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Conveying a clear message in just a few words

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Technical Communication in the Middle Kingdom

China's transformation from a manufacturing nation
to a knowledge hub



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From the editor

China is a nation of many contradictions. It treasures conservative values, yet aims for pathbreaking innovations. It loves to exhibit its urban face, yet is fundamentally rural at heart. It is deeply rooted, yet aspiring into space.

China is also a nation of economic superlatives. It has the fastest growing consumer market on the planet. The ancient empire is also the largest manufacturing economy in the world and no other nation exports more goods than China. However, despite its reputation, China is no longer merely the workbench for cheap consumer goods produced in large quantities. Today, the nation is presenting high-quality innovations to international markets. This development underlies the growing importance of technical communication.

To comply with national and international product safety regulations, Chinese organizations must deliver excellent, accurate, and relevant product information. This technical information must fulfill two major roles: First, it needs to guarantee the safe use of the product or machinery. Second, it needs to ensure that the product is used most efficiently. In order to create user information that fulfills these requirements, China needs qualified technical writers.

With its insatiable thirst for consumption and its dizzying production ratio, it's hardly surprising that production-related industries, such as technical

communication – have struggled to keep pace. Today, a few institutions are looking to fill this gap, such as the Peking University. In collaboration with the University of Twente in the Netherlands, it has developed several courses on technical communication and translation (see page 10). In this issue we also highlight specific customs and behaviors that will help you to safely manoeuvre potential cultural pitfalls on your first business trip to China (page 29).

We hope you enjoy our magazine and look forward to your feedback.

Corinna Melville

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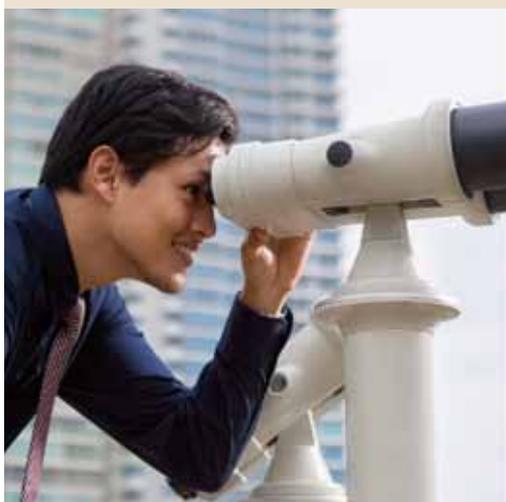
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Technical Communication in the Middle Kingdom

In a place that is rapidly developing from a manufacturing nation into a knowledge country, it is little surprising that there is a strong need for high-quality technical communication. The Peking University is working on closing this gap.

page 10



Creating effective labels

They need to be short, concise and convey a clear message: Labels are important parts of products and help to explain essential functions. They also pose a great challenge to technical writers.

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Preparing yourself for your first business trip to China

Ready for your first trip to the People's Republic? Here are some tips that will help you avoid major pitfalls and get the most out of your Chinese adventure.

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Apps will be transformed by cognizant computing

Cognizant computing – the next phase of the personal cloud movement – will become one of the strongest forces in consumer-focused IT, according to research firm Gartner, Inc. It will have an immense impact across a range of industries, including mobile devices, mobile apps, wearables, networking, services and cloud providers, causing major shifts in revenue and profit flows.

“Cognizant computing is transforming personal clouds into highly intelligent collections of mobile apps and services,” said Jessica Ekholm, research director at Gartner.

Cognizant computing is a consumer experience, in which data associated with individuals is used to develop services and activities according to simple rules. These services include alarms, bill payments, managing and monitoring health and fitness, and context-specific ads. Cognizant systems will deliver their services across multiple devices.

The practical application of cognizant computing helps business-to-consumer (B2C) companies to acquire deep insights into consumers’ preferences and daily lives, which will therefore assist in creating better,

more-personalized tailor-made services and offers, as well as ameliorate customer services. This, in turn, should help providers strengthen their competitiveness (and responsiveness) in a market where consumers are becoming increasingly aware of new services and offers, pricing structures, and the reputation of a brand.

“Cognizant computing is already beginning to take shape via many mobile apps, smartphones and wearable devices that collect and sync information about users, their whereabouts and their social graph,” said Ms. Ekholm. “Over the next two to five years, the Internet of Things and big data will converge with analytics. Hence, more data will make systems smarter.”

As a result, Ms. Ekholm said that by 2017, smartphones are expected to manage some tasks for us – probably better than we can do them ourselves. More-onerous administration tasks, such as booking our car in for service, changing a hotel booking if our plane is canceled, or sending information to our doctor about refilling our repeat prescriptions, are a few examples. Once this point has arrived, apps and services that are hosted in the personal cloud will interact with smartphones and other devices and the intricate app ecosystems they have created.

Any company in the business of providing a service, using apps or selling devices will be affected by cognizant computing in some way. Cognizant computing will allow companies to better connect with customers and to create more valuable products, services and offers.



Image: © rangizzz/ 123rf.com

www.gartner.com

Market for outsourced translation and interpreting services grows steadily

The global market for outsourced language services and technology will surpass US\$37.19 billion in 2014, according to a study by independent market research firm Common Sense Advisory. In its 10th annual global industry research report, "The Language Services Market: 2014," the firm details the findings of its comprehensive study. CSA Research, which has published market size estimates and global rankings for the past nine years, found that the demand for language services continues, and is growing at an annual rate of 6.23 percent. As part of the study, the firm surveyed language service providers from every continent to collect actual reported revenue for 2012, 2013, and expected revenue for 2014. It found that although the market continues to expand – the current growth rate of 6.23 percent represents an increase over last year's rate of 5.13 percent – it is less than 12.17 percent CAGR in 2012.

"Language service providers in most regions of the world reported steady growth during calendar year 2013," explained Don DePalma, Common Sense Advisory's founder and Chief Strategy Officer. "However, we contend that the era of double-digit growth in language services is over, due to several factors, including exchange rates, global competition, and an increase in the use of translation technology. The good news is that the market continues to grow, just not as much as it once did."

Included in the report are the largest language services providers globally, as well as by region. The five highest-ranked companies on the list of the largest 100 language services companies, listed according to 2013 revenues, are: Lionbridge Technologies (US), Hewlett-Packard's Application and Content Globalization group (FR), TransPerfect (US), LanguageLine (US), and SDL (UK). Two of these are publicly traded companies

– Lionbridge (LIOX on NASDAQ) and SDL (SDLL on the London Stock Exchange).

Additional tables and charts within the report include:

- Current market size estimates for the language services industry along with a detailed description of the research methodology
- Projected growth rates for the industry through 2018, including region-specific breakdowns
- Rankings of the largest 100 global industry leaders
- Critical benchmarks for LSP financial performance, including average revenue per employee, average revenue per salesperson, and average revenue per project manager, including differences by company size and geography
- Regional rankings of the largest translation and interpreting companies in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Oceania, North America, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, and Western Europe
- Reporting on the fastest-growing services in the industry, such as translation, website globalization, software localization, and on-site interpreting
- Breakdown of the market revealing market size estimates for on-site interpreting, translation technology, machine translation post-editing, video interpreting, mobile and game localization, and other services

Adds Vijayalaxmi Hegde, Director of Research Operations at Common Sense Advisory and report analyst, "The market for outsourced language services and supporting technology is immensely important to the organizations and individuals that produce or consume information. We predict that the industry will continue to grow and that the market will increase to US\$47 billion by 2018."

The list of the 100 largest language services providers based on revenue for 2013 is available at

www.commonsenseadvisory.com



Image: © Ratchanida Thippayos/ 123rf.com

TAUS BECOMES INVOLVED IN THE GLOBAL STANDARDIZATION PROCESS

The Translation Automation User Society (TAUS) is now actively taking part in the work of ISO Technical Committee 37 (ISO TC 37). In May 2014, TAUS was approved to become member of the national mirror committee of ISO TC 37 by NEN. The company developed several best practices on translation automation and related topics in the past. TAUS' resources and expertise can now find their way into future standards on machine translation, post-editing, controlled language and quality evaluation. TAUS will be involved in creating and promoting ISO standards for the translation industry and, in turn, to "hard-code" these standards in its tools and resources.

www.taus.net

IN EVERY LANGUAGE ADDS TELEVISION APP LOCALIZATION SERVICES

In Every Language, a provider of translating, interpreting and localization solutions, has added television app localization to its company offerings. The company was trained by Amazon to handle the translation challenges of 3-D phones such as Fire TV and Fire Phone.

www.ineverylanguage.com

LIONBRIDGE ONDEMAND API

Lionbridge, a US-based provider of translation, development and testing solutions, has released a translation-specific onDemand API, designed to enable technology platforms to write to a single API (application programming interface) from one provider.

www.lionbridge.com

NEW FEATURES ON CROWDIN

Crowdin, a translation and localization management platform, has added new features. The platform now offers more translation vendors to choose from, semi-automatic screenshot tagging and a batch translations upload function.

<http://crowdin.net>

Young customers expect a consistent brand experience

SDL has released the final report of its "Five Truths for Future Marketers" series. Titled "Channels are Irrelevant", the report features results from SDL's global survey of more than 1,800 millennials (ages 18-36). The data reveals that today's consumers no longer care about where they are or what device they are on when interacting with a brand, as 58 percent of millennials polled said they expect to engage with a company whenever they choose and via whichever channel they elect. The data highlights the critical need for brands to stop focusing on channels and instead apply what they know about their consumers to elevate the overall experience in the buying journey.

Millennials are the "always on" and connected generation, demanding consistent and seamless interaction with brands wherever they are and from any device they choose. According to

the data, millennials touch their smartphones 43 times per day and 30 percent admit they touch more than four devices over the course of 24 hours. Even through the myriad of platforms consumers use to interact with a business, 60 percent of millennials surveyed expect a consistent experience from brands whether they interact online, in store or via phone. These statistics indicate how critical it is for marketers to adapt to the rapidly changing range of consumer behaviors, preferences and expectations. Customers move effortlessly between on and offline touch points and they expect brands to travel with them, responding to and anticipating their needs.

"Consumers have drastically changed the way they engage and interact with companies, altering expectations and making it imperative for brands to quickly adapt," said Paige O'Neill, chief marketing officer at SDL. "To keep pace, marketers



Image: © Michal Bednarek/ 123rf.com

should focus on the experiences customers want throughout the customer journey, and adjust company strategies to coincide. If you change the way you engage customers on one channel, it may only be one step in an overall strategy. It is vital for organizations to ensure channels are so connected that they become irrelevant, placing the focus on delivering true omni-channel engagement."

Millennials are empowered by an overabundance of digital devices and can pick when, where and how they want to interact with brands, making the shift to omni-channel engagement even more daunting. However, if marketers focus on the behaviors, preferences and expectations throughout the customer journey and adjust strategies as needed, customer experience will remain a top priority. For brands, there are three critical questions to guide the process to true omni-channel engagement:

- **Are you tracking where and how customers interact with your brand?**

It is essential to meet customers where they are and to consistently offer information they find useful. Content should be specific to each stage of the buying journey and brands must take full advantage of the information and data collected on where their messaging performs well with the buyer. By capturing who is interacting with them and at what stages of the buying journey, brands can deliver relevant information to the consumer, elevating the experience. Growing customer relationships is not always about getting the sale. Marketers need to take a long-term view and understand that meaningful relationships develop over time.

- **Is your customer experience consistent across different devices and platforms?**

Consistent customer experience can be a key differentiator for a brand. It reinforces your identity, and in a marketplace full of competition and noise, it keeps your audience focused on the most important message of all – yours. According to a recent customer experience

survey from McKinsey & Company, measuring satisfaction on customer journeys is 30 percent more predictive of overall customer satisfaction than measuring happiness for each individual interaction.

- **How can you continue to connect internal silos to ensure access to all the critical data you need?**

Marketers must work with relevant departments and agencies to create a communications asset inventory and identify all touch points along the customer journey. Are you effectively collecting – and leveraging – data from every step along the way? If not, what more can you do to improve internal collaboration? Staying attentive and periodically updating both your inventory and related processes allows you to prevent emerging channels from creating new data silos.

www.sdl.com

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Technical Communication in the Middle Kingdom



Technical Communication Education at the Peking University

Establishing technical communication as a professional discipline

Although technology plays a major role in Chinese business and everyday life, the field of technical communication is still largely unknown within Chinese industry and academia. Since the 1990s, attempts have been made to establish technical communication courses and programs in Chinese universities. In this article, we will describe the recent developments at Peking University.

By Zhijun Gao, Jingsong Yu, and Menno de Jong

The emergence of technical communication in China

From a bird's-eye view, the development of technical communication as a discipline in China is a necessity. China's economy has grown rapidly, and China is evolving from a manufacturing to a knowledge country. Technology plays a vital role in this process. The importance of technical communication for the technological and creative industries is undisputed in the Western world. The professional and academic status of the field is underlined by longstanding academic journals, like *Technical Communication*, magazines, like *tcworld* and *Intercom*, and associations, like tekcom and the Society for Technical Communication (STC). Of course, technical communication already exists in Chinese companies. Wherever more or less complex products are made, technical communication is required. Companies now solve this by setting up call-centers, or by sending engineers to support their users. Writing user documentation is often not seen as a professional task that requires high expertise.

Engineers are sometimes writing documentation, as an extra to their engineering work. We have even heard that a company's reception desk was in charge of writing the user instructions. This is the burden of professionals whose job it is to make things clear and simple: for us it is evident that this requires high expertise, but outsiders may only see the simplicity. The big issue is if Chinese companies are ready to recognize technical communication as a professional field.

In China, we are at the start of developing a technical communication discipline. This is, almost by definition, a complex process. Companies must learn that hiring academically trained technical communicators adds value to their products, helps to reduce costs elsewhere in the company, and enables high-quality user support, which is crucial for a company's long-term viability. But companies will only do this, if there is evidence and experience supporting the value of technical communicators. Hence,

universities must recognize this field as an important addition to their educational and research programs - but to do so they need recognized scholars. However, we are gradually moving in the right direction. The needs felt and expressed by some of the leading companies in China are helpful: employment figures for technical communicators in China appear to be good.

Two groups of companies feel the need for professional technical communicators in China. The first group consists of the international companies. Ever since China's open-door policy in 1978, more and more foreign companies have entered the Chinese market. These companies usually have a mature technical communication department in their home countries. When they set up branches or R&D divisions in China, they also try to start a team of technical communicators.

The second group consists of large Chinese companies that are increasingly going abroad



Image: © design56/ 123rf.com

to expand their business. In their globalized business, these companies find out that high-quality user support is indispensable, not only because foreign customers require it but also because of the geographical, cultural and linguistic distance between the company and its international customers.

Challenges for technical communication in China

In our view, universities should play a central role in the development of technical communication in China. Some companies already appear to be eager to hire technical communication professionals, and we can trust that in the future even more companies will feel the need for a competent technical communication department.

However, there are three major challenges for technical communication in China. The first is that well-trained technical communicators are not available in China. Although some universities offer a few courses on technical communication, so far no Chinese university offers a comprehensive program in technical communication. Therefore, companies use workarounds. Some companies hire unqualified personnel; others try to find in-house solutions. Qiaonan Xu, director of IBM Information Development China, shared with us how they address this issue: IBM either hires

language-major graduates with good computer skills or computer-major graduates with a good English proficiency. These graduates will receive a special in-house training before they start working as technical writers.

The second challenge is that there is a lack of qualified instructors and learning materials. Universities that recognize the need for technical communication may have problems finding a suitable director to develop the program, qualified professors to teach as well as adequate instruction materials. Nationwide only a few university professors and lecturers regard technical communication as their area of expertise. As far as we know only one recent textbook is available in China: *A Practical Guide to Scientific and Technological Writing* (Chinese version), by the ZTE group.

The third challenge is the most fundamental: There is a lack of technical communication research focused on the Chinese context. The vast majority of the knowledge about technical communication is based on Western research. These insights may apply to Western cultures and language systems, but we cannot be sure that they are equally valid in the Chinese context. Research has shown that there are cultural differences, but this research suffers from a lack of scope and consistency as well as an imprecision between descriptive practices and assumptions about effectiveness. Specific research is needed within the Chinese context to develop and validate best practices in technical communication.

Technical Communication at Peking University

Peking University (PKU) is one of the few universities in China that already recognize the potential significance of technical communication. Below, we will describe the context in which technical communication is developing at Peking University. After that, we will briefly describe courses that have been taught and the double-degree program on Technical Communication and Translation, which is developed in collaboration with the University of Twente in the Netherlands.

Context: Starting from Computer-Aided Translation

The initiative for a technical communication program was taken by the department

of Language Information Engineering in the School of Software and Microelectronics. The department is the first in China to offer a Master's degree in Computer-Aided Translation. Originally, the department's mission was to prepare students for the modern translation industry. Nowadays, the mission has broadened to cultivating talents for the modern language service industry. Language service comprises technical writing, technical translation, language technology, digital publishing, linguistic education and consulting. Three types of competencies are required: language (culture), technology, and management competencies. In our view, this context has two big advantages. First, in China, the relationship between (technical) translation and technical communication is a quite natural one. In the past, when the Chinese technological and creative industry was still in the early stages of development, many user instructions had to be translated. And Chinese companies that are internationally oriented have to consider technical communication and translation in combination. Second, the department historically focuses on cultivating interdisciplinary talents, combining language and computer competencies. In the past, the department's main focus was on translation and translation technology. Students were prepared for the translation industry, but also found employment as technical writers, for instance with IBM, EMC, Symantec, and IGT. Some are currently heading the technical writing teams of their companies as directors. The increasing requests of companies for qualified students for technical writing positions led to the gradual development of technical communication within the department.

To support the development of a technical communication research and education program, we held two Technical Communication Salons (seminars) in the past two years, which were attended by leading industry and academia players as well as interested graduate students. We also attended several conferences on technical communication, such as the International Conference of Technical Information and Communication organized by the China Association of Standards, and the Technical Communication Summit held by TIBCO. These seminars and conferences underline the growing attention towards technical communication in China.

Educational activities: Courses and a double-degree program

In the following we will present an overview of the educational activities regarding technical communication at the Master's level. First, we will describe individual courses. After that, we will discuss a double-degree Master's program that is currently under development.

A first course is *Technical Documentation Writing*. This course has been in the curriculum since 2008. The purpose is to familiarize students with technical writing principles. The course is offered in collaboration with industry partners: Motorola in 2008, Siemens in 2009, IBM in 2010, and Sigma Kudos 2011-2014. Last year's syllabus included:

- Introduction of technical writing
- Document types and writing styles
- Technical writing mindset
- Methods, tools, and processes
- Technical English
- Time management, planning
- Practice and evaluation

Another course is *Authoring Technology and Practice*. This course, which started this year, aims at equipping students with relevant skills and knowledge regarding the latest authoring technology. Again, the course was offered in close collaboration with several industry partners. Course evaluations showed that many of the students liked to learn about authoring technology and putting the knowledge into practice. The course comprised four modules:

- Controlled language
- DITA and its application in the automotive industry (by Tweddle)
- Adobe RoboHelp and MadCap Flare (sponsored by MadCap)
- Simulation projects and hands-on practice (by Huawei)

A third course is *Communication Design and Communication Research*, which focuses on design methodology and the role of empirical research in (product and instructional) design processes. The course pays attention to the phasing of design activities and design paradigms, the role of academic and applied research, the role of creativity, the nature of expertise, and the social aspects of design processes. It is taught in collaboration with the University of Twente.

The three mentioned courses form part of the prerequisite courses for students who want to enroll in the double degree program *Technical Communication and Translation*, which is under development in a close collaboration between Peking University and the University of Twente. The program focuses on combining technical communication with translation and localization, and on explicitly addressing the role of culture in technical communication processes.

The double-degree program is a two-year program. In the first year, students study at Peking University to learn about translation and localization. In the second year, they will study technical communication at the University of Twente. We believe that the combination of topics prepares students well for the Chinese technical communication practice. Nevertheless, it will also be worthwhile for Western students interested in technical communication.

Conclusion

There is still a lot of work to be done before technical communication will be an established discipline at Chinese universities as well as a recognized and valued specialization within companies. However, the need for a solid technical communication education is increasingly recognized by the various stakeholders such as companies, universities, students, and government agencies. Peking University aims at developing a unique technical communication program by combining it with translation and localization. Collaboration, both with leading companies and with recognized international programs, is a key element in this process.

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A Chinese case study

Solving worldwide communication challenges



Image: © chinaview/ istockphoto.com

By Emma Lilin

I am one of the 1,000-plus technical writers at Huawei, a leading ICT provider with facilities in over 170 countries and regions. With such a huge presence, Huawei has to address global challenges when it comes to technical communication.

In the 1990s, Huawei resolved most Chinese customer issues through their technical support service. At that time, there were only a few technical documents and the content tended to be fairly simple and monolingual, and was predominately delivered in printed copies.

Starting from 2000, Huawei expanded rapidly into international markets, and it was confronted with some rather significant challenges in terms of technical communication. First, an exponential increase was seen in product documentation. Before 2000, Huawei created only a few different types of manuals. However, after 2000, the company needed to develop a complete set of documentation for each product series, including network planning, deployment, upgrade, operation, and maintenance manuals. This increase in technical communication requirements led to a tenfold increase in the word count.

Second, the content delivery mode changed greatly. In particular, Huawei developed an electronic file manager and reader: HedEx. With HedEx, users can conveniently view product information, quickly find required information, and easily download and update documents.

Increased responsibilities for technical communication

Technical communication aims to continuously improve customer satisfaction by offering excellent information experience. In addition to developing product manuals, our technical communication team has the following responsibilities:

1. To develop graphical user interface (GUI) elements for software.

Technical writers in certain technical communication positions also participate in designing software GUIs, which entail items such as analyzing user tasks and describing task flows. Apart from online help documents, technical writers are also responsible for producing embedded online information.

2. To provide support for the creation of bidding and marketing documents.

Being concise and efficient is essential for technical communication in the marketing domain. Technical writers are expected to develop infographics and supporting graphics that are able to convey clear product benefits and capabilities, thus helping users easily understand new product features and functions. They also have to produce multimedia documentation, such as flash-based presentations and videos.

3. To develop and administer the Huawei technical support website.

The Huawei technical support website is the major portal through which users seek solutions to their issues concerning Huawei products and documentation. The technical communication team is responsible for developing and administering the support website. This task includes managing forums, handling customer feedback, and managing online groups. The mobile app enables users to view Huawei documentation on their mobile phones and resolve issues any-time, anywhere.

4. To develop and maintain tools and platforms for the creation and release of Huawei product manuals.

Huawei has developed a web-based tool to develop and publish product documentation. To date, over 15,000 R&D engineers and technical writers are using this tool to collaboratively develop documentation online. This tool is able to automatically format content, thereby improving the release process and turnaround time.

3. Effective quality measurement

Huawei has devised a multi-layer quality model that focuses on improving user perception, consisting of over 160 assessment items. Huawei uses a tool to scan and evaluate the quality of deliverables based on the assessment items of the quality model. The evaluation provides a statistical basis for quality improvement.

4. Clear content policies

In the era of mobile Internet, our technical communication team concentrates on communication between the company and users. The team has established multiple SIGs within the company with specific interests, such as mobilization, multimedia, and user experience. Because superb information experience helps improve user perception of products and user loyalty, we will offer users quality information in a more expedient and convenient manner to continuously improve user satisfaction.

Core competencies

1. Deep understanding of user requirements
Huawei technical writers are committed to developing customer-oriented content. We use professional user analysis approaches to build user models and organize information according to user requirements, thereby helping our customers create business success.
2. Efficient development approaches
In addition to DITA-based single-sourcing development, we use a tool to extract required information from product data and automatically generate DITA topics without requiring human intervention.

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The changing nature of content

Technology has changed enormously over the last 70 years. But have technical communication standards kept up sufficiently to reflect these changes? It appears that some of the most successful software companies are breaking generally accepted best practice in technical writing – a trend that clearly should get us thinking.



Image: © alphspirit/ 123rf.com

By Ellis Pratt

If you were going back in time 20 or 25 years and found yourself in a classroom learning about technical writing, you'd probably find it was almost identical to classes on this subject offered today. Technical communicators tend to assume that technical communication best practices, which have been taught for the past 25 years, and even further back in time, are still appropriate today.

Yet, there are developments that are prompting the question if the commonly accepted approaches are still the best way to go in all situations.

Let me list a few examples:

- Mozilla, the developer of Firefox, reported that a change to a more conversational and friendly style of writing Help topics resulted in a 13.1 percent increase in page hits. The re-written pages were helpful to 800,000 more people per year, providing a significant reduction in support calls.
- Other leading web-based companies, such as Twitter and MailChimp, have Help topics that are breaking the rules of traditional technical communication best practice.
- At the tekomp 2013 conference, Melanie Huxhold and Dr Axel Luther of SAP reported that more users were viewing SAP's screencasts than reading the Help pages. In other words, a medium that is more verbose and harder to use for searching specific information, was more popular than the online Help.
- User documentation is often criticized for being boring and old-fashioned, and there is a commonly held belief outside of the technical writing community that "no-one reads the manuals", that we create something of uncertain value.

How we got to where we are today

If you look at the timeline of technical communication standards, you'll see that most of these standards emerged from the aerospace and mainframe computer industry sectors between 1960 and 1990. According to the xml.org website even DITA is based on standards from this period.

These standards were written when technology could be described as big and scary for many users. When things went wrong, the consequences were usually expensive and sometimes even dangerous.

A focus on efficiency rather than quality

In recent years, the focus in technical communication has mainly been on improving the efficiency in producing content. You'll hear conference speakers using the Ford Model T motor car as a metaphor for how technical communicators should take a more engineering approach. Unfortunately, there's been less focus on improving the value of the outputs we create. Here, we can also learn lessons from the Model T. By 1926, Ford had been overtaken by General Motor as the leading car manufacturer in the USA. They had ended up with an efficient way of creating a car that fewer and fewer people wanted to buy. There's a danger we're making the same mistakes as Ford did with the Model T.

Our changing relationship with technology

Technology is evolving

In his presentation, "Technology's epic story", Kevin Kelly argues that technology is following an evolutionary path over time, similar to humanity's biological evolution. We can use the five key forces in evolution to create a simple radar chart.

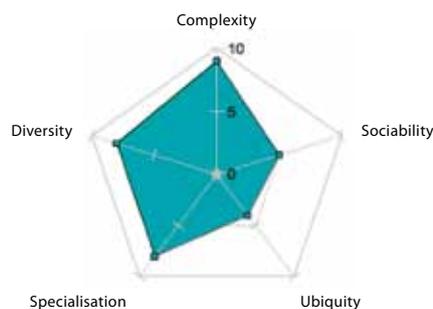


Figure 1: Radar chart measuring traditional technology by the five major attributes in evolution.

We can describe the shape of technology in the second half of the 20th century as looking roughly like shown in Figure 1.

Products tended to specialize in one function, and work under different operating systems. Today, a great deal of consumer technology is ubiquitous, even mundane. The shape of the diagram for these products would resemble a shape as shown in Figure 2.

Users are changing

As technology has become part of everyone's daily lives (particularly web and mobile applications), most people's relationship regarding technology has changed.

Many people now regard technology as something that should just work. When it fails, with many products being so much cheaper than ever before, they're more likely to stop using it, even throw it away, instead of trying to fix the problem.

Today we also see more tech-savvy users.

These users want to do more than to be functionally competent; they want to master a product. They might also be inclined to tinker and make it do things the manufacturer never intended.

How products are sold is changing

Research shows a large number of people tend to search for the solution to their problem before they buy a product or service. This means that we're seeing a new marketing funnel emerge. Google calls this the "The Zero Moment of Truth." *tcworld magazine* recently reported on this trend

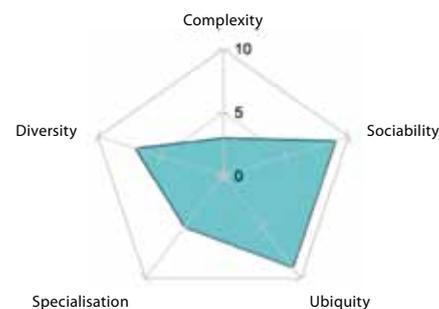


Figure 2: Radar chart measuring recent technology by the five major attributes in evolution.

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- www.infomanagementcenter.com/index.php?page=1419

in the article “A business case for technical communication – facts & figures”.

Technical content is now seen as the start of the customer journey, because it’s providing information that’s important to the prospect. This means the content that technical communicators produce must serve an additional function: provide the answers to people’s problems in a way that also promotes products and services.

Towards a new model of technical communication

When products no longer fit the “big, scary and expensive” description, and when users are more competent, a new model of technical communication may be more appropriate.

Design-led documentation

Some organizations are taking a more design-led approach to user documentation. Citrix, for example, has been one of the first documentation teams to adopt this approach. Citrix’s Senior Information Experience Manager, Mathew Varghese, describes how its technical documentation team is becoming an “Information Experience” department. For Citrix, Information Experience is a way of empathizing with users to understand their needs and assisting them through the whole customer journey.

The company’s goal is to provide the right content to the right user, at a time of the user’s choosing. This means a more immersive user experience, moving away from confining user assistance to a traditional user manual or Help file. It includes looking at how content can be delivered in the User Interface, in forums, through videos and blogs.

Affective design models

Other organizations are changing the tone of voice and are adopting a more conversational

approach in certain places in their user guides. For example, the writers at Mailchimp.com first identify the likely emotional state of the reader of a page, and then use a tone of voice best suited to that state.

A nuanced approach

Does this mean you need to abandon DITA or Minimalism? Not necessarily. The new approaches mainly lead to a change in the way introductory and conceptual sections are written. Task information and the procedural steps usually remain unchanged.

The traditional approach is probably still the best approach if your users are anxious or frustrated when they start to read your content, or if you are documenting products where mistakes can be expensive or even dangerous.

Challenges for technical communicators

These new approaches can create some challenges for technical communicators, particularly in an international context.

Unless it is managed carefully, a more conversational tone is likely to lead to a greater use of idioms in the content. This can create further challenges for localization. For example, on the “Getting started with Twitter” Help page, you’ll find a section called “GET FANCY: Explore advanced features”. “Get Fancy” is a phrase that, in respect, would tear many translators’ hair out. Users in some cultures might take offence at content being written in the second person, informal voice (for example, using the “Du” form of “you” instead of the more formal “Sie” in German). Even in English, the levels of formality accepted by users in different countries can vary.

This means, clear guidelines need to be given to writers on how to write these more informal topics in a culturally acceptable way.

Conclusion

Technical writing, and the nature of the content we provide, is changing, as users’ relationship with technology evolves. This means that what we teach as best practice in technical communication needs to reflect these changes.

With web analytics, user feedback and usability testing, we have the ability to analyze user behavior and gain a more detailed understanding of users. We have the opportunity to identify the situations where the nature of the content we provide – the tone of voice and how content is delivered – should change so that it better meets the users’ needs.

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Creating effective labels

When people talk about TC deliverables, they usually mean product manuals, user guides, online Help, tutorials, and other types of documents. We forget about a very important type of content information that is actually part of the product itself: namely, labels.



Image: © BahadırTanrıover / istockphoto.com

By Leah Guren

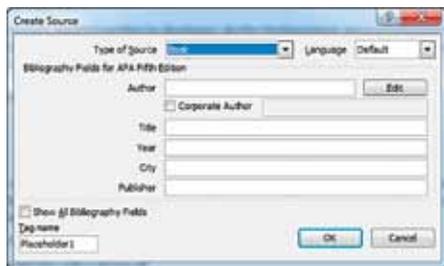
Labels are very small pieces of information that are part of the product, such as interface elements in a GUI or controls on a physical product.

In most companies, labels are written by developers. While developers are experts at their technology specialty, they are not trained in the many skills needed to create effective labels. Therefore, for the best possible user experience, we as professional technical communicators need to contribute our knowledge of good communication, clarity, and usability.

This article explores how labels differ from other types of documentation and best practices for writing and editing labels.

What are labels?

Labels are elements that help identify and explain parts of products. You can think of labels as mini-chunks of information that help users make correct choices about product use. When thinking of software, labels are all of the words associated with an element in a screen or dialog box. For physical products, labels are text or graphics that mark controls or provide helpful guidelines. For example:



Dialog box from Microsoft Word. Each interface element has associated text to name the element. These words are labels.



Simple blender. There is text associated with both controls (OFF/ON and LOW/HIGH), as well as markings that indicate the volume of the carafe. These, too, are labels.

Does every product need labels?

Clearly, some products require fewer labels. When a simple physical product is well-designed, it may require few or no labels. A classic example of good design is a USB plug. The asymmetrical placement of the pins in the plug and the socket make it impossible to incorrectly insert a USB device. This means that there is no need for labels indicating which side is up, or explaining what to do. Even the universal symbol for USB  that is printed on the top of the USB plug is more of a branding issue than instructional labeling. But most of us write about products that are far more complex. Ask yourself this:

- ✓ Is your product a software application with a user interface?
- ✓ Is your product a hardware device with more than two controls?

Yes? Then your product needs labels.

What is the true function of a good label?

The right label provides cues to help a user interact with the product easily and naturally. Some elements are simple to label; for example, labeling a power switch ON/OFF is obvious. But what label would you give to a dialog box text field that allows users to enter a coding string to define variable fields in an output report?

The challenge is that a label must be:

- **Concise.** As short as possible.
- **Clear.** Provide just enough information to trigger recall.
- **Unique.** Be distinct from other labels within that product.
- **Enduring.** Must survive the user learning curve.

That doesn't mean that a label must be so self-explanatory that it tells the user *everything* needed without any other source of information. A label does not have to explain every nuance of the interface element. A good label, however, will have a strong recall factor, meaning that once the user has a small amount of practice, the label is sufficient to trigger that memory.

The problem

Developing the most effective labels requires an understanding of usability (specifically, user cognitive response), interface design, clear communication, and localization best practices. Unfortunately, in most companies, developers create the working terminology for their prototypes, including all the labels. These temporary labels can be illogical, inconsistent, too vague or have too much text, be difficult to translate, and may not even be aligned with marketing's preferred terminology. Very often, the developers are not native English speakers, which can lead to awkward, ineffective labels. And what happens? In many cases, these temporary labels end up finding their way into the final product.

By the time technical communicators get involved in the documentation process, it is often too late to make changes to the interface. No matter how good the user guide or online Help is, one piece of the product information puzzle will be missing.

The right solution

To improve labels, we need to:

1. Create labels that endure throughout the user experience.

A common mistake is to design information for the out-of-box experience (that is, the user's first exposure to a product). The problem is that most products have a learning curve; once a user has passed that initial period of complete ignorance, excessive explanation just gets in the way and makes the product interface clumsy. Interface labels should carry the user through three phases: immediacy, learning curve, and permanency. Immediacy means that there is enough information to give someone an inkling of what the element is or does. The learning curve is a period of time in which the user becomes familiar and gains some level of expertise with the product. And finally, permanency means that the label supports long-term usage with minimal interference.

For example, the first time someone sees a screen, the label *"Enter the date on which you wish this event to begin"* may seem very friendly and understandable. However, by the third time the user has seen that screen, the wordiness of the label becomes a burden. Therefore, "Starting Date" is better for long-term use.

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2. Learn to think visually.

Visual labels can be very effective, but require a lot of thought and testing. Most icons are not instantly understandable; however, if you find a design that becomes meaningful to a user once the purpose is explained once, this can be a winning solution.

For example, perhaps you didn't understand  the first time you saw it in a toolbar. But after learning that this paintbrush allows you to "paint" formatting, you probably found it easy to remember. This is an icon that has a very high recall factor.

3. Find creative alternatives.

Sometimes, the best solution for a label is no label at all. Better design of the interface element (for example, ergonomic controls and intuitive placement that meet user expectations) may be the answer. But when labels are needed, don't fall into the trap of using the same words or icons. Perhaps there is another way? Creative brainstorming may lead to new ideas and options.

For example, I once convinced a client to get rid of a six word warning ("*Do not use while <product> running*") by implementing a minor design change that prevented the dial to be turned while the product was running.

Sometimes, technical limitations force us to find creative solutions. Physical products that are very small or an awkward shape don't provide space for complex labels. Similarly, most software applications have a limited amount of screen space for text.

4. Test your prototypes.

Labels require as much usability testing as documentation. As part of the product usability testing, we can measure how effective our labels are. Do the testers understand them? Do they get enough information to interact smoothly with the product? Make sure that you understand the basics of usability testing and are fully involved with your company's test plans.

Conclusion

TC professionals need to be involved in every stage of writing and editing product labels. To achieve this we need to:

- study design and UI (user interface) concepts.
- promote our UX and usability expertise so that we can be involved earlier in the development process.

- coordinate communication between marketing and development to get buy-in for terminology consistency. If we talk to management in terms of the ROI (for example, reduced expenses for content management and localization), rather than just improved user experience, we are more likely to succeed.

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Exploring the inner life of SMT systems

Have you ever wondered what the inside of a machine translation system looks like? Or considered what it would be like to crack open a system and examine its internal components? We've all dreamed of shrinking down to a few millimeters and exploring the insides of household appliances – or, better yet, the internal systems of the human body. But what would we find if we gazed down at the inner depths of machine translation?



Image: © stocksnapper/ 123rf.com

By Anne Göhring, Martin Volk (University of Zurich) and Rihards Kalniņš (Tilde)

Students at the University of Zurich's Institute of Computational Linguistics recently obtained this opportunity in an introductory course on machine translation and parallel corpora. Instructors at the institute wanted to give their students a deeper understanding of the inner life of SMT systems by letting them "peek under the hood" of a real MT platform and tinker with the internal components.

The machine translation platform chosen to examine was LetsMT, provided by Tilde, a European language technology company. Since its launch in 2012, LetsMT has been used to build numerous customized MT systems. These include MT systems deployed by European governments as well as MT solutions integrated into popular mobile apps and language software.

LetsMT had already been employed as a classroom aid at the University of Copenhagen, where the Centre for Language Technology uses it as a "hands-on" tool to teach students the basics of statistical machine translation (SMT). In the spring term of 2014 the University of Zurich joined them, furthering the goal of teaching the next generation of MT professionals about how language science and technological development can be merged to create powerful new solutions.

Changing course

In previous years, students at the Institute of Computational Linguistics who had been introduced to the principles of statistical machine translation were asked to train their Moses system on the University of Zurich's server. Although they didn't have to install any software or collect any parallel corpus, students found that this first encounter was often discouraging.

Therefore, the course instructors Prof. Martin Volk and Anne Göhring decided to follow the lead of the University of Copenhagen and use LetsMT for the assignment. The idea was for the computational linguistics students to begin as quickly as possible to experiment with a statistical MT system without worrying about the technical details.

The explicit goals for their first assessment were "to learn to train a statistical MT system, and to experiment with your own MT system (and compare it, for example, with Google Translate)." The institute also encouraged the students from the start to discover SMT in an interactive way and explore the "inner life" of SMT systems.

Exploring the inner life: benefits and advantages

It is difficult to quantify the specific insights students gained by using the LetsMT platform, how user friendly they found it, or how useful this experiment was for achieving the learning goals of the course. But student reports included lots of very positive feedback. For instance, one student wrote: "It turned out to be astonishingly easy"; and another said: "the steps were easy to follow and thoughtfully explained."

From a teaching perspective, the University of Zurich found that the LetsMT platform offers many advantages. For students, the multilingual aspect is very important. Students were asked to choose any convenient language pair, where "convenient" meant that (a) they understood both source and target languages well enough to assess the quality of the translations delivered by their systems, and (b) there was at least one parallel corpus available for this language pair.

Instructors and teaching staff did not make use of the whole functionality of LetsMT, since they had decided that the students should register as demo users of the platform. This restricted students to train on available parallel corpora of limited size.

The wide range of languages covered by LetsMT gave students the opportunity to experiment with their preferred language pair, including their mother tongues. The institute had examples of systems for translation to and from English and German, Spanish and German, Russian and German, as well as systems for English-to-French, Italian-to-English, Swedish-to-English, and Swedish-to-German translation.

The clearly structured interface of LetsMT led students seamlessly through every step necessary for building a statistical MT system. The resulting flow chart automatically produced for each created system perfectly illustrates the whole building process and is a great help for all participants.

Another nice feature for both students and teachers at the University of Zurich was the easy access through the web interface, although the institute's teaching team already had everything prepared to train Moses systems on its server.

One last positive feature not explicitly mentioned in the assignment was the ability to train domain-specific systems. Some students spontaneously focused on that aspect, for example, choosing corpora from the legal domain, translating some in-domain and out-of-domain texts, and finally evaluating the resulting translations manually.

Theory and practice, and beyond

Similar to the teaching goals described by the University of Copenhagen, the Institute of Computational Linguistics wants students to "study MT in both theory and practice in order for them to become competent users." But in contrast to students from language programs, computational linguistics students should develop some more technical skills, ideally programming skills.

For this reason, at the end of the term, instructors assigned a Moses training and evaluation task to be done in groups of 2-3 students. All the groups completed the assignment within two weeks following the step-by-step instructions given them, most of the teams without any additional help.

Still, the Institute of Computational Linguistics continues to search for a didactic solution to bridge the gap between the easy-to-use LetsMT platform and the less comfortable path the students must follow to create an SMT system all by themselves.

The University of Zurich discovered that using LetsMT helped level out the different educational backgrounds of the participants and allowed students to immediately build their own SMT systems. Instructors also found that the platform covers many different issues treated during the course – like the size of monolingual and parallel corpora, the training steps, the translation and language models, evaluation metrics, and domain adaptation – and thus helped convey the main ideas and principles of SMT to the students.

Closing the feedback loop

Thanks to the use of LetsMT in the classroom at the University of Zurich, the team at Tilde was also able to improve the overall LetsMT experience for other users. The Institute of Computational Linguistics was in close contact with Tilde about their use of the platform throughout the spring semester. This included detailed feedback reports from professors and students in the program.

One issue that students often encountered was the use of specific tags in technical documentation. Translators often receive documents that include bits of HTML code, for example, from websites and user interfaces. This is a known stumbling block for MT systems, which often automatically translate and reformat tags, render-

ing them meaningless. This issue was highlighted by the Institute of Computational Linguistics, and Tilde was able to provide a remedy.

LetsMT can now correctly deal with complex tags and placeholders, ensuring that MT systems

can accurately translate technical documents and HTML code. This is a major leap forward for the application of machine translation that could be accomplished due to the successful collaboration between the University of Zurich

and Tilde. In the future, the University of Zurich will continue to employ LetsMT in the classroom, teaching future language technology professionals about the inner life of SMT systems. And, we are happy to see what new inspirations these explorations will bring.

contact

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Clear abbreviations and symbols

Technical writing ways to fix the

requires a balance between brevity and clarity. Here are some short, simple meaning of confusing or ambiguous terms.

By Susan Grimmette

My first job in 1977 was with a chemical company. I handed in a text to a manager and got it back with a chemical term (abbreviation) crossed out and underlined with dots and STET written next to it. My supervisor and I were both puzzled. What did STET mean? Perhaps, sulphated tetraethyl toluene? After much guessing we phoned the manager. He laughed at our lack of classical education. Stet is the Latin word for “let it stand”. There are numerous abbreviations and symbols taken from Latin that are frequently used in English texts. I will describe their meaning below. I also list ambiguous symbols used in scientific writing and suggest simple ways to pin down their meaning by supplying context.

Latin abbreviations

In an English text written by a non-native speaker, I came across the abbreviation “f.e.” I assume the writer tried to abbreviate “for example”. Life is, however, not that simple. As you know of course, the correct abbreviation in English is “e.g.” and is derived from Latin.

The table below shows the most common abbreviations with Latin origin.

A while back, all educated speakers of English were expected to know some Latin, but these days, not many people learn Latin. In addition, non-native speakers of English have a hard time recognizing Latin abbreviations, let alone using them correctly.

To help non-native English readers and translators, I would advise you to define the Latin terms and symbols that you use, either in an introduction at the beginning of your manual or in a glossary of terms at the end. You can, of course, avoid the Latin altogether by writing out “for example” each time you use it, but it might make your text unnecessarily voluminous.

Data mining

In Pears Cyclopaedia from 1969 I found the following under “How to correct printers’ proofs”:



English term	Abbreviation	Latin	German equivalent
among others	i.a.	Inter alia	u. a.
and so on / and the rest	etc.	et cetera	usw.
in itself	per se*	per se	per se
compare	cf.	confere	vgl.
for example	e.g.	exempli gratia	z. B.
note well, take note	N.B.	nota bene	NB
Number (in the U.K.)	№	numero	Nr.
that is	i.e.	id est	d. h.

Image: © pzaxe/ 123rf.com

Heading	Text
Marginal mark	stet
Meaning	Leave as printed (when words have been crossed out by mistake)
Corresponding mark in text	... under letters or words to remain.

Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers from 1983 states the following under "Proof-correction marks":

Heading	Text
Instruction to Printer	Correction made in error. Leave unchanged.
Textual mark under characters to remain
Marginal mark	a tick in a circle

Thus we can deduce that by 1983 the Latin marginal mark had been replaced by a graphical symbol.

Unfortunately this is not the case for all the Latin abbreviations used in English. Some of them are still around.

Abbreviations

When you are using abbreviations, bear in mind that some of them have different meanings in different countries (UK/USA, UK/Germany) or in different fields of science.

Pounds of confusion

Symbol	Different meanings
#	pound(s) in weight (USA), hash, number, sharp (music)
£	librum (USA), UK currency, lira (old Italian currency)
lb	pound(s) in weight (UK)

Internationally ambiguous numbers

Symbol	Meaning in English	Meaning in German
› (comma)	thousands	decimal comma
• (period)	decimal point	thousands
Example:	5,000,000.40 euros	5.000.000,40 Euro

Ambiguous scientific symbols

Symbol	Length	Time	Angle
°	-	hour(s)*	degree(s) (also temperature)
' (single inverted comma)	foot/feet	minute(s)	minute(s)
"(double inverted comma)	inch(es)	second(s)	second(s)

* in medical shorthand

Hence 5'4" can mean both 5 feet 4 inches (length) and 5 minutes 4 seconds (time or angle). Three degrees can be an angle or a temperature, as well as Prince Charles' favorite trio.

Concise scientific terms

Symbol	Abbreviation	Meaning
psi	lb/sq. in.	pound(s) force per square inch
ppm	-	part(s) per million

Importance of context

The symbol 5'4" has different meanings in different areas of science. Of course, such terms only appear ambiguous when taken out of context. We use context to supply meaning: the text surrounding this term will generally pin down the meaning.

When the context is lacking, for example in tables or software error messages, you need to specifically supply it. I explained the term 5'4" above by indicating the context in parentheses. Alternatively, you can use meaningful headings, as in my table "Ambiguous scientific symbols" above. Remember that in some cases it might be easier to give an

example, rather than a long explanation. You must of course clearly indicate that it is only an example ("This invention includes but is not limited to...").

Conclusion

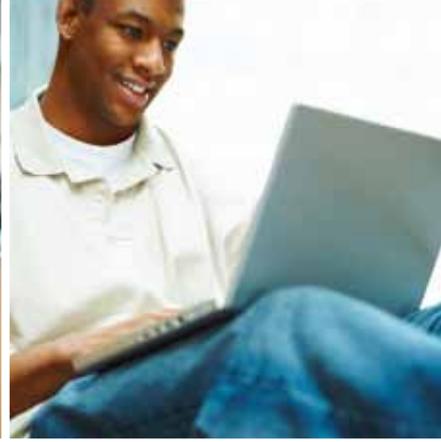
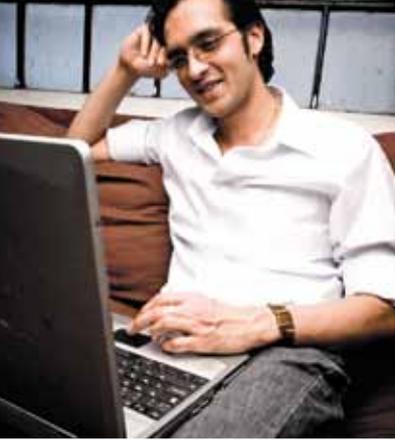
Some terms are ambiguous, because they mean different things to different people in different cultural, lingual and scientific contexts. Others may be confusing, because they are derived from Latin. To clarify meaning for all readers and empower translators to do a good job, define your terms (symbols and abbreviations used in this manual) in a dedicated section at the beginning or end of your text.

contact

Susan Grimmerette studied Physics and Chemistry, and started her career writing patent specifications for a chemical company in London. Since moving to Germany in 1985 she has developed manuals and online Help in German and English for software companies and engineering companies, in particular for the aerospace industry.



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Preparing yourself for your first business trip to China

Your ticket has been booked and you are ready for your first journey to the Far East. Here are some tips that will help you avoid major pitfalls and get the most out of your Chinese adventure.



Image: © Nikada / istockphoto.com

By Oliver Friese

China and its market are in the daily focus of Western companies and politicians. But despite the growing number of business relationships and expanding tourism in China, the country remains a mystery to many travelers. China has isolated itself several times in its history of more than 5000 years. One of these periods ended just a few decades ago. International relationships and understanding still need time to grow. But now your ticket is booked and you are curious about your first business trip.

Of course, you are aware that there are cultural differences between the West and Asia. Less obvious, however, are the differences within China. A look at the map reveals that the size of China compares to that of Europe. Now think of the cultural differences that exist within Europe, e.g. between Lithuania and Spain. Daily business in Vilnius follows different rules than in Madrid. The same applies to China, so it clearly matters where exactly you are doing business. Also keep in mind that the developmental stages vary a lot from region to region. Beijing, Shanghai or Hong Kong are just as well-developed as London, Berlin, San Francisco, Sydney or Cape Town. But in the vast People's Republic of China, you also find underdeveloped regions. Nevertheless, there are some common rules, that may help you on your first business trip to China.

Organizing your business trip

Booking a flight to one of the major Chinese airports is easy. However, applying for a Visa takes more time. Avoid two dates for traveling: the Chinese New Year (or Spring Festival) and the Golden Week. The date of the Chinese New Year depends on the moon calendar and therefore varies from late January to mid-February. The Golden Week is a seven-day holiday (around October 1st), which many Chinese use for family visits or sightseeing. During these times, trains, airplanes and taxis are overcrowded throughout the country and many offices remain closed, so don't schedule any business for these holidays.

Planes are the easiest way for long-distance travel within China. Tickets are cheap and English is understood at most airports. It is not advisable to rent a car, because of the dense traffic. To find your way around in the cities, your best choice is a taxi.

Every hotel, restaurant, bar or shop has a business card, which you can collect and simply show to the taxi driver if you want to go to a specific place.

Chinese characters

Within the Chinese provinces you not only find different manners, but also a variety of languages. The standard Chinese language is the Mandarin spoken in the region of Beijing. This is also the language used on radio and television broadcasts. This means that your business partner from Harbin, North-China will understand your translator from Beijing, but maybe your translator will struggle a little to understand the North-Chinese dialect. This can be compared to someone from Hamburg speaking to a Bavarian or someone from Manchester talking to someone with a strong London city accent.

Although the spoken Chinese languages may differ a lot, they all share the same characters. Sometimes you will see Chinese people painting characters with their finger into the palm of their hand. In this way they try to show their dialog partner which word they mean.

Be careful with hand gestures, especially when it comes to numbers. The Western gesture for two can be misinterpreted as eight and the alluring gesture with your index finger to tell somebody to come to you can be interpreted as very rude.

To communicate numbers, always carry a small calculator or a piece of paper with you and simply write the numbers. There are Chinese characters for numbers, but the Arabic numbers are also common in China.

The first meeting

In China it is important to be on time. Both men and women should dress according to international business standards. To greet someone, you shake hands and do not bow, like e.g. in Japan. The handshake is rather soft compared to the one in Western cultures, where a firm handshake is interpreted as a trait of a powerful person.

Hierarchy

In the Chinese culture hierarchy is of vital importance. Therefore, you always need to address the person with the highest rank first, and then work

your way down. If you have a good translator, he will direct you in the right way. If you travel to China as a delegation member, your superior must introduce you. If he fails to do that, nothing that has been discussed with you will matter.

In the Chinese culture the group is valued more than the individual; hence you introduce yourself with your family name, followed by your first name. Chinese names are hard to remember and even harder to pronounce for Western tongues. Thus, Chinese who often have contact with foreigners, give themselves a Western name.

Hierarchy also means that you respect older people or people in a higher position, in the same way that a salesman respects the client. Therefore it is essential, that you are aware of your position within the respective hierarchy. Keeping the face also means acting according to the hierarchy. For example, you do not criticize your boss or correct him in public, even if he is wrong. In the Western world we are often too honest to be polite. In China people are often too polite to be honest.

Exchanging business cards

Business cards are vital in China. A person without a business card will not be taken seriously. The business card itself should be of good quality and exquisite style. Also, think carefully about your title: On Chinese business cards everybody is at least a manager. To show your real position in your company it might be necessary to adapt your job title and print special business cards for China. Otherwise your Chinese business partner might think that he is talking to a lower rank and will not show any serious business interest. Sending him a representative of a lower rank would be interpreted as no real interest in the business on your side. Sounds complicated? Not really.

Treat the business card with as much respect as the person who gave it to you. Never ever scribble on a business card while the owner can see it. When receiving the business card, take it with both hands. Turn it around and take time to read it, even if it is written in Chinese characters. Showing interest in the business card indicates your interest in the owner. When you put the card away put it in a pocket next to your heart. The place where you put the business card symbolizes how

valuable this contact is for you, so don't put it in the back pocket of your pants. During a meeting you can put the business cards in front of you to look up the names of the participants.

Business dinner

In China, eating is vital in more than the literal sense. This is also reflected in the way the Chinese count people. Westerners count groups by the head or talk about a headcount, while the Chinese count groups by the number of mouths. In addition, there is no important business meeting that does not include a dinner. Most Chinese restaurants have separate rooms where you can eat and have business talks in private.

If you're not able to eat with chopsticks, learn it. There is nothing more embarrassing than an international salesman in Asia, who cannot eat with chopsticks. Asking for a fork and knife is pointless if you are not in a special Western restaurant.

The dining tables are usually round and have a smaller turntable on top. Food is served in a different way than in Chinese Restaurants in the Western hemisphere. You won't get your own plate of food. Instead, all the dishes are put on the turntable. The host orders at least one dish more than people or mouths are at the table. The food is not eaten in any particular order, like a Western menu. Turn the table, so the dish you like is in front of you and put some of the food on your plate or in your bowl. Sometimes there is a spoon in the dish. If not, use your own chopsticks. If you don't need your chopsticks do not rest them vertically in the bowl, as this is interpreted as a harbinger of death. Instead place them (horizontally) on the edge of the bowl. If food has dropped from your chopstick on the table, just ignore it and take fresh food from your bowl. Take the bowl into one hand and hold it close to your mouth, to reduce the distance, which you have to cover while balancing food on your chopsticks. Don't empty a plate completely unless it was so good that another one should be ordered. When you're finished with eating, leave some food in your bowl.

In some parts of China, it is the duty of the host to make sure you get the best pieces of food. In this case, the host might put some food into your bowl without asking you. He will take the

food with the chopsticks he is using, but an attentive host will turn his chopsticks around to the unused side.

Chinese dishes are usually very healthy and often consist of vegetables. If meat is served, the preferred meat is chicken, beef and pork. Fish and other seafood are always served fresh (often out of a restaurant-owned fish tank). Don't shy away from a dinner invitation. No one will invite you to eat dog, cat or snake unless you ask for it. Most Chinese don't like these either.

As Westerners we believe that rice is an indispensable part of any Asian dish. But in China rice is considered "the bread of the poor", so don't be surprised if no rice is served. You will also have a hard time finding fortune cookies, because these cookies have been made popular by Chinese restaurants in the United States.

Sometimes business negotiations are held during dinner, which means that a dinner can take hours.

Drinking

In China you can find all kinds of beverages. Soft drinks, a wide variety of teas, beer, wine and different liquors are all common. The tea cup usually sits on a little plate and thus can easily be mistaken for the rice bowl. A good host will pour and serve the tea for you. The Chinese also love beer. If you are from Germany, you will most certainly be served Tsingdao beer. This beer is widely regarded as the best Chinese beer, because the brewery, which today is the second largest brewery in China, was originally founded by Germans in 1903. There is a wide variety of Chinese beer available and you will most certainly find one matching your taste. Some excellent hard liquor, which will be served in small cups, is also available. The Chinese toast "Gan Bei!" is the call to drink the whole cup in one gulp.

Alcohol is often served and drunk in large quantities. If you have an important meeting the next day and want to stop drinking, do not touch your glass or cup, even if your host is filling it to the top.

Saying no without losing face

It is easy to lose face by saying no. This is why you will not hear it very often and you should avoid using it. The trick is to find a good and polite excuse.



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For example, if you don't want to drink alcohol, don't say: "I never drink alcohol, because I do not like it." This could imply that the host was serving something you do not like. A better excuse is: "My doctor told me not to drink alcohol." This implies that the decision was made by somebody else. Also, health is always important to the Chinese, so they will respect this decision and nobody loses face.

Small talk

A good personal relationship is the basis for a good business relationship. So practice small talk and take time to get to know your business partner. However, refrain from discussing politics or other sensitive topics, as this might be uncomfortable for your host. Pictures of your family and your home are much appreciated. Since the family is very important for the Chinese, they will love to hear about yours. You will be showered with compliments about how handsome everyone in your family is. When pictures are shown to you, the same delight and compliments are expected from you. You can also show pictures of the landscape or landmarks of your home town or region.

Sport is also a good topic of conversation. Chinese people love soccer and basketball. They often support foreign national teams and are very well informed about the performance of teams in different national leagues.

Relationships and gifts

From a Western perspective, Chinese people seem to have rather complicated relationships to one another. The exchange of gifts is very important to keep these relationships going. If you want to build a relationship, a gift is expected. If you are not prepared, you will most certainly receive a gift and have nothing to give in return. This does never look good, even in our Western culture.

However, be careful with what you are giving, because a lot of things have a symbolic meaning. For example, giving a watch implies that the receiver's time is coming to an end. Therefore, try to find out what the person might appreciate as a gift. A decorative souvenir displaying your company's name is always welcome. Ideally, a gift would be something from your home country that cannot be bought in China. Never give a present to a Chinese with the la-

bel "Made in China" – not even as a giveaway at fairs. Also keep in mind that the monetary value of the gift is evaluated. This means, that receiving a gift of great value is bound to great expectations.

Even the color of the paper the gift is wrapped in plays a role. Red is the most appreciated color. It would look greedy to open the gift at once, so don't be disappointed if your gift is put aside, unopened. Often you will hear humble words like "this was not necessary" or "the gift is too much", etc. If you really want the present to be opened right away, you will probably have to follow a more complex code of practice: First you ask the person to open the present immediately. If he refuses (which he probably will), you offer to open it together. If this offer is also refused, you ask if you may open the present for the other person. Once you have unwrapped the gift, you can use the chance to take a photograph of you and the other person holding the gift.

Where to find help?

When the Chinese market first opened to foreign companies, doing business in China was only possible for global players. But today there is a good infrastructure for medium and small companies as well. China has institutes in many countries to help foreign companies find a business partner in China. Information can also be found on the websites of the Chinese embassy in your country. Alternatively, you can contact your embassy in China. They often have information about service companies that can support you.

Some countries run facilities in China that house a hotel, restaurant, meeting rooms and offices for newcomers to the Chinese market. One of these is the German Centre Shanghai. Industry and trade organizations offer business trips to China. On these trips you have the backup and support of a whole group of business partners. This can help to prevent mistakes on both sides. Remember that you are as foreign to the Chinese as the Chinese are to you.

A good translator will be your eyes and ears in a foreign world. If he has an understanding of both worlds, he can help prevent misunderstandings. This can be done by choosing the right words or giving the right hints. Also, when preparing for a meeting, take the time to discuss specific expectations beforehand.

To conclude

Does your Chinese experience leave you feeling like a small child, who can't really communicate what he wants? Don't get frustrated or angry if things aren't progressing as quickly as you like. Anger is a very negative emotion in China, revealing a lack of character. So remain calm and you will find that Chinese people can be very kind and are willing to forgive a lot of your mistakes. You will receive help to an unparalleled extent.

Expect to be surprised: As China is quickly catching up with the Western world a lot of young Chinese have taken the opportunity to study abroad. Your business partner might have a master's degree from a British or American University, speak eloquent English and know exactly how to build a good business relationship with you. Developing business relationships in China takes time, and good relationships are worth more than the best contract.

contact

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Cycling for humanity

The annual OnOurBikes fund raising tour has raised 10,025 US dollars for the Translators without Borders charity. The funds help to train Kenyan healthcare translators.



Image: Lucjan Szeleter towing the OnOurBikes mini-caravan

By Louise Law

Humanitarian support comes in many guises. Translation charity, Translators without Borders (TWB) is the leading charity for the localization industry. TWB provides translation support to crisis-affected communities and international aid organizations, to those in distress who need to communicate and access critical, accurate information in their native language.

Crucial to the success of TWB is the continued support from sponsors and donations through fund raising activities. One inspiring event that takes place each year in spring is the

OnOurBikes long-distance sponsored bike ride. The driving force behind this is Polish-based language services provider, TextPartner. The core TextPartner cycling team consists of three members: Marek Gawrysiak, Ewa Gawrysiak and Lucjan Szeleter but many more people joined the team for different legs of the journey.

For each annual cross-border bike ride, the team “sells” kilometers to sponsors at five US dollars per kilometer, and all donations go straight to TWB. More specifically, the money is put into TWB’s Fund-a-Transla-

tor program, part of the Healthcare Translator Training Center in Nairobi, Kenya, where TWB provides training, computer equipment and Internet connection to healthcare translators. The trained TWB translators also translate medical and health-related articles for Wikipedia – a service available at no cost from any mobile phone in Kenya.

“Translators without Borders uses language to spread knowledge around the world, we use bicycles to raise awareness and funds for their mission,” explains Marek Gawrysiak, Managing Partner at Text-

Partner and member of the OnOurBikes cycling team.

TextPartner completed the first OnOurBikes ride in 2012 when the team cycled 440 kilometers in four days from Poland to Budapest. The team raised enough money to pay for two TWB translators to train at the Translator Center in Kenya for one year. The 2013 ride took the team through the Alps and into the Ukraine. They cycled 600 kilometers across Poland, the Ukraine, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, plus an extra 70 kilometers into the Alps and raised a total of 3,250 US dollars.

The Baltic Loop 2014

On May 3rd the team completed the 2014 ride, the “Baltic Loop” where the OnOurBike team cycled for eleven days and completed a 2,300 km ride through Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, and raised 10,025 US dollars! Team members stopped for a few days at the European Language Industry Association (ELIA) conference in Riga where they were given a free booth to raise awareness of the project. A highlight of the “Baltic Loop” was Lucjan Szeleter, who towed a special bike trailer during the entire tour, to ensure that the logos of the country sponsors were always visible.

What’s next? Capitals Route 2015

Preparations for the OnOurBikes 2015 bike ride are already in full swing. The 2000-kilometer route will start in mid-May in Dublin, Ireland, and will continue through England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, and will finish at the TextPartner headquarters in Poland. The team is planning to stop over at

the Localization World conference that takes place in Berlin from June 3-5, 2015.

"The OnOurBikes team are awesome!" said Lori Thicke, founder of TWB. "The team at TextPartner does a fantastic job raising much-needed funds to train the translators at the TWB Healthcare Center over in Nairobi. Since they started this annual event, they have cycled over 3000 kilometers and raised nearly 16,000 US dollars for TWB – about 15 translators trained for one year!"

"The famous Polish polar explorer and author, Marek Kamiński, states that he uses his bicycle to write books. We use our bicycles to give African people access to critical, life-saving knowledge in their native languages. We believe access to knowledge in a native language is a basic human right. Once a year we get on our bikes to unite the translation world in its efforts to help Translators without Borders carry out their valuable mission", declares Marek Gawrysiak.

Become a sponsor

If you are interested in sponsoring any OnOurBikes ride, visit www.onourbikes.info

For more information about Translators without Borders, visit www.translatorswithoutborders.org

contact

Louise Law is Global Communications Manager at Welocalize & Marketing volunteer at Translators without Borders.



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Sep 10	SDL Innovate Sydney www.sdl.com/innovate	Sydney, Australia
Sep 12	SDL Innovate Tokyo www.sdl.com/innovate	Tokyo, Japan
Oct 1 – 2	Brand2Global 2014 www.brand2global.com	London, United Kingdom
Oct 5 – 7	ELIA Networking Days www.elia-association.org	Tuscany, Italy
Oct 22 – 24	Information Development World www.eiseverywhere.com/ehome/86671	San Jose, CA, USA
Oct 29 – 31	Localization World Vancouver www.localizationworld.com	Vancouver, Canada
Nov 5 – 7	Languages & The Media www.languages-media.com	Berlin, Germany
Nov 11 – 13	tcworld conference 2014 http://conferences.tekom.de/tcworld-conference-2014/	Stuttgart, Germany
Nov 17 – 19	Content Strategy Applied www.eiseverywhere.com/ehome/93210	San Jose, CA, USA

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①

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The 10th **Languages & The Media Conference**, under the theme Smart Technologies, Smart Translations, will take place in Berlin from November 5 – 7, 2014. It will bring together researchers, language practitioners, translators, interpreters, software developers and all those who produce, market, or distribute audiovisual materials for information, entertainment or educational purposes to discuss these pressing questions.

As the flow of content increases, so does the demand for translation in the form of dubbing, subtitling, voiceover, subtitling for the deaf and audio description. Technology has come to play an important part when trying to catch up with these changes. In recent years, developments in machine translation, cloud storage, digital television and voice recognition, amongst others, have not only had wide-reaching ramifications for the media and translation sectors, but have also gone mainstream, with users across the world having easy access to sophisticated technologies and expecting instantaneous results.

Within the industry, new job profiles are emerging alongside new services and the employment landscape is being radically altered by expanding possibilities of access to audiovisual media. The needs of global broadcasting, for instance, must accommodate potentially conflicting demands for diversification and localization, whilst NGOs and international organizations must overcome the complex and diverse demands of operating in multilingual fields.

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