

## Internationalizing Your Content: Authoring with Localization in Mind

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*This discussion is structured around my experience working with companies who are authoring content destined for localization.*

*Beyond the five steps detailed in this paper, I will present three related case studies which will illustrate how I have worked with three individual companies to incorporate best practices in authoring into their processes. Each company's case begins with a unique starting point as well as varied writing team organization, localization objectives and resource availability.*

*Technical communicators working with small, mid-size and large companies who are targeting international markets can benefit from these strategies.*

### INTRODUCTION

Localization is the process of adapting a product or service to a particular language and culture.

Internationalization is the precursor to localization and involves the process of planning, designing and implementing a culturally and technically neutral product which can easily be localized. Internationalization helps decrease translation cost and speeds up time-to-market by addressing crucial technical, aesthetic, cultural, and linguistic issues at project start-up. It also has the unique advantage of streamlining not only the localization of your content but authoring in general.

Your company has a product slated for international distribution. Accompanying your product is a complete documentation set that needs to be written:

- Labels
- Datasheets
- Installer Guide
- User Guide
- Quick Start Guide
- Training documentation
- E-learning
- Website content
- The list goes on...

Once all of this content is written, it needs to be translated into several languages. The question is: How can your team write effectively in a short time frame, allow for simultaneous shipment across all regions, and keep the cost down as much as possible?

For starters, involve your LSP (Language Service Provider) from the beginning. True localization renders the translation of content completely transparent, making it appear as if the content was originally created in the target language. Your LSP will be able to offer you valuable advice about images, wording, and layout so that you don't have to change things later on when there's no time or money left to do so.

At Language Intelligence, we are often asked to assist our clients' writing teams with solutions ranging from how to arrange text on a page to file migration into XML. You can start small or you can go big – easy yet significant adjustments within a writing team or a full-blown enterprise-level solution. Either way, you can start saving time and money while improving overall consistency and quality right away.

### Step 1: Start with the words

Making sure that your audience will understand how to use the product correctly is a key element in that product's success. Once your content goes to translation, your first audience is made up of translators. They need to fully understand not only the product but also your words so that they can accurately convey your descriptions, procedures, warnings, etc. in their own language.

Three important things to keep in mind when you sit down to write: Simplicity, Consistency, Clarity.

#### **Simplicity:**

- Use simple sentence structure: That doesn't mean "short," it means keeping the structure predictable and organized; making it easier for a new user to understand and easier for the translator to communicate.
- Use self-contained sentences and phrases: Avoid sentence fragments and open clauses, especially before lists.
- Avoid too many modifiers: Word order becomes confusing during translation and the modifiers end up far removed from the noun they are describing.
- Avoid idioms and slang: Especially when they're not obviously idiomatic.

#### **Consistency:**

- Single term = single use: Be mindful of words that can be read as both nouns and verbs, for example.

- Keep word choice consistent: Avoid unnecessary synonyms or words with like meanings in the same context. This is especially important for terminology consistency and taking full advantage of translation memory technology.

#### **Clarity:**

- Avoid nominative pronouns: restate objects for clarity.
- Do not write negative words to represent a positive idea: For example, "Don't add water if the light isn't on." Instead write, "Only add water when the light is on."
- Use words in the context of their most common definition.
- Be open to using a symbol or image: Work with your LSP to determine if an image is appropriate and clear for all target locales.

Following these rules will make your job easier, facilitate sharing writing tasks with fellow team members and significantly improve your content's preparedness for localization. If the writing is clear it will take less time to translate, cost less and make the translation more transparent.

You are laying a foundation for your content.

### **Step 2: Create a Knowledge Base: Adding support to your words.**

Before starting a project, you most likely collect information about a new product from product developers and product managers. You create a list of features, specifications, warnings, etc. You may also develop a glossary of terms so that terminology definitions are consistent. This knowledge base should be shared with your LSP. Translators will benefit immensely from this type of information and anything else you can provide that will help them to gain a deeper knowledge of your company's specific product and terminology. **Everything that you need to know in order to author a manual or product documentation, the translators also need to know in order to translate.** Sharing information with your LSP is the most fool-proof way to ensure accuracy.

Does your company conduct in-country linguistic reviews? If so, it becomes even more critical to share this information. If it's a new product to you, it's also new to them. Minimize the effort and challenges associated with doing an in-language review by working with your LSP to create a collaborative translation effort around the product's documentation overall.

### **Step 3: Identifying Topics. "Chunking."**

In step one you focused on the words themselves. In step two you began to add structure to the words. In step three you will start to group, or "chunk" the words into standalone topics.

Topic-based authoring, also known as structured writing, involves molding your words into discreet standalone units that focus on a single subject. Don't think of your document as narrative. Think of it as a collection of individual topics that, when assembled, provide the reader with a complete picture of all of the information they need to know about your product. Chances are that if you are writing out a feature description in your Installer Guide, it will not change when written for the User Guide.

A fast and easy way to start thinking on a topic level is to create a topic map out of your document outline. Each individual subject will be a separate topic with its own specific purpose. They should be written as standalone pieces of content that can be used in any context.

#### **Benefits of Topic-based writing: What's in it for you?**

- Easier to write - quicker, more accurate, more consistent.
- Reuse, reuse, reuse. Write the topic once and then use it over and over again.
- Easier to share tasks with other team members - allows you to switch tasks, reuse, streamline and share information.
- Easier to manage updates.
- Translation of updates to the documentation is much less expensive when existing content does not need to be reviewed; if the context is the same there is no need to check it again.
- Reduces cost, time and effort involved in localization and makes the localization process more agile. Individual topics can be translated without having to wait for the entire document to be complete.
- Best way to use translation memory technology.

### **Step 4: Collaboration - Reuse and repurpose content**

Now that you have chunked your words into topics it becomes easier to not only reuse whole pieces of content, but also to share that content with others. By creating unique topics and translating them, you now have boilerplate versions of both the source and translated content which can be reused, significantly

reducing the time and cost involved in content creation and translation.

In all of the content that will be generated for an individual product (installation guides, operation manual, data sheets, web pages) it is likely that there is the potential for content reuse. Imagine that you are tasked with the creation of all of these various documents. Where do you begin? Most likely, you (and the other content creators involved) will start by creating outlines of the content that needs to be included in each one of these outputs. From these outlines you have now created your topic maps. Although there may be multiple contributors and multiple outputs, there is often significant efficiency to be gained. By identifying common topics across all of the various outputs, the opportunity for reuse potential becomes obvious. Now that you are reusing content, and effectively collaborating, what's the next step? Technology. In step 5 you will look at how technology, in this case XML, can further reduce time, cost and effort.

### **Step 5: XML Implementation**

If you have followed all of the steps laid out so far, you are well on your way toward a very efficient writing system. XML implementation is the most logical next step. XML provides a structure which you can use to define your information. The tagging structure of XML associates purpose with your information. Translation updates, which are typically time-consuming and arduous, will now be efficient and consistent.

#### ***Here are some of the benefits that an XML implementation provides:***

- Easily index and search the topics that you have created.
- Reusable content: No longer write the same thing over and over again.
- Updating documentation is more targeted and easier to execute.
- Improved version control and management when everyone pulls content from the same place.
- Multiple formats are generated from a single source. No more trying to create web pages from FrameMaker or MS Word documents.
- Improved collaboration: Share content with other team members and workgroups. It makes everyone's job easier and improves overall consistency and quality.

- A more translation memory-friendly text format. Your company saves money, saves time, and sees better translation consistency from project to project.
- Decrease the time and cost spent on DTP work for multiple languages during localization.
- Create an agile translation environment where topics can be translated individually prior to the completion of the entire document.

## **SUMMARY**

The objective of content internationalization is to eliminate duplicate efforts and duplicate costs. The steps outlined in this article provide strategies that you can incorporate into your writing immediately. Starting with simple changes to the wording of your content, each step becomes more and more beneficial, leading you and your team toward advanced solutions like XML implementation and true single sourcing.

## **REFERENCES**

- (1) Microsoft Corporation Editorial Style Board. The Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications – Third Edition. Washington: Microsoft Press, 2004.
- (2) Read more about topic-based authoring at DITA XML.org – the online resource for information regarding the DITA OASIS Standard: [DITA.XML.ORG](http://DITA.XML.ORG)

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As Director, Global Client Solutions at Language Intelligence, Lisa Pietrangeli works with clients to develop internationalization strategies for all stages of the content development process, including authoring, terminology management, XML implementation, translation and output finalization. Her experience working in many areas of the business, including project management, resource selection and management, localization consulting, quality management and management of the localization project management staff, allows her to approach translation challenges from diverse perspectives. With this insight, Lisa is able to help clients streamline their process, allowing them to set the stage for higher quality translations with increased consistency, quicker turnarounds, and better cost efficiency. Lisa holds degrees in Art History, Spanish, Italian and certification in American Sign Language. She has been with Language Intelligence since 2000.