behind many of the sites gave little or no flexibility to adapt sites to these niche markets, and the expense of adapting sites for the purpose may have prevented others from taking the risk.

## Niche Websites

Niche websites aimed at sub markets are rare amongst estate agents in Spain yet are used to great effect in other countries and provide unique SEO and market funnelling opportunities. From retirement buyers to special interest buyers such as golfers, the competition for dedicated websites is very low, yet these markets (amongst others) are highly lucrative.

Many estate agents own domain names with excellent log tailed keywords that they are not using and have never developed websites for.

Whereas in the past, this may have been a tactical decision to prevent their competition buying the domains, it has now become easier to turn those domains into lead generators at low cost and the SEO opportunities on the market may see these websites rank highly in their market niches.

Launch niche websites quickly and cheaply with the Respacio system, easily define properties sent to each site and manage any number of sites from the CRM.

# Conclusions

If you are serious about selling property to international markets in Spain then we hope this white paper has helped to inform you about your competition and how they are performing. The following nine points summarise the main conclusions that you should be considering after digesting the many facts and figures that we have brought together for you.

## The market size is increasing

Although the total market size is increasing, the British market share is shrinking and estate agents need to optimise their marketing for other nationalities, many have not adapted at all.

## Agents are not displaying languages correctly

Very few agents are displaying alternative languages correctly, and many are using auto translation software. This means that competition for foreign buyers is much lower than it might at first seem by simply judging the sheer number of estate agents displaying foreign languages.

## Websites are not structured for multiregional search

A tiny fraction of estate agents have gone the whole way towards exploiting their full multilingual and multiregional website potential. These few have a substantial advantage over others.

## CRMs limit the ability of websites to compete

Contact relationship management systems used by estate agents provide limited SEO functionality for estate agent websites, their software is old and not suitable for today's competitive market.

## Very few agents are investing in SEO

With so few agents investing in SEO, an investment in the channel can now go a long way and opportunities abound. There may be thousands of estate agents with websites, but very few are investing in marketing them.

## Now is the time to launch niche websites

Niche websites focused at smaller market sectors have become viable due to the ability of software to create these sites and the gaps in SEO for longer tailed keywords.

## Very few agents are investing in content

Estate agent blogs litter the internet like abandoned ruins in the deepest countryside of Spain and those who provide fresh content are able to attract Google, and the buyers it brings.

## Language demand does not match supply

The languages spoken by buyers are not matched by those provided by estate agent websites and the ratio of websites to property buyers shows clearly that some sectors of the market are under-served with some obvious market gaps.

## Website content does not match markets

Estate agent websites are not sensitive to the differing demands of market sectors and websites are losing conversions by not providing visitors the content they want to see.

# Next steps

## For estate agents and property developers…

If you represent an estate agency, then it's time to review your CRM and your websites.  We would be happy to do this for you if you like our analytical style. You can drop us a line at info@respacio.com and we can provide you with an in-depth analysis.

Take it a step further and try out the Respacio system free of charge with no strings attached for 14 days.

**Click here to try the Respacio system for FREE**

## For marketing agencies and website developers…

If you represent a marketing agency or website development company, and you would like to be able to offer your clients the latest systems designed for the Spanish real estate market, then get in touch.  We are looking to onboard new technology partners now!

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## Notes on the data used in this report

**Data Sources**

Property sales statistics in Spain are taken from the Colegio de Registradores de la Propiedad, Bienes Muebles y Mercantiles de España.

Statistics on websites have been taken from our own analysis of 907 estate agents advertising Spanish property for sale on foreign language real estate portals in March 2018.

SEO statistics have been taken using Ahrefs tools and Google page speed insights.

**Demand for languages**

There are some complications in calculating the demand for languages based on the nationality of buyers. For example, Belgians may speak French, Flemish or German.  Flemish speakers prefer their own language but have little difficulty in understanding Dutch.  About 60% of Belgium speak Flemish, 40% French and 1% German.  We have divided Belgian buyers into Flemish and French 60/40 in calculating language demand.  Swiss may speak variants of French, German, Italian or Romansh as their first language.  They constitute a very small number of buyers and we have shared them as 60% German, 20% French and 10% Italian.

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