
Cherryleaf

Reducing Translation Costs



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Reducing translation and localisation costs

Introduction

Question: How do successful organisations get their message across to different cultures?

Answer: very expensively!

Translating documents takes a great deal of time, effort and money, issues that multiply with every new language and version update you produce. Translation comes at a high price, exceeding the cost of writing the original content after only a few languages. In recent years, we have seen only limited improvements, with the main change being the drive to reduce the cost per word to its lowest possible rate. It is an industry that is under increasing pressure to find new ways to improve cost-efficiency, quality and the time-to-market.

These days, staff in localisation departments spend their time essentially on project management, translation and quality assurance. However, by using one of the emerging systems that integrate content creation, localisation and content management into an efficient system, many of these activities can be automated or avoided all together. We are now seeing the emergence of technical content control systems that can be used to improve the turn-around time, translation costs and the quality of the translations themselves. In recent projects, where these systems have been implemented, organisations have seen substantial savings in localisation costs, with word count reductions and translation costs of around 30%.

Reducing repeated translations

How have these improvements been achieved? The answer is by using single-source technical content systems that make intelligent use of XML. These systems know what content is translatable, what had been previously translated, and what has been reused, added or changed. It means that only content that requires translation is sent to translators.

In addition to costs for translation, localisation companies often charge for scanning text that has already been translated. This cost is now eliminated, because these new systems submit only content that is completely new content or has been changed.

Breaking document into components

The biggest change is that, in these systems, the Technical Authors write document components rather than entire documents. A component could be a procedure, a process, technical data etc. and can be reused in different manuals. A master document then holds links towards the different components that make up the manual. When similar content is found in different documents, the small differences can be published conditionally. This limits considerably the number of modules that need to be managed.

This re-use of content reduces the size of the documents that have to be translated.

This approach enables you to translate each component as soon as it is ready. The system knows what content is translatable, what has previously been translated, and what has been changed. It only submits components as and when they are ready.

The systems we advocate use XML in a way that allows translators to use their favourite translation memory tools. The software tracks and manages this source content as it is translated into each language. They export the text to XML in a format-neutral mark-up, which increases accuracy by eliminating the effects of formatting on memory matches. They can translate the content, and then return it to the system intact.

Translators are given a document that highlights the content that appears in the XML files. These documents ensure the translators have the required context for translation, avoiding the need for unnecessary reviews.

Summary

It is encouraging to see that new products are coming on to the market that actually work and enable the localisation process to happen more swiftly and accurately. By using single-source technical content systems that make intelligent use of XML you can reduce the size of the documents that have to be translated. This leads to cost benefits, saving of time and better project planning. More time will be required at the beginning of the project to set up the document correctly, which is well worth the effort for the rewards.

About Cherryleaf

Cherryleaf Limited is a technical communication company based in the United Kingdom. We are the most copied technical communicators in the UK, with expertise in single sourcing (reusing content) and online Help. We have locations in Brighton, Heathrow (London) and Oxfordshire (Thame), and we carry out work throughout the UK and Europe.