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From the editor

Current research suggests that most companies' approach to customer satisfaction might be shortsighted. Until now, organizations have emphasized so-called customer touchpoints, those critical moments when a customer interacts with the organization – be it face-to-face in a shop, online or on a customer service hotline. Service-oriented companies have spent a great deal of time and money to analyze and improve those touchpoints, believing that this will lead to greater customer satisfaction and increased revenue.

Today, organizations begin to see the bigger picture. Instead of brushing up those short interactions, they manage the complete journey. Not only do they do their best to handle individual transactions, but they also seek to understand the reason for the customer's complaint or call, address the cause and share the results to improve the entire process.

According to a recent study by Forrester Research, some 72 percent of global business leaders say that improving the customer experience is a top business priority – just behind growing revenues at 75 percent. Thus, customer experience is one of the most important drivers of business success today. "A unified customer experience is a breakthrough innovation that can create signifi-

cant competitive advantage," states Scott Abel, content strategist and author of this magazine's focus story (page 11).

For technical communicators, driving this improved experience means breaking down silos and collaborating with everyone in the company who creates content – from marketing and sales through to customer service. In a globalized world this also means combining corporate branding with the cultural and linguistic needs of customers, wherever they may be. Diana Ballard digs into the international, multilingual aspects of customer experience (page 14).

Social media provide a great source of feedback, which can help to maintain a brand that customers feel connected to. Raymond Calbay shares his strategy of social media listening (page 20).

New to Stuttgart? We hope to welcome many of you on the new premises of the tcworld conference in Stuttgart. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the birthplace of Mercedes and Porsche, we have put together a short guide to Stuttgart (page 36).

We wish you all a fruitful and enjoyable conference!

Corinna Melville



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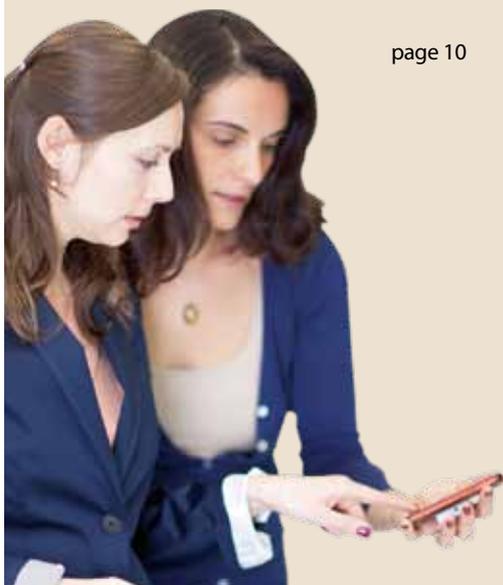
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Creating a consistent customer experience

New research suggests that today's customers expect a unified experience from the first TV ad that catches their attention all the way through to customer service and technical support. What role can technical communication play in this paradigm shift?

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Using social media to improve technical content

Social media channels such as Twitter and LinkedIn are valuable sources of feedback for technical writers. But how can we extract the important bits from the chatter?

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Innovation through DITA

To reap the full benefits of DITA, technical writers need to do more than simply migrate their documentation. They need to rethink the entire documentation process.

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GLOBAL BUSINESS

Despite its dominance in China, Alibaba won't be sweeping away US market share in the near future. Rather, it will take a major acquisition or a number of years for Alibaba to pull together a platform that could compete with major players like Amazon, Apple, eBay, and Facebook, according to new Forrester research.

But when it comes to Alibaba's long-term strategy, anything is fair game. "Future investment possibilities include real estate, or possibly an alternative payment provider to help drive cross-border sales," writes Forrester in the new research. "The specific strategy is unclear, but it's likely that whatever Alibaba invests in will provide the one thing the company cares about the most: consumer data."

While Alibaba's end game does remain unclear, Forrester sees three main global investment strategies stemming from Alibaba's shift to operate outside of China: 1) eCommerce investments to launch new platforms and drive sales; 2) logistics partnerships to move products faster, cheaper, and farther; and 3) mobile investments to acquire customer intelligence.

www.forrester.com

European firms will spend even more on social media marketing

European social media marketing spend will reach €4.3 billion by 2019, up from €2.6 billion this year – a 10.5 percent compound annual growth rate (CAGR). This is according to research firm Forrester's latest five-year social media marketing forecast for the 17 Western European countries.

Across the region, social marketing spend is being driven by consumers' increased mobile usage, with social mobile advertising growing at a 20 percent CAGR over the next five years. By 2019, approximately €3,540 million – 82 percent of total spend – will be delivered through mobile, while only €772 million (18 percent) will come from desktop. This shift is most obvious in the UK and Germany, where Forrester forecast social media spend on desktop to fall at a compounded annual rate of -17.9 percent and -14.4 percent respectively, through 2019.

Facebook continues to dominate European consumers' social habits, with an 8 percent increase in engagement since 2012. Twitter lags behind Facebook, with only 14 percent of EU-7 online adults

visiting the social site at least monthly, compared to Facebook's 60 percent. But recent changes to Twitter's advertising platform and its geotargeting offering will help it to become a media force to be reckoned with in Europe over the next few years.



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Multilingual content gives global brands the competitive edge

Making language and localization a priority is a critical first step for brands to gain a competitive international marketing and sales advantage. According to independent market research firm Common Sense Advisory (CSA Research), it takes twelve languages to reach 80 percent of the world's online audience and 21 to reach 90 percent. To optimize multilingual content and streamline international operations, growing numbers of global corporations and language service providers (LSPs) rely on translation management systems (TMS). TMS tools

facilitate the rapid development, day-to-day management, and publishing of multilingual content in the language services industry. Based on in-depth interviews with 28 TMS technology providers, CSA Research recently published its 2014 report on TMS. The purpose of this report is to clarify the types of TMS available today and assist technology buyers in identifying the correct sub-category of systems that will best address their particular business case. It addresses the technology and process innovation trends that affect

technology decisions for enterprises and LSPs.

Senior analyst and TMS expert at CSA Research, Ben Sargent, explains, "Before spending time or making costly mistakes, make sure you know the complete picture, which you won't be hearing from the software vendors, or from other practitioners who only know their own work environment. Our research takes you inside the \$37 billion dollar translation industry for a backroom tour of translation process and tools."

Key components of the report include:

- Emerging and ongoing industry trends and how they affect the TMS selection process
- The role of TMS in the globally distributed supply chain of translation production
- The six types of commercial TMS available and alternatives
- Elements or functional components needed to address nine common business case scenarios

The report answers the following questions:

- Why do companies adopt TMS – what are they trying to accomplish?
 - Which departments use TMS, what size companies, and how do they outsource?
 - Which business scenario matches their current situation and how will their needs change over time?
- How are adoption trends changing as TMS use expands into more countries and more industries?

www.commonsenseadvisory.com



IAOP RELEASES 2ND EDITION OF ITS OPBOK

The International Association of Outsourcing Professionals has released the newest version of its *Outsourcing Professionals Body of Knowledge*, a cohesive and comprehensive outline of the generally recognized good practices and skills required to ensure sourcing success and reflect continually evolving knowledge. The OPBOK provides full guidance on the critical factors in any outsourcing program.

www.iaop.org

SAFABA AND MEMSOURCE PARTNER TECHNOLOGY

Safaba Translation Solutions and MemSource Technologies, a developer of cloud translation software, have entered a technology partnership. The joint solution allows access to Safaba's MT technology from within Memsource Cloud and support of all advanced MT analytics features such as the post-editing analysis.

www.safaba.com

SKRIVANEK OPENS OFFICE IN AUSTRIA

Skrievanek Group, a provider of localization solutions, has opened a new office in Vienna, Austria. The new location brings the company's network total to 45 offices in 17 countries throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas.

www.skrievanek.com

VASONT SYSTEMS PARTNERS WITH INGENIUX

Corporation Vasont Systems, a component content management solutions company, has partnered technology with Ingeniux Corporation, a web and social content management software company. The combined technology provides a structured content and web experience management solution.

www.vasont.com

Marketers must adapt to engage next generation

SDL's "Five Truths for Future Marketers" series shares millennial preferences and behaviors, and recommends best practices for evolving marketing to connect with the next generation of customers.

The average millennial (ages 18-36) checks his smartphone 45 times a day, and is 56 percent more likely to discover brand content on social networks than via search engine or traditional email, according to a study by SDL.

The study was conducted as part of a new SDL series titled "Five Truths for Future Marketers," which details five key ways that marketers must adapt to engage the next generation of highly connected and informed consumers whose digital preferences are vastly different and may not respond to traditional marketing tactics. The Five Truths for Future Marketers are:

1. Campaigns are extinct
2. Your data trumps big data
3. Content finds the consumer

4. There is only one language
5. Channels are irrelevant

Campaigns are extinct

The first report in the series is titled "Campaigns are Extinct," and examines the need for marketers to advance beyond traditional marketing campaign approaches, particularly when marketing to millennials.

Your data trumps big data

The second report "Your Data Trumps Big Data" found that despite all the hype surrounding Big Data, it's the small data - the customer's data - that really impacts the bottom line. Millennials in the U.S. will respond to brands when they use data specific to them to create a contextualized and personal customer experience. 60 percent of U.S. millennials would

provide more personal data to a company they trust. If brands are using tracked information to better the customer experience, consumers will see how the data is being used and ultimately begin to trust the motives of the brand - fostering future engagements and ultimately purchases.

Content finds the consumer

Marketers have come to realize that churning out mountains of content is not a sustainable or effective way to target its millennial customers. Fortunately, volume doesn't matter but creating the right content and delivering it consistently - wherever your customers are - does. Millennials turn to social networks for content discovery first, drastically outranking online and customizable newsfeeds, according to the third report "Content Finds the Customer."

There is only one language

According to the fourth report "There Is Only One Language", 32 percent of millennial consumers in English-speaking countries prefer a language other than English, and 46 percent are more likely to purchase if information is presented in their preferred language. These findings demonstrate that it is imperative for brands to speak to consumers in the language they desire to improve the overall customer experience, foster brand advocacy and ultimately drive increased sales.

Channels are irrelevant

According to the final report "Channels are Irrelevant", today's consumers no longer care about where they are or what device they are on when interacting with a brand. 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. All five reports and infographics can be downloaded from the SDL website.

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OASIS approves XLIFF 2.0 Localization Interchange Standard

IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, SDL, Symantec, University of Limerick LRC, and others advance interoperability between commercial and open-source localization tools

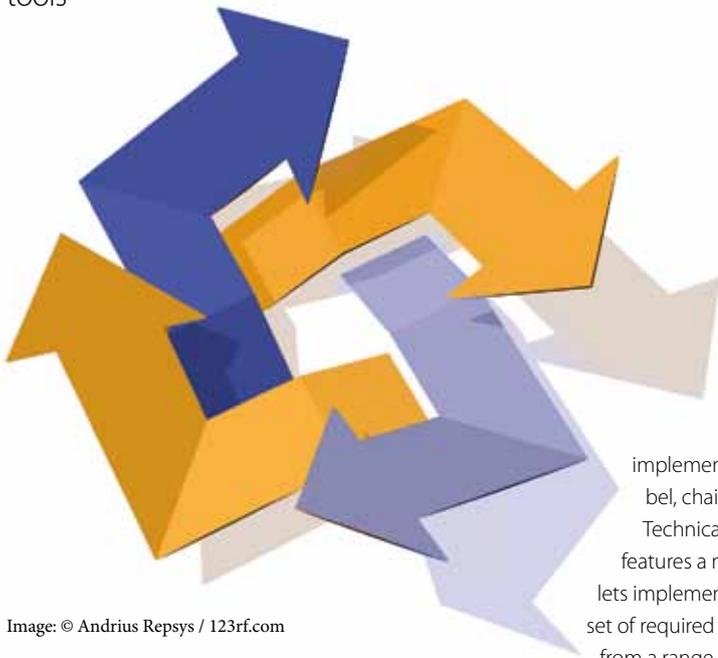


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The OASIS international open standards consortium has announced the approval of the XML Localization Interchange File Format (XLIFF) 2.0. Enabling interoperability between localization tools, XLIFF frees publishers from the difficulty and expense of pre-processing localizable content from proprietary formats. XLIFF 2.0 is now an official OASIS Standard, a status that signifies the highest level of ratification.

XLIFF defines a standard, extensible vocabulary that captures relevant metadata for any point in the lifecycle so that it can then be exchanged between a variety of commercial and open source tools. It supports common software and document data formats and mark-up languages. "XLIFF is widely regarded as the gold standard for localization. Version 2.0 enhances interoperability and makes the standard even easier to

implement," said Bryan Schnabel, chair of the OASIS XLIFF Technical Committee. "XLIFF 2.0 features a modular approach that lets implementers support the core set of required features and choose from a range of optional modules.

The mechanics for common localization tasks like segmentation, annotation, and inline have been streamlined. Conformance requirements have been clarified to ensure that compliant XLIFF 2.0 files generated by any tool or process will be accessible by any other tool or process."

A number of tools have been developed by the international community to support the standard, including a test suite, an online validator, and an open source Java Library to create, write, read, and manipulate XLIFF 2.0 documents.

XLIFF 2.0 is offered for implementation on a royalty-free basis. Companies, non-profit groups, governments, academic institutions, and individuals are welcome to participate in the OASIS XLIFF Technical Committee, which continues to advance the standard.

www.oasis-open.org

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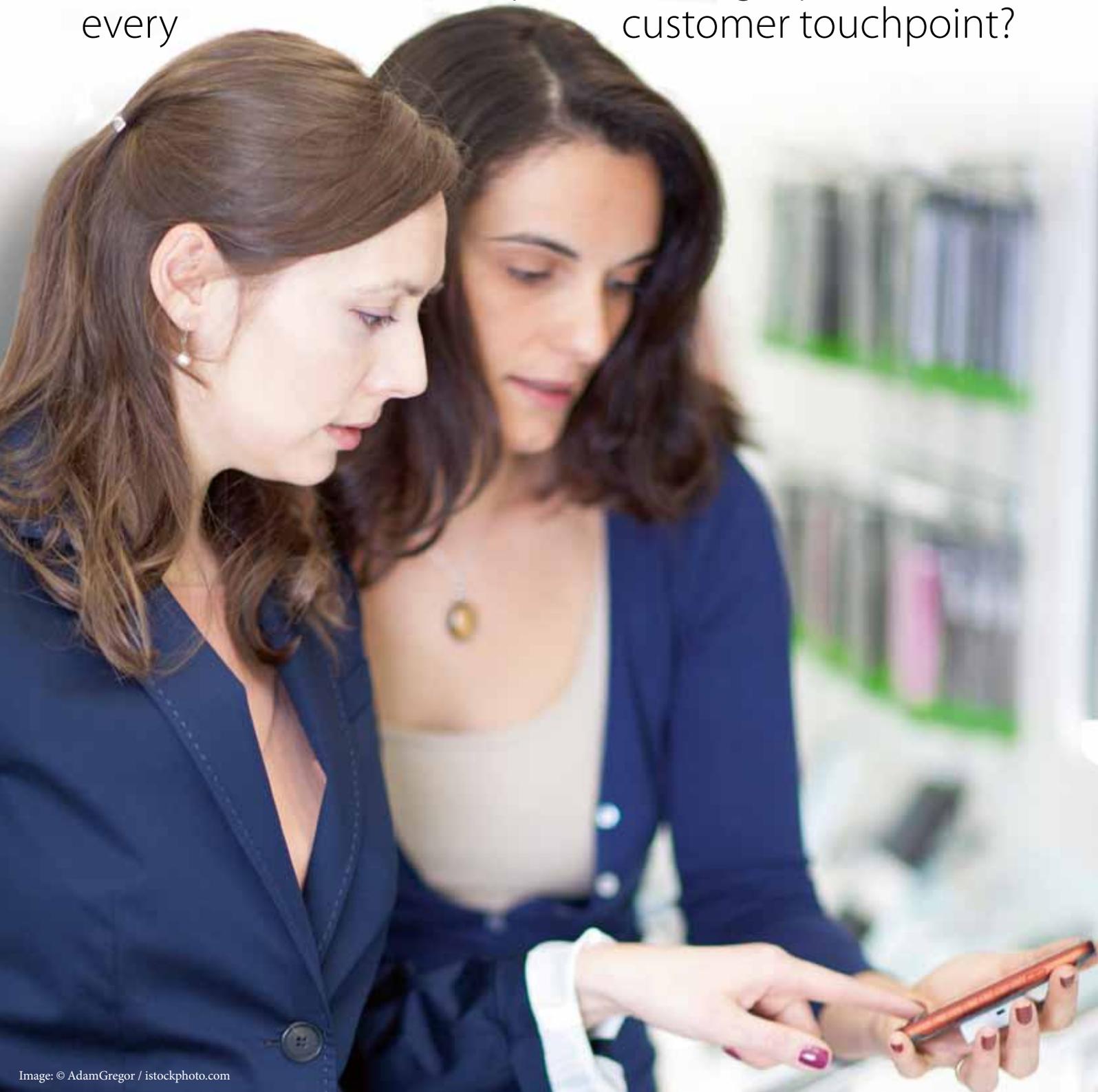
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Creating a consistent customer experience

From marketing material to instruction manuals: Can we unite our content to present a single picture at every customer touchpoint?



Lip service is no longer enough:

Why you need a unified customer experience strategy

By Scott Abel

If you're looking for ways to improve the customer experience, take a close look at the way you produce content. Chances are, you'll discover that many of the frustrations your customers have with your brand are a direct result of their experience with the content you produce. Or, more specifically, a direct result of how your organization creates, manages, and delivers the information you provide to customers. According to research from Gartner, more than 90 percent of organizations don't have a formal content strategy in place to ensure the content they produce is consistent across all customer touchpoints. As a result, the customer journey is riddled with inconsistent experiences. Frustrating and confusing experiences with content that leaves customers wondering, "What happened?" But, it doesn't have to be this way. In organizations where content is valued as a business asset – and where customer experience is more than lip service – the people that create customer-facing content work together. They collaborate to ensure that every interaction a customer has with the brand, across every touchpoint, is consistent. They break down silos that prevent collaboration. They reorganize staff. And, they rethink the way they work. Every effort is laser-focused on efficiently producing content that creates exceptional customer experiences.

What's the problem?

In a word: Silos. Customers expect a unified and consistent experience. But, most brands aren't set up to deliver what customers expect. Silos get

in the way. They damage brand. They negatively impact loyalty. They do nothing to increase sales. It's not enough to dazzle prospects with flashy advertising and sexy marketing collateral. You have to continue to dazzle them by providing amazingly useful, relevant, and accurate content after they become customers. At every touchpoint. On every platform. Every time.

To do so, you'll need to rethink the way content is created, managed, and delivered by information developers in your organization. You'll need to break down the silos between departments. Sales, marketing, PR, technical documentation, support, and training can no longer operate in isolation from one another. To create exceptional experiences based on content, everyone who creates content needs to work together.

A unified customer experience

Once a prospect buys a product or service, the content they interact with is no longer familiar. The instructions provided don't look, feel, or sound anything like the marketing and sales materials that introduced them to your brand. Neither does the service contract, the warranty, the customer support website, the product documentation, nor the training materials. For no good reason, the content experience changes drastically – and not in a good way. That's why organizations that recognize the importance of a unified customer experience have started rethinking what it means to be customer-centric.

If your organization is like most, it isn't organized around the customer. Instead, it's organized as companies always have been: around a corporate hierarchy. Each department nestled nicely into a walled garden. Protected. Separate. Different. Cut off from the others who produce content for prospects and customers.

When a company is organized around itself, it's impossible to produce a unified customer experience. Silos ensure content inconsistency and make it impossible for an organization to speak with one voice. That's because marketers working in isolation from customer support have no idea why customers call the help hotline. The training department creates content without any involvement from the documentation team. And the technical support staff has no idea what the folks in sales are communicating to prospects.

But, when a company recognizes that the content it creates – regardless of who created it or for what purposes – has a direct impact on customer experience, silos come down. Content creators start to think strategically. Old models are discarded. Collaboration becomes the norm. Customers notice.

If your organization isn't able to provide a unified customer experience, chances are you are a victim of what content strategy guru Ann Rockley calls "the content silo trap". Here are a few steps you can take to overcome this communication obstacle.





Image: © marigranula / 123rf.com

✓ Step one: Admit you have a problem

Much the same as a 12-step program for – let's say – Alcoholics Anonymous, the first step to creating a unified customer experience strategy involves admitting that you have a problem. Recognizing the problem involves taking an honest look at the way everyone in your organization creates content. And, it involves understanding the experience of your prospects and customers at every stage of the customer journey.

Action: Put it in writing. Admit that you have a problem. Spell out why you believe it exists and what the implications of not solving it might be. Make sure to capture both the problems you believe are caused by content silos and the estimated financial impact on the organization.

✓ Step two: Take an honest look

Take an honest look at your content production processes. If you do, what you're likely to find is that most everyone tries to create the best content possible; content they believe

your prospects and customers want and need. They do so with the best of intentions. But, they do so in isolation from – and differently than – everyone else in the company who is creating content for exactly the same prospects and customers.

If you take the time to look a little closer, especially with help from a knowledgeable and experienced outsider, you'll find that the people who create customer-facing content in your organization do so using different approaches, rationales, models, and personas. They may use different – and incompatible – authoring software, content management systems, and other tools. They may even hoard content, making it difficult for others in your organization to easily find and repurpose it. You may also find that content creators (and their managers) are rewarded for completing work on time and on budget, instead of being rewarded for working smarter. Content creators may not be empowered to work with others in meaningful ways. And, department managers may be fearful of stepping outside the existing corporate hierarchy. Instead, they may be focused on protecting their turf (and their jobs).

Action: Hire a qualified specialist with experience in taking a critical look at the way organizations create, manage, and deliver content. An external, process-oriented content strategy expert will ask the right questions; challenge your assumptions; measure your efficiency; identify process bottlenecks, unnecessary technology hurdles, and manual tasks that would be better performed by machine.

✓ Step three: Enlist the help of a champion who can influence organizational change

If collaboration and teamwork are little more than buzzwords spouted at your cross-departmental management meetings, your organization will be unable to create a unified customer experience. That's because unifying the customer experience means unifying the content-producing parts of your organization. In organizations that value the customer experience created when a prospect or a customer interacts with content, all content creators

work toward a unified goal – a remarkable, content-powered customer experience. These organizations have made a commitment to unifying content creation, management, and delivery processes in an effort to produce consistent content and to speak with one voice. If your organization is like most, the leaders probably don't realize there's an enterprise-wide content problem. And, even if they do, without a clear assessment of the damage (prospects decide not to purchase your products/services and customers decide to purchase future products/services from the competition) they won't provide the level of support necessary to effect meaningful change.

Action: Create a unified content strategy designed to provide your organization with the ability to create content that supports a unified customer experience. Ensure the plan includes specific, measurable improvements and actionable steps that can be taken to get there. Enlist the help of a champion.

The best champions are upper-level managers; folks with influence and power – and access to budget dollars. Find out what your champion cares about most (what do they think success looks like?) and ensure your plan of attack addresses their concerns.

Make sure every step of the project provides value for the champion and map your metrics back to items the champion cares about, like ridding the organization of unnecessary waste or helping the company increase sales.

Change, maturity, and innovation

A unified customer experience is a breakthrough innovation that can create significant competitive advantage. When prospects enjoy the content experience you provide, they are much more likely to purchase a product or service from you. And, if existing customers are delighted by the experience, they may be more likely to remain loyal customers.

Breakthrough innovations don't happen overnight. They are accomplished incrementally, over time. They usually involve significant change. They often start as a pilot or proof-of-concept that is based on an initial concept that is refined and improved as the project matures.

Breakthroughs can be difficult to achieve, especially if the organization lacks the ability (or the maturity) to execute. The ability of an organization to quickly and effectively react to threats, opportunities, or market forces is an indicator of how well they innovate (and how mature they are in the innovation department).

Remember, significant change can be challenging. It takes time and money to create a breakthrough innovation. Adopting a unified customer experience strategy will be easier for some organizations than for others. A strong leader, governance, funding, appropriate tools and technologies, as well as process maturity, are required to succeed.

Innovative breakthroughs are often game-changing approaches that delight some and

frighten others. To ensure the least amount of friction between content-producing groups, enlist the help of a change-management expert to ensure the least resistance.

Learn more

If your job is to create an exceptional customer experience based on content, consider attending Information Development World 2014: The Conference for Technical, Marketing, and Product Information Developers. The event takes place October 22-24 in San Jose, CA. The conference exists to help organizations learn to create content experiences that convert prospects and retain customers.

www.informationdevelopmentworld.com

contact

Scott Abel,

"The Content Wrangler",

is an internationally recognized content strategist who specializes in helping organizations

improve the way they author, maintain, and deliver information to those who need it. Scott writes regularly for content industry publications and is a popular presenter at content events around the globe.



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Creating content for global-ready customer experiences

More and more companies strive to achieve personalized customer experiences that speak to the user naturally and fluently. In a globalized world, personalizing content also means combining corporate branding with the cultural and linguistic needs of customers around the world.



Image: © Tsung-Lin Wu/ 123rf.com

By Diana Ballard

By 2017, 90 percent of Internet users will access online content from smartphones and other mobile devices, increasing from 73.4 percent in 2013. Sharing life and work on the telephone opens a world of opportunity for personalized content experiences, with the power to deliver the right content, in the right language, at the right time, and on the right device or channel.

Therefore, it is no surprise that 75 percent of mobile application developers want access to user data in order to deliver personalized content, amid concerns over privacy.

Location is the most sought-after data, with 32 percent of mobile application companies wanting to know where users are located.

Beyond factual data, such as location, understanding the persona of the user remains the most critical key to delivering customer-rich experiences with content. With more and more businesses expanding across geographic borders, understanding user behavior in a global context is a strategic imperative for any organization.

While English is the major content language online, the Internet is increasingly exposing users to multiple languages, and now multilingualism is a social and business phenomenon. The global market for translation services is set to increase from an estimated \$37.19 billion in 2014 to \$47 billion in 2018. Content strategists are placing global insight, globalization and cultural openness at the heart of the content creation and planning processes. However, developing a global content strategy still remains a major challenge because it is a relatively new discipline. Modern localization itself has emerged only over the last 25 years. More than a question of language alone, products, services and content may be consumed differently around the world.

Residents of the U.K. and the U.S. have long enjoyed the privilege of speaking the major language of international trade. This has brought linguistic and cultural diversity into the common business and social psyche of two nations that are geographically isolated without any (or many) bordering countries. This is changing fast,

of course, especially in the U.S. where more and more people now have a mother tongue other than English.

In the past, translation has suffered from a sense of isolation as entrenched as the physical trade routes connecting one country to another. Often, translation has been perceived as a matter of converting words from one language to another at the end of a production line, often absorbing delays elsewhere earlier in the process. Along with complaints over lead times, escalating costs for translation as content and languages increase, localization may be perceived as a burden, rather than an investment creating valuable revenue streams.

Without multilingualism, it has been hard work to plan for globalization. Traditionally, in a worst-case scenario, user instructions ill-fitting the product are “transferred” during translation to contaminate the content of other locales, with potentially more serious implications, making the product feel less relevant, more complicated, confusing or simply foreign.

Now, there’s no hiding the user instructions in the box anymore. Dynamic content comprises all content across all languages, and is as important for brand prestige as marketing campaigns to inspire loyalty. Throughout the user experience, all content, not just marketing material, leaves a lasting impression. User instructions may prove as valuable as marketing content and may ultimately enable users to deploy products and services fully.

Personalization is not the only demand on content. Other demands include:

- Higher volumes of content and increased regulatory control
- Faster time to market demanding agility in processes
- Growth of channels and devices
- Increase in markets and languages

According to Ann Rockley, a pioneer in content reuse, intelligent content strategies for multi-channel delivery, and content management best practices, “Content is the lifeblood of an organization.” In her book *Managing Enterprise Content: A Unified Content Strategy* she states: “Structurally rich and semantically categorized content” must be “automatically discoverable, reusable, reconfigurable, and adaptable.” So-called intelligent content enables companies to rapidly adapt content to the changing needs of their customers and the devices they use.

It may be ironic that the sustainable delivery of personalized content requires us to move away from the idea of hand-crafting content. A dynamic content model is based on topics and modular content, a reuse strategy and a taxonomy strategy. The personalization of content is built into the plan by downstream design.

Creating global content that is translation-ready requires collaboration across the supply chain and understanding common and diverse cultural, market, and linguistic values and drivers. Re-engineering source content destined for translation has never been more important as we move to a more fragmented, continuous localization model.

A host of activities and terminology have emerged around global content strategy.

Globalization

This is the analysis and plan behind any global content strategy. The plan should be fine-tuned regularly and include a review of performance together with an assessment of current and future needs. Success depends on how well the global supply chain – including language

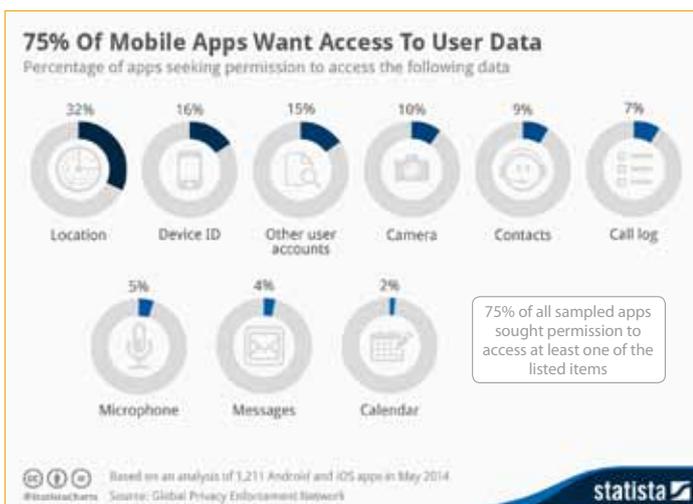


Image: What App developers want to know about the users of their Apps.

Source: www.statista.com/topics/779/mobile-internet

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service providers – are connected to a common purpose, defined by guidelines and best practices, and underpinned by an intelligent content strategy and technology suite. The sense of partnerships and strength of collaboration will ultimately dictate the success of messaging across all languages and how efficiently and cost-effectively it is delivered.

Internationalization

This is the process of making content world-ready before translation. The better R&D, engineering and marketing teams anticipate global-ready products and services, the easier and more successful localized versions will be. The products they navigate and describe will more closely meet the needs of global consumers. Internationalization is increasingly valuable in agile software models, providing easy access to translatable content and avoiding the need to re-design for each locale for a wide variety of reasons, including currency, time/date, formats, units of measure, to name just a few of the traditional localization challenges. Localization must handle apps sensitively to deliver technically accurate content in the right tone and style, which is adaptable to the device. For example, allowing “white space” for translation to flow after translation

from English into European languages, such as German or French, will have a huge impact on the look and feel, as well as the usability of any content.

Content creation best practices

Global English and similar authoring disciplines not only serve to promote clarity, simplicity and consistency in the source language content across authoring teams before translation, but almost always significantly reduce word counts while also increasing re-usability, saving time and money during translation. Style guides in the source language (e.g. English) and across all translated languages start by defining the audience, style and tone of voice (e.g. formal vs. informal) with regional variations and personas based on locale and cultural diversity.

Core terminology

Understanding the key concepts and values of your company, products, services and features will help everyone in the global supply chain understand the core terminology unique to your organization. Establishing a brief list of critical terminology is essential. This will prescribe translatable and non-translatable items, generic

vs. explicit terms, usage of acronyms, and adoption of global vs. regional terms. Understanding the concepts behind your unique terminology will be the single most influential factor in promoting technical accuracy in the source content and across all language translations.

Depending on the “world-readiness” of content, the global content strategy will include flexible workflows for translation, localization or transcreation. Localization and most especially, transcreation, will allow greater creativity while adapting original source content to local language versions to meet local cultural, business or market drivers. Some organizations will follow a process to establish global (translated) campaigns with original campaigns created in each locale to capture and deliver local messaging. A global content strategy is imperative if companies want to master the increasing content challenges. In an online world, personalized experiences demand impactful, intuitive user interfaces, websites and applications, as well as user information and support information speaking to the user naturally and fluently. Ultimately, any localization task requires a synergy, which can be achieved when a dedicated localization partner works as an extension of the organization they serve.

They are very committed, take part in training and research, and also invest in the thoughtfulness, which brings content and guidelines to life in powerful local language versions. Translation is a form of personalizing content, combining global brand and content imperatives with the local, cultural, and linguistic needs of users around the world. As content goes mobile, never before has the quality of local language versions been more important for true personalization.

contact

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The role of technical communication in customer experience

Attracting and maintaining customers has traditionally been the task of marketing and sales departments. Will the shift towards customer experience require that we redefine the role of technical communication? What new responsibilities and opportunities lie ahead?



Image: © webphotographeer/ istockphoto.com

By Sarah O'Keefe

An emphasis on customer experience will transform the practice of technical communication. "Just get it out the door" is no longer a viable strategy, if it ever has been. Bad technical communication leads to a bad customer experience.

Understanding the hierarchy of content needs

Like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we can develop a hierarchy of content needs, as shown in Figure 1. Technical communicators must assess their practices across the entire hierarchy of content needs starting from the bottom of the pyramid.

To create truly outstanding technical information, your content must meet all of the criteria shown in the pyramid. Minimum viable content satisfies the bottom three criteria: it is available, accurate, and appropriate.

Available: Available content means that information exists, *and* that the person who needs the content has access to it. This category requires that content is findable, searchable, and discoverable – if readers can't successfully locate the content they need, it might exist, but it's not really available to the readers. This includes content that is hidden behind a firewall.

Accurate: Content must be accurate. In this category, we also evaluate information for grammar, formatting, consistency, and other specifications that improve the content quality.

Historically, technical communicators have emphasized accuracy. I think this is because it is one of the few areas in which the content creator can directly control the results. Ensuring that content is available, for example, requires collaboration with other parts of the organization (such as the website team). Collaboration, however, can be the source of delays and other issues.

Appropriate: Appropriate content is content that is delivered in the right language, in the right format and at the right level of complexity. The customer's needs, rather than business preferences, must drive content delivery choices. Content is technically "available" if you put it in an ugly PDF and email it to your customers, but that approach is unlikely to be an appropriate choice. Depending on your customers, appropriate content could mean creating

a mobile-friendly HTML web site, an EPUB file, or something entirely different. Different customers will need different formats, and if technical communicators are tasked with supporting customer experience, they must provide those formats.

To ensure that the right format is available, we need to establish a flexible authoring and publishing environment that can deliver these formats.

To ensure that the right language is available, organizations must first understand their markets and customer requirements, and then implement a solid globalization and localization strategy.

Connected: Connected content allows customers to engage with your information. They should be able to comment on content, provide positive and negative votes, and perhaps edit content or contribute to a community site. Providing connected content means supporting users in engaging with your information.

Intelligent: At the top of the content needs pyramid we find intelligent content. Intelligent content is not just static text, but information that can be manipulated for different purposes.

Examples of intelligent content include personalized content, interactive service manuals, or content that can be filtered based on a specific customer's needs.

Delivering intelligent content often requires you to integrate database content (e.g. product specifications) with authored content. Troubleshooting instructions might be integrated with information from the organization's parts database.

Creating intelligent content requires an investment in technical communication. Technical communicators no longer create stand-alone pieces of content. Instead, the information they produce is part of an information chain.

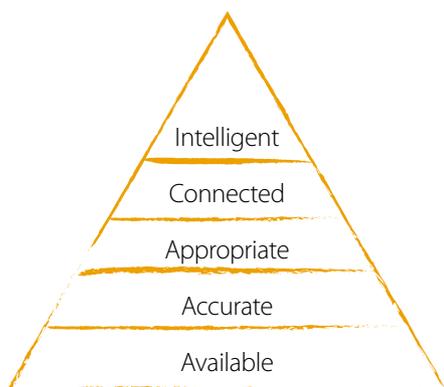


Figure 1: Hierarchy of content needs

Using the hierarchy of content needs

To create truly outstanding technical information, you must meet all of the criteria shown in the pyramid. Minimum viable content meets the bottom three criteria of available, accurate, and appropriate. Unfortunately, many organizations fail to deliver even minimum viable content. They provide content that is outdated or technically inaccurate, that is inaccessible (it's locked behind a firewall) or delivered in an unsuitable format that does not contain the right level of detail, or content that is not available in the required languages.

In many organizations, delivering minimum viable content would be a huge improvement and this should be the first step.

Toward a unified customer experience

To support a unified customer experience, technical communicators need to look beyond the pyramid of content and beyond regulatory compliance. A document that conforms to the machinery directive doesn't necessarily provide a good customer experience. In some cases, regulatory requirements might even stand in the way of a good customer experience. It is our job as technical writers to balance regulatory requirements with customer needs. It's quite common today to have glossy, beautifully designed sales and marketing materials, with targeted offers, fun interactive product configuration calculators, and the like. Once the customer buys the product, things change: The installation instructions are provided as a blurry, photocopied sheet of paper shoved into the product box. More often than not the text itself is incomprehensible. The implied message to the customer is: "Now that we have your money, we no longer care what you think of us."

If customer experience is a priority, we need to make the transition from pre-sales prospect to post-sales customer a smooth one. Instead of focusing solely on the direct costs of technical communication (salaries, software, etc.), we need to start thinking about the indirect costs. An investment in technical communication can affect the following customer experience components:

- Customer satisfaction
- Reputation (positive social media posts instead of being criticized for terrible installation instructions)

- Better match between customer needs and technical content provided
- Less need for product returns (customers understand product better)

Changing our approach to technical communication

A focus on customer experience requires a new approach to technical communication. Organizations need a content strategy that covers all types of content (including marketing material, instruction manuals, etc.), provides for a unified look and feel, and a smooth transition from one content type to another. Technical support content (such as knowledge base articles), marketing white papers, and product documentation all need a common foundation, so that the customer (or prospective customer) has a positive, consistent experience.

Although technical communication today is often constrained by legal, cultural, and linguistic requirements, these factors might not improve the customer experience. Technical communicators need to find the right balance between these requirements and a positive customer experience. They should ask questions such as: Will adhering to an ISO standard result in a document that is easy to understand? How can we create content that suits the customer's needs while complying with the machinery directive?

The customer experience is a chain of interactions. Let's make sure that technical communication is not the weakest link.

contact

Sarah O'Keefe is the founder of Scriptorium Publishing and a content strategy consultant. Since founding the organization in 1997, Sarah has worked with numerous organizations to assess content issues, develop solutions, and implement new technologies that unlock content value. She is the author of *Content Strategy 101: Transform Technical Content into a Business Asset*.



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Using social media to improve technical content

Technical writers can no longer ignore social media. Valuable (and not so valuable) information about your company, its products and possibly even its instruction manuals is being exchanged here on a daily basis. So how can you extract the clues from the chatter?



By Raymond Calbay

In *Likeable Social Media*, Dave Kerpen underscored the most important rule in engaging any type of audience: “Listen first, and always!” Social media isn’t always an obvious information pool for technical communication purposes. Maybe you’re in a specialized business-to-business market, or your company isn’t too keen on maintaining an active presence in social media. Whatever the case, it doesn’t mean that you can’t use social media to funnel back the questions, problems, and user-generated tips that your customers talk about online.

Social media listening should be part of any technical communication team’s content strategy. However, a recent survey by the Center for Information-Development Management reveals that less than half of respondents do so. Are you still thinking about business objectives that could justify time spent on the effort? Listen to this: the majority of users would rather search online for quick answers than press F1 to find official Help content. Ensuring that your customers’ voice is considered in your authoring process could boost your content’s potential to help resolve pain points, reduce call center costs, and double as a brand asset and touchpoint.

Here are some suggestions on how to establish a social media listening program for your team.

Identify channels for monitoring feedback

Remember that you should be more concerned with conversations around your company’s product and not just focused on the technical content you produce. Any social media listening program should start with your own company resources, such as a Facebook fan page, YouTube channel, or corporate blog. But what if your company hasn’t realized the benefit of such accounts yet? You can check out related social networks, forums, and other resources that directly or indirectly touch on your product, service, or industry. You can also use competitors’ sites to dig deeper to what you could be missing out on. Make an initial list of around 20 social media sites that you find worthwhile to monitor, and then split the responsibility within your team.

Design a mechanism for recording feedback

Research and choose the right online tools for social media monitoring. Free tools such as Google Alerts or HootSuite are good places to start for finding user-generated content. You can then later assess if you need to budget for advanced tools or outsource the function. To help with initial content analysis, you can create a simple online form that your team can use to log actionable feedback from social media. You don’t need to copy-paste entire threads of conversations – just pick relevant extracts to record and keep the URL to review the original context later. One hard area to track is user-to-user replies in the comments section, but this is where some of the most interesting details thrive.

Provide a means to classify the type of user-generated content that is recorded: question, complaint, tip, use case scenario, or troubleshooting information? Once you move on to examining feedback that can be repurposed in your content, it will be a godsend to be able to filter the collected logs.

Mine and analyze the collected feedback

As social media feedback pours in, plan on when to hold your initial review of the collected logs. You can time it so that you can triage items that are worthwhile to include in your next major content development cycle. When the volume is rather overwhelming, it doesn’t mean that you have to apply all or most of the feedback you got. Decide and prioritize with your team on items that serve most value to customers. Most of the collected feedback will be related to how the product functions itself. Be sure to pass this critical information along to product groups, and share any action you’re planning to implement on the content side. From a technical communication perspective, it’s one way to advocate for your users and to also contribute proactively to the R&D process.



Turn feedback into useful content

Social media feedback will hopefully surface ideas for content that you haven’t produced yet, and ideas that could be improved. Concept and task topics could very well be inspired by third-party blogs. A forum reply can be considered as an additional tip to an existing tutorial. Or maybe a Facebook comment could make you rethink how you deliver content on the Web. Also, since the collected logs would indicate how your target audience phrases questions and uses key terms, you can learn from their vocabulary and add their “words” in certain topics to increase searchability.

Technical communicators must recognize that their professionally packaged and vetted content faces a huge challenge in the “unofficial” knowledge thriving in online forums, blogs, and social networking sites. As we’re seeing now, users themselves are starting the conversation, figuring out alternate ways for getting tasks done, and troubleshooting issues that they encounter. And, they’re sharing their experience and expertise without expecting anything in return.

Instead of fearing that the profession would go into obsolescence, technical communicators must listen to social media and respond to it by developing user-centered content. Better yet, technical communicators should use these same social media channels to deliver content and to start engaging in online conversations. By doing so, there’s going to be a stronger case for technical communication as an indispensable part of the customer experience.

contact

Raymond Calbay leads the social listening program and #htctips campaign of HTC’s Taiwan-based User Education team. He has ten years of experience in technical communication and content management. He holds an M.A. in Communication from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila.



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Protecting against Rogue MT

Website visitors regularly use free machine translation to read content that's not in their native language. Corporate translation buyers worry that this practice of using "rogue MT" – output generated by sites not under their company's control – undermines their carefully crafted customer experience.

By Donald A. DePalma

How common is this problem? CSA Research's survey of 3,002 consumers in non-Anglophone countries found that most visitors sometimes use free MT when they visit English-language websites. That means that many international visitors who can't read English click away from English-language websites to

get free translation from Baidu, Bing, Google, or Yandex – and thereby break the continuity of the customer experience (CX). It's not just English content that gets machine-translated: Web users around the world do the same thing, jumping to free MT when they cannot read what they encounter.

Companies around the world have been increasing their investment in building powerful online experiences as they craft a rich dialogue with prospects and customers. They first target their home market, then move on to other countries. CSA Research's 2013 study of web globalization found that 60% of the world's

2,787 most prominent websites support two or more languages, while the remainder is monolingual. Across the entire dataset, the average website supports five languages. Of course, five languages will reach many more people than just one language. However, to maximize visibility, enterprises need to



Image: © Cienpies Design / 123rf.com

choose the right nine languages if they want reach 80% of the world's most economically active online population. That means offering a website in English, Japanese, German, Spanish, Chinese, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Arabic. But even then, this strategy excludes up to 20% of your pool of potential customers who speak other languages.

What happens when visitors who speak languages that you don't support arrive at your website? When they do not find their language, their first action may be to abandon the site. But the survey found that many won't give up without trying MT – 76% of consumers from non-English-speaking countries at least sometimes use MT to understand English (see Figure 1). Even 62% of those who are most confident in

their English-language skills admit to using machine translation. They have lots of options: free online MT associated with search engines such as Baidu and Google; sites provided by MT developers such as Lucy and SYSTRAN; and MT built into the Chrome browser, Skype, and Twitter.

Website visitors who use an MT-enabled browser such as Chrome often choose to stay on your site – even if the translation isn't optimized to your brand voice and message. Those accessing your site through browsers without this translation capability must leave to find help elsewhere. Once they do, they break out of the brand dialogue that you've crafted for them. In both instances, we call the output "rogue MT" because what they see isn't under your control.

How often do you use machine translation software to understand the English you read at a website?

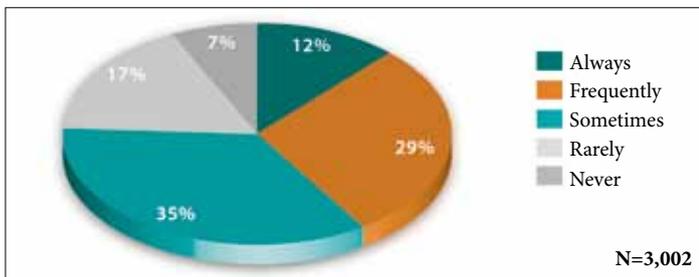


Figure 1: The Majority of Consumers Use Machine Translation
Source: "Can't Read, Won't Buy" (February 2014), Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

How concerned are you with the potential misrepresentation of your brand through the use of free online machine translation?

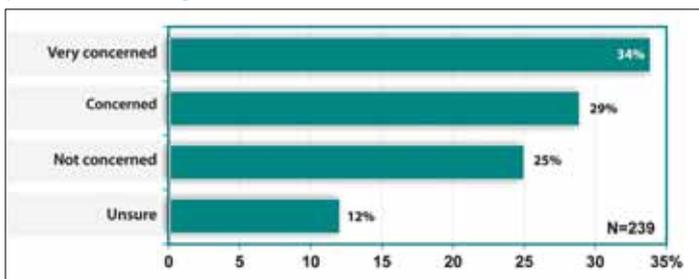


Figure 2: Buyers Show Concern for MT Misrepresenting Their Brands
Source: "Transformative Translation" (October 2013) Common Sense Advisory, Inc.



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To see a complete list of GALA member companies, please visit www.gala-global.org.

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Why is that a problem? These visitors read machine-translated content that doesn't accurately reflect your company's voice, terminology, or products. While the translation may seem okay, the MT output will be missing critical branding elements such as your tone and style. This usage concerns managers and executives responsible for outbound communication. In a 2013 MT survey, CSA Research asked 239 buyers of translation about the potential for free MT to misrepresent their brands – 63% were concerned or very concerned (see Figure 2). They worry that global customer experience will be derailed by a detour to a free MT website. Such rogue translations can be terminologically incorrect, badly branded, and even dangerous. However concerned they are, you cannot do much about rogue MT – unless you actually localize the customer experience. Changing human behavior is difficult, so the best way to keep visitors from using third-party MT – or finding a local-language alternative to your website – is to give them content to consume in their own language. Common Sense Advisory recommends two sets of actions to improve the stickiness of your website in global markets – and lessen or eliminate the use and impact of rogue MT.

The ideal – and obvious – solution to the rogue MT problem is to translate content throughout the customer experience. You can also improve content quality and collect data to help you make decisions about where to invest next:

- **Localize the customer experience for the most valuable markets.** Human translation of all company content into all possible languages of potential visitors is an expensive solution – and not one that can be

implemented within the confines of the average budget. The best alternative is to localize for the markets that matter the most to your business strategy. To reduce expenses, work with your favorite language service provider on a tiered approach and explore options such as post-edited MT.

- **Improve the quality of the original content.** Make sites more accessible to non-native readers of English by removing dialect-specific idioms, colloquialisms, shibboleths, slang, and any cultural references. This effort will: 1) make content easier to understand for those with minimal English; 2) possibly result in better translation when visitors resort to rogue MT; and 3) yield better output if the company chooses to localize the customer experience using human translators.
- **Monitor traffic and ask for preferences.** Keep track of where your visitors are coming from so that you can gauge the demand by locale – and invest accordingly. Once you know where their visits originate, you can offer translated landing pages where you ask them for their language preferences.

The ubiquity of free MT makes it an easy solution for web users who need language help. Companies can use the same free (or nearly free, when accessed through a website) software or its commercial equivalents to:

1. **Keep visitors on your CX track, even while deviating from your brand.** The least costly solution is to offer a “translate this page” option using a widget or plug-in that calls MT software via an API. It returns machine-translated output within your CX context design. Beware! This approach

depends on an untrained MT engine that is not tuned to your lexicon or style. However, your visitors' preference for their own language should keep them moving forward. Why? Most respondents to our global consumer survey prefer content in their own language, even if the quality is low. This linguistic bias may cancel out any generic MT missteps.

2. **Invest in an MT solution tailored to your brand.** The more ambitious solution trains MT to your company's voice and style – and takes control of your image and brand for audiences that prefer languages not supported by human translation. Work with your LSP or an MT specialist to train an appropriate engine. Focus first on high-impact CX areas such as user reviews, post-sales customer care, and discussion forums for these less critical locales.

Longer term, this trained MT may be able to carry more of the CX load. Ten percent of CSA Research's MT survey respondents said they were already generating publishable quality from MT. Sixty-six percent said the results were “fair,” requiring post-editing before publication. Many MT developers are claiming higher levels of publishable output right out of the black box, with an even higher percentage suitable for post-editing. Of course, obtaining the best results will require formal translation asset management – mining parallel linguistic corpora, including translation memory, terminology databases, and post-editing output – that can be used to train and maintain the engines. In the short term, translate-this-page widgets can fill in gaps in the customer experience, while PENT increases output, speeds up

turnaround times, and frees up funds for more translation work. The ideal is a seamless, consistent customer experience with no dead ends, but organizations should plan for speed bumps along the way.

The bottom line: Consumers and business buyers prefer content in their own language, so they frequently turn to free machine translation. When they do, they break the flow of the customer experience you've designed for them. If you want to engage that customer in your brand dialogue, it's time to bring machine translation into your content strategy.

contact

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Writing non-native English in technical communication

Are you a technical communicator who writes and designs technical information in English, despite the fact that English is not your mother tongue? If you are, you are not alone. In a global working environment with tight budgets and deadlines, this is the reality for me and a growing number of technical authors. Here is a strategy that helps you deliver English texts of high quality.

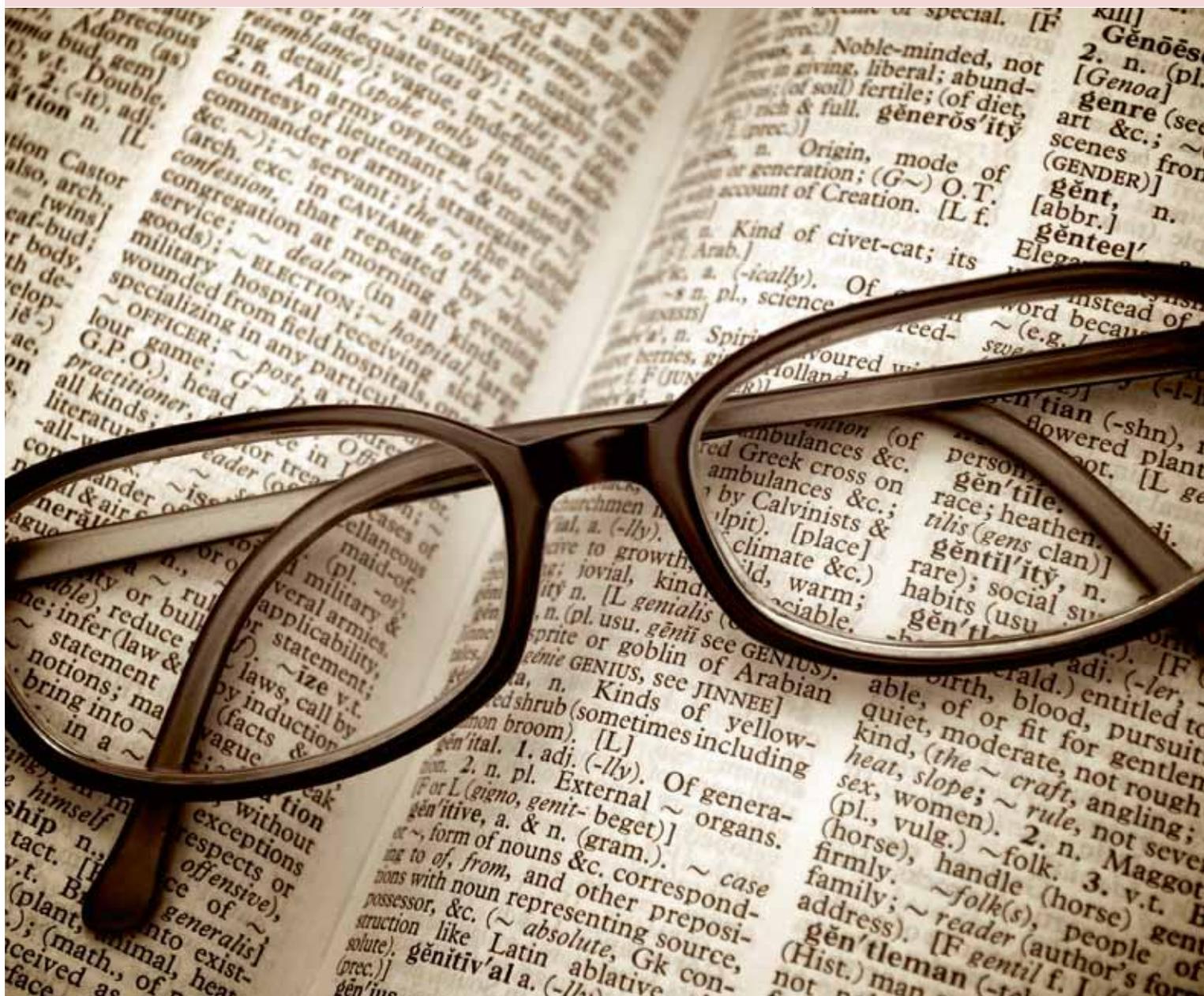


Image: © Veerant Suwngulrut / 123rf.com

By Karina Lehrner-Mayer

Why write non-native English?

In an ideal world, professional texts should be written exclusively by native speakers who are linguistic, technical, and communication specialists. However, this is not the reality for many technical writers who work for international or national companies in Europe operating on a global basis. I have been working as a technical writer in Austria for over 15 years, and during this time, I rarely wrote documentation in my native language, German. Much more often I produced technical information for a worldwide audience in English.

And, to paint a picture that is even further away from the perfect professional world of technical communicators: Rarely were the texts I produced proofread by native speakers; sometimes the texts were peer-edited by other non-native speakers. The plain truth is that most of the time the descriptions, instructions, and other technical information I created in English were edited by no one else but me.

The strategy: React – Rule – Read – Research – Review

Without a native speaker at your side who will edit your documents, you need to work out a plan that helps you design user assistance of the highest quality.

Here is the strategy I have developed for making sure the non-native English I write is as near-native English as possible:

- **React:** Face the challenge
- **Rule:** Take command of the English language
- **Read:** Read as much as you can

- **Research:** Consult the experts (style guides, grammar references, and dictionaries)
- **Review:** Double-check, and then check again

React: Face the challenge

A German native speaker, I am a technical writer at an Austrian-based company where I design technical information in English. Even with a university degree in English, having lived in an English-speaking country, and with more than 15 years of experience writing in English, I am constantly aware that – well, I am not a native English speaker. It is this awareness that makes the difference, because it keeps me on guard. Take this advantage by paying more attention, by double-checking your words, by consulting all the language references you can find, by going the extra mile – and by developing a strategy such as the one described in this article.

☞ **Tip:** Being alert starts before you even write the first word. For example, when you analyze your audience, consider special regional requirements of the English you will have to use.

Rule: Take command of the English language

I started out as a translator, became a technical translator and then grew into a technical writer. Using my English language and communication skills, my job is to research software and investigate the best way to present the right information for users. Presenting the right information in the best way depends largely

on using English in a correct and appropriate manner.

Whether you turned to technical writing because of your linguistic skills or because of an aptitude for technology, as a non-native speaker who writes in English, you must devote time and energy to the rules and regulations of the English language. You will have a basic knowledge of grammar and usage rules, but you must also be willing to delve deeper into certain areas if the need arises. Concentrate on aspects that are especially important in technical texts such as misplaced modifiers, subject/verb agreement, active voice, etc..

☞ **Tip:** Use your knowledge of grammar to build up the linguistic skills of the documentation team. When confronted by non-native English writers from other departments, you will stand on a firmer ground if you have good arguments for your choice of words. And if you find yourself occasionally lost in the maze of rules and guidelines, take a break and watch *Word Crimes* by “Weird Al” Yankovic (1).

Read: Read as much as you can

When other non-native speakers ask me what is the one thing they can do to improve their writing skills, my answer is always: read! While I read books and magazine articles relevant to our profession, I also read fiction and listen to songs in English. Every good native-English text helps you tune into the English language. If the only English texts you get in touch with are your own or those of your fellow non-native technical writers, chances are you get used to the mistakes you and your co-workers make. Read texts that are written by native speakers and that

are relevant for your field of work. Do not let yourself get accustomed to the typical errors that are most commonly made by speakers of your native language.

☞ **Tip:** A welcome side-effect of reading industry journals and books is mentioned by John Hedtke, who says: “If you read one book and one or two magazines a month for a year, you’ll (a) be doing more than 95% of your peers, and (b) you might be ready for a promotion or new job.” (2)

Research: Consult the experts (style guides, grammar references, dictionaries)

As a person who likes her texts and the texts of the whole documentation team to be consistent and compliant with best practices, I am naturally fond of style guides. Industry style guides such as *The Yahoo! Style Guide* (3) appeal to me in two ways: I find helpful information about standards and conventions, and I learn from the way they are written in English.

After I consult a dictionary or a grammar reference, it is most often the style guide that tells me what the appropriate choice is. A grammar reference presents all possibilities without indicating which would be the best for you, and a dictionary might give various translations without showing enough examples and context to identify the correct term.

See if you can find style guides that also cover typical mistakes of non-native speakers. In your in-house style guides, address issues that come up frequently in texts of the team’s non-native writers. If your documentation team does not have a style guide,

grab the opportunity and build one, as I did for the documentation team I joined four years ago. (4)

◊ **Tip:** For German-speaking authors, I find the following two resources especially useful: the tekomp guide-lines *English for German-speaking authors* (5) and the bilingual edition of *Writing plain instructions* by Marc Achtelig (6).

Review: Double-check, and then check again

I am extremely critical when editing my own English texts. I don't trust them to be one hundred percent linguistically correct after the first draft; I always re-write and, when in

doubt, consult style guides, grammar references and dictionaries. I like to be sure that my texts are as close to native-English as they can be.

Use a word, a term, a phrase, a grammatical construction only when you are certain it is accurate. If the word, term, or phrase doesn't "feel right", then don't use it. Or only use it after you've done your research and found out that it is correct. This is the only way to assure that you will reach the highest possible quality of the non-native English texts you produce.

◊ **Tip:** Technical communication is much about language, its system and components and how they work together. When I review my texts, I am guided by the questions that Marcia Riefer Johnston uses in her book to sum up what powerful

writing means: "Ask each word: *Why* are you here? *Why* are you here? *Why* are you *here*?" (7)

Conclusion

Writing non-native English in technical documentation is a reality, whether we think it is desirable or not. The strategy described in this article helps you to write non-native English of high quality:

- **React** to your situation by staying alert and following a strategy.
- **Rule** and study the English language system.
- **Read** and absorb good native-English.
- **Research** terms and phrases and know which references to trust.
- **Review** your own words until they feel right.

contact

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Innovation through DITA

When documentation is migrated from legacy to DITA, work practices are also changed from the conventional processes of authoring, editing, translating, and publishing. However, many benefits of moving to DITA are not being realized when technical communicators simply modify legacy processes, rather than rethinking them completely.

By Tony Self

Innovation and re-imagining

Innovation is beautifully defined on the Australian Government Business website (www.business.gov.au) as: "changing or creating more effective processes, products and ideas". The site follows with the important observation:

"Being innovative does not mean inventing; innovation can mean changing your business model and adapting to changes in your environment to deliver better products or services. Successful innovation should be an in-built part of your business strategy... where you create an environment and lead in innovative thinking and creative problem solving."

For technical communicators, DITA can be the "change in your environment" that can lead to "creative problem solving". In many cases, imagination is required to dream about what might be possible. Many work practices can be re-imagined to allow better information products to be created more effectively.

The need for innovation

Every field of human endeavor experiences relentless change over time. Some change is brought about by new knowledge and awareness, some by the also relentless business and competitive pressures, and some by the very human drive to do things better. In technical communication today, there are many drivers for change, including globalization, shorter product life cycles, and the increasing number of publishing options.

XML and open source

If you look for examples of innovations in software over the past few decades, you'll probably find XML and/or open source as the enabler. The World Wide Web is unbeatable as an example of open source. Open source encourag-



Image: © Oleksiy Mark / 123rf.com

es innovation by encouraging sharing of knowledge and large-scale collaboration. What used to be called **eCommerce**, but is now really commerce, is a good example of XML as the enabler of information interchange. Nearly all computer-to-computer exchange of commercial transaction information is via XML. In the big picture, XML is a format for storing all human knowledge. At a lower level, thousands of XML languages are used for storing information in formats specific to their industry, and that includes the technical communication industry. DITA provides one of those XML languages for technical communication; not only has DITA the advantage of being XML-based, it is also open source. It therefore provides an excellent platform or environment for innovation. Two important parts of the XML family are XPath and XSL-T. XPath is a

query language for XML documents, and allows parts of a document to be identified so that it can be treated in a particular way. XSL-T is a transformation language, and allows XML documents of any type to be processed into other types of documents. Together, DITA documents, XPath and XSL-T provide an easy means for documents to be engineered, in stark comparison to “dumb” legacy documents, which simply exist as a large static blob.

The burden of legacy documentation

When documentation is migrated from legacy to DITA, work practices are also changed from the conventional processes of authoring, editing,

translating, and publishing. However, many benefits of moving to DITA are not realized if legacy processes are simply adjusted where necessary. For example, the document review process might be slightly modified so that a review PDF is produced from DITA just like it used to be from Microsoft Word. Gerry McGovern described this approach (in his *New Thinking* newsletter), in the context of Web content management, as “old school, analog people trying to handle new problems with old tools”. What is needed is a total rethink, where new challenges are met with new solutions. (One of those new solutions might be that the power of DITA is used in document review to generate separate documents for checking terms, links, context, title consistency, figure naming, and image sizing.)

Buggy whips

The resistance to change is often illustrated with the example of buggy whips. In the early days of motoring, automobiles were adapted horse carriages, and were even known as horseless carriages for a time. Early cars came fitted with a buggy whip socket, to hold the whip used to control the horse (see Image 1 and 2).

The metaphorical buggy whip can be found in some DITA-sourced publications (such as Roman numerals in front matter pages in PDF output), but more commonly in workflows. The topic-based architecture of DITA allows content to be produced in parallel, but many teams still use a linear process. DITA makes it easy to re-use topics across publications, but many technical communicators prefer to use their own



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Márta Balázs, MD, Edimart, Hungary

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words rather than re-use those of others. But most common is the lack of imagination. DITA and XML provide a powerful set of tools, but we tend to shy away from using them.

DITA makes the impossible possible

With imagination, DITA makes anything possible in documentation, including the impossible! The key features of DITA can be summarized as:

- open source (community-owned)
- the separation of content and form through semantic markup
- XML
- modular architecture
- embedded metadata

All these features work together, but the XML part is particularly important. Web browsers and servers are XML-aware. Programming and scripting languages, and development environments, are XML-aware. Desktop applications and cloud-based applications are XML-aware. Because DITA's file format is XML,

any XML-aware tool or technology can be used with DITA content. DITA content can be sorted, filtered, re-sequenced, and otherwise processed in ways not possible previously.

Let's say you need to publish a subset of statistical data in a spreadsheet within your technical manual. That's no problem: The data can be automatically extracted from the spreadsheet and inserted into your manual with the help of a little script using standard XML functions. Let's say you want the field descriptions in your Help system to be used as tooltips within the software application. No problem. It just needs a programmer to write a dozen lines of code to make it happen. Let's say you need to check all the external links to websites in your 1000-page policies manual. No problem. Generate an extract of your manual as a single web page containing only the links (see Image 3).

Most of these ideas require the involvement of a developer, and technical communicators should avoid trying to do everything themselves. Collaboration - be it with developers, illustrators, designers, information architects or other specialists - is a necessity in an environment of innovation.

Wouldn't it be good if your responsive web content quoted prices based on today's exchange rate? If shortened forms of topics could be displayed for busy readers? If procedural steps could automatically be converted to flowcharts? If a table of contents could be displayed as a fancy navigation system on a website? If search result pages were automatically shown in context if the user scrolls up or down? If procedural steps could automatically be extracted from your manual and displayed in Google Glass? If a database could be interrogated to produce a 13,000-topic reference manual in 30 minutes? If inconsistent use of terms would be highlighted

by running a script? And wouldn't it be good if an *Interactive Electronic Technical Manual (IETM)* could display the current engine temperature within the recommended operating range? And, if metric would be automatically converted to imperial for American customers?

Steps towards innovation

The Australian Government Business website cited previously provided five steps towards innovation, and these can be easily adapted to suit innovation in technical communication.

1. "Conduct an analysis of the market environment, your customers' wants and needs and competitors." In many cases, you will find that your customers don't want PDF... they want mobile web content. Or that competitors are providing customized or dynamically transformed content when you are not. Or the quality or timeliness of information that you provide within your budget is not meeting the needs of your customers.
2. "Develop a strategic responsive plan which includes innovation as a key business process." If you are still producing documents the same way that you could have 20 years ago, innovation has probably not featured in your strategic plans in that time!
3. "Train and empower employees to think innovatively from the top down." Although it's difficult to teach people to innovate, it is easier to empower them. Technical communicators should be well trained in new documentation techniques. Not just DITA and XML, but in methodologies and approaches such as responsive web design, agile, mobile first, augmented reality, IETMs, head-up displays, and e-ink devices.



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Image 1 (top): An early Benz horseless carriage

Image 2 (above): Buggy Whips - A metaphor for resistance to change

4. "Connect with customers and employees to generate ideas." It is easy to make assumptions (or excuses) about what customers want, and even what they can cope with. It's better to actively solicit their ideas, and work collaboratively to create better information products.
5. "Utilize available resources and business advisors to drive innovation in your business." Technical communicators often want to be entirely self-sufficient, and to control the process from draft to publication. Seeking short-term specialized help from experts and developers is invariably a wise and cost-effective decision, but requires a deliberate change of approach to "ownership".

Summary

DITA allows us to see documentation in an entirely different light. With imagination, we can engineer information to create better documents in a more efficient and effective way. We have to be careful to avoid the buggy whip mentality by fostering and encouraging innovation, and by looking for the opportunities that DITA and XML offer for technical communicators.

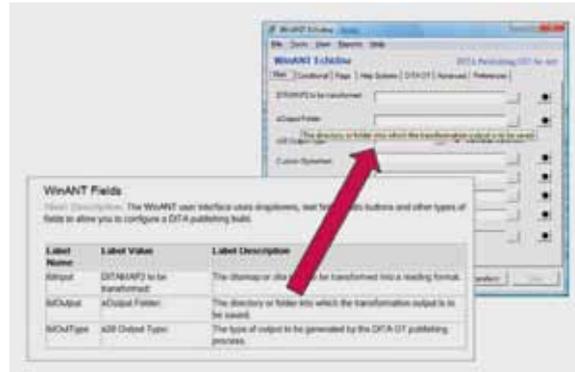


Image 3 (below): Field descriptions from the documentation being re-used as tooltips

Want to learn more about DITA?

Here is a list of related information

- **How Does DITA Change Authoring?**
by Jacquie Samuels
<http://techwhirl.com/dita-change-authoring>
- **The Buggy Whip Trap**
by Dave Berkus
<http://berkonomics.com/?p=1704>
- **Dynamically converted measure units in DITA through XSL-T**
by Tony Self
www.hyperwrite.com/Articles/showarticle.aspx?id=104
- **Introduction to DITA Conditional Processing**
by Dave Gash
www.hyperwrite.com/Articles/showarticle.aspx?id=88
- **Game Changer: How Agile Product Development Is Putting Technical Content Creators Through Their Paces**
by Kumar Vorg
www.acrolinx.com/blog/game-changer-agile-product-development-putting-technical-content-creators-paces
- **Head Up Displays for Technical Communication**
by Tony Self
<http://iconlogic.blogspot.com/weblog/2014/04/user-assistance-huds-in-technical-communication.html>

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Anywhere, anytime, collaboratively - the m-learning paradigm

Mobile learning forces educators to try to understand the learner's needs and abilities on a deeper level than ever before. What opportunities does m-learning hold for technical communicators?



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We are still "...training autonomous problem solvers, whereas... [learners in the workplace] are increasingly being asked to work in teams, drawing on different sets of expertise, and collaborating to solve problems."

Henry Jenkins, *Annenberg School of Communications (USC),
Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*

By Ray Gallon

In most Western countries, debates rage about education, especially in the context of the rapidly accelerating changes of the digital universe we now live in. We sometimes forget that in that same context, learning must be a lifelong process and takes place in the workplace as much - or maybe more - than it does in any classroom.

Since the seventies, distance-learning systems have been the subject of experimentation, utopian visions, vilification, but most of all - they've just been ignored. As with many vanguard ideas, the realization was rather less splendid than the vision:

- They retained, for the most part, a mass lecture paradigm, with the professor declaiming and dispensing knowledge to the students - in an amphitheatre or watching a monitor somewhere else.
- They depended on satellite connections that were very expensive and not always reliable at the time.
- They were based on analog video technologies that had been designed mostly for television broadcasting - i.e. one-way transmission.
- The equipment was heavy, difficult to maintain, and costly.
- Some teachers and professors were afraid of the technology for one reason or another, and never learned to master it.

Today's complex society, a mere forty years later, has made it imperative that we develop learning strategies that not only transcend space and time, but also transcend the standard model. Our mobile technology is much more flexible and adapted to these needs than the heavy video equipment of the seventies, and in both developed and developing countries, just about everyone has a mobile device of some kind. In developing nations, 79 percent of the population has a mobile phone, according to a 2011 report from the

International Telecommunications Union. In short, mobile devices are ubiquitous, and their portable, always-connected nature makes their users equally ubiquitous.

Our fast-moving lives demand that we shift our focus rapidly from one subject or task to the next, somehow managing to keep track of where we are with each. We call it multitasking, but in fact, it's a time-sharing system for the brain. It means that often, when we need to learn something, it's a small bit of information or a quick task that helps us solve the problem we're faced with right now, at this minute. We don't have time for digging into concepts and related activities, unless we have an immediate, contingent need for it.

The learning environment of a classroom or amphitheatre is not even remotely well adapted to this type of learning. The mobile device you're carrying in your pocket, however, is. According to a recent article by S. Okazaki & F. Mendez in the *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, the perceived ubiquity of mobile services reflect "the benefits derived from continuity, immediacy, portability, and searchability," and that's what we're looking for, at least a large part of the time.

What is m-learning?

The U.K.-based mobile learning platform MoLeNET describes m-learning as:

The exploitation of ubiquitous handheld hardware, wireless networking and mobile telephony to facilitate, support, enhance, and extend the reach of teaching and learning...[It] can take place in any location, at any time, including traditional learning environments such as classrooms, as well as in workplaces, at home, in community locations, and in transit.

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Among the advantages cited by various researchers, m-learning provides:

- Ubiquitous social connectivity
- Instant information access
- Enhanced view of the world through digital augmentation
- Empowerment for learners, who can become content and context generators within authentic learning environments rather than simple consumers of transmitted content

Hidden in this list is the fact that m-learning can be informal or non-formal, and can allow a learner to grab a piece of information very quickly to satisfy an urgent, immediate need. This is, of course, a double-edged sword. On one hand, it provides quick solutions to urgent problems. On the other, it leaves gaps in our knowledge. If we grab only a quick solution, we might be dealing with a very advanced bit, but we don't have the background that underpins it – so we might be working at a very sophisticated level on something about which we have, in general, only beginner or intermediate knowledge.

How can we use m-learning in technical communication?

The most important part of m-learning for technical communication is the notion of ubiquitous social connectivity. Our users/learners are no longer isolated - not from each other, and not from us.

Our challenge is to be present where they are - in social networks, at the top of the list of their Google searches, and anywhere that they seek to learn about our products. We need to be findable (this eliminates most PDF files), current, and our information needs to be displayed in a mobile-friendly manner that is easy to read on a small screen.

This can no longer be relegated to the "nice to have" category. If your company is not doing this, you can be sure that your competitors are.

We need to start looking at mobile devices as our "manuals" - but with a difference: the content users' access on a mobile device is not static, like printed manuals. It is dynamic, and it is constantly being updated and corrected, not only by our efforts, but also by increasingly savvy, self-directed, empowered users/learners, who will call us to task and hold us responsible if we are not ahead of them.

Imagine a near future where the mobile device is not only a source of information about our products, but also their control device! This can be true for

software, of course, but also for machine industries. Most machinery today is controlled by software of some sort or another, and it is a very short hop from putting the user assistance on a mobile device to putting all the control software on a mobile device. Mobile devices are not limited to phones or tablets, either. Today, mobile devices include glasses, watches, earpieces, clothing, smart cards, and even implants. Tomorrow we'll have contact lenses, direct data manipulation in virtual space, wearable control surfaces.

No matter how intuitive these new devices become, people will always need to know about how they function, and what to do with them. Will we be ready to provide them with that knowledge in a format and presentation that works for the new breed of device and the new breed of user?

Technical communicators today need to stay abreast, not only of current developments, but also of the most promising research in this field; we need to be prepared for a future that we can only partially predict. Tool providers, also, should be looking ahead towards the tools they can develop to make it easy for us to embed information into this mobile learning environment, so that users can profit fully from our new products.

M-learning is not just a modern alternative to classroom education. It is a contemporary trend that helps fast-paced users solve immediate problems on the go. As technical writers it is our job to facilitate this kind of learning experience.

contact

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A plethora of new services, the latest software tools and state-of-the-art products will be displayed at the tekomp Trade Fair in Stuttgart this year. Kaleidoscope, provider of technical documentation and translation services, has taken the opportunity to introduce our readers to their solutions.



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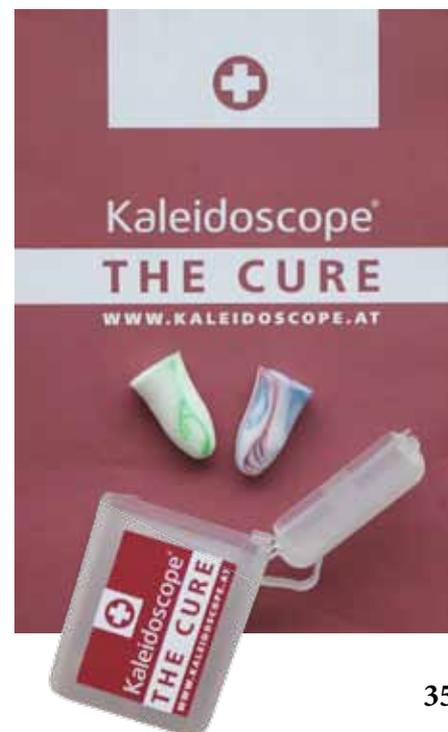
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Proven concept, new location: tcworld conference moves to Stuttgart

For the first time since its launch in 2005, the tcworld conference will be held at the International Congress Center in Stuttgart. The state capital of Baden-Württemberg is renowned for its fast cars, high-quality living and its hard-working, down-to-earth locals.

An innovative, dynamic economy

Few other locations in Europe can match the Stuttgart Region as a center of high technology and innovation. Stuttgart is not only a representative example of the regional automobile sector and the future industries resulting from it, such as electromobility, but also of other leading technology clusters such as engineering, IT and the increasingly important environmental technologies. In all, some 160,000 businesses are based in the economic area of Stuttgart. They include not only numerous international enterprises, but also countless highly specialized medium-sized and smaller firms, many of which lead the field in their particular technology. The region, which saw the birth of the automobile, can still today claim to be the world's leading center of the automobile industry. Almost 180,000 people are employed in the regional automotive cluster, with a turnover of more than 40 billion euros in automobile construction alone. Around the premium vehicle producers Daimler and Porsche, and also Bosch, the largest automotive supplier, a highly innovative mix of medium-sized ancillary industries and specialized service contractors has sprung up. On the basis of its almost 130-year-old tradition of vehicle construction, the region is also emerging

more and more as Europe's leading location for electromobility. Since 2009 it has been one of eight German regions funded by the Federal Ministry of Transport to step up the development of an infrastructure and the establishment of electromobility in the public sector.

The Stuttgart region is one of the most important partners to receive subsidies of some 40 million euros in order to expedite the development of electrically-powered vehicles suitable for large-scale serial production, as well as the corresponding charging technologies and IT solutions.

Traditionally, the engineering sector, too, has always played a leading role in the region's economy. In particular, this branch owes its outstanding reputation to the manufacture of tools and special-purpose machinery, intelligently combined with product-related services. With around 66,000 employees and a turnover of almost 18 billion euros, it is the location's second technological flagship and includes numerous global leaders.

Arts and museums

The Stuttgart Region is a veritable paradise for exceptional culture. Stuttgart's State theater is the world's largest tripartite theater. The Stuttgart

Ballet has enjoyed a worldwide reputation ever since the days of John Cranko and Marcia Haydée, while the State Opera has received the coveted "Opera House of the Year" award for its outstanding performances several times. The productions of the "Schauspiel Stuttgart" theater company are also acclaimed all over Germany. Repertoires in the theater-loving Stuttgart Region include classical and contemporary productions, dance and cabaret, dialect plays and experimental works. What's more, the Stuttgart Region's two musical theaters make it one of the most musical locations in Germany. Architectural highlights and out-of-

the-ordinary museums form a unique ensemble in the Stuttgart Region. Both automobile and architecture enthusiasts come from all over the world to visit the spectacular double-helix construction of the Mercedes-Benz Museum and the impressive Porsche Museum. The region boasts one of the most renowned museums worldwide with Stuttgart's State Gallery, which presents masterpieces of art from eight centuries. The works of internationally acclaimed artists are strikingly displayed in Stuttgart's Museum of Art.

Culinary Stuttgart

Sampling delicacies from the region's kitchens and cellars is an experience involving "Spätzle" (Swabian noodles), Spätburgunder wine, and starred gastronomy. From traditional Swabian fare with hearty specialties accompanied by wines from Württemberg, to award-winning gourmet restaurants with an international reputation, the Stuttgart Region offers culinary experiences to delight every palate.

Information on the Stuttgart Region and the many options available can be found under www.stuttgart-tourist.com

*The Fernsehturm Stuttgart
is the world's first television tower.*



*The Ludwigsburg Palace
features an impressive garden.*



*The busy city center
is laid out for shoppers and pedestrians.*





The Schlossplatz Stuttgart is the heart of the city.



The Porsche Museum features 300 restored cars.



The Neues Schloss (new castle) was built in the heart of the city center.



The impressive Mercedes-Benz Museum covers the history of the famous car-maker.

Focus on sustainability

Out of the 18 European congress destinations with a higher-than-average commitment to sustainability, ten are in Germany. Stuttgart is one of them.

The WirtschaftsWoche Sustainable City Indicator (WWSCI) 2012 has confirmed that among Germany's 50 largest cities Stuttgart excels in every category (economic strength, environment, human capital, social affairs, energy and transport, as well as transparency and commitment).

Many businesses in the Stuttgart Region are committed to maintaining high ecological standards and are increasingly fostering the concept of sustainability through the use of innovative products and production technologies.

Public institutions also see themselves under an obligation to ensure a livable environment for future generations: Stuttgart's public utility companies already supply their customers and all public buildings entirely with green electricity. Stuttgart Airport (EMAS certified) received the 2013 Green Controlling Award of the Péter Horváth Foundation in collaboration with the International Controllers' Association (ICV).

The state of Baden-Württemberg is one of Germany's four "showcases for electromobility", with the Stuttgart Region as one of its main partners. Along with many other schemes, the "Car2go" project sponsored by the Daimler AG began in 2012.

The Messe Stuttgart trade fair center and the ICS International Congress Center Stuttgart are equally exemplary in their commitment to sustainability. A total of 34 000 square meters of solar collectors are installed on the roofs of the exhibition halls and the ICS, as well as on the adjoining Bosch car park, supplying climate-friendly electricity. At the same time, intelligent heat production and highly efficient gas-fired condensing technology provide effective heating and cooling systems.



The Stuttgart Trade Fair (Messe Stuttgart) hosts a number of international fairs.

STUTT GART

Getting there and around

The quickest way to get to Stuttgart is by air. Stuttgart Airport is one of the most modern in Europe. 42 airlines fly to more than 110 destinations in 30 countries; some 10 million passengers use this gateway to Stuttgart. The International Congress Center Stuttgart is located in the direct vicinity of the airport.

Lines S2 and S3 of the rapid transit railway (S-Bahn) provide a direct link from the airport to the main railway station in the heart of the city, only 13 km away. Motorists can reach the Congress Center via the A8 Karlsruhe – Munich motorway.

With the VVS 3-Day Ticket from Stuttgart's Tariff and Transport Union (VVS), congress and conference participants are well equipped to explore Stuttgart and the region in a comfortable and environmentally compatible manner with the trains and buses of the regional transport network. Tickets can be purchased from the Tourist Information at Stuttgart Airport, the "i-punkt" Tourist Information opposite the main railway station or at their hotel on presentation of their congress registration or confirmation of hotel reservation.

Individual timetables are available at www.vvs.de

tcworld calendar 2014/2015

when	what	where
October 22 – 24	Information Development World www.eiseverywhere.com/ehome/86671	San Jose, CA, USA
October 27 – 28	TAUS Annual Conference	Vancouver, Canada
October 29 – 31	Localization World Vancouver www.localizationworld.com	Vancouver, Canada
October 31	Executive Leadership Workshop http://conferences.tekom.de/tcworld-India-2015/	Bangalore, India
November 5 – 7	Languages & The Media www.languages-media.com	Berlin, Germany
November 11 – 13	tcworld conference 2014 http://conferences.tekom.de/tcworld-conference-2014/	Stuttgart, Germany
November 17 – 19	Content Strategy Applied www.eiseverywhere.com/ehome/93210	San Jose, CA, USA
November 21	think! India www.gala-global.org/think-india	Bangalore, India
December 2 – 4	Gilbane 2014 http://gilbaneconference.com/2014/	Boston, MA, USA
February 19 – 20	tcworld India 2015 http://conferences.tekom.de	Bangalore, India
March 22 – 25	GALA 2015 http://conferences.tekom.de	Sevilla, Spain

①

Information Development World is a conference dedicated to helping organizations create exceptional customer experiences centered around content. The goal is to bring together the brightest minds in the content arena: content strategists, technical communicators, content marketers, product managers, customer assistance specialists, translators, localizers, taxonomists, and user experience professionals to demystify the methods, standards, tools and technologies needed to deliver exceptional omni-channel customer experiences.

②

The third tcworld India **executive leadership workshop (ELW)** for experienced and aspiring documentation managers will be held at the Istana I and II at Hotel Hyatt, MG Road, Bangalore. This one-day workshop is intended strictly for directors, managers, and project leads in the Technical Communication (TC) industry. It will include interactive group discussions, hands-on exercises, brainstorming sessions, and panel discussions focused on the following themes: Innovation, Motivation, and Productivity (IMP). Renowned experts, who are leading lights in the field of technical communication, will present latest trends and discuss relevant issues concerning the TC industry. The event will feature engaging and practical workshops on driving efficiency, improving quality, handling changes, nurturing innovation and much more.

③

The second annual **Content Strategy Applied USA Conference**, brought to you by eBay and The Content Wrangler, is the only conference dedicated to showcasing best practices and case studies from content strategists in the trenches. The organizers' goal is to bring together the brightest minds in the content strategy arena to demystify the methods, standards, tools, and technologies needed to deliver the right content, to the right audience, anywhere, anytime, on any device.

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