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February 2014

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A new brand of courses blends learning with cloud-based software and social media

Writing manuals that inspire

Encouraging people to fix their devices takes more than mere instructions

Terminology management put to the test

When is terminology management really worth the effort?

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tcworld
magazine for international information management

From the editor

Back in 2008, a Chinese Café involuntarily stumbled onto the stage of worldwide publicity when it put up a large sign in both Chinese and English. The Chinese characters simply translated into „Dining Hall", but the cheerful English sign read „Translate server error".

To many, the amusing translation blunders produced by fully-automated machine translation systems are the best such tools have to offer. In the notorious machine-versus-human battle, homo sapiens still holds the upper hand. So far.

In the localization and translation industry, machine translation has evolved into an indispensable business asset – one that not only increases productivity, but also quality. The consistent use of terms relevant to the subject matter contributes significantly to the overall quality of a document. And this is where terminology management comes in. Integrated into a computer assisted translation (CAT) tool, terminology management can greatly impact on translation projects, large or small. Add to the picture multiple languages and the benefits of terminology management increase exponentially.

To highlight the benefits of terminology management and promote its use, Russian-based language service provider ABBYY conducted research to evaluate the impact of terminology management on automated translation. Artem Ukrainets and Anna Sidorova have the details (page 11). Research firm Common Sense Advisory conducted interviews with language professionals from various locations to find out how they view the value of terminology management. In an interview with our magazine Ben Sargent sums up their findings (page 14).

Uwe Muegge revolutionizes the way localization is taught in today's classrooms. He suggests that today's curriculum should shift the focus from pure linguistics to localization project management (page 17).

With compelling manuals the iFixit user community aims to inspire people to fix their devices and keep them out of landfills. Recently, the company published a handbook that teaches people how to write such manuals (page 22).

Edwin Skau contemplates the core skills that will keep technical writers in business for many years to come (page 26).

This issue pays special attention to all our readers who will participate in the fourth tcworld India conference, taking place in Bangalore on February 20 and 21. Please check out our directory for a full list of companies who will exhibit at this popular event (page 32).

Corinna Melville

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Terminology management put to the test

Establishing a comprehensive termbase in multiple languages and incorporating it into a CAT tool is an effort that many language professionals shy away from. In which cases is it really worthwhile?

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How I teach localization: Not like old-school translation

A new brand of industry-specific courses blends live instruction with cloud-based tools and social media.

page 17

Writing manuals that inspire

Manuals need to go beyond mere instructions in order to encourage people to fix their devices. Here is how to write such manuals.

page 22

GOOGLE ACQUIRES DEEPMIND

Google has confirmed its acquisition of London-based artificial intelligence company DeepMind Technologies. DeepMind's technology aims to make computers think like humans and has been used in demonstrations of computers playing video games. Like many other innovations, the technology could be used to controversial ends. Google has agreed to establish an ethics board to ensure the technology isn't abused. Google did not reveal any further details.

www.google.com

LANGUAGE SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGY MARKET SURVEY

Common Sense Advisory, Inc., an independent market research firm specializing in the language services industry, has issued a call for participation in its annual global language services and technology market survey. The survey will be open until April 30, 2014.

www.commonsenseadvisory.com

TAUS AND JTCA PARTNER

TAUS and Japan Technical Communicators Association (JTCA) have signed a partnership agreement giving JTCA members a 20% discount on TAUS membership. This partnership opens the reports, online resources, tools, data and metrics developed by TAUS and its members to many of the large Japanese corporations that are members of JTCA. JTCA members will also be able to attend the TAUS Executive Forum on April 10 and 11.

www.taus.net

BENEXTRA KOREA MERGES WITH HANSEMEUG

BENEXtra Korea has merged with HansemEUG, Inc., a provider of solutions for content development, translation and localization. All BENEXtra staff were part of the merger.

www.hansemeug.com

COMINDWARE PROJECT

Comindware, a provider of team work management solutions, has launched Comindware Project, a product designed for project managers to simplify project management, improve real-time visibility into projects and enable social collaboration to create a productive and predictive work environment.

www.comindware.com

European Association for Technical Communication

Technical communication professionals from several European countries have founded the new association "tekom Europe". Its aim is to raise awareness for the significance of technical communication in Europe, to align the occupational profile across Europe and to develop industry standards for user manuals and operating instructions.

The European Union influences the production of consumer and capital goods through a series of specifications and regulations. This also affects the product information. Through established standards, technical writers create documents that are easy to understand, thus allowing the user to operate the device correctly and safely.

When goods are sold within the EU, producers have to follow regulations such as the EC Machinery Directive, Low Voltage Directive, or the Product Safety Directive. Furthermore, the EU publishes a series of standards that provide general principles and detailed requirements for the creation of user information. This includes the IEC 82079-1:2012 "Preparation of instructions for use", which was published in 2012. Ultimately, the EU also influences the education and training of tc professionals.

Goals

The main task of the newly founded association is to represent the interests of content creators and users on a European level. To reach this goal tekom Europe representatives will participate in the formulation of European standards and directives as well as in the description of trade-specific skills and compentences. In addition, the new association will promote cooperation among universities and educational institutions in Europe. tekom Europe supports important EU objectives such as improving the training of young people, the employability and mobility of workers as well as the competitiveness of the European economy in general.

Structure

The association will initially consist of members from six country groups, as well as two corporate members. Additional country groups might be established in the future. Each country group is above all concerned with the interests of its own members.

Together tekom Europe members benefit from the association's greater weight and power. tekom Europe's highest body is the Assembly of Delegates, which decides on future projects and draws up the annual budget. It furthermore elects the volunteer Board of Directors, which consists of a chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The association was founded in compliance with the German Association law; seat of the association is in Stuttgart.

Image: © Kristian Kirk Mailand/ 123rf.com

www.technical-communication.org

Sixty percent of the world's top global brands are multilingual

Independent market research firm Common Sense Advisory has released the results of its annual review of the world's 2,787 most prominent websites. The firm's global web marketing report *Assessing the World's Most Prominent Websites* is based on its annual Global Website Assessment Index. The report details which industries require the most languages, correlations between languages and revenue increases, and how corporate translation buyers and language services providers can use web metrics for benchmarking and business case development.

For seven years, the research firm's analysts and statisticians have combed the world's most prominent websites. Its latest research reports are based on review of 2,787 websites compiled from Alexa Top 500 Global Sites, the Interbrand 100 Best Global Brands, the Forbes Global 2000, and the Fortune 500 lists. Common Sense Advisory found 59 different languages that appeared ten times or more and that 60 percent of these sites were multilingual. English appeared on 2,480 of them (89%). The research reveals that, for multilingual sites, the average number of languages was 8.35, with many major brands offering 30 or more.

However, the research concludes that most companies add languages too slowly or too late, in effect "chasing" growth into international markets.

Adds lead analyst on the report, Ben Sargent, "We know from our interviews and consulting engagements that this globalization phase often commences in earnest after saturating home and home region markets. Our data proves that most companies add languages to global websites in an effort to maintain sales growth – but not soon enough or fast enough."

Image: © Illia Uriadnikov/ 123rf.com

Detailed findings and data points in the 90-page research report and subsequent briefs include:

- Only a handful of prominent sites become multilingual without English being the first or second language.
- A country's level of integration in the world economy is apparent in the average number of languages found on the websites of prominent companies headquartered in that nation. The data from 2013 shows Taiwan has a higher average number of languages on prominent websites than did Indonesia; northern and western Europe remain as the most integrated economies.
- Businesses that augmented their translation budget were 1.5 times more likely than their Fortune 500 peers to report an increase in their total revenue.
- Companies with prominent websites offering 33 or more languages, including American Express, Audi, Cisco, Coca-Cola, IBM, McDonalds, and Microsoft, grew the amount of capital they carried over from 2012 to 2013 by 12.42 percent, almost double the amount as companies with fewer than 20 languages.
- Minority languages are overcoming majority dominance. In India, Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu are growing, with Hindi dropping. In Spain, Spanish is falling while Basque, Catalan, and Galician are all rising.

www.commonsenseadvisory.com

Augmented reality will become an important workplace tool

Although the adoption of augmented reality (AR) in the enterprise is still in its infancy, AR technology has matured to a point where organizations can use it as an internal tool to complement and enhance business processes, workflows and employee training, according to research firm Gartner, Inc.

"Augmented reality is the real-time use of information in the form of text, graphics, audio and other virtual enhancements integrated with real-world objects," said Tuong Huy Nguyen, principal research analyst at Gartner. "AR leverages and optimizes the use of other technologies such as mobility, location, 3D content management and imaging and recognition. It is especially useful in the mobile environment because it enhances the user's senses via digital instruments to allow faster responses or decision-making."

Mr. Nguyen said that AR is particularly powerful for:

- Discovering things in the vicinity — for example, enclosed objects generating heat.
- Presenting real-world objects of potential special interest — for example, detecting and highlighting objects generating higher than normal levels of radiation.
- Showing a user where to go or what to do — for example, helping a worker make a repair in a hazardous environment where visibility is low.
- Providing additional information about an object of interest — for example, distance, size or level of danger.

AR services use various device sensors to identify the users' surroundings. Current implementations generally fall into one of two categories — location-based or computer vision. Location-based offerings use a device's motion sensors to provide information based on a user's location. Computer-vision-based services use facial, object and motion tracking algorithms to identify images and objects. For example, being able to identify a shoe among numerous objects on a table, Google Goggles (image-based search), or optical character recognition (OCR).

The business potential for AR has increased through improvements in location services and image recognition. The precision of indoor location services has increased significantly, and this greater accuracy allows businesses to use AR location features for vehicle, campus and in-building navigation and identification. Image recognition capabilities in AR solutions allow user organizations to use these AR capabilities in processes that require staff to visually identify objects and parts and for real-time decision-making. For example, firefighters can use AR to find out ambient temperature or a building layout so they know exits, and potentially dangerous areas. These technologies together provide various benefits to using AR as an internal tool. This includes enhancing current business process, facilitating and optimizing the use of current technologies, and providing business innovation.

Nevertheless, while enterprises have used AR for internal purposes in the past, these have been for specific and limited tasks and enterprises have developed these solutions internally using custom hardware and software. Some companies are experimenting with how they can best use AR as an internal tool. Gartner expects to see moderate adoption of AR for internal purposes over the next five years as the availability of powerful handheld devices, such as smartphones and tablets, and more portable, convenient and affordable head-mounted displays is making internal AR applications more widely available.

AR has the potential to improve productivity, provide hands-on experience, simplify current processes, increase available information, provide real-time access to data, offer new ways to visualize problems and solutions, and enhance collaboration. IT organizations can use AR to bridge the digital and physical world. AR is an opportunity for IT to provide leadership to enhance the enterprise's interaction with its internal user base.

Prior to deploying an AR solution as an internal tool, enterprises must however identify a clear goal or benefit for the deployment, such as improved access to information, or to provide training and assess how the organization can use AR to reach this goal.

More detailed analysis is available in the report *Innovation Insight: Augmented Reality Will Become an Important Workplace Tool.*

www.gartner.com

Image: © wikipedia.org

SDL launches Customer Experience Cloud

SDL has launched the SDL Customer Experience Cloud™, a unified suite of offerings to help marketers create and deliver seamless global customer experiences across all channels, devices and languages. The SDL Customer Experience Cloud integrates web content management, campaign management, social intelligence and analytics, e-commerce, language solutions and documentation, with a unified user interface. The suite is the result of several years of work, including acquisitions and a considerable amount of R&D, according to SDL. The release follows the move of several other large language service providers towards customer experience, including Salesforce.com and Oracle.

"We are in a new age of customer marketing where the journey and post-sale behavior can glean insights for brands to make smarter decisions about how they build relationships," said Mark Lancaster, CEO of SDL. "By 2017, 70% of customer communications will be digital, contextualized and consumed on demand with multiple channels, including Web, mobile devices and social media. Enterprises are taking steps to provide a more personalized and engaging customer experience for traditional communications such as transaction documents, marketing collateral and point-of- purchase displays. Today, only 22% of those customer communications are digital — the majority are still paper-based."

www.sdl.com

GALA announces board officers for 2014

The Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) has announced the following new officers elected within its 7-person Board of Directors for 2014:

- Chair
  Robert Etches (TextMinded Danmark, Denmark)
- Vice Chair
  Véronique Özkaya (Xplanation, Belgium)
- Secretary
  Jesper Sandberg (Sandberg Translation Partners, United Kingdom)
- Treasurer
  Joël Sigling (AVB Translations, Netherlands)

The additional directors are Terena Bell (In Every Language, USA), Diego Bartolomé (tauyou, Spain), and Serge Gladkoff (Logrus, USA/Russia). Gladkoff continues in his position as Program Lead for GALA's CRISP initiative (Collaborative Research, Innovation and Standards Program).

"It is with a snippet of pride and a large chunk of humility that I accept the post of chair of the board this year," Etches remarked. "It is an honor to represent the many fantastic companies that constitute the GALA family, and I will do everything in my power to repay the trust the members have placed in me."

www.gala-global.org/conference

Image: © wakila/ istockphoto.com

put to the test

Image: © Sergey Kulikov/ 123rf.com

Raising productivity of automated translation: The factor of terminology

To reveal the benefits of terminology management and promote its use, translation provider ABBYY Language Services conducted research to evaluate the impact of terminology management on automated translation. Here is what the company found.

By Artem Ukrainets and Anna Sidorova

Professional translators can hardly imagine their job without glossaries. Improper or inconsistent use of terms is the source of many (if not most) errors, which Language Service Providers (LSP) report on bad translations. This regularly leads to customer complaints. With tremendous technological breakthroughs in the translation industry during the past two decades, the urgency for proper terminology management has increased. The translators' former personal reference materials, glossaries and translation memories (TM) have become a company's linguistic assets.
The proliferation of Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) tools and the emergence of Machine Translation (MT) technology integrated into these CAT tools have been in the spotlight for several years already. One of the most important questions today is how technology improves human productivity and what needs to be done to increase the efficiency of automated translation. In 2013, we conducted extensive research on the impact of a translation memory and different machine translation systems regarding the speed of the translation process. This year we approached a more subtle issue, which is harder to evaluate: The impact of terminology management on automated translation.

Our starting point

First, let's touch upon existing terminology practices. A glossary consistency check is usually performed after an in-country review of the translation. We often hear from translators that they spend a lot of their time (up to 90 percent in certain cases!) searching for the right translation over the Internet or in reference materials which the client has provided. It still happens frequently that the glossary is supplied in form of a PDF or Excel file, and is not directly integrated into the translation workflow. Thus, users have to either search for terms in a very time-consuming manner or simply learn them by heart. In some cases, the knowledge of these terms is what qualifies a translator for the particular field. So potentially, if we provide a person with a well-prepared and easy-to-access glossary, we might be able to unleash the potential of many other professional translators, who are not yet familiar with the field.
And yet, in most of the existing CAT tools, which are widely used by professional translators and offer a wide range of features, terminology remains a simple display of term and its translation, where other forms of words might be omitted.

Definitions

glossary
collection of words that have special meaning in a project

term
word that has a special meaning in a given subject field

termbase
database that contains a collection of words that have special meaning in a given subject field

terminology
collection of words that have special meaning in a given subject field

terminology management
effort to control the usage of words that have special meaning in a given subject field

Second, our research of 2013 clearly shows the new value of terminology: Terminology is the decisive factor in achieving good MT results. All of the post-editors of automated translation who took part in our experiments stated that they spent the majority of their time searching for and editing terms. Further analysis revealed that sometimes post-editors even changed terms that had already been translated properly, i.e. they did unnecessary work that increased the overall post-editing time.

All of that proves that the proper implementation of MT technology should contain the advanced terminological module to ensure real gains in productivity. Without proper implementation, there is the potential to get poor fuzzy matches, which would simply not improve productivity. Perhaps more alarmingly, getting bad MT proposals at the segment level could negatively impact productivity, since the translator would have to read through multiple variants to determine which one to choose, if any at all.

Our goal

The new research of 2014 is dedicated to measuring how terminology-related functionality affects the translation time. In general, the translator is expected to use proper terms during the translation phase, then the editor makes sure that all terms have been used correctly. The operational overhead and time used for these two phases depends greatly on whether the glossary and QA checks are integrated into the translation workflow.

Our technical base

We used the cloud-based automated translation environment www.SMARTCAT.pro integrated with one of the state-of-the-art terminology solutions (www.LINGVO.PRO). The latter uses advanced morphological search, which allowed us to easily find all forms of terms regardless of their tense, gender, number or case. All glossary terms are displayed at the very moment of translation. In this way the translators did not have to employ any external system or reference material to look for the term and its translation. The application of this technology allowed us to achieve a significant reduction of translation time.

Another important part was the built-in QA check of SmartCAT, that is performed at the segment level. Whenever the segment was confirmed, its translation was checked with the glossary for consistency. Such an automated check not only reduces the overall number of terminology-related errors, but also the editing time.

To be more precise, we measured the exact time a person spent on translation or editing at the segment level. SmartCAT also has a metrics functionality. With this we tracked changes made during different steps of the workflow, and thus could see which mistakes the translators had made.

All these features allowed us to perform a very detailed experiment.

Methodology

We arranged a two-step workflow consisting of translation and editing, which is quite common in the industry. Editing is essential to check the quality of the final texts and, in particular, to ensure the proper use of terminology.

We used three different methods for translating a document from scratch:

1. No initial translation memory, machine translation or glossary. No initial TM is chosen to reduce possible inconsistencies introduced by other translators. No MT or glossary means that the translator has to look for all translations manually, either on the Internet or on any other available sources.
2. No initial TM and MT. A glossary is provided in the form of an Excel file. In this case the translator has to switch continuously between the CAT tool and the Excel file. This simulates a regular situation for LSPs, when the customer provides a glossary with its own structure and format.
3. No initial TM. MT is automatically delivered into CAT results for reference. The glossary is assigned to the project within SmartCAT, and terms are fed into CAT search results.

The documents featured in all translation methods are different, but have the same topic with the same set of terms and are of approximately the same size. The average size of the document is about two pages (500 words). The topic of the texts is patent application, which is very sensitive regarding the correct terminology.

The glossary has a good correlation to the source text – on average there are about ten unique terms for each document with 26 entries (some terms appear in the text more than once).

The same person with medium knowledge of the topic translated all three projects (it is likely that experienced translators will have very little gain of the technology). The files were translated one by one without any interruptions.

After the translation was completed, an editor performed the final review of the document (not a formal LQA procedure, but regular editing to obtain a final delivery document). The amount of changes between these two stages was calculated for all three documents.

Work time was measured at segment level, and the complete time calculated for both the translation and editing phase.

Results

The table shows that translation time decreases from document to document, which demonstrates the effect of more easily accessible terms. Translators don't need to spend time searching in multiple resources, or to even look somewhere outside the CAT tool.

Editing time is reduced as well, as the translator makes less mistakes (which also can be seen in the corresponding row of the table), and the editor does not need to refer to other sources to look up terms.

Other factors

There are several factors, which we did not address in the experiment and which might have both positive and negative impacts:

Parameter / Document	1 – no glossary	2 – external glossary	3 – glossary in CAT
Translation time (min)	82	75	64
Editing time (min)	32	26	19
Terminology errors	9	4	0

- Translators tend to learn most common terms over time, so for long-term projects the effect might be lower.
- Preparing an elaborate glossary takes time, so the overall time reduction for translation might be less. Translating a glossary is also a challenge, as translation really depends on the context. It makes sense to have a comprehensive glossary for long-term projects in cases where translators are not very experienced, or where quality is crucial.
- For glossaries with a large number of terms it is almost impossible for a translator to learn all the terms, so in this case the effect of an automated terminology workflow plus QA checks would be significantly greater.

Conclusion

Terminology is an important factor affecting translation time, and one that can be easily estimated. It is also critical for the productivity of the translation process, and thus should be tackled before the project starts.

Terminology is always the most time-consuming part of a project, especially for large ones. To address this, the first essential step is extracting and translating terminology, i.e. creating a term base. It helps greatly, if this term base is supported by the terminology management function of your CAT tool. Terminology serves as the backbone, which will support the whole body of translation.

Glossaries can also help to customize corporate MT systems. In addition, they can assist professional translators with future projects.

If integrated in a complete CAT solution, automatic quality checks help to evaluate the results of translation. Usually this is sufficient to ensure correct terminology usage. We discovered that it is extremely helpful if the automated translation system is capable of highlighting correctly used terms. This protects them from over-editing, and communicates the correct terms to the post-editor/translator without taking up extra time. We believe that such a dynamic approach increases both productivity and consistency. The text for translation is first analyzed and the terminology extracted, saving the context for the translator's reference. Then the terminology is incorporated into the MT customization parameters, and once the post-editing is completed, the automated quality check-up validates the terms' translations. We suggest that this approach works most efficiently in an integrated, cloud-based application. In this way, translators have permanent access to the system during all stages: while creating the term base, while customizing the MT engine, and during post-editing.

contact

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Artem Ukrainets received his PhD from the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and has been working in localization, translation and software development for almost ten years. In 2010, Artem joined ABBYY Language Services, provider of language services and technologies, where he currently serves as Head of Research.

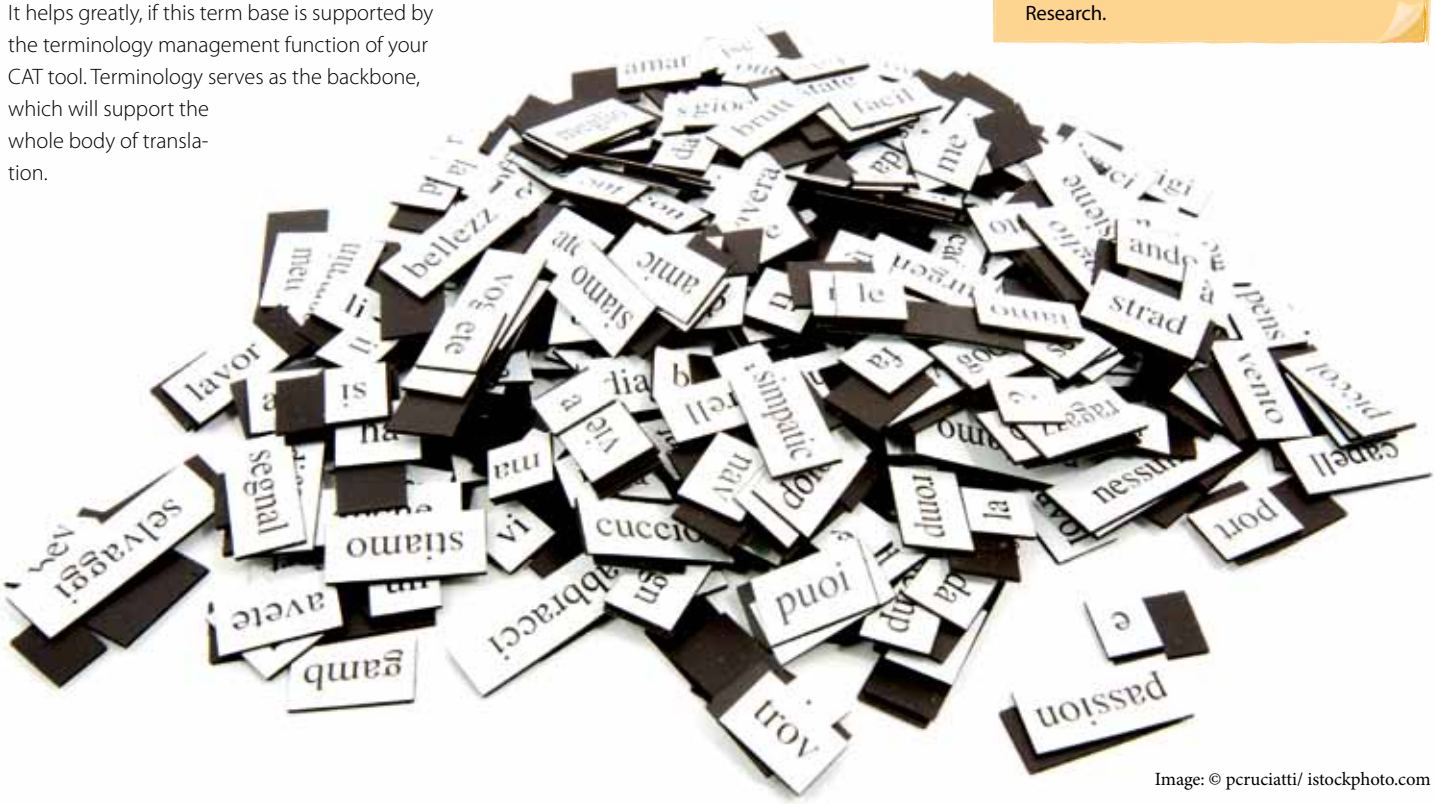

Image: © pcruciatti/ istockphoto.com

Unleashing the potential of terminology management

Research firm Common Sense Advisory has interviewed individuals from 24 organizations in Europe and North America, asking them how they view the value of terminology management. Participants comprised a wide spectrum: some manage in excess of a million terms while others compile spreadsheets or databases with a few thousand entries; some organizations employ dozens of full-time terminologists and lexicographers while other firms outsource all terminology management; and some term bases include 80 languages, while other companies manage terms in a single language. tcworld spoke with Common Sense Advisory's senior analyst Ben Sargent.

Interview by Corinna Melville

Who benefits from terminology management?

The value of terminology management is crystal clear to those with a professional background in authoring or translation. Yet, for someone who has never engaged in the practice, terminology management may sound like a lot of extra work. Localization managers feel deadlines, so they wonder why they should add yet another task to the list. The short answer is that the benefits make the practice worthwhile for both LSPs and their customers.

Organizations find that terminology management helps them make more efficient use of their employees' schedules. Reducing the amount of work spent on terminology-related tasks frees up authors, editors, and translators to spend time on other jobs. In other words, if the process is not managed, then employees and contractors spend even more time on terminology tasks – but the extra effort is invisible, embedded in those other tasks. These hidden costs affect authoring, copy-editing, translation, linguistic review, and QA. In companies with aggressive publication or release dates, the effort saved also improves production turnaround times.

What are the benefits for language service providers?

It is easy to understand how terminology can spiral out of control, especially for organizations dealing with multiple locales, languages, and markets. Add to that a handful of translation vendors that work with hundreds or thousands of linguists, and the need for some sort of control system becomes even more apparent.

Consistency is a significant contributor to overall translation quality. By providing participants – both internal and external – with prepared terminology assets, an organization standardizes key terms and phrases. Even those working in monolingual settings find that using the same terminology across agencies, departments, or business units makes data-sharing more effective and efficient, improving the overall quality of output.

What are the benefits for clients?

The value of terminology management sometimes becomes visible, not through positive experiences, but through painful ones that

manifest as a result of either not engaging in this practice or not doing it well. This is particularly true as organizations expand in size and increase their product and service offerings. The more content you create, the greater the need for consistency. Each time a company adds more languages, locales, products, or a new acquisition, data volume increases exponentially and inconsistencies become more likely.

Whether you build it or buy it, terminology management software costs money for software, training, and integration. However, formal terminology management benefits companies both within a country and across its global business units. Harvesting, normalizing, and integrating your company and industry terminology into authoring and translation systems allows you to save money on repurposed content and translation, improve quality, and increase efficiency. More consistent terminology can also improve safety, compliance, and customer service.

In addition, managing terminology ensures that the maximum number of term-related issues are resolved early in the process of content creation and translation, leading to fewer corrections later on. When errors and inconsistencies are changed post-publication or post-release, they cost more to fix.

In our experience working with thousands of buyers, some, especially those at lower levels of localization maturity, believe that translation memory is all they need to achieve consistency. Part of the confusion in this regard stems from the fact that so few people realize what terminology management actually is, equating it to a glossary, bilingual dictionary, or a spreadsheet. In reality, while these are all tools that may help with the management of terminology, they alone do not define the practice.

Which factors help to turn terminology management into a success?

Saving time and money while improving quality makes terminology management sound enticing. However, turning that potential into reality requires buy-in and participation from a range of actors in the content lifecycle. A terminology database is worth nothing if it's not used. Thankfully, once those involved in the production and translation of content experience the benefits of terminology management, they frequently want more of it. The trick is getting them to try it. For this reason, engagement is critical to the success of any terminology management initiative. Sometimes, the tool itself is its own best cheerleader, but that is rarely enough.

End-user training and documentation are absolute musts. You should have extensive documentation for users to show them how to query the database, how to use a term, and what the various fields include. Making the information available in multiple formats will also prove critical to success, such as delivering instructions via e-learning modules, printable guides, highly visible links from the company's intranet home page, and even full-day, on-site trainings.

How can translation buyers measure the benefits of terminology management?

Organizations that treat terminology management as an afterthought often regret it. They find out – the hard way – that not starting out with uniform terminology results in making changes later, carrying out frustrating review processes, and going back and forth with translation agencies to negotiate modifications.

For many businesses, unclear or inconsistent language can mean that a release date slips, marketing collateral must be urgently reprinted, or user manuals may not make sense to customers resulting in extra support calls.

Companies that instrument their process flow to capture business intelligence will witness productivity improvements at all steps where a human actor interacts with content – from authoring to SEO meta-tagging. Companies that outsource these tasks can negotiate lower prices points with vendors if the terminology process is both solid and accessible. Whether from productivity measures or direct cost reduction in outsourcing, the benefits of terminology management can and should be measured, though it may take up to a year to see the full benefit.

Are there certain cases in which terminology management is not recommended?

Even a small job benefits from terminology management, but the effort expended must match the monthly or annual flow of content through translation. Thus, practitioners must make a judgment call about how much term research, process development, tools, and training to commit to the project. In cases where the effort will not be maintained and improved on an ongoing basis, beware of over-investing.

In cases where the in-country reviewers do not participate directly in the terminology review and approval – or do not have access to the term lists used by the translators – the benefit is dramatically reduced. The exercise quickly becomes a headache for all involved because reviewers challenge approved terms. Thus, terminology investments increase their benefits as a company matures its translation management capabilities, as indicated in Common Sense Advisory's Localization Maturity Model.

Some level of terminology management should be in place wherever there is a steady flow of content and whenever a knowledge worker is manipulating words. The level of terminology support for a "crowd" contributor who edits machine translation output in an online forum may be different than the support needed for a technical writer authoring a user manual. But terminology improves the results from any participant.

Related research from Common Sense Advisory referenced in this interview:

- *The Case for Terminology Management*
- *Content Source Optimization*
- *Optimized Localization Maturity*

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How I teach localization: Not like old-school translation

Teaching students how to transfer meaning from one language to another is not enough to prepare linguists for careers in technology-driven translation and localization. A new brand of industry-specific courses blends live instruction with cloud-based tools and social media.

Image 1: The author demonstrating the use of a cloud-based translation memory system on a smartphone · Photo: Jane Wang

By Uwe Muegge

Almost 15 years ago, I received an MA degree in translation. Even at the time, I felt that this traditional degree did not fully prepare me for the field of technology-driven translation that I entered after graduation. In 2008, with a decade of industry experience under my belt, I was appointed Chair of the MA program in Translation & Localization Management (TLM) at the Monterey Institute in California. In this article, I am illustrating some of the features of the courses that I teach that differ radically from the translation courses I took not so long ago.

How is localization different from translation?

Let me begin by defining some relevant terms. *Translation* refers to the process of transferring the content/meaning of a written **text** from one language to another. *Localization* refers to the process of adapting a **product** or service in such a way as to make it suitable for a (foreign) locale or market. In other words: The translatables in localization are almost always linked to a product or service, whereas in many traditional translation projects, there is no such connection.

Focus on tools and processes

The fact that in localization, there is a strong connection between translatable text and product, has a direct impact on my teaching. I emphasize that a text in localization often has a prior version and typically is part of a larger release of related texts (e.g. user interface, help, manuals/tutorials, marketing collateral, etc.). Unlike in the translation of a newspaper article, for instance, which generally stands on its own, in localization, consistency within and across documents is of utmost importance. If translators use different terms to describe the same feature, e.g. in different documents of the same release, users might get confused. The big question is: How does one ensure the highest degree of consistency in the most efficient manner in a teaching environment? In my opinion, by having students develop a deep understanding of the benefits of translation tools and the processes associated with these tools.

Translation memory systems for quality assurance

Efficient, quality-oriented localization requires the use of sophisticated tools. Over the course of the two-year TLM program, my students get to work with quality assurance systems, machine translation systems (statistical and rules-based), terminology management systems, and translation management systems. But the most important tool that I teach, and which I insist students use for all localization projects, is the translation memory (TM). Why? Not because students benefit from translation matches immediately, which often they don't. But because students immediately benefit from the many quality assurance features TM systems offer, even if the memory is empty: Completeness control (is every sentence translated?), formatting control (are all tags present?), and terminology control (were glossary terms used correctly?), to name just a few. I want my students to look at translation memory systems as quality assurance tools first and productivity tools second. I believe that every localization project belongs in a translation memory system, regardless of whether or not there will be translation memory matches.

Terminology management is crucial

Solving the terminology challenge means solving a big (if not the biggest) part of the localization quality challenge. I say that because in a former life I was the corporate terminologist of a Fortune 500 company. In that role, I had the opportunity to see the dramatic effect proactive terminology management (i.e. providing multilingual terminology before translation) has on the entire localization lifecycle: Translators produce better translations faster, editors edit more and change less, and ultimately quality goes up, and cost goes down! Developing basic terminology management skills can be as simple as introducing students to the terminology management features of a translation memory system and Google Advanced Search Queries as research methodology. And these skills can - and should - be part of an introductory general course students take in their first semester (I teach basic terminology management early in my Introduction to Computer-Assisted Translation [CAT] course, which is one of the first courses all TLM students take). More advanced skills, such as building a termbase from scratch, batch processing of entries, and achieving standards compliance can be covered later in a dedicated terminology management course (I teach a separate terminology management course in the second year, when students take other advanced courses such as software localization, website localization, translation management systems, etc.).

Cloud-based systems level the playing field

When I took my first course in computer-assisted translation, the learning environment was very restrictive: Students had to go to the computer lab, which was only available a few hours per week, and the PCs ran only one operating system (US English Windows). From an institutional perspective, teaching CAT was an expensive proposition because the software licenses and maintenance contract cost tens of thousands of dollars per year. The cloud changed all of that. In addition to having access to all of my teaching materials online – and shared student-generated content – my students have access to online translation software – from any device. In other words: Students can use a laptop, tablet or even a smartphone that runs Windows, MacOS, iOS, Android, etc. to work with the latest cloud-based translation tools. As an instructor, I really like the fact that the software solutions we are using, e.g. Lingotek, TermWiki, and Wordfast Anywhere are completely free. And since these software services do not require any upfront financial investment nor any involvement of IT (no software to install!), I deployed these tools literally within a few hours.

Focus on the industry

Traditionally, translation courses are taught as part of language study programs, where the emphasis has always been on working with literary texts and methods of analysis. Localization is very young as a practice and even younger as a field of study, and I personally find the traditional literary approach not particularly helpful in training future localization professionals. As the Senior Tools Strategist at Beijing-based CSOFT International, I work with both translation buyers on the client side and

project managers on the vendor side on a daily basis. Through my involvement in complex global localization projects, I have developed a deep understanding of the skills people need to launch a successful career in the field of localization. And that is what informs my teaching practice.

Project management is becoming the most important skill

The vast majority of students graduating from the Translation and Localization Program in the past few years work as project managers (PMs), both on the provider and the client side. While there are exceptions – mostly in smaller organizations – project managers typically don't translate. Instead, PMs manage localization projects throughout the entire lifecycle from planning and preparation to production and quality assurance to delivery and post-mortem. My goal is to make sure my students are ready, not only for the best jobs after graduation, but also for the best internships after the first year of study. That is why I teach basic project management skills in my Introduction to CAT course: Covering the phases of a typical project, best practices (e.g. identifying client needs vs. wants and managing projects towards meeting or exceeding those needs), developing a quality assurance strategy, etc.

Students seek in-house employment instead of freelance careers

According to survey results, only 10 percent of incoming localization students are interested in a freelance career. In other words: The overwhelming majority of students is looking for in-house employment after graduation. Today, very few organizations have internal translation departments. In fact, even most language service providers do not employ translators, but use freelance linguists instead. Take CSOFT, the localization service provider I work for, as an example: While CSOFT has a network of several thousand freelance linguists, out of a total in-house workforce of approx. 500 employees, less than 10 percent are translators. With those numbers in mind, preparing students for a career as an in-house employee in the localization industry means shifting the emphasis from linguistic towards project management and technical skills.

Industry standards serve as best practice

With localization being such a young field, teaching seems to suffer from a lack of unifying principles, methodologies, and even text books. Does that mean educators have to start from scratch when they develop materials for localization courses? Not in my humble opinion! While there may not be an abundance of text books, there are in fact quite a few industry standards that can be used for teaching localization-related best practices. For instance, I use *ASTM F2575: Standard guide for quality assurance in translation* as a road map for teaching students how to structure localization projects. And I use other standards such as *ISO 704 Terminology work – Principles and methods*, that I believe are highly effective teaching materials. Granted: These documents, like most standards, were not explicitly written for an audience of college students. However, I am a strong believer in sharing best practices, and I think university classrooms are an excellent place to spread the idea of standardization in the localization field.

Focus on social

There is an obvious connection between social networking and localization: Localization of social networking services and apps played a crucial role in the global success stories that Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are. It is a well-known fact that social networks were among the early adopters of new business models such as crowdsourcing, which is one reason I cover these services in class. But the primary reason I use social media as an educational tool is that social networking sites make it very easy to extend teaching beyond the classroom.

Helping students find the best (job) opportunities with LinkedIn

With approx. 260 million users, LinkedIn is the global leader among professional networks. It did not come as a surprise to me when a survey in my Intro to CAT course indicated that 54 percent of incoming students already had a LinkedIn profile. But it quickly turned out in class that none of those student profiles had content in all three sections most recruiters check: Photo, headline and summary. Also, students generally don't understand that unlike a résumé page on

a career website like Monster or CareerBuilder, a LinkedIn profile is typically not visible to basic LinkedIn members outside the user's network. This is why I am devoting class time to explaining how LinkedIn works, how to create a compelling profile and how to efficiently build a large LinkedIn network. I also encourage students to take advantage of my extensive professional network, and many do even long after leaving my program. For instance, I was recently contacted via LinkedIn by a former student, whom I subsequently assisted with securing a leadership position in the internal machine translation program at Honda R&D.
(You can find me on LinkedIn here: www.linkedin.com/in/uwemuegge)

Sharing breaking industry news in real time on Twitter

Every day, I come across internship and job announcements, scholarships and competitions, industry events and conferences that might be of interest to my students. Some of these opportunities are short-lived, and the sheer number of them makes it impractical to use class time to communicate these news items to students. Twitter is an ideal channel for sharing this type of information with students because twitter is an opt-in service, so there is no danger of inundating students with unwanted information. In addition, I make extensive use of hashtags such as #Chinese, #internships and #t9njobs, which makes it even easier for students to separate relevant tweets from irrelevant ones. Examples of students who have directly benefitted from information shared via twitter: One student won the prestigious JTG Student Translation Scholarship and another one landed an internship with the International Criminal Court and a job with Amazon after acting upon tweets I sent.
(You can find me on twitter here: https://twitter.com/UweMuegge)

Engaging current, past, and future students with Facebook

Is there a difference between how instructors in other fields and localization instructors use Facebook? Probably not. But I do think localization instructors are ahead of the curve in the percentage of them that is active on social media (100 percent of instructors in my localization program are). So what do I share with my present, past and sometimes even prospective students? Photos from visits to local attractions, announcements of and reports from community events, and of course, pictures of the food I eat (I recently switched to a vegetarian diet). At the same time, Facebook lets me stay involved with my students' lives, whether they are landing a promising internship, going on a big trip, or are having a baby. And no, not all students friend me on Facebook, but many do – and typically the connection in the virtual world remains intact long after students graduate in the real world. (You can find me on Facebook here: www.facebook.com/UweMuegge)

Image 2: A sample of tweets by the author about opportunities for students in the translation / localization field

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Writing manuals that inspire

Teaching people how to fix electronic devices and keeping them out of landfills is the ambitious goal of the user community iFixit. The key to this are interesting and exciting manuals that make repairs easy and fun.
After releasing its own documentation software Dozuki, the organization has recently published a handbook on how to write such manuals. Here is an excerpt.

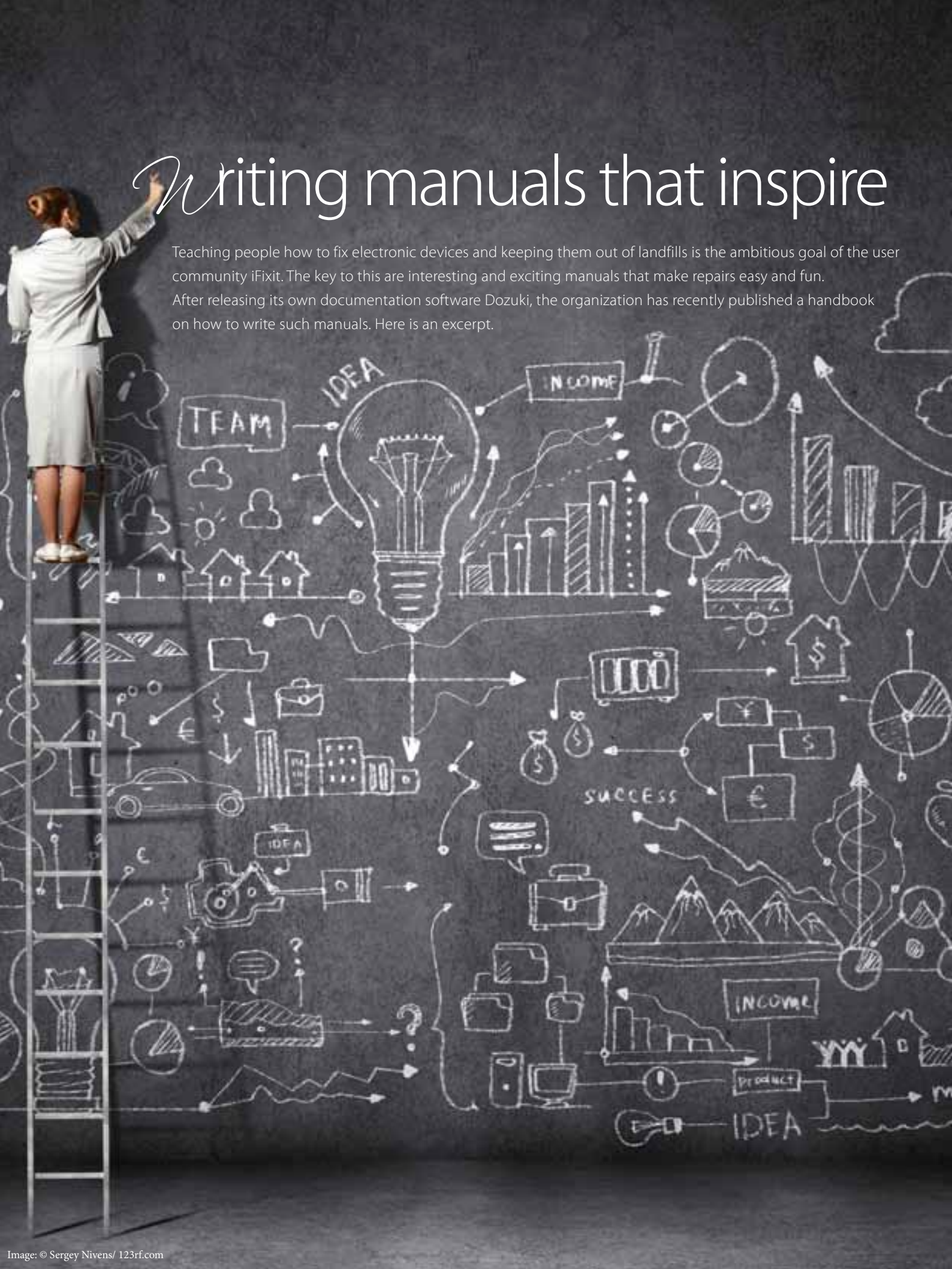

Image: © Sergey Nivens/ 123rf.com

By Kyle Wiens and Julia Bluff

So, you've decided to write a manual. We extend our hand in hearty congratulations of the do-it-yourself moxie that led you here. Welcome to the world of technical communication!

Now, at this very moment, you may be chuckling to yourself, "Technical communication … Isn't that an oxymoron?"

We get it. Bad manuals happen … a lot. It's a universal experience: You take Junior's Christmas gift out of the box, crack open the assembly manual, and, suddenly, everything goes horribly, horribly wrong. Three hours later, all you have to show for your effort is a mutant tricycle. Junior will not be pleased.

The best way to learn something is to have an expert teach you. But manuals are the next best thing. Great manuals, like the ones from iFixit or Mackie, are teachers.

Manuals are important. Whether you're writing about how to perform maintenance on a CNC machine, use video editing software, bake a soufflé, or rebuild an engine, you're teaching someone something new. If your manual succeeds, the reader will have done something that wasn't possible without your help. And that's pretty amazing.

Look before you write

Writing effective instructions is an achievement. Modern instructions shouldn't just be a list of useful directions. They embrace the aesthetic and conventions of our time: highly visual, sleek, interactive, and well-designed. And when they're done right, they're a pathway to empowerment.

Right now, you're probably excited to get writing. But before you start galloping off into the tech writing sunset, know this: most of the manuals and guides out there are written by people who have no firsthand knowledge of the subject matter. We think that's a problem. It takes more than just writing skill to write a good manual: it also takes understanding. There are two laws of tech writing:

1. Know thy product and process
2. Talk to thy experts

Know thy products and process

The first requirement for tech writing is knowledge. You can't teach someone how to do something until you've done it yourself. If you're writing assembly instructions, put the product together. If you're writing about software, use the program. If you're writing a product manual, you should know the product inside and out. Use it, take it apart, figure out how it works and what it's meant to do.

Once you think you know the process, try to teach it to someone else. Teaching is a great way to solidify your knowledge, and what you learn from watching your student struggle will make your manual better.

Talk to thy experts

If you're not an expert at what you're writing about, talk to someone who is. Chat with the developers, technicians, or designers. Ask them to give you a walkthrough of the product, process, or software. Ask them how it's made, how it's done, and why things are the way they are. Then, keep asking if you need more help.

Glean as many stories from them as you can. Understanding the process that goes into making something will clarify your understanding.

How manuals are usually written

How manuals are usually written: Tech writers create a first draft based on initial functional specifications. Of course, the real product barely resembles the spec by the time the manual is written. The first draft is a total waste of time. As part of the frustrating review process, engineers give the writers hand-scribbled notes. Tech writers assemble another draft, which engineers promptly rip apart. And the process starts over again. Finally, the document is published.

But it doesn't have to be that way. The faster and more frequent the interactions between engineer and writer, the better the final product will be.

Being concise

Style tip #1: Be direct and get to the point. Then stop writing.

That rule applies doubly if you're writing for the Internet. Chrome, Safari, and Firefox are all called web browsers instead of web readers for a reason. People don't read web pages. They scan, hunting and pecking for words and phrases that they find pertinent. The average person spends just seconds on a web page, reading only about 20% of the text. The more concise you are, the more information readers actually read.

Pro tip: Concision reduces as many words as possible without changing the meaning.

Even paper manuals aren't "well read," in the classic sense. No one curls up at night with a manual. Just like on web pages, people look for the information that they want. The more text-dense manuals are, the less likely people will dig through them.

Check out this example of an actual warranty statement from an actual kitchen appliance:

> Example 1: We suggest you complete and return the enclosed product registration card promptly to facilitate verification of the date of original purchase. However, return of the product registration card does not eliminate the need for the consumer to maintain the original proof of purchase in order to obtain the warranty benefits. In the event that you do not have proof of purchase date, the purchase date for purposes of this warranty will be the date of manufacture.

It's only three sentences, but it's dense, impersonal, and wordy. Here's our revision:

> Example 2: Please return your completed product registration card so we can verify your purchase date. Keep the original proof of purchase to secure your warranty benefits. If you don't know the purchase date, give the manufacture date instead.

Isn't that better?

How to make paragraphs more concise

Lead with the most important information: Front-load useful details. Assume that your reader isn't going to slog through an entire paragraph. When you start with the important stuff, your readers take the essential point with them – even if they don't read everything.

Get rid of unimportant information: Readers want just the facts, so eliminate any off-topic information. Ditch extra bits and tangents. If you're teaching us how to rebuild a car engine, we don't need to hear the production history of the Mustang. Just give us directions.

Check your word count: Example 1 has 76 words. Our revised paragraph comes in at 37 words. Saying the same thing in half the words is a great goal.

How to make sentences more concise

Short sentences are your friend: Writers eager to appear smart often use really, really, very quite long sentences. Pro tip: Don't do it. Overly long sentences are confusing. Aim for sentences that have no more than 24 words. Yeah, we know – sometimes your product name is longer than that. But do your best. Your paragraph will flow better with a healthy mix of sentence lengths.

> Simplicity can be striking. We learned something surprising while reading On Writing Well by William Zinsser: "Of the 701 words in Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, a marvel of economy in itself, 505 are words of one syllable and 122 are words of two syllables."

Here's a long sentence from a backhoe manual:

> "Assemble small 90° adapter fitting to outlet port of filter base and orient so that free end of fitting will point toward backhoe and angled about 30° upward from horizontal."

Now, here's our revision with three short sentences instead of one long one:

> "Attach the small 90° adapter fitting to the port of the filter base. The free end of the fitting should point toward the backhoe. Angle the fitting about 30° upward of horizontal."

Dump any empty words: Empty words just sit there, like a lump on a long-winded log. Take a look back at the warranty example. The backhoe manual used the phrase "In the event of." But "in the event of" is just a fancy way of saying "if." Why use four words when one will do?

Reduce the amount of "to be" verbs: "To be" verbs laze about without actually doing much. Of course, don't go overboard and weed every single one out of your verb population. Some sentences require "to be" verbs – no way around it. But, where you have a choice, replace lazy verbs with active verbs – ones that move the sentence forward. Fun fact: This paragraph contains no "to be" verbs.

Here's an example from a car assembly manual: "If you damage any parts, it ***will*** probably ***be*** because they ***were*** either not stored properly or, the wrong tool ***was*** used to install them."

That's three passive verbs in the same sentence. We eliminated the lazy verbs for our revision: "Storing a tool improperly or using the wrong installation tools can lead to damaged parts."

Use passive voice strategically: Using passive voice doesn't make you a bad person, no matter what your English teacher said in 10th grade. Just use passives purposefully. Unless you have a reason for using passive voice, switch to active voice.

Here's an example of passive voice from a user manual: "A booster seat ***should be used*** to obtain proper seat belt fit."

Who is obtaining the proper fit? Who is doing the using? That's the thing about passive voice: No one knows. Sentence construction isn't an episode of Murder She Wrote. No one should have to guess who did what. Start with a verb if you're writing directions.

Let's try rewriting that using active voice: "***Use*** a booster seat to properly fit ***the child's*** seat belt."

Crystal clarity

Imagine your words are a sliding glass door. Now imagine smashing into the glass door – hard. That's how clear your writing should be: dangerously clear.

Avoiding confusion: A common-sense approach

Check out this product description:

> "Work has been proceeding in order to bring perfection to the crudely conceived idea of a machine that would not only supply inverse reactive current for use in unilateral phase detractors, but would also be capable of automatically synchronizing cardinal grammeters. Such a machine is the Turbo-Encabulator."

Did you get that? Yeah, we didn't either.

The Turbo-Encabulator is completely made up. But, when a description of the Turbo-Encabulator ran as a joke in a 1946 edition of Time, most people thought it was real. Why? Because they'd seen so many other bad manuals and product descriptions like it before. The Turbo-Encabulator is a parody of technical writing and, as with all parodies, it's funny because it's based on reality.

This, on the other hand, is 100% bonafide:

> "The delay knob moves the main sweep horizontally, and it pauses at 0.00s, mimicking a mechanical detent. At the top of the graticule is a solid triangle ▼ symbol and an open triangle ▽ symbol. The ▼ symbol indicates the trigger point and it moves with the Delay time knob. The ▽ symbol indicates the time reference point and is also where the zoom-in/zoom-out is referenced."

Granted, this oscilloscope operator's manual isn't designed for a novice. But the writers unnecessarily mention a "mechanical detent" and a needless passive sentence "is referenced." It just makes the sentence hard to understand.

So, how do you avoid confusing your reader? Keep in mind that real people will read your writing, and they probably aren't as technically knowledgeable as you are. Here are a couple of suggestions to make your writing more humane:

Use Plain Language: Did you know that Plain Language is a movement? Plain language "is focused on readers." It ensures that your readers can "quickly and easily find what they need, understand what they need, and act appropriately on that understanding." Use plain English, words that most people understand, and short sentences.

Lay off the jargon: Or, at least, use it as sparingly as possible. Jargon is only used within a specific discipline. Chances are, no one outside of your industry knows what it means. If you absolutely need jargon, do your best to provide context, short definitions, or even a glossary of terms. Sometimes, jargon just makes you sound silly. A case in point:

Extra-Lift Carriage Control Lever
Brings small items close to the top of the toaster, for easy removal.

An Extra-Lift Carriage Control Lever? For easy toast removal, you say? Good for you… but the rest of us just call that a "lever."

Don't turn verbs into nouns: Verbs are happy being verbs. Don't force them to become nouns when they don't want to be nouns. Verby nouns make your sentences unhappy, which in turn make your readers unhappy.

Here are some completely unparsable work instructions for an automotive assembly line:

> With the control levers (handles) fully depressed: for the clutch – complete disengagement of the engine from the transmission; smooth shifting of gears means correct adjustment of the clutch cable.

Now, we're not sure what's happening with the punctuation – and we'll likely never sort it out. But the nounification of those verbs, we can rectify. Here's how we did it:

Completely disengage the engine from the transmission. Correctly adjust the clutch cable for smooth shifting gears.

Articles are not the enemy: Articles are those little words in front of nouns, like "the," "an," and "a." When writing instructions, people have a tendency to skip articles altogether. They say things like, "Disconnect cord from wall" instead of "Disconnect *the* cord from *the* wall." We have yet to suss out the reason for this omission, but we assume that it is rooted in a deep-seated desire to sound like a robot. Until the singularity strikes, feel free to use articles whenever they are called for.

Turn it over to a novice: Sometimes it can be hard to tell when your writing is unclear. Want to make sure? Give your writing to someone who knows nothing about the subject matter. Try a Hallway Usability Test: hand what you're working on to five random people who just happen to walk down the hall. Every time someone says, "I don't know what this means," you've gone off the rails on the clarity train.

iFixit's original field service manuals were tested on unsuspecting art students: we handed them a computer and our new manual and watched them use the instructions to take it apart. Every time they got confused, we knew we had a problem. We used what we learned from their attempts to make the service manual better.

Don't use weasel words: Some words weasel into your sentence and steal your oomph. Words like "quite," "mostly," "slightly," "seems," "sort of," "pretty," and "somewhat" are built-in sentence loopholes. They signal to the reader that you mean what you say … just not really. Is the screw "pretty hard to tighten" or is it just hard to tighten? Is running into your ex "fairly uncomfortable" or is it just downright uncomfortable? Say what you mean without wishy-washy words.

…to be continued in our next issue

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Back to the future:

Five future-proof skills for technical communicators

Image: © alphaspirit/ 123rf.com

By Edwin Skau

For a little over a decade, we've been hearing people talk about the future of technical communication. We've seen new technology change the way we interact with and use technology. What was once cutting-edge has now become commonplace. Companies are getting more and more addicted to innovation, and professional growth is increasingly linked to new and compelling initiatives. There is a proliferation of new kinds of tasks, deliverables and work profiles allover, leaving some with the sinking feeling that they are becoming vestigial organs in a rapidly evolving professional body.
Much of that apprehension is unwarranted. The new roles that have sprung up mostly serve to append, not replace, existing roles. All of them draw on existing skills, although they may differ in application. Technical communicators with a firm footing in traditional skills are the best placed to grow into content strategists, information curators, content evangelists, media mashers, and just about any profile that's going to come up in the next few years.
Here are five future-proof technical communication skills with immense potential to contribute to any content ecosystem.

1. Articulation

The lifeblood of any communication profession is the ability to express thought with the utmost clarity, conciseness, and purpose. Whether you use text, visuals, or sound; individually or in combination; as presentations, games, or in any other form; your communication must follow a clear line of thought, be efficiently expressed, and lead to a meaningful goal. These have always been the hallmarks of good communication and will always remain critical to communication success even if your goal is to obfuscate and confuse. This skill extends beyond the realms of grammar, vocabulary and syntax, to critical thinking and effective use of rhetoric and argumentation.

2. Research

Subject matter is the payload of content. The purpose of technical communication is to instruct and inform. This information osmosis necessarily flows from an area of greater knowledge to an area of less knowledge. The instructor must know enough about the subject, the audience, and the context in order to frame and deliver effective communication. Besides critical reading and interviewing skills, this also involves an ability to filter and select the most rewarding resources.

3. Organization

The skill of organizing involves being able to establish, analyze and meaningfully present relationships between things. Organizing the flow of information is a critical skill for writing, speaking, making movies and animation, and just about any form of communication. This ability to classify and present information using taxonomies and ontologies plays a critical role in designing and creating robust and compelling information architecture.

4. Emotional intelligence

A recent addition to an armory of soft skills, emotional intelligence is the magic additive that often ensures success to any activity. Besides helping you develop a level of self-awareness that can detoxify most relationship and personality concerns, it also lubricates interpersonal transactions. Collaboration is becoming a ubiquitous factor in most professional settings, and the winners of today and tomorrow are people who can get along with just about anybody and work effectively with them. Besides the ability to build a huge people network, this skill teaches you to use that network effectively to achieve mutually fulfilling goals. Emotional intelligence is also a key ingredient in messaging. Of the three persuasion modes – ethos, pathos and logos – the first two are functions of emotional intelligence, and are responsible for 96 percent of communication success.

5.Technical aptitude

More a talent than a skill, technical aptitude is the factor that sets apart the technical communicator from other communicators. The ability to assimilate, analyze, and sometimes extrapolate technical information is important for the success of continued growth in this profession. Besides being useful in the study of subject matter, it is also the tool used to sharpen the saw and grow your other areas of expertise. Technical aptitude engages the qualities of curiosity, trouble-shooting, tenacity, and adaptability to learn and expand your vocabulary of ideas. This does not work well with dogmatic and insular thinking, but requires an open mind that is also organized and systematic in its pursuit of knowledge.

So while you hurtle headlong into the future of technical communication, take the time to build your inventory of skills and tune them up regularly. Consider ways to repurpose your aptitudes and leverage your experience. Invest in your skills, and they will give you the best returns.

contact

Edwin Skau
is the founding director of Solutions by Design, a management consultation boutique for communication and marketing solutions. Solutions by Design will launch a new re-skilling training program for technical communicators in April 2014.

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TCTrainNet: Technical Communication Training and Certification in India

tekom's international training and certification program TCTrainNet has been developed with particular focus on international businesses, who want to establish a common standard for technical communication teams across the globe. This platform for corporate training and certification already helps companies and their employees to enhance their writing skills and to secure standards and specifications.

With two new training partners in India, TCTrainNet is increasing its presence on the subcontinent: Samuel Jayaraj, owner of the translation agency Translation4IT in Bangalore, and Sindhu Hegde S, student (MBA in Marketing and HR) at Sri Bhagawan Mahaveer Jain College in Bangalore, will help to ensure a smooth training and certification process for Indian companies and tech writers.

Jayaraj Samuel: "Before starting a technical translation agency ten years ago, I was in IT for more than eleven years and involved in programming multiple languages, database design and management. I am happy to be the contact person for TCTrainNet in India. My role includes support, coordination and logistics. TCTrainNet offers a flexible online platform and an internationally recognized certificate backed by the German professional association for technical communication, tekom."

Sindhu Hegde S: "Before starting the MBA in marketing and HR, I have worked for Tata Consultancy Services where I was responsible for data analysis and interpretation. I live in Bangalore and I am pleased to be the contact person for Indian technical communicators regarding marketing and sales of TCTrainNet. I also help to organize the fourth annual tcworld India conference."

Please contact us for information regarding the next courses. For your information: The online course runs over a duration of six months, can be completed while working full time and requires an average of seven hours weekly.

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www.tc-train.net
or contact
c.keller@tekom.de (worldwide)
sam@tcworld.info (India)
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Image: © nyul/ 123rf.com

tcworld calendar 2014

when	what	where
Feb 19 – 21	**tcworld India** http://conferences.tekom.de/tcworld-india-2014/home/	Bangalore, India
Feb 24 – 26	**Localization World Asia** www.localizationworld.com	Bangkok, Thailand
Feb 26 – 28	**Intelligent Content** www.intelligentcontentconference.com	San Jose, CA, USA
March 3 – 6	**Writers UA West** http://writersua.com/conference/	Palm Springs, CA, USA
March 23 – 26	**GALA 2014** www.gala-global.org/gala-2014-istanbul	Istanbul, Turkey
April 10 – 11	**TAUS Executive Forum** www.taus.net/taus-executive-forum-in-tokyo-2014	Tokyo, Japan
April 13 – 15	**MadWorld 2014** www.madcapsoftware.com/events/madworld/	San Diego, CA, USA
May 23	**TAUS Roundtable** www.taus.net/taus-translation-automation-roundtable-in-moscow	Moscow, Russia
Oct 1 – 2	**Brand2Global Conference** www.brand2global.com	London, United Kingdom
Oct 22 – 24	**Information Development World** http://informationdevelopmentworld.com	San Jose, CA, USA
Oct 27 – 28	**TAUS Annual Conference** www.taus.net/taus-annual-conference-2014	Vancouver, Canada
Oct 29 – 31	**Localization World Vancouver** www.localizationworld.com	Vancouver, Canada
Nov 11 – 13	**tcworld conference/ tekom Annual Conference** http://conferences.tekom.de/tcworld-conference-2014/	Stuttgart, Germany

tcworld India: we've come a long way

This year tcworld will host its fourth conference in Bangalore. With nearly 400 visitors expected, it is the largest gathering of technical writers and translators on the subcontinent.

Images: © tekom

By Akash Dubey and Gururaj B.S.

The year 2011 witnessed an important milestone for the technical communication industry in India. The oldest and largest community of Indian technical communicators Technical Writers of India (TWIN), in partnership with tekom, organized the first international conference for technical writers in India: tcworld India.

A successful start

The first tcworld India conference was a roaring success. It was – and still is – the only event where participants come face to face with stalwarts and experts in technical communication from around the world (Australia, Belgium, Germany, India, Singapore, Ukraine, USA, and more). This was the only event in India where participants got first-hand exposure to global trends, standards, and best practices in the field of technical communication. Despite being a new brand, tcworld India established itself as a premier and must-attend event for technical communicators at all experience levels:

- Individuals looking to progress their careers
- Managers looking to brainstorm with peers and to hire talented professionals
- Directors looking to contribute to the industry and to get informed on the latest trends

And that's not all. Documentation service providers and tool vendors got the opportunity to interact with decision makers such as documentation managers, directors, and architects. International vendors established contacts with local partners to promote their products and services.

Overall, this first international event offered great learning and business opportunities to all participants.

The journey

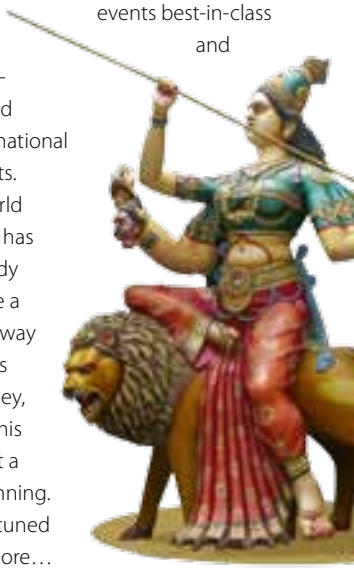
After the phenomenal success of the first conference, there has been no looking back. The tcworld India conference has been growing strongly. It has witnessed an increase of more than ten percent in participation every year. The number of international presenters has seen a steady growth as well. And, these aren't invited presenters, but they participated using the "Call for Paper" route. This can clearly be attributed to the tcworld India brand appeal.
To capitalize on this brand appeal and to increase participation further, the scope of the tcworld India conference was broadened in 2013. For tcworld India 2013, the track Translation was added, as it is closely related to technical writing. This track attracted nearly 100 translators, making it one of the largest gatherings of translators in India.
To specifically address documentation project leads, managers, and directors, the exclusive tcworld India Executive Workshops were organized in 2012 and 2013. These too were very well received, as they offered brainstorming, networking, and a focused learning opportunity for the leadership community.

The team

The tcworld India conference was conceptualized by the TWIN and tekom leadership teams, which include experts with decades of collective experience in various facets of technical communication. They have a deep understanding of the technical communication and translation domains, the requirements of small and large teams, aspirations of individual contributors, challenges of the leadership community, and much more. This understanding has helped the team to craft high-quality programs for the technical communicators and translators in India.
The leadership team is also supported by volunteers from the TWIN community. Their enthusiasm, commitment, and passion help to make these events successful.

The road ahead

Considering that Indian industries as well as its professionals are increasingly involved in global markets, the TWIN and tekom leadership team is striving to provide learning opportunities around latest trends, tools, best practices, and standards that are shaping the technical communication and translation industries. The goal is to make the tcworld India events best-in-class and must-attend international events. tcworld India has already come a long way in this journey, but this is just a beginning. Stay tuned for more…



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