Going Local in India
AMEKS Infotech Site Redesign

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1. Executive Summary

AMEKS Infotech is a small IT service provider based in Chennai, India. It was formed by a team of experienced IT Professionals. AMEKS currently offers consulting, development, testing, and contractor services to its clients near Chennai. AMEKS prides itself as one of the most affordable one-stop destinations for all IT needs. However, AMEKS is virtually unknown to most businesses in India. Therefore, AMEKS has decided to increase its market share and establish a name for itself in the Indian market. As a first step toward that goal, AMEKS has decided to redesign its website.

India is a high-context, collectivist culture with high power distance and long-term orientation. The website designed for the Indian culture should focus on the following:
- Relationships and community
- Long-term value for its clients
- Technical expertise
- Affordability

AMEKS’ current design looks very amateurish with distracting animation, poor layout, ineffective graphics, and poorly written copy. Cultural issues are overlooked that could greatly improve the website. In this report, I reviewed three pages: Home, Services, and Training. I suggested redesign options for each that help simplify navigation, de-clutter the content, and emphasize values important to the Indian culture.

This report begins with a detailed analysis of the Indian culture on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall’s framework of context for cultural communication. The heuristics review section provides common web design practices from the Indian culture. Then, the design analysis section addresses the limitations of the current design, offers the redesign, and discusses cultural needs addressed by the redesign. The resulting design is warm, inviting, personal, and focuses on the core cultural values in India.
2. Introduction

Thanks to the democratizing influence of the Internet, the world is becoming a smaller place. This doesn’t mean, though, that the world is becoming a more homogenous place. On the contrary, as more and more people go online, new companies are starting up every day in all parts of the world. One such start-up company is AMEKS Infotech based in Chennai, India.

AMEKS has high aspirations of becoming a major player of IT services in the Indian market. AMEKS’ long-term goal is to expand into the overseas market. But, due to current slowdown in the global markets, AMEKS has decided to focus its efforts on the growing Indian market. Therefore, this redesign effort will focus primarily on optimizing the site for the Indian culture even though AMEKS currently has a few clients in Singapore and aspires to enter the US market.

Studies have shown that culture influences the ways in which people process information, and this has a follow through effect for the ways in which websites should be designed to appeal to different cultural audiences (ScienceDaily, 2007). Wurtz (2005) states that creating appealing and efficient websites for other cultures is no longer just a matter of language and modification of time and date formats, but requires dealing with design issues that include culture-specific color connotations, preferences in layout, animation, sounds, and other effects that are characteristic of today’s generation of websites.

This report begins with a detailed analysis of the Indian culture on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and Hall’s framework of context for cultural communication. The heuristics review section provides common web design practices from the Indian culture. I also draw on heuristics researchers have found to be successful in collectivist cultures. Then, design analysis addresses the limitations of the current design, and offers the redesign, and discusses cultural needs addressed by the redesign.
3. **Cultural Analysis**

According to Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010), culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (p. 6). Hofstede et al. assert that in order to function as world citizens we should be able to understand the value differences that come with national differences (p. 28). Table 1 below shows how India fares on the world stage on the five cultural dimensions offered by Hofstede et al.

### Table 1

**Cultural dimensions scores for India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>World Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance (pp. 57-59)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Orientation (p. 240)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity (pp.141-143)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism (pp. 95-97)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance (pp. 192-194)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1. **Power Distance**

India has Power Distance (PDI) as the highest Hofstede dimension for the culture, with a score of 77 compared to a world average of 56.5. This PDI score for India indicates a high level of inequality of power and wealth within the society. In high PDI cultures, the inequality of power, wealth, physical strength, and intellectual capacity is accepted by the population as a cultural norm (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 54). Having been born and brought up in India, it is my experience that those with power do everything possible to show it or heighten it, and not share it. At the same time there is an expectation for a corresponding benevolence to be shown to those with less power when the need calls for it. In business circles, status is recognized by age, university degree and profession,
person’s job title, and material possessions (Ahmed, Mouratidis, & Preston, 2008, p. 13). Therefore, biographical profiles of top management on About pages should include formal degrees and people in power should be formally referred to as Sir, Madam, Mr., Mrs., or Dr. during communication in meetings, websites, and letters wherever appropriate. Ahmed, Mouratidis, & Preston (2008) assert that websites in high power distance cultures should display authority’s role, pictures of important people in the company, and organizational charts as images or official certification logos (p. 8).

Power distance influences the following aspects of the web design (Marcus, 2001, p. 8):

♦ Formality in addressing people of high power
♦ Focus on expertise, authority, experts, certifications, official stamps, or logos
♦ Prominence given to leaders vs. citizens, customers, or employees
♦ Importance of security and restrictions or barriers to access
♦ Social roles used to organize information
♦ Emphasis on the social and moral order (e.g., nationalism or religion) and its symbols

3.2. Long Term Orientation

Long Term Orientation (LTO) focuses on the degree to which the society embraces, or does not embrace long-term devotion to traditional, forward-thinking values. India’s high LTO score indicates the country prescribes to the values of long-term commitments and respect for tradition. This is thought to support a strong work ethic where long-term rewards are expected as a result of today’s hard work. For websites, this translates into emphasizing long-term value potential for the business.

High LTO cultures emphasize the following aspects of web design (Marcus, 2001, p. 22):

♦ Content focused on practice and practical value
♦ Relationships as a source of information and credibility
♦ Patience in achieving results and goals
♦ Focus on long-term value creation
3.3. Masculinity

According to Hofstede et al., “a society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.140). A feminine society, on the other hand, is one where emotional gender roles overlap; both women and men are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (p.140). India has Masculinity (MAS) as the third highest ranking Hofstede dimension at 56, with the world average just slightly lower at 51. The higher the country ranks in this dimension, the greater the gap between values of men and women. Marcus (2001) state that user interfaces in masculine culture should emphasize gender/family/age traditional values and navigation emphasizing exploration and control (p. 26).

High MAS cultures emphasize the following aspects of web design (Marcus, 2001, p. 26):
- Traditional gender/family/age distinctions
- Work tasks, roles, and mastery, with quick results for limited tasks
- Navigation oriented to exploration and control
- Attention gained through games and competitions
- Graphics, sound, and animation used for utilitarian purpose

3.4. Individualism

India’s low individualism score (IDV) suggests that its culture stresses the interdependence and long-term mutual obligations between individuals and organizations. This interdependence influences an individual to want to be in an environment where he feels belonged and integrated. Hence, collective cultures enjoy group work and derive their identity from being part of a collectivity (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 51). As a result, this dimension within the context of web design depicts community relations, family themes, pictures, and symbols of national identity, and loyalty programs (Ahmed, Mouratidis, & Preston, 2008, p. 9).

Collectivism influences the following aspects of the web design (Marcus, 2001, p. 12):
- Focus on group achievement
Prominence given to aged, experienced, wise leaders and states of being
Importance given to products shown by themselves or with groups
Emphasis on relationships
Emphasis on tradition and history

3.5. Uncertainty Avoidance

India's lowest ranking dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) at 40, compared to the world average of 65. This suggests that the India’s culture is more open to unstructured ideas and situations. The population has fewer rules and regulations with which to attempt control of every unknown and unexpected event or situation. Low UAI score suggests that the design need not be highly structured, and colors and typography can be used to emphasize information.

Low UAI cultures emphasize the following aspects of web design (Marcus, 2001, p. 19).
- Complexity with maximal content and choices
- Less control of navigation; links might open new windows
- Focus on underlying concepts rather than narrow tasks
- Coding of color, typography, and sound to maximize information

3.6. Context

Apart from Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions discussed above, the concept of context is also useful to identify web design strategies for cross-cultural websites. First used by Hall, the expressions “high-context” and “low-context” are labels denoting inherent cultural differences between societies (“Hall's cultural factors”, n.d.). High-context and low-context communication refers to how much speakers rely on things other than words to convey meaning. In a high-context culture, there are many contextual elements that help people to understand the rules. As a result, much is taken for granted, but this can be very confusing for people who do not understand the “unwritten rules” of the culture. In general, cultures that favor low-context communication will pay more attention to the literal meanings of words than to the context surrounding them.

India is a multilingual subcontinent, and many Indians are bilingual or even trilingual. In
India, 22 languages are recognized as official languages. The largest language is Hindi; the second largest Bengali. English is the second official language of 100 million speakers, but also the language of law, government, and businesses (Wikipedia, 2010). Indian communication style follows the high-context culture discourse. In most Indian languages people talking to an elderly person use respectful forms. For example, in Marathi (which happens to be my native language), high respect for elders is also seen in younger sisters and brothers never calling their elder sibling by their first name, but by the words tai (eldest sister), mai (second eldest sister) and bhau (eldest brother).

Wurtz’s research study on the differences in web designs from high-context and low-context cultures observed the following about the high-context websites (2005):

- High use of animation, especially in connection with images of moving people
- Images promote values characteristic of collectivist societies
- Featured images depict products and merchandise in use by individuals
- Links promote an exploratory approach to navigation on the website; process-oriented
- Many sidebars and menus, opening of new browser windows for each new page
4. **Heuristics**

St. Amant (2005) presents a prototype method to analyze sites designed for other cultures (p. 74). He states that through such an analysis, designers can gain a basic understanding of another culture’s communication expectations related to online displays (p. 74). This allows designers to use this knowledge to create materials for users from other cultures. St. Amant suggests that this approach should be seen as a complement that provides foundational knowledge related to basic aspects of culture and web design (2005, p. 74). Specifically he says to look for characteristics in the following areas of the site:

- Menu bar
- Buttons
- Color
- Hyperlinks
- Body text
- Search engine
- Images

I reviewed three websites to understand their current web design practices. I reviewed sites from companies like Tata Consulting Services, an IT Services provider; ICICI Bank Limited, a publicly traded bank; and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, a state-owned telecommunications company. As I reviewed the sites, I noted the design conventions used on each. Based on this review, I derived the following heuristics for web design for the Indian culture.

- Place the logo in the top left corner. Linking the logo to the home page is optional.
- Animation includes videos and graphic animations, including animated navigation.
- Images and graphics focus on products, advertising messages, people wearing traditional attire, family photos, photos of older people, and photos of actors/actresses endorsing products.
- For color, blues and oranges are used most often. Blue color represents peace, and orange color represents purity of being in the Indian culture.
- Menu bars are across the top and in the left side bar. Global navigation may be included in the left sidebar as well as across the top. In some cases, secondary
navigation is included on the right hand side.

- Okay to use hyperlinks in the body text.
- Including a site search is common.
- Holiday message from the CEO is commonly featured on the site.
- People's title and credentials are listed wherever names are mentioned.
- Okay to use lots of links on the home page.
- Copy is verbose and okay to use technical words.

See Appendix A for a comparison table of my findings from each site.
5. **Design Analysis**

For this report, I chose three pages to review and suggest redesign options. These pages were accessed in December 2010.

- Home (http://www.ameksinfotech.com/)
- Services (http://www.ameksinfotech.com/service.php)
- Training (http://www.ameksinfotech.com/training.php)

5.1. **Home page**

**Current Design**

![Original Home page](image)

*Figure 1: Original Home page*

The first thing that jumps across is that the logo of the company is on the right hand side and search box is on the left hand side. A scrolling marquee features current job openings with the company at the top left corner. In addition, there is an animation next to the graphics in the middle as well as one more scrolling marquee on the right hand side. These animations appear throughout the site. The site features The Company page as its
home page, but there is no separate home page. Home page includes two links--Vision and Ethics--that go nowhere. Multiple colors are used for links and text throughout the page with no clear hierarchy or logical explanation. Lastly, the graphics used on the home page and throughout the site are boring and do not reflect any of India’s cultural values such as collectivism, long-term orientation, or high power distance.

There are two things that are well designed in the AMEKS’ current website. First, the logo is visually attractive. Second, there is a consistent global navigation at the top of all pages. Therefore, I kept both these ideas in the redesigned website.

Redesign

Figure 2: Redesigned Home page

In the redesigned site, I moved the logo to the top left corner and moved search to the top right corner. For the top navigation bar, I used orange color as it signifies sacredness and purity in the Indian culture (“The meaning of colours”, n.d.). This will help AMEKS build trust with its business partners.
I made several changes to the information architecture of the site. I removed Enquiry link from the global navigation and incorporated it with Contact Us page as both functions are similar in nature. I renamed On-campus Training with simply Training, AMEKS Update with a commonly used News & Events, and The Company with About AMEKS. After these structural changes, I designed the main content of the home page.

In the middle of the page is a large image of a popular Bollywood actor, Shah Rukh Khan, who appears endorsing the benefits of a long-term relationship with AMEKS. In India, it is very common for Bollywood actors and actresses to endorse companies and their products. It is thought that “endorsements by Bollywood stars impress the common people and motivate them to purchase these commodities” (“Endorsements by Bollywood stars”, n.d.). On the redesigned home page, the wording of the endorsement message speaks to the collectivist nature of the culture, which often emphasizes relationships and long-term value potential for business partners (Marcus, 2001, p. 12). As the AMEKS site grows, this middle area can be used to rotate a set of images or a video about AMEKS, as users in high-context cultures usually appreciate video or some kind of animation present on a site (Wurtz, 2005).

On the right of the main image are two promotional images. The first is a promotion for career opportunities with AMEKS. This image is a replacement for the scrolling marquee at the top left corner of all pages. This image uses vibrant green color to attract attention, but it is not too distracting. The second promotional image is of a solution AMEKS developed for the automotive industry. Client testimonial text appears below the two images. AMEKS can rotate testimonials from different clients in this area. Below the main image are two additional promotional images. AMEKS can use this real estate to highlight white papers, products, or services.

The redesigned home page appears inviting, warm, personal, and focuses on the long-term orientation and collectivism dimensions.

5.2. Services page

Current Design:
Figure 3: Original Services page

The Services page features different services the company offers. The headings Training, Development, and Consultancy appear as links because of their turquoise blue color, but they not clickable. The user would expect to click on them because the site uses turquoise blue color for links on other pages. The title of the graphics Career Work Bench appears like a promotion for some other page on the site, but the graphics is not clickable. As stated previously, the graphics used on this page does not reflect any of the cultural values of India.
Redesign:

Figure 4: Redesigned Services page

The redesigned page establishes a clear hierarchy of visual elements on the page. The heading appears in a large font with navy blue color. Below the headline is a summary or marketing message for the page. All links appear in turquoise blue color on this page.

A medium-sized image is displayed on the right of the page. This image depicts a group of AMEKS employees winning a trophy. Just below this image, two certifications achieved by the company are shown. According to Marcus, sites designed for high power distance culture should focus on expertise, authority, experts, certifications, official stamps, or logos as a way of conveying high power status (2001, p. 8). Below the certification images is a small promotional image for a technical quiz visitors can take to test their knowledge. This quiz is another attempt at displaying status of the company as an expert on technology.

This page is written to highlight the Indian cultural values. It uses phrases such as “we
focus on helping you succeed,” “providing services for more than a decade,” and “you have a partner you can depend upon”. These phrases appeal to the collectivism and long-term orientation values in the Indian society.

5.3. Training page

Current Design

The Training page provides a list of training courses offered in various technologies. The bullet points appear as link from their visual appearance, but they are not clickable. Also, On Campus link on the left of the page goes nowhere. The Tech Quiz promotional graphics on the left appears orphaned with no association to the content on the page. Also, the links appearing in the scrolling marquee on the right open pages in different windows.

Figure 5: Original Training page

The Training page provides a list of training courses offered in various technologies. The bullet points appear as link from their visual appearance, but they are not clickable. Also, On Campus link on the left of the page goes nowhere. The Tech Quiz promotional graphics on the left appears orphaned with no association to the content on the page. Also, the links appearing in the scrolling marquee on the right open pages in different windows.
Redesign

Figure 6: Redesigned Training page

The redesigned Training page looks visually consistent with the Services page. It uses a consistent color scheme to establish visual hierarchy. The main body text appears in the middle of the page and is divided into two major sections — for professionals and for students. In addition to the navigation bar at the top, the Training page is also linked from the Services page for quicker access.

On the right of the page appears a picture of a training facility with real people getting trained. According to Nielsen (2010), users pay close attention to photos and other images that contain relevant information such as photos of products and real people as opposed to stock photos of generic people. The text is written in simple and plain English. It uses a phrase “come and learn together with us” to appeal to the collectivism dimension.
6. Conclusion

The redesigned site is warm, inviting, personal, and focuses on building long-term relationships with its customers. This design is scalable and can be easily tailored to western cultures when AMEKS decides to enter these markets. By understanding the cultural values of a country, we can create sites that are intuitive and easy to use. And if the site is designed well, users won’t even notice the design conventions used. When designing sites for Indian users, the following cultural characteristics must be considered:

**High Power Distance:** Websites in high power distance cultures display status through authority’s role, pictures of important people in the company, and organizational charts as images or official certification logos. The redesigned Services page incorporates this cultural aspect.

**Long-Term Orientation:** Websites emphasize long-term value potential for business partners through slogans, pictures, and well-crafted wording. The redesigned Home page uses wording about “Relationship Quotient” and uses a popular actor to convey the message. In addition, client testimonial is used to increase this perception. This will allow AMEKS to build relationships through credibility.

**Collectivism:** Websites focus on group achievement and relationship building. This can be achieved with group pictures of employees or real customers. Also, well-crafted wording can help deliver that message. All three redesigned pages reflect this cultural value.

**Context:** Websites in high-context cultures use animation and images promoting values characteristic of collectivist societies. The redesigned Home page uses lots of images and many of them can be turned into rotating images or animation.
7. References


## 8. Revision History

<table>
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<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>11/29/2010</td>
<td>Anant Patil</td>
<td>Initial draft</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>12/5/2010</td>
<td>Anant Patil</td>
<td>added introduction</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>12/6/2010</td>
<td>Anant Patil</td>
<td>Added cultural analysis, heuristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>12/7/2010</td>
<td>Anant Patil</td>
<td>Added design analysis, captured screenshots, designed web pages</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>12/8/2010</td>
<td>Anant Patil</td>
<td>Proof-read report, minor edits, updated citations and references</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>12/12/2010</td>
<td>Dr. Carol Barnum,</td>
<td>Idiomatic corrections, updated redesign of services and training page</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
<td>12/13/2010</td>
<td>Anant Patil</td>
<td>Redesigned the Training page per Dr. Barnum’s feedback</td>
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## Appendix A: Comparative Analysis Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Navigation</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Images/Animation</th>
<th>Body Text</th>
<th>Search Engine</th>
<th>Hyperlinks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| tcs.com     | Logo placed at top left.  
Home page uses a drop down as substitute for global navigation. Inner pages use top menu bar for global navigation.  
Additional navigation on the right via links and drop-downs. | Background color varies between sky blue and white.  
Bright green color is used to bring attention to the top menu bar. | Home page features a very large animation of rotating images.  
No picture of a person present. | Text is verbose and uses technical terms on occasions. | No search engine present. | Hyperlinks use browser default colors  
Used mostly for sub Menus.  
Not used very often in the middle of a paragraph. |
| icicibank.com | Logo placed at top left.  
Global navigation is across the top.  
Secondary navigation is present on left and right side. | Orange color for menubar.  
Red color for links.  
Navy blue for headings.  
White for page | Heavy use of animation and images throughout the site.  
Animated images used for promotions on the side. | Text is verbose and uses technical terms on occasions.  
Text color is black.  
Hindi language option available. | Search engine present. | Some hyperlinks open pages in new window.  
Hyperlink color varies between sky blue, red, navy blue. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bsnl.co.in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logo placed at top left corner, but does not link to the home page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home page is filled with text, images, and links.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Page background is white, text color is black. Images use a heavy amount of blue and navy blue colors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy use of animation and images throughout the site. Animated images used for promotions on the side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text is verbose and uses technical terms on occasions.</td>
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<td>Text color is black.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No search engine present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some hyperlinks open pages in new window.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperlink color varies between blue and black.</td>
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