Top 10 Ways to Reduce Localization and Translation Costs Without Sacrificing Quality!

Some say that the best way to reduce localization costs is by avoiding localization altogether. Yet companies with a global vision have realized that to compete in a global economy, both they and their products have to speak their clients’ language.

Once you decide to localize for a certain market, measures should be taken to make localization tasks as efficient and effective as possible. Throwing the localization project over the wall to your distributors or just any third party is not the best way to go. You should be working with professionals that know how to reduce your localization costs, without sacrificing quality.

1. Correct localization process
Every localization project begins with a spec and a plan. The spec is like a bill of material, that references and quantifies all the components requiring localization. This includes the number of words to translate, words to review, words to leverage from previous translations, pages to layout or desktop publish, topics to compile and QA (Quality Assurance), art files to localize or recapture, tables and dialog boxes to resize and QA, software files to compile and QA, etc.

Since project timelines and costs are derived from this spec, it is essential that these specs result from the use of the most optimized process, translating into the most optimized costs and schedules. Working on the native files, for instance, not only does away with the need to extract text from the source files, but more importantly, it eliminates the need to re-insert them for each and every target language.

Reducing long term localization costs should be the main goal. Investing in the correct process may increase upfront costs, but will tremendously reduce long term costs. Use of translation memory tools (databases and search engines), glossary and style guide generation, use of professional translators and investment in quality assurance processes will increase your upfront costs. They are essential, however, to reduce long term costs. Choosing the correct localization process is the most important task that can be done to reduce cumulative costs.

There are many processes to consider and follow. A top-down localization process reuses text from translation memory and applies it to the new source files, while a bottom-up localization process compares or contrasts old and new source files, applying changes to the old target files. Depending on the level of change, it may make sense to follow one or the other. A hybrid methodology that combines both top-down and bottom-up processes is the ideal methodology to implement.

2. Verbosity is the enemy
Once the correct process is identified, look at optimizing the different components that comprise localization costs. It is no secret that translation contributes to over 50% of a localization project’s costs, so any optimization you do to reduce the word count will lead to lower translation and localization costs.

Verbosity is therefore the enemy. Try to be concise and straight to the point. Eliminate unneeded and obsolete text. Cut fat wherever possible. Not only will you save on localization costs, but your end-users will thank you for it.
Apply the Pareto Principle- The 80-20 Rule. Only 20% of your product is used 80% of the time by your users. Try to identify the parts that are never or rarely used and minimize them. You may decide to only localize 20-30% of your product’s documentation or help. Or you may decide to release a “light” localized version of your product.

3. Author for localization
In an effort to simultaneously release a product into many languages, source files are often rushed to localization teams, shortening the edit cycle. While it saves time to start translation early, always make sure that the final source files are thoroughly edited, before they are submitted for localization.

Early optimization for localization and proper editing performed on the source files will reduce rework and result in savings multiplied by the number of languages that you localize into. For more information, read Authoring for Localization.

4. Single-Sourcing is finally practical
"Chunking" is a thing of the past. With the advent of new authoring tools, single-sourcing is finally becoming a reality. Anyone that reuses information throughout documents or needs to present it in different formats should consider single-sourcing. By consolidating recurring information and building final files from a common source, regardless of formats, translation-leveraging from translation memories is minimized and costs reduced.

Perhaps you have a product that works on various platforms or for various OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers), and multiple user manuals are needed. In these cases, the majority of the content is the same. Rather than writing and maintaining three separate manuals, a low-level single-source solution would allow you to write the content once and "code" it for each adaptation. The same is true if you want to release the same information into many formats such as printed manuals, online help or context-sensitive help.

Many of the current authoring tools offer single sourcing options. Most of these options provide the basic functionality needed to convert docs to help, or vice versa. Check out RoboHelp®, the most used online help authoring tool. Adobe's FrameMaker®, used in conjunction with WebWorks Publisher®, also provides a low to medium level method of creating online help, manuals or PDFs. At the high-end, XMetaL and ArborText's Epic® use database technology to provide a single-sourcing solution. The highly structured content is stored in the database not as a manual or online help file, but as raw data, typically in XML. You create the content freely without worrying about the final output. Then you pick and choose what data and format you need and output it in a semi-automatic way.

5. Consistency, Consistency, Consistency
While single-sourcing deals with consistency at the topic level, efforts should be made to ensure consistency at the string (sentence) level. Improving consistency in your source-language documents or applications minimizes the turnaround time and reduces translation costs, especially when translation memory tools are used. Translators only have to translate any unique string once. If you are consistent in the use of common strings, the total strings count to translate is reduced by the number of consistently reused strings (also called repeats).

Consistency is probably the most important concept in instructional writing -- such as help text, procedures and demos. To help maintain consistency, create a glossary for your terminology and a style guide to follow, and do follow them.
Here are some ways to strive for consistency:
   a. When referring to the same concept or object, use the exact same words.
   b. Avoid the use of homonyms, as they can cause confusion.
   c. In headings and bullet points try to keep syntax consistent.
   d. Use terminology consistent with industry standards.
   e. Proofread for overall consistency, not just for grammar and typos.

6. Last-minutes updates are unavoidable
In today’s rapid pace of technology, changes are often made to source files after localization has begun on them and before the product is released. This requires that these changes are folded into all target languages, potentially contributing to large cost overruns. In order to control costs associated with last minute updates, consider the following:
   a. Once translation has started, deliver changed source files to your localization group before the linguistic edit/review cycle begins. The localization group's top-down localization process and translation memory software can be used at the end of the translation process, but before editing, to leverage already translated strings in the newly delivered files. Incremental costs here should be proportional to the percentage of change.
   b. If minor changes to the source files are delivered after the linguistic edit has started, the best place to implement them is directly in the target files during QA. To facilitate bottom-up localization, provide new source files with revision marks enabled, so that changes are easily identified. Incremental costs should be minor.
   c. If major changes to the source files are delivered after the editing cycle has started, but before DTP is done, leveraging the translation from the translation memory is essential, requiring a top-down approach. Incremental costs should be proportional to the percentage of change, plus a single digit percentage leveraging overhead.
   d. If major changes to the source files are delivered after layout/DTP, they will be treated as a new project, similar to a new release (see following topic). This requires the generation of new project specs, plans, schedules and costs. This is the costliest scenario possible, prior to committing printing or production costs, and should be avoided whenever possible.

7. Plan future releases
It is important for any company to classify releases as major or minor and plan when and where localization should occur. To some companies, only major releases are localized. Since with each update there are recurring localization costs, minimizing the number of localization updates will reduce the size of the needed localization budget.

There are other practices that you could follow to lower your cost during updates:
   a. Avoid making unnecessary changes, minor or major, to the files requiring localization. Changes will result in fuzzy matches (similar but not identical matches) by the translation memory search engine and end up costing money and time to update the translation. Always weigh the value of the change to the user against the added cost.
   b. With each update, try to use previous version files as-is. Unchanged old files will permit as-is reuse of their old target files, reducing the need to leverage, review, layout and QA, thus eliminating their associated costs.
   c. Avoid switching file formats. When you go from WinHelp to HTML help, the formatting tags in WinHelp are different from HTML tags; therefore, the Translation Memory will not find a 100% match on the already translated segments, increasing the cost of translation. This is also true if you go from QuarkXPress to InDesign, or from one development environment to another. If you must switch, do so only during major updates or releases.
8. A picture is worth 1000 words
Using art (graphics, pictures, charts, dialog boxes, bitmaps and other) throughout your manuals, documents and help can add tremendous value to the user and simplify the understanding and usability of your product. Use them strategically to replace text when possible. Art that doesn’t contain text, seldom needs localization. (Only in cultural-sensitive areas may art files require changes, but this is not often found in technical subjects).

Only use art when it adds value. Often the user is running software simultaneously to the help file. Having dialog box bitmaps displayed in the online help is redundant, since the software is already displaying that dialog box. By minimizing the use of dialog box art, recapture in all necessary languages is minimized, as is the associated cost.

Use callouts whenever possible outside the graphics. Again, art that does not contain embedded text may require no localization efforts at all. Callouts can easily be translated with the rest of the document, further reducing localization costs.

9. Use only A4 or US-Letter size formatting
Online PDF files and other online documentation formats are becoming a very common and feasible alternative to printed documents. More and more companies are using this distribution method, rather than publishing printed manuals.

A4 and US-Letter format printers are inexpensive and widely available to users. If you are formatting PDF or online manuals, make sure they are released in either of these formats. Using other formats may make it harder for users to print. Furthermore, using A4 or US-Letter rather than more common smaller page formats reduces the number of pages to layout, minimizing desktop publishing costs.

If you are not localizing but you are printing and shipping manuals, consider reallocating your printing and shipping budgets to localization. International users prefer an online manual in their native language over a printed manual in a foreign one!

10. Quality must never be sacrificed
There is a price to be paid for quality. Always keep in mind whom you are localizing your product for. Cost-cutting measures should never steer your focus away from the user. The costliest localization project is the one that causes the user to shelve your localized product and, instead, use your source language product! All localization efforts and costs will then be lost.

A second translator review, in-country proof, or final quality assurance may seem unnecessary, but bypassing any of these areas will lead to inferior quality, having a negative effect on your company’s image, reputation, product usability and end-user satisfaction.

When partnering with a localization vendor, you have decided to work with professionals that understand all the nuances of localization. You should expect professional results that your end-user will be thrilled to use. Quality comes at a price justifiable by its dividends—lower support calls, wider product use and satisfied clients. The cost of poor quality far exceeds its savings. Never accept anything less than a completely satisfied end-user.
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We’ve built this guide because despite the need, nothing like it exists: a concise, step-by-step handbook for globalization and localization in the new millennium.

New clients come to us with a desire to go global but unsure of what the process entails. Some face a catch-22 dilemma. They want to penetrate international markets, but cannot justify the localization costs.

Others – some who have been localizing for years – want to know more about the new tools and processes that will improve both their results and their bottom line.

Here you will find the practical advice you need to start on your way and follow through to a successful finish.

So, whether you’re just entering the wide world of globalization or you’re a veteran of the field, this guide is for you. We invite you to take a look inside the industry through the eyes of a successful localization company. Enabling Globalization will enlighten and inspire you – and leave you eager to tackle your next international market!

The eBook is offered free of charge to GlobalVision’s clients or may be purchased from Amazon or the book’s website at www.EnablingGlobalization.com.

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