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Write to design

Designing great, narrative copy with UX writing

Understanding blockchain technology

Could this new concept transform the way we manage information?

Can I have the cake and eat it too?

How positive intelligence can change your life

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tcworld

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From the editor

What to do when the leaves are shaking

Your mind is the most powerful tool you possess. Yet, it might not always work in your favor or in your interest. In his bestselling book *Positive Intelligence,* CEO coach and university lecturer Shirzad Chamine describes ten automatic mental habits of our brain that cause us to be overly critical, controlling, fearful, or restless, undermining our happiness, creativity, empathy, and success. Chamine calls these habits "Saboteurs" and traces their roots back to earlier human evolutionary stages, when the habit of noticing and focusing on the negative was crucial to survival: "When the tree leaves started shaking, the early human who assumed the worst and ran was the one who survived and passed his genes. The one who waited to gather full and unbiased information before taking action was eventually eaten by the tiger."
Well, we might have moved on from the jungle days, but the vast majority of us still live in fear of being eaten by the tiger. Of course, rather than a feline predator, the "tiger" these days represents a failed relationship, the loss of our job, or being humiliated, rejected or betrayed. But the fear might be just as real – and because there is no tree to climb up and wait for the danger to pass us by, it might become paralyzing and counterproductive in both our personal and professional lives. In fact, many of us might be living in this state of high alert and anxiety for most of our lives.
Chamine suggests mental exercises to help control your Saboteurs and, with claimed benefits "ranging from dramatic performance improvements… to far greater creativity and happiness", who could refuse to give it a try (you can read more about positive intelligence on page 38)?
As a professional community, we are at a point in time when the leaves are shaking considerably. Many technical writers, information architects, and content strategists have witnessed significant changes over the past years with regard to how information is produced, managed, and, most importantly, perceived. We are no longer creating information booklets that will be tossed out with the box that the product was delivered in. These days, information has become a major asset, increasing sales and improving brand reputation.
It is not danger that is causing the tremor; it is change. And as terrifying as it might be, we must learn to silence our Saboteurs and face change head on with curiosity, strength and optimism.

Corinna Melville

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Write to design

Words are perhaps the most essential part of a user interface, as they determine whether or not users perceive the message and have a positive experience on your site or app. As we move towards more intuitive designs, our language has to become more natural and conversational – the principles of UX writing.

page 12

Understanding blockchain technology

Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies have made blockchain technology a hot topic – though it is still perceived with some skepticism. But could it revolutionize the way we manage information?

page 22

Can I have the cake and eat it too?

Positive intelligence is a term coined by best-selling author and speaker Shirzad Chamine. It draws conclusions from several fields of psychology and promises to significantly change our professional and private lives.

page 38

ACROLINX RELEASES FREE EBOOK

Acrolinx' latest ebook *The 9 Ingredients You Need to Create Better Content* defines characteristics for good content, such as consistency, clarity, and findability, that will help companies achieve their business objective. The ebook is available for free download from the company's website.

www.acrolinx.com

LSP METRIX MODEL

Independent market research firm Common Sense Advisory (CSA Research) has developed a data-based research series to help language service providers (LSPs) benchmark their business and operational maturity against the development stages of the CSA's LSP Metrix™ model. This data helps LSPs to understand what other businesses in their field are doing and what sets top performers apart.

www.commonsenseadvisory.com

SDL AND NUANCE PARTNER

SDL and Nuance Communications have announced a strategic partnership to jointly develop Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered solutions that enable customers to convert, translate and gain insight from large volumes of voice and video content. The partnership kicks off with a co-developed solution based on SDL Enterprise Translation Server (ETS) and Nuance Automated Speech Recognition (ASR), which will help organizations to convert audio and video content into text for SDL ETS and securely translate it with its Neural Machine Translation capabilities.

www.sdl.com

CONVERSIS OPENS U.S. OFFICE

Conversis' first office outside the United Kingdom will be located in Raleigh, North Carolina, and be situated in Research Triangle Park, which is also home to some of the company's largest life sciences clients. The opening is scheduled for late April 2018. The expansion follows a period of positive and sustained growth for the company over the past 12-18 months.

www.conversis.com

How customer experience impacts stock performance

Research and advisory firm Forrester has released a paper that examines the relationship between a company's customer experience (CX) quality and its stock performance. The research found that there is a correlation between the two – the top 20 percent of brands in Forrester's Customer Experience Index (CX Index™) had higher stock price growth and higher total returns than a similar portfolio of companies drawn from the bottom 20 percent. Here are some other key findings from the research:

- **Brand-by-brand correlation between stock performance and CX is weak.** Forrester found a Pearson correlation of just under 0.4, right on the border between a low and moderate correlation. This shows that as CX Index scores increase, so does stock performance – but with a great amount of variability.
- **The leader category contains different industries than the laggard category.** Out of the nine industries represented in the leader category, which ranged from digital retailers to airlines to auto and home insurance providers, only one industry also contained brands in the laggard category.
- **Within a single industry, leaders don't always outperform laggards.** Out of the 15 industries with more than one publicly traded brand, seven had CX laggards (health insurance providers, airlines, TV service providers, internet service providers, etc.) that outperformed the CX leader on total returns.

www.forrester.com

Image: ©Montri Thipsorn/123rf.com

Digital business requires growth mindset, not just technology

When embarking on a digital business transformation, too often organizations ignore the need to change the mindset of their staff, according to research firm Gartner, Inc. A technology shift not backed up by a corresponding cultural shift puts the success of a digital business initiative at risk.

"For any transformation to be successful, people need to buy into your vision," said Aashish Gupta, research analyst at Gartner. "The culture aspect and the technology demand equal attention from the application leader, because culture will form the backbone of all change initiatives for their digital business transformation. Staff trapped in a 'fixed' mindset may slow down or, worse, derail the digital business transformation initiatives of the company."

While every organization has its own unique culture, it must understand the nuances of attracting and retaining talent with values and mindsets aligned to the mission and culture of the organization. "This requires a healthy and psychologically safe team environment within a growth mindset organizational culture," said Mr. Gupta.

"Psychologically safe" means making co-workers and team members feel that they will not be punished or humiliated when asking for help, admitting mistakes and vulnerabilities, or expressing concerns.

Applying a growth mindset culture has been a success in well-known online companies. An online clothes and shoe retailer instructs all of its new hires to experience its call center. This includes training and spending time answering customer calls, allowing employees to gain a holistic view of the business and understand that customer service is the backbone of it.

Prompting mindset change in four steps

"Cultural change requires significant investment," said Mr. Gupta. To help application leaders implement mindset change among their staff, Gartner has developed a four-step plan:

Image: © BrianAJackson/istockphoto.com

1. Vision

Create a compelling vision that can be shared as a story to inspire and motivate a desire for change. Everybody should understand what is meant by a growth and product mindset. "A growth mindset demands people to be comfortable with the speed of the digital era, and they must be willing to make quick and risky bets instead of slow and safe bets," said Mr. Gupta.

2. Define

Define key behavioral attributes that reflect the intended mindset change. These can be individual accomplishments that contribute to the team, business or customer results; a greater number of projects; or acquiring new skills.

3. Implement

HR should be involved to ensure that performance metrics, as well as the descriptions of roles and responsibilities, are updated to include these key behavioral attributes, before rolling them out to all departments. "Acceptance will happen only if the change is visible throughout the organization," said Mr. Gupta.

4. Measure, monitor and wait

Allow some time for the changes to percolate. Continuously measure and monitor the changes through anonymous surveys. "You can ask employees if they understand the company's messaging around culture, or if they see their leaders practicing it and if they find their colleagues taking the initiative seriously," said Mr. Gupta. "Also, remember to track performance measures. Be patient. Fostering a growth mindset culture that requires behavior changes among your staff takes time. However, the rewards are considerable as everyone perseveres, learns, grows and accepts that potential is nurtured, not predetermined."

www.gartner.com

Worldwide spending on AI systems to surpass US$19 million in 2018

Worldwide spending on cognitive and artificial intelligence (AI) systems could reach US$19.1 billion in 2018, an increase of 54.2 percent over the amount spent in 2017. With industries investing aggressively in projects that utilize cognitive/AI software capabilities, the International Data Corporation (IDC) *Worldwide Semiannual Cognitive Artificial Intelligence Systems Spending Guide* forecasts cognitive and AI spending will grow to US$52.2 billion in 2021 and achieve a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 46.2 percent over the 2016-2021 forecast period.

"Interest and awareness of AI is at a fever pitch. Every industry and every organization should be evaluating AI to see how it will affect their business processes and go-to-market efficiencies," said David Schubmehl, research director, Cognitive/Artificial Intelligence Systems at IDC. "IDC has estimated that by 2019, 40 percent of digital transformation initiatives will use AI services and by 2021, 75 percent of enterprise applications will use AI. From predictions, recommendations, and advice to automated customer service agents and intelligent process automation, AI is changing the face of how we interact with computer systems."

Leading industries

Retail will overtake banking in 2018 to become the industry leader in terms of cognitive/AI spending. Retail firms will invest US$3.4 billion this year on a range of AI use cases, including automated customer service agents, expert shopping advisors and product recommendations, and merchandising for omni-channel operations. Much of the US$3.3 billion spent by the banking industry will go toward automated threat intelligence and prevention systems, fraud analysis and investigation, and program advisors and recommendation systems. Discrete manufacturing will be the third largest industry for AI spending with US$2.0 billion going toward a range of use cases including automated preventative maintenance and quality management investigation and recommendation systems. The fourth largest industry, healthcare providers, will allocate most of its US$1.7 billion investment to diagnosis and treatment systems.

"Business transformation is occurring across all industries as successful companies embrace the array and potential impact of these solutions. Automated customer service agents, increased public safety, preventative maintenance, reduction of fraud, and improved healthcare diagnosis are just the tip of the iceberg driving spend[ing] today," said Marianne Daquila, research manager, Customer Insights & Analysis at IDC.

Image: © Tatiana Shepeleva/123rf.com

Biggest use cases

The cognitive/AI use cases that will see the largest spending in 2018 are: automated customer service agents (US$2.4 billion) with significant investments from the retail and telecommunications industries; automated threat intelligence and prevention systems (US$1.5 billion) with the banking, utilities, and telecommunications industries as the leading industries; and sales process recommendation and automation (US$1.45 billion) spending led by the retail and media industries. Three other use cases will be close behind in terms of global spending in 2018: automated preventive maintenance, diagnosis and treatment systems, and fraud analysis and investigation.

Cognitive software

A little more than half of all cognitive/AI spending throughout the forecast will go toward cognitive software. The largest software category is cognitive applications, which includes cognitively enabled process and industry applications that automatically learn, discover, and make recommendations or predictions.

The other software category is cognitive platforms, which facilitate the development of intelligent, advisory, and cognitively enabled applications. Industries will also invest in IT services to help with the development and implementation of their cognitive/AI systems and business services such as consulting and horizontal business process outsourcing related to these systems.

Global reach

On a geographic basis, the United States will deliver more than three quarters of all spending on cognitive/AI systems in 2018. Western Europe will be the second largest region, led by retail, discrete manufacturing and banking. The strongest spending growth over the five-year forecast will be in Japan (73.5 percent CAGR) and Asia/Pacific (excluding Japan and China) (72.9 percent CAGR).

www.idc.com

XLIFF localization standard gains international acceptance

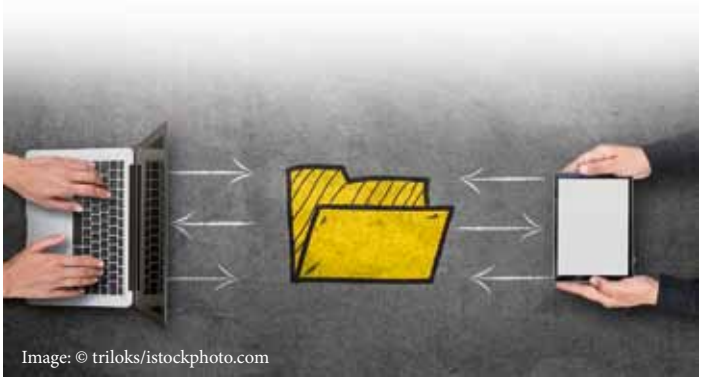
Image: © triloks/istockphoto.com

The XML Localization Interchange File Format (XLIFF) XLIFF 2.1 has been approved by the OASIS open development organization as an official OASIS Standard, a status that signifies the highest level of ratification.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has also approved XLIFF for release under the designation "ISO 21720:2017".

XLIFF gives any multilingual content owner a single interchange file format that can be understood by any localization provider, using any conformant localization tool. XLIFF has the power to improve translation practices for documents, websites, product interfaces, or any other media on which text resides.

"These approvals validate what the international community has known for some time – XLIFF is a key component of any efficient localization ecosystem," said Bryan Schnabel, chair of the OASIS XLIFF Technical Committee. "We are gratified by the international recognition given to XLIFF by ISO and by the OASIS membership at-large."

XLIFF is designed for both simplicity and extensibility. Its robust core takes translatable content from a source format into a format that can be easily translated with Computer Aided Translation tools. XLIFF also supports a range of modules that address advanced translation challenges, including translation memory, translation glossary, segmentation metadata, advanced validations, word counts, and more.

The Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) applauded XLIFF's approval. GALA's executive director Laura Brandon noted, "GALA is excited to be a collaborator in the international XLIFF community. We intend to contribute developments on extraction and merging guidance from our new Translation API Cases and Classes (TAPICC) initiative."

"XLIFF 2.1 is an essential part of our continuous globalization foundation to provide responsive localization supply chain in a cost-effective way to content and software on IBM Cloud," said Helena Shih Chapman, director at IBM Globalization Executive.

XLIFF is available 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.

www.oasis-open.org

What airport wayfinding can teach TC practitioners

Text by Leah Guren

Image: © Nikada/istockphoto.com

If you travel as much as I do, you probably spend many hours every year in airports. Some of that time is needed for ticketing, check-in, getting through security, and finding the correct gate. But often, you are still left with a long, boring waiting time. Perhaps you read, browse the many shops, try to do some work on your laptop, watch a video, or visit a lounge. I find it difficult to concentrate and am constantly looking for distractions to help me pass the time. And while some airports are better than others, they are still places that most of us endure rather than enjoy.

The solution? Spontaneous usability testing! While people-watching on a recent trip, I started to pay attention to how people interact with airport signage. Have you ever noticed that airports offer an excellent microcosm for studying usability? You may think that airport signage is not applicable to TC practice, but it is actually closely related. Consider:

- In TC, we talk about signposting, which is about graphic and text elements that allow users to find and identify information (for example, table of contents, index, cross-references, links, headings, icons, etc.).
- In airports, signage relates to wayfinding [1], which is about the signs that help travelers navigate through the airport (for example, signs for terminals and gates, signs for services and facilities, instructional signs about what is allowed or forbidden, etc.).

Further, think about the special challenges that an airport faces. What other large facility is guaranteed to have users…

- from different countries and cultures?
- speaking (and reading) different languages?
- of different ages, physical capabilities, and experience levels?

The science of wayfinding

Wayfinding has developed into a specialist field. These signs are treated very seriously; there are many standards that apply to signs, recommending best practices for things such as typeface, amount of information, approved icons, and more. Clearly, good signage means that people will be able to move through a complex structure and find their way while avoiding hazards (for example, entering the wrong way, going through no-return doors, controlled zones, wet floors, and more).

This is critically important. Yet consider all the limitations of airport signage:

- Size: There are a lot of signs competing for limited space. Signs have to be large enough to be seen from a distance without creating visual noise for the overwhelmed traveler.
- Content load: There cannot be too much information in a single sign, so the designers have to make careful choices about what information is critical, and how to split different bits of information along the path.
- Language cues: When listing info in two or more languages, how are the two differentiated?
- 3D representation on a 2D surface: Arrows are a constant challenge; a sign on the wall with a left or right arrow is fairly clear, but what about signs hung from the ceiling? What do the up and down arrows mean? How many times have you been confused?

As technical communicators, most of us are familiar with concepts of choosing the right typefaces, the right size, and avoiding visual noise or content overload. But there are some valuable lessons that we can learn from the last two issues: language cues and 2D representations.

Language cues

Some airports use multiple languages in the same typeface, stacked or separated by a slash [2]. This is always a challenge for a stressed, sleep-deprived brain. What works much better is when different languages are presented in different colors or typefaces (see Image 2).

Image 1: Multiple languages stacked using the same typeface…

Image 3: Which way to the baggage reclaim? *Source: Design Work Plan*

For our TC content, think about using a strong and consistent visual cue in the layout and design that will help users focus on the correct information for their user type. (After all, presenting content in two languages is exactly that – having different content for two different audiences.)

2D representation

It is easy to indicate "turn left" or "turn right" with a sign on the wall. But how do you indicate "straight ahead"? And what about signs suspended from the ceiling? Up and down arrows may also mean "straight ahead" and "back" rather than "up" and "down"; how can you communicate what is basically 3D orientation within the confines of 2D representation?

This is not as easy to solve as the language (audience) cues. In fact, even as a savvy traveler, I find myself confused by some arrows (see Figure 3).

In TC content, our biggest challenge comes when documenting physical devices and selecting graphics that give users a sense of perspective and orientation within the 2D representation. Always make sure that you perform usability testing on any product diagrams used in procedures.

Image 2: … and using different typefaces. *Source: Design Work Plan*

Conclusion

So the next time you find yourself bored at an airport, take a good look at the signage. Think about how you can use similar concepts of wayfinding to make your documentation more universally understandable!

References:

[1] Symonds, P., "Wayfinding Signage Considerations in International Airports", Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding; Volume 1; Issue 2

[2] Design Work Plan, http://designworkplan.com/design/airport-signage-photo-inspiration.htm

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leah Guren is the owner/operator of Cow TC. She has been active in the field of technical communication since 1980 as a writer, manager, Help author, and usability consultant. She now devotes her time to consulting and teaching courses and seminars in technical communication, primarily in Israel and Europe.

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Image: © alphaspirit/123rf.com

A good user interface is usually associated with visually appealing elements such as colors and buttons. But it is *words* that truly deliver your message. "UX writing" not only improves your copy, it helps you to develop user interfaces with a catching, narrative design.

Text by Nithya Krishnan

Technical writers have long been working on providing copy for user interfaces. However, as we transitioned from traditional graphical user interfaces to web-based applications and, more recently, to conversational user interfaces, the challenges have changed, and so has the definition of good text.

Text is an essential element for any user interface, as the right words in the right context help users achieve their goals and find what they were looking for. Thus, text is an integral part of your content strategy, an approach that involves crafting, developing, managing, and publishing written and graphical content to create a consistent and pleasing user experience (UX). Your content strategy should always focus on what the user wants to achieve, and the design of both graphics and text should follow suit.

The discipline of UX writing can be regarded as part of a content strategy, one that focuses on helping users achieve their goals with the simple use of text. UX writing helps you to craft copy that supports the general design concept and enables successful interactions, thus enhancing the user experience.

Defining good copy

In the field of design, any content that is written in text, however big or small, is commonly called copy. For any user interface, visually appealing elements such as illustrations, colors, shapes, icons, and buttons are crucial. But imagine if the text on a button or a menu option keeps you guessing about the meaning. Wouldn't that be rather annoying to a user? It might even stop him or her from using that website or application again. When we think about the products we love, most of the time, it really is those tiny and delightful details that make us want to go back to using an interface. Good copy plays a pivotal role in the experience users have with the interface and determines if they come back to it. It builds a connection.

Great products can change the way people work. That's why it is important to constantly innovate and design solutions that enable users to make their lives better and easier. Using text that not only guides the user, but defines the way in which the product is consumed, adds a whole new dimension to the way we design interfaces; it simply means making the user experience more inclusive.

Copy needs to be clear, consistent and simple, so that people can interact with the product intuitively. When users don't notice that they are being guided, it means that the UX writing has been done well. In addition, UX writing, as any other copy content, should be based on the context and the target audience.

Storyframes before wireframes

To create good user interfaces, content can't be an afterthought. It must be the first thing that you start analyzing. For instance, if you want to use a website to engage with your users, the content – not the layout – must come first. This is why it is essential to include UX writers right from the early stages of the design process, even before creating wireframes.

When you plan what you want to communicate to your audience, words are often the best starting point from which to build your layout. Fabricio Teixeira, design director at Work & Co, framed this subject in his article "Storyframes before Wireframes", suggesting that by starting designs in a text editor, we can tell better stories through our UIs.

Figure 1: Copy is an essential part of any content strategy.

Some key aspects of having good copy are:

- It provides clear feedback and next steps.
- It helps to set expectations. Clear, upfront and transparent copy reduces risks and encourages users to act.
- It says it clearly and simply.
- It helps you get started.

The challenge of UX writing is to stick to a modular design. You must simplify text and turn a complicated message into one that outlines the problem, process and outcome in a simple manner. Taxonomy plays a crucial part in creating copy.

In general, a UX writing portfolio needs to do three things: Clearly outline the customer problem, explain the process and/or approach, and reveal the final outcome.

Adopting a conversational tone

As we move into a more conversational trend in the applications that we consume, a UX writer must understand narrative and conversational design aspects to be able to convert product requirements into a clear and engaging user story. The writer must showcase an inventor's spirit, highly refined aesthetic sensibilities and a fine-tuned ability to contextually communicate the right message in the right place at the right time.

When people read content written in a conversational tone, it gives them the feeling that they're being spoken to directly. Rather than talking to your audience as a whole, you'll be conversing with them personally. Unfortunately, most of us have spent our professional lives following rigid, boundary-driven rules. It does take an effort to break this habit and communicate effectively and colloquially. It is important to note that writing in a conversational tone does not equal writing sloppily or using poor vocabulary.

The crucial step is addressing the reader directly. An easy way to do this is to pretend that you're writing to a close friend. Forget formalities. Make your writing more approachable and less arduous for your readers. By stripping off the clutter, you can focus on the core message you are trying to communicate. Once you've crafted your message, read it out loud. This helps you to spot errors a lot more easily.

The essence of good copy is to turn every message in your digital product into a valuable conversation.

Some more dos and don'ts:

- Copy must contain useful data but not be poorly presented.
- Copy must be presented in a visually amazing way but not show the lack of meaning and purpose.

Keep a good balance between words and graphics, and make them work together smoothly. This means that appearance and meaning support each other, and both become more powerful elements in the user experience. Recalling the words of the famous American author, Dr. Seuss, "Words and pictures are yin and yang. Married, they produce a progeny more interesting than either parent."

Figure 2 shows good examples of how copy can provide extra delight to users when interacting with certain applications/websites.

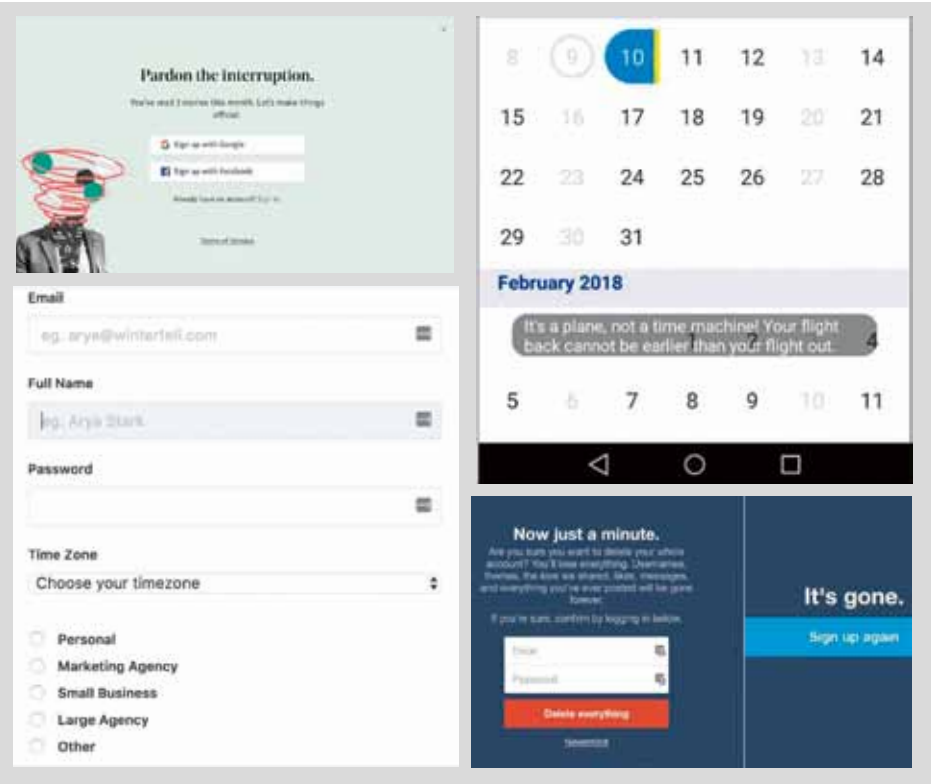

Figure 2: Catchy copy can make a website or app more engaging and fun.

Becoming a UX writer

If you've been working in content writing or content design and strategy, you will already have a fair understanding of what user-centricity is all about. To move into the field of UX writing, you need to become more sensitive to this aspect, in both the way you think and write. Here are some suggestions to help you on the path of UX writing:

- Keep an open eye and develop a heightened awareness of your surroundings and your interactions with both people and technology. When ordering food online or buying your favorite brand of shoes or a home appliance, ask yourself: How was the experience? How did I

feel and what made me feel that way? Did I experience any delightful moments?

- Study the creative process of artists and designers. Phrasing, tone, and delivery are some aspects to keep in mind. All creative professions open their minds to deeper subjects.
- When applying for a UX writing position, your CV is your first interview. Highlight some examples of your work or provide a portfolio at the time of your interview. This can help to substantiate how well you fit in.

What's in store for UX writers

We are so accustomed to looking at design as a medium that's mainly about wireframes and mockups that we tend to forget the text. But what about the small details that really change the way users consume products? We can't deliver narrations through visuals only.

What we need are words. And that's the storytelling part of design. Moving towards a more conversational path, there is an increasing need for UX writers. You write your story as you design your interface. With a narrative design, storytelling helps to gain and keep the attention of the user. When you use metaphors to resonate with the content, it becomes a more natural approach to conveying an idea. Just as we see a deeper integration of technology in our daily lives, we will see a deeper need for storytellers, people who are intuitively good at anticipating what words are needed, and when.

As a UX writer, you are an advocate for your organization's design. You must work to shape product experiences by creating useful, meaningful text that helps users complete the task at hand. You should help set the vision for content and drive cohesive product narratives across multiple platforms and touch points. As a stellar writer, you have a portfolio of work demonstrating content that simplifies and beautifies the overall user experience.

During the course of your work as a UX writer, you will have the opportunity to work with people in a variety of UX design-related jobs including researchers, product managers, engineers, marketing and customer operations professionals. Collaborating with each, you must strive to establish a cohesive language and a unified voice across products and platforms. You must use both empathy and logic as you design your product. You play the pivotal role of endorsing the product with not just good, but great copy.

You must be flexible and work well in a truly agile environment. You may have to define your own role and responsibilities, take on cross-functional tasks (like generating a wireframe, developing voice guidelines, or planning editorial strategies), and do so effectively.

In other words, as a UX writer, you are walking into an environment where nothing is certain, and where you must be able to do your job well, but also advocate your own importance in the process.

Creating your UX writing portfolio

Once you've moved into the field of UX writing, and have enough to show for it, it's important that you give yourself good credit for it. And how do you do this? By creating a portfolio that highlights your key competencies and examples of your work.

You can use some of the following tips to market your work:

- Are your samples easy to access and follow?
- Does your writing cater to the target audience?
- Is your writing clear and succinct?
- Does your writing reflect the problem and show the user how to respond to it?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nithya Krishnan is a user assistance developer and user experience advocate. In her 10+ years of experience in the field of technical communications, she has authored end-user documentation across various domains. With an academic background in information technology, her interest lies in creating a cohesive learning environment for all roles involved in a software development process.

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Technical product information impacts brand perception

Technical product documentation has always been an important component of a company's sales offerings, but in recent years it has started to play a much larger role in the overall customer purchase experience. A survey conducted by SDL highlights where in the customer journey technical documentation offers valuable touchpoints.

Text by Arjen van den Akker

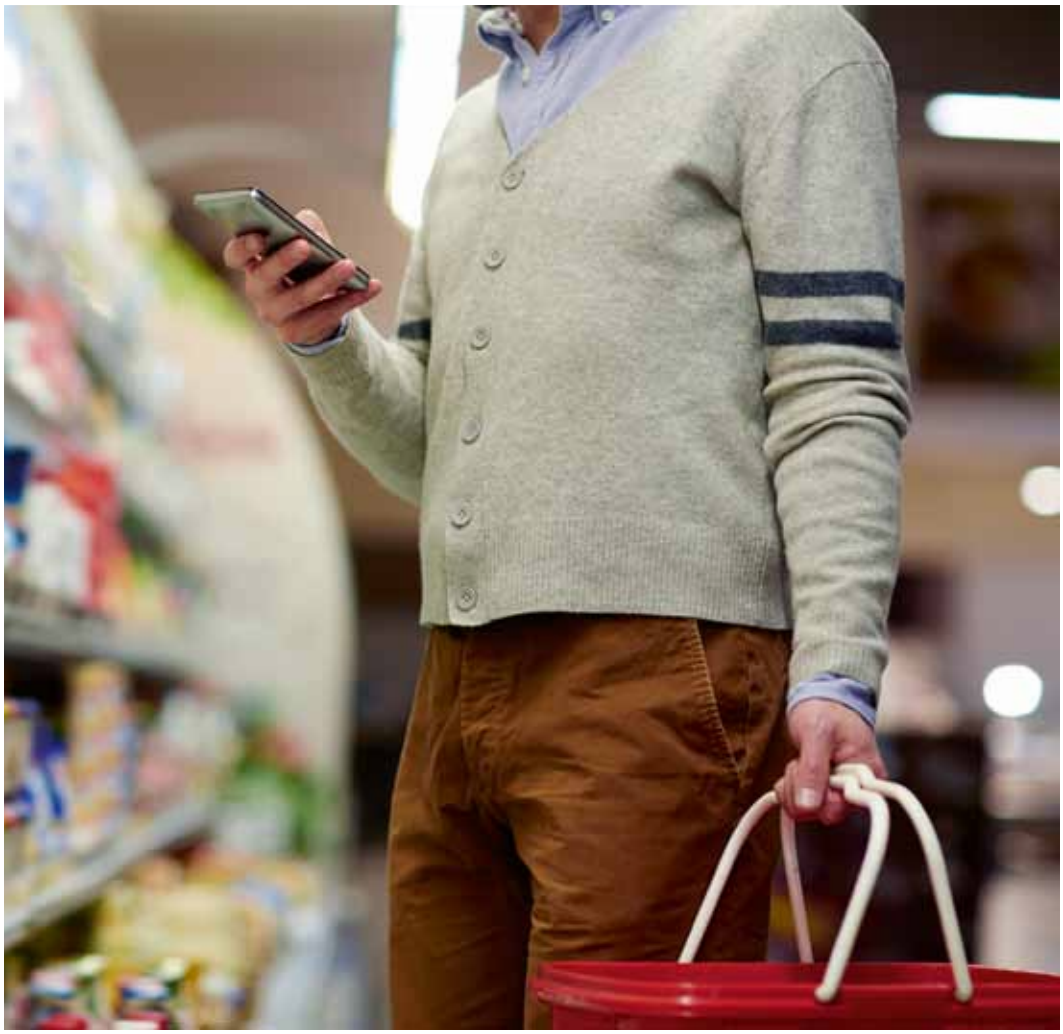

Image: © shironosov/istockphoto.com

Although it was clear that quality documentation continued to play a part even after a purchase was made, one surprising result of the recent SDL survey was the value that customers now place on technical documentation before completing their purchase. The full report, which summarizes the results of this survey, is available on the SDL website.

Global market preferences

What stood out in the responses globally is that there is an increased demand for high quality product content from companies, and in particular manufacturers, to drive not only purchase decisions but to build brand loyalty. Technical content is not just used to set up a newly purchased product, it is also often the first place people go to troubleshoot a problem. This is online technical content, instead of a printed manual that might have come with the product.

For a significant number of consumers, both business-to-business and business-to-consumer, online technical documentation is also an integral component to the review process, and companies are judged in the reviews on the ease of use and availability of that content. The following statistic illustrates this for the U.S. market alone, where almost three quarters (73 percent) say quality product information makes it more likely that they will recommend a brand to others. This puts technical documentation on par with any marketing effort a company might make and illustrates how valuable this type of content is across the enterprise.

Top three observations

From all the data gathered from the survey, these are the top three findings that show how and where consumers want to interact with a company's technical documentation:

1. 81 percent want content available in their language. Localizing content shows a company's understanding of and commitment to other cultures, which in turn enhances a brand's overall image.
2. 65 percent want content available in multiple formats. No longer is the printout in the box or an online PDF sufficient to meet a customer's needs. Video in particular is gaining ground as a preferred way to consume technical information.
3. 61 percent want content available on multiple devices. Product searches no longer happen just on a desktop computer. They are done on tablets and phones as well, so having online information optimized to these other, mobile, formats is meeting a critical customer need.

The evolution of product information

The biggest change in the search for and consumption of product information is that search engines and company websites now surpass the printed manual or downloadable PDF. And again, the quality of the information available online becomes a predictor of how a company is perceived. At all stages, the online technical information impacts the brand perception.

How is technical information used?

While 53 percent of global respondents use technical product information to learn more about a product before purchasing it, the information is used for more than just purchase decisions. It is starting to replace traditional customer service. In fact, the survey showed a dramatic drop in the use of customer service, with only 8 percent of respondents even considering an actual customer service department of value in their purchase decision.

Consumers prefer to consult different sources for help with a product before even considering contacting customer service.

The findings indicate that more often than not, a manufacturer's website is trusted more than the product manual for accurate and up-to-date information. This makes sense considering how often there are version updates to certain types of products and that those updates might not always make it into the manual in time.

What really matters

The majority of respondents – 94 percent in fact – agree that having all information available on a single platform, in a single place or source, is important to them. A single platform gives a company the option to interact with customers along different touchpoints, from product pages, to FAQs, to general company information and technical documentation.

As a side note to this, a company that also hosts user groups, where people are actively engaging and sharing information, gives that company's brand just that little bit of an extra boost.

How do millennials fit in?

Compared to other age groups, the millennial age group (18- to 34-year olds) consumes technical data differently. They are digital natives who are used to searching online not only to find product information but also to engage with user communities. User communities form an important part of their daily online activities and are a part of their regular social interactions. They are more likely to judge a brand based on reviews and don't share the same brand loyalty their parents might. In some ways, this means a company needs to work harder to capture this market and build loyalty.

Millennials also expressed a growing preference for video as a way to learn about products. They will often share videos with their peers or on social media platforms, which again, reflects on a brand.

Customized information

To recap, what stood out in the survey results is that people want technical documentation easily available in one place, in their language, accessible in multiple formats and on different devices.

It sounds simple, but this does require considerable planning and effort on the part of a company to seamlessly provide all of this to both existing and new customers. Underpinning an effort to meet those goals has to be robust and reliable technology that can update content across sites and languages with ease. Technical content should be componentized to facilitate and streamline this process as well. The consumer of today expects a seamless digital experience.

Following the trend indicated in the survey, high-quality technical product content has a significant impact on customer satisfaction and influences brand loyalty and sales. It should play a leading role in any content operating plan a company puts in place. It cannot be stressed enough that the customer experience is made up of different elements, but at each point there is content – or technical documentation – that fuels the interaction and determines the impression a customer develops of a company and the brands it offers.

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Arjen van den Akker works as product marketing director at SDL in the Content Management and Digital Experience space. He combines a passion for technology and communications with a background in computer engineering and marketing. Arjen has worked at a series of international B2B software vendors and has over 25 years of expertise in turning technology jargon into messaging and clear propositions that relate to business outcomes.

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Three best practices to improve CX and boost engagement

Engaging customers around the globe means speaking multiple languages while maintaining one distinctive voice – a juggling act that becomes ever more vital in the era of the customer.

Text by Calvin Scharffs

Image: © Nikada/istockphoto.com

In times of digital global marketing, it's easy to match a competitor's pricing and offer copycat products. Providing a better customer experience (CX), on the other hand, is an area where companies can really distinguish themselves from the pack. In *Walker's Customers 2020: A Progress Report* [1], the customer experience consulting company predicted that "by 2020, customer experience will overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator." In a recent Gartner survey on the role of CX in marketing, the majority (89 percent) said that they expect to compete on customer experience [2].

Improving CX is good for customers and it is good for business. Happy customers are more likely to purchase and refer others, and are willing to pay more to avoid the hassle and inconvenience of poor CX. A recent Temkin Group survey found that CX is highly correlated to future purchases [3]. "Consumers who have had a very good CX are 54 percent more likely to buy from a company than consumers who have had a very poor CX. Consumers who have had a very good CX are also five times more likely to recommend a company." This is in line with Oracle's *2011 Customer Experience Impact Report*, which found that 86 percent of customers will pay more for a better customer experience [4]. So there is a definitive financial incentive to provide a better CX.

Whether your organization is new to entering global markets or has a large globalization group dedicated to delivering multilingual content, there are three best practices that will improve customer experience and boost engagement. It comes down to personalization, localization of your entire marketing tech stack, and a consistent experience with your global brand.

Best Practice #1: Make personalization a priority

Learning about your products and services is the number one reason most consumers engage with your brand, so your information has to be both personalized and relevant. A recent article by Fast Company, titled "3 Ways to Make Your Company Relevant", explained that to resonate with global customers, your brand and message must appeal to the personal values and community of the end user [5]. Personalization is how companies create relevance, so to boost engagement and improve your CX, you need to make personalization a priority. And in a global marketplace, you can't be relevant or personal if you are not providing content in the native language.

Eliminating language barriers is key

To ensure your product and services maintain global relevance, your messaging, tone, and style must resonate with the target locale. The digital economy knows no borders. Independent research firm Common Sense Advisory (CSA) found that non-native speakers won't buy products or services from English-only websites [6]. To fully engage global customers, eliminating language barriers is the first and most important step toward personalization.

To personalize the customer journey, companies need to provide multilingual content throughout their entire marketing tech stack.

Best Practice #2: Localize your entire global marketing tech stack

While many companies focus their localization strategy on translating their website, it shouldn't be the only platform. To personalize the customer journey, companies need to provide multilingual content throughout the entire marketing tech stack. CSA research discovered that, to optimize global customer experience, you have to look beyond localizing your website.

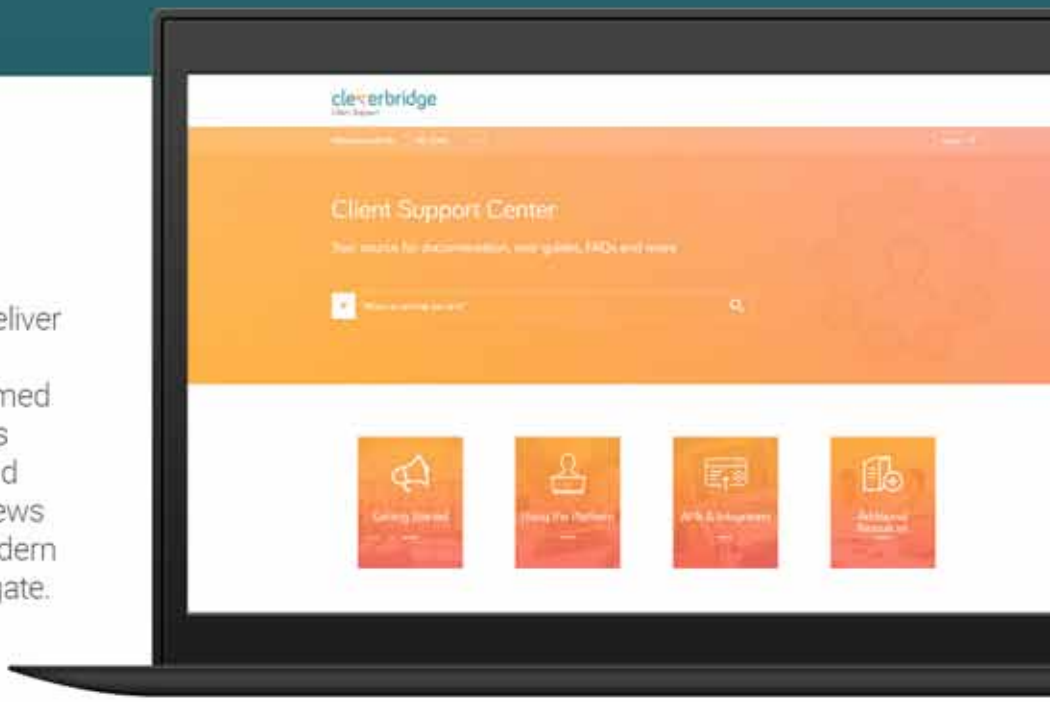
> "In 2016, building multilingual websites only takes a company so far. ...Customer experience (CX) builds from the combined result of website experiences plus the direct extensions of that look, feel, and function into HTML-based email, apps, social profiles managed by the brand, and various on-site engagement channels. When your company designs or manages the content where brand and customers meet, that is part of global CX, including video, chat, forums, and even call center interactions."
>
> *Roadmapping Global Customer Experience with 58 Best Practices. [7]*

The recent Marketo survey *The State of Engagement* [8] discovered that B2B consumers are using more channels to engage with their vendors. When asked which marketing channels customers engage with most, the results showed that the most-used channel is not a website – it is email. Consumers were highly likely to use email, social media, chat, podcasts, online communities and forums. Thus, companies need to offer multilingual content throughout the customer journey and across all the digital channels that are part of an effective marketing mix: social media, email marketing, community platforms, knowledge bases, etc.

madcap software

Global E-commerce Software Provider cleverbridge Creates Modern Client Support Center with MadCap Flare

Single-Source Publishing with MadCap Flare Streamlines Content Delivery



cleverbridge

By leveraging MadCap Flare to deliver its HTML5-based Client Support Center, cleverbridge has transformed the way its clients and employees access content, offering advanced search capabilities, role-based views for multiple audiences, and a modern look and feel that is easy to navigate.

"MadCap Flare's top navigation output has played a significant role in helping us to implement a state-of-the-art website that users find easy to use. Drop-downs have made it possible for us to limit the number of navigation levels to just three, making the content much less cluttered and easier for clients to navigate."

JULIANE KNOBLOCH | Technical Writer, cleverbridge

Read the Full Case Study and Download Your Free 30-Day Trial Today at **MadCapSoftware.com**

Technology for translation

Web developers are responsible for making sure that the path to global engagement and localization goes as smoothly as possible. When enterprises prioritize user experience and customer engagement, providing dynamic, multilingual content with agile, 24/7 delivery is key. Translation management systems (TMS) are specifically designed to address the challenges of continuous global publishing. Cloud-hosted and offered on a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) basis, a browser-based translation workflow and publishing platform is fully integrated and interoperable with all of the most popular third-party applications.

Translation connectors and multilingual application programming interfaces (API) can be integrated into your native environments, enabling you to create, update, and manage delivery of multilingual content without leaving your native environment. There are translation connectors for all of today's most commonly used marketing technology platforms: marketing automation, content management systems (CMS), customer relationship management (CRM), customer engagement platforms, software, knowledge bases, and more. Robust API can seamlessly integrate content management, content authoring, code development, and source control.

Best Practice #3: Create a consistent brand experience

The goal of establishing a strong brand is to convince customers of your company and product value with content that educates, differentiates, and strongly communicates your value proposition. And it has to be done in a way that creates an emotional connection between your brand and the consumer.

One of the most common drawbacks when brands go global is maintaining the consistency of corporate messaging and branding. Integrated localization technology will help ensure that your international customers have the same CX, no matter where they live or what language they use to engage with your brand.

The Lucidpress report *The Impact of Brand Consistency* from October 2016 [9], predicts that brands that are consistently presented are three to four times more likely to experience brand visibility. The report also identified the financial value of ensuring branding consistency: The average revenue increase attributed to always presenting the brand consistently is 23 percent.

Software to ensure consistency across borders

Cloud-based translation software and linguistic assets make it easier for companies to create consistent brand messaging in any country or language by collecting translated terminology in repositories. Translation memories (TM), style guides, and glossaries can be effectively used to ensure brand consistency among several different departments in several different countries.

Cloud-based terminology management enables global companies to achieve effective and accurate translations by organizing specific terms along with clear sets of rules for their usage. This ensures that translators use your industry-specific terms, acronyms, technical terms, short phrases and slogans appropriately. Terminology management also protects any keywords used for search engine optimization (SEO), so your content remains searchable in any language.

Tech-forward companies rely on these innovative translation tools to centralize multilingual content management and to maintain consistent voice, messaging, and branding worldwide. It also optimizes your translation spending. Reusing translation is easy when the information is stored in the cloud. Organizations do not have to duplicate efforts or pay for the same translated terminology over and over again.

Personalized engagement is good for business

In its survey of Fortune 500 firms titled *Fortune 500 Companies that Invest in Translation Report Higher Revenue*, CSA found that businesses that augmented their translation budget were 1.5 times more likely to report an increase in total revenue. Companies that translated consumer information were also twice as likely to experience revenue increases and to generate improved profits. [10]

Making personalization a priority, localizing more than just a website, and providing a consistent global brand experience makes reaching and engaging with a global audience easier. Corporate enterprises that use powerful localization technology aren't just buying translation – they are investing in the ability to improve CX, engage more customers, and improve their bottom line.

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Understanding blockchain technology

"Blockchain" has become a popular term in recent years, particularly in technical industries. But what is the concept behind it and what are its applications? And could it transform the way that information is developed and managed?

Text by Bhushan Jahagirdar

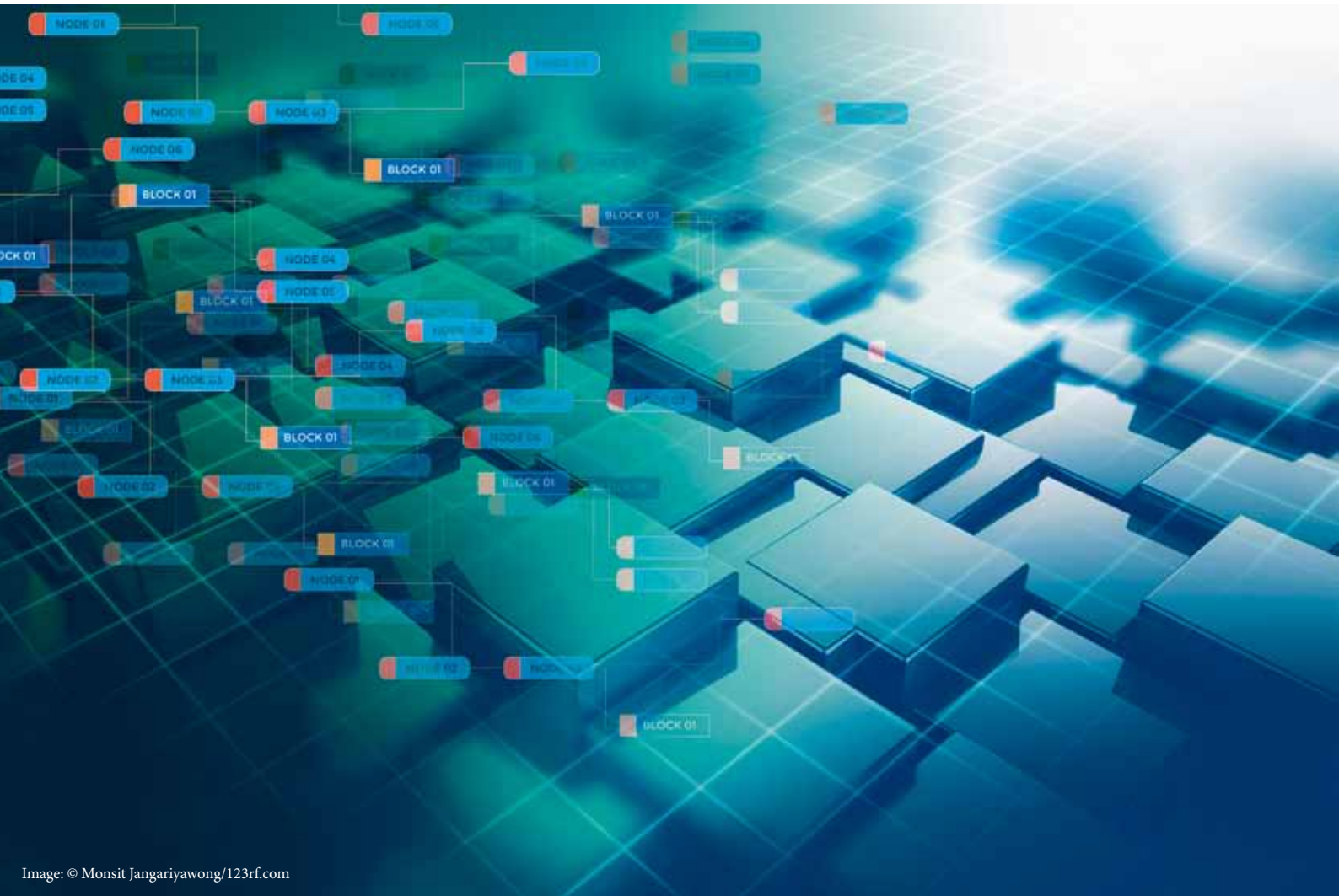

Image: © Monsit Jangariyawong/123rf.com

Blockchain is a concept that was invented by a mysterious person going by the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto. Even now, nobody really knows who this person is. The concept was first published in his whitepaper "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System" a decade ago, back in 2008.

A blockchain is a digitized, distributed "ledger" that contains unchangeable data in the form of packets or blocks. A ledger is a record of financial transactions, which is used to prepare financial statements for the organization. It includes information of revenues and expenses. Figure 1 shows an example of what a ledger looks like.

Note that for each deposit or withdrawal a new row is added as a complete, valid entry.

For any database that is accessed or influenced by more than one party, so-called "distributed ledgers" are used. A distributed ledger is a type of ledger that is synchronized across a network and is spread across multiple sites, institutions, or geographies.

To clarify the idea, suppose you have a bank account that can be accessed by your partner as well as by you, and both of you have a ledger. Whenever you – or your partner – make any transaction, corresponding entries are made in both ledgers. So the entries in both ledgers are synchronized at all times.

Now imagine if such synchronization is done without the control of a bank; say software is taking care of it with the help of nodes or computers with high configurations connected in the network.

This is the crux of the blockchain technology. The blockchain technology is based on the concept of a distributed ledger. Every participant is in synchronization and can see the same up-to-the-minute copy of the ledger at any given time.

Date	Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
Jan. 10, 2018	Journal Page 1	$15,000		$15,000
Jan. 20, 2018	Journal Page 1		$2,000	$13,000
Feb. 1, 2018	Journal Page 1	$12,000		$25,000

Figure 1: A simple ledger or record of financial transactions

Bitcoin and blockchain

"Bitcoin" and "blockchain" are the two terms that are often used interchangeably. In reality, bitcoin is an application while blockchain is the platform on which the bitcoin application runs. As an analogy, just as iTunes is an application on your iPhone running on the operating system iOS, bitcoin is the application that is running on the blockchain technology.

Bitcoin is a digital currency. It is also known as a cryptocurrency. An encryption mechanism is implemented to regulate the generation and distribution of bitcoins. There are some alternatives to bitcoin, often called altcoins, which also evolved using blockchain technology.

One of these alternative cryptocurrencies is Ethereum. It came into existence only in 2015 and is much faster than bitcoin. It has capability to perform operations in a few seconds as compared with a few minutes in bitcoin. Transaction units in Ethereum are called ethers. Ethereum is also known as programmable money, as it has a built-in programming language called Solidity. You can write smart contracts and decentralized apps (DApps) using Solidity (smart contracts are explained later in this article). DApps is a website with files and databases that are not stored on a centralized server. In this sense, bitcoin and ethereum are not competitors and help users to solve different types of problems.

Blockchain and supply chain management

Now, let's look at a supply chain as an example to illustrate how blockchain technology works. In a supply chain, the manufacturer, distributor, wholesaler, and retailer need to be connected to enable transactions between them. But if each of them has a separate system or database to keep track of stock items, their systems might not be in sync, not to mention the additional implementation costs that are incurred by each entity. Also, one of the entities could try to manipulate the database entries for their own benefit. Opting for one centralized database, on the other hand, might allow a smart hacker to get into the system or bring it down altogether.

Now, suppose blockchain technology is implemented: Each entity can now see the exact same copy of the ledger with information regarding stock items. This mechanism is also more secure as it is very difficult for a hacker to bring down multiple copies of a database.

If the retailer wants to make a payment to the wholesaler in the form of a bitcoin or any other cryptocurrency, the information about this transaction is stored in the form of a block. The retailer then broadcasts this block to other nodes in the network to verify the transaction. This also confirms the identity of the retailer, which is necessary because there is no bank involved in validating the transaction.

Other nodes in the network then validate the block. Once this is completed, the appropriate number of bitcoins or other cryptocurrency is added to the wallet of the wholesaler and a corresponding entry is added to the ledger. Other ledger copies are automatically updated so that each entity remains in synchronization. Figure 2 on page 25 illustrates the process.

The overall validation process is not that simple in reality. Various algorithms are in place and many are evolving day by day.

Blockchain types

The blockchain system can be broadly categorized into two groups: private blockchains and public blockchains.

- **Private blockchain** – As the name suggests, a private blockchain is implemented where all of the participants know each other. This system is often used within a company that is spread across multiple locations or geographies. Transactions happen between trusted parties.
- **Public blockchain** – This system is spread hypothetically without a fixed scope or boundary. In this system, you do not need anybody's permission to add your data to the system.

- **Permissioned vs. permissionless blockchain systems** – This determines who can validate transactions. In the case of permissioned blockchain, only one subset of users is authorized to validate any transaction, whereas, in the case of permissionless blockchain, anybody can join and validate the transaction.

Smart contracts

Just like bitcoins, smart contract is another application of blockchain technology. It is used for document validation and notarization. As the name suggests, smart contracts are contracts or agreements that are triggered automatically after certain criteria and specified conditions are fulfilled. These contracts are executed without human interference.

One of the application areas in which smart contracts can be used is renting a house, an apartment or a commercial office space. After all valid documents have been submitted by both the tenant and the house owner, the smart contract is triggered automatically. Money is transferred from the tenant's cryptocurrency wallet to the owner's cryptocurrency wallet. When the contract is finished, the security deposit can automatically be transferred from the owner's wallet to the tenant's wallet. This brings more transparency to the transaction, which is crucial in big monetary deals.

Proof of existence

Proof of existence is an online service developed in 2003 by Manuel Araoz and Esteban Ordano. It verifies the existence of documents in the blockchain system based on the timestamp. This concept can be applied to prove ownership in a variety of applications such as legal documents, government documents, property-related documents or land records.

Blockchain in real estate

When buying a house, you usually need to deal with a property broker, a lawyer, and the government before you can close the deal. The overall process requires a huge pile of documents and lots of time, and involves hefty charges for the involved parties.

Now imagine if blockchain technology is in place. There are huge benefits:

- **Transparency in the transactions** – Real estate is said to be one of the biggest sectors generating black money. Governments charge their taxes on the basis of the documented price, which might differ from the actual transaction price. Through blockchain and smart contracts, transactions will be "digital only" and the government has access to the actual transaction value.
- **Tamper-proof documents** – As records in the blockchain technology are tamper-proof, property buyers are fully aware of

the real owner of the land. It is very difficult to sell property based on fake documents. Governments obtain an exact idea of who is holding how much property. Recently, the government of India launched a pilot project implementing blockchain technology in a few Indian states such as Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. This has helped the government to identify "Benami" properties – properties acquired keeping the owner's identity hidden – and take action against it.

- **No intermediate parties** – The need for a broker and a lawyer is eliminated, as documents can be validated automatically and notarized with the help of smart contracts. This can save huge amounts of money and time.
- **Trustworthy data updated in real time** If we can extend the capabilities of the blockchain technology, we can probably display the exact same copy of the property listing on different websites. Any change in one of the websites will lead to an automatic change of the respective property in all the websites where that property is listed.

Blockchain and healthcare

In our highly health-conscious society, people want their medical data to be stored in safe locations. After all, it is very important and very sensitive data. This thought came to the attention of some hackers, who executed ransomware attacks primarily targeted at medical systems. With blockchain technology, medical data is more secure, as it is replicated at multiple sites. In addition to the storage mechanism, various encryption algorithms are implemented to keep the blockchain safe. Blockchain can also improve the following areas of healthcare:

- **Claim processing** – Claim processing is one of the most important steps after any medical treatment. As of now, it is still a time-consuming manual process. If there is a smart contract in place, this process can be made speedy and transparent.
- **Medical history management** – Medical records become tamper-proof and secure. Your doctor has access to your data at any given time. Various documents can also be standardized so that they can be shared among various hospitals that you visit.

Figure 2: A supply chain process using blockchain technology

Blockchain and technical writing

Technical writers play a major role in explaining complex technologies to users in simple language. The blockchain technology has great benefits for technical writing:

- **Document safety:** Documents can be stored on a distributed database as they are made more secure by applying cryptographic keys.
- **Intellectual property:** In a private blockchain, document ownership is fully disclosed, leaving no room for ownership-related issues. However, if you are using a public blockchain, the content that you have published, for example on a website, receives a timestamp along with a hash key. This makes it impossible for anybody else to publish the same content: In this case, your website can be regarded as an entry in the ledger, and as blockchain cannot contain duplicate keys, it becomes impossible to publish duplicate content.
- **Royalties:** Suppose you are a freelance technical writer and the payment you receive is based on the number of copies sold. After implementing blockchain, you can earn your bitcoins for each copy. The publisher can't cheat you as the transaction is automated and triggered by set conditions.

You can refer to resources or various guides such as the User's Guide and Developer Guide on Bitcoin.org.

Conclusion

Blockchain really is a very great and groundbreaking innovation and has often been termed a "paradigm shift". It is a technology that is still evolving. We can all benefit from it as it matures and percolates into our daily lives.

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One word, one meaning

Think using a controlled language is too complicated, not suited for your market or simply too "controlling"? Think again. The S100D and the ASD STE-100 are two free standards for Simplified Technical English that could help you produce more user-friendly documents with no new software needed.

Text by Robert Meyer

Image: © wosephjeber/istockphoto.com

Has your company recently sold equipment to a vendor who requires MIL-SPEC (military specification) documentation? Or perhaps, despite the fact that you are not a native speaker, you find that a lot of your writing is in English and word choice really gives you a headache. Or perhaps your product manager has asked for some improved product installation documents after a grueling product installation/validation cycle. If you have been in the field of technical communication for a while you have no doubt heard of ***Simplified Technical English***, controlled language, and the foreboding acronyms S1000D and ASD STE-100. Your fellow writers might have even given you their honest opinions: too complex, too expensive, not user-friendly, only for the aviation industry, etc. You might even have been put off by the idea of someone "controlling" your language. After all, language is a living thing. Whatever your experience, perhaps one or both of these standards are worth a look.

They are both available online at no cost and are recognized worldwide. This article will give you the basics, and you can sample the science via a free download to see if you want to add them to your writing/editing toolbox.

What S1000D and ASD STE-100 are... and aren't

Both standards are implementations of the theory of "controlled language" or "rule-based writing", ideas that have been studied, debated, developed, and implemented in different forms since the 1930s. To quote from an excellent article by Herbert Kaiser from tcworld 3/16 [1]:

> "A language is guided by a few rules. The principles of language are based on the insights gained from research into comprehension. Information that is structured according to specific rules and recipient-oriented is understood better by the user."

In more basic terms, these standards can be thought of as highly specific formatting and style guides for technical English.

S1000D started as a research project by engineers at The Boeing Company, who wanted to standardize English-language maintenance manuals on Boeing aircraft deployed worldwide. The standard has evolved considerably and is now known as an XML specification for preparing and managing equipment maintenance and operations information. As such, it is more geared toward the format and content of technical documentation sets than the writing of it. It was initially developed into a standard by the AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD) for use with military aircraft, and it has a steering committee that maintains control of the specification.

The current ASD STE-100 was developed from early work in the 1980s and is a controlled-language specification originally developed for writing text in aerospace industry maintenance manuals. It is a strictly limited and standardized subset of standard English and is officially trademarked as Simplified Technical English (STE). It is not an XML specification and is probably more like a "style guide on steroids".

Neither one is a software application or a machine-translation tool. Though both had origins in the aerospace maintenance industry, their particular use is NOT restricted to this industry. In fact, the stakeholders in the ASD STE-100 consortium have enthusiastically pushed for the standard's use in many other industries. Both standards, true to their aircraft-maintenance pedigree, are particularly well-suited to writing procedures – even computer program procedures – but not exactly made for frothy web-content writing.

Image 1: Pages from S1000D Issue 4.2 showing prototype pages of a maintenance manual.

S1000D

You will probably find the S1000D more useful as a "big picture" of the content and layout for technical material, whether you plan to build XML data schemas or not. Say you get tasked with writing a manual for a new piece of machinery. If you don't already have a good template, you can probably base at least your table of contents on the list of data module types defined in the S1000D specification. First, download the standard from the S1000D website:

http://public.s1000d.org/Downloads/Pages/S1000DDownloads.aspx

Naturally, it is in XML and the latest PDF (Issue 4.2) is more than 3500 pages, so be sure to leave it as a PDF. In the specification, the contents of each required data module (service bulletin, description, wiring data, maintenance schedule, etc.) are rigorously defined, which makes this an excellent reference checklist for that new manual you were asked to develop. If your manual contains all the components listed in this specification, it will probably be good enough as a first draft, with later additions or revisions based on the specific product and customer requirements.

Though it is not meant as a how-to manual, the S1000D specification walks you through each section an S1000D-approved manual must have, using a maintenance procedure for a bicycle instead of a Boeing. At a minimum, any MIL-SPEC documentation would have to have the XML schemas specified to be valid. There are thousands of other more detailed schemas/descriptions for every conceivable piece of equipment bought military (see everyspec.com). You will find the description very effective, though not exactly pretty, with the XML markup for each component in the schema shown. It doesn't get simpler than this. You follow the template, make it customer-specific, and check the legal requirements for safety notes and warning messages. Interestingly, all the text written in the specification meets ASD STE-100 standards.

ASD STE-100

ASD STE-100 is a writing and editing tool. After your manual is designed and formatted, you will drill down to the writing to make the procedures

as foolproof as possible. To do so, and to help your customers with a limited understanding of English and the need to get a procedure done absolutely correctly, you might be well advised to check some of your text against the ASD STE-100 (Simplified Technical English or STE) specification.

Though STE was developed to avoid translation costs, many machine translation systems use its rule-based methodology to make translation quicker and cheaper. Again, for a thorough background on ASD STE-100, see Herbert Kaiser's article [1]. To put it simply, STE is built on the assumption that most, if not all, maintenance procedures can be explained and understood using a controlled dictionary of 900 English words clearly defined for one single use and 65 strict rules on grammar and the usage of these words in context. To quote Herbert Kaiser, STE…"can be understood so clearly from its structure and word selection that users with minimal knowledge of English understand this technical information immediately and can implement it exactly."

Just like the S1000D, development of ASD STE-100 started in the late 70s, originally as a standard for the European aerospace and defense industries. Since then, it has evolved into a standard widely used by international corporations, especially for maintenance and installation text. Now only three percent of the dictionary terms are limited to aerospace usage. Download the specification (Issue 7) here: www.asd-ste100.org/request.html. The 382-page PDF is free of charge and new versions are listed periodically.

Put on your specs!

The first 89 pages of the STE specification contain the grammar rules. Experienced technical writers will not find anything really new in these rules; they are standard technical writing rules (both in English and German). However, they are well illustrated with vivid examples. The rules in Section 9 (Writing practices) are worth reviewing, as the examples show how to change sentence structure to accommodate the approved words in the STE dictionary.

The dictionary follows in Part 2. This dictionary doesn't give definitions; rather, it lists the words accepted for use in the standard and gives you an approved and not-approved use of the word, if applicable. Note that many of the not-approved uses involve the passive voice. This rule is included in Section 1.

Here is an abbreviated version of Herbert Kaiser's explanation of the STE methodology used:

1. **Keyword (part of speech):** This is the keyword entry with information on the type of word, because every permitted word in STE is permitted only as a specific word type. For example, "test" is only permitted as a noun (the test), but not as a verb (to test).
2. **Approved meaning/ALTERNATIVES:** This contains the definition of a permitted word. Alternative phrasings are given for words that are not permitted in STE. These are listed in lowercase letters.
3. **APPROVED EXAMPLE:** The entire text in this column is in uppercase letters. This indicates that everything conforms to STE. These are sample sentences from technical manuals for the keywords displayed in column 1. If the keyword shown in column 1 is not permitted in STE (lowercase letters), this column has sample sentences with the alternatives provided in column 2 (uppercase letters).
4. **Not approved:** This also deals with sample sentences from technical manuals. But the lowercase letters indicate that the sentences do not conform to STE. The column is only filled for keywords that are not permitted. Column 4 is empty if the keyword conforms to ASD STE-100.

Word (part of speech)	Approved meaning/ ALTERNATIVES	APPROVED EXAMPLE	Not approved
activate (v)	START (v)	START THE MOTOR.	Activate the motor.
	OPERATE (v)	THE LEVERS OPERATE THE MICROSWITCHES.	Microswitches are activated by levers.
	CONNECT (v)	MAKE SURE THAT THE CIRCUIT IS CONNECTED.	Make sure the circuit is activated.
don (v)	USE (v)	USE PROTECTIVE GOGGLES WHEN YOU DO WORK ON FIRE EXTINGUISHERS.	You must don protective goggles when working on fire extinguishers.
	PUT ON (v)	PUT THE MASK ON AND BREATHE THROUGH IT TO MAKE SURE THAT THE OXYGEN SUPPLY IS CORRECT.	Don mask and breathe through it to check oxygen supply.

Image 2: Entries in the ASD Simplified Technical English (STE) specification dictionary

Though it may seem overly strict, the STE attempts to limit a word to as few uses as possible in a text. Those who read (and write) modern English as a second language should welcome that. To cite an example from Wikipedia: The word "close" can only be used in one of two meanings:

1. To move together, or to move to a position that stops or prevents materials from going in or out
2. To operate a circuit breaker to make an electrical circuit

The verb can express closing a door or closing a circuit, but cannot be used in other senses (for example to close the meeting or to close a business). The adjective "close" appears in the dictionary as an unapproved word with the suggested approved alternative "near". So STE does not allow "do not go close to the landing gear", but it does allow "do not go near the landing gear."

In addition to basic STE vocabulary listed in the dictionary, Section 1 (Words) gives explicit guidelines for adding technical names and technical verbs that writers need to describe technical information. For example, words or phrases such as overhead panel, grease, propeller, to ream, and to drill are not listed in the dictionary, but qualify as approved terms under the guidelines in Part 1, Section 1 (specifically, Writing Rules 1.5 and 1.10). Of course, it might be interesting or professionally beneficial to read through all of the dictionary entries, but you can also search some of your most-used words to see how they are adjudicated. You might be surprised! Phrases or words you have been using for years may appear as "not approved", while other words you thought were too abstract are included as "APPROVED EXAMPLE".

Don't expect the STE specification to solve some of your more thorny writing questions. For example, I (and a product manager) once spent a lot of time debating the word "fitting", as in "injection nozzle fitting" and got nowhere. Somehow, the phrase translated directly as "screwed fittings" from the base language, which didn't really work in English, of course! Not even the STE dictionary could help me with this.

In any case, treat STE as another resource, and keep in mind that the specification was originally aimed at an audience that did maintenance and repair of aircraft engines, so some of the approved examples seem a bit clunky (I would NEVER write that!). Also, the dictionary does not deal with spelling issues (American or British spelling). The list of international companies that have incorporated the STE into their in-house writing/editing systems spans the alphabet, from Avaya to Xerox.

There's an app for that!

If you like what you see in the spec, but your company hasn't implemented it, you can download several plugins that will search through your document for words listed in the dictionary and offer the alternatives in the specification. Techscribe offers an ASD STE-100 plugin "Term Checker" available for download with review and purchase options [2].

Etteplan also has a tool that is a little more muscular, but includes the ASD STE-100 in its search routine, as well as standard acronyms and other specifications [3]. Of course, just dropping an approved STE word into a sentence will not always work, so it goes without saying that you will have to re-edit and proofread after any STE validation work. And don't despair, STE is considered a living language and accepts feedback from users to improve it or argue with the specification. You can download a feedback form on the ASD STE-100 web page.

With an understanding of the intended uses for these two specifications (S1000D and ASD STE-100) and a bit of wordsmithing, you can improve the clarity of any maintenance and installation documentation you write in English. And the next time you see "ASD STE-100 compliance?" on the project kickoff "wish list" you can confidently say: "Already implemented! Next?"

References

[1] www.tcworld.info/e-magazine/technical-communication/article/simplified-technical-english-a-globally-proven-trendsetter

[2] www.simplified-english.co.uk/index.html

[3] https://technicaldocumentation.services/offering/hyper-ste

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Meyer is a technical writer and content developer currently working in Germany. During a long and varied technical writing career in the US and Europe, he has authored documentation across a range of domains: aerospace, biotech, IT, and remote process control. He enjoys helping new technical writers get started in the business.

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Mobile-forward design:

Principles for maximizing return on language investment

Based on data gathered from 3,169 websites, CSA Research has uncovered a set of principles that the firm defines as mobile-forward design (MFD) – design principles that help global brands deliver brand.com experiences in more than 45 languages. It argues for a "same experience, all devices, all markets, all languages" approach to expanding a brand's total addressable audience.

Text by Benjamin B. Sargent

Image: © Cylonphoto/istockphoto.com

"ROI Walls" hold back most big brands

Each year, as part of the Global Website Assessment Index, Common Sense Advisory (CSA Research) gathers data on language support by the world's most valuable brands, most successful web properties, and biggest companies. To identify companies most likely to benefit from website globalization, we use lists compiled by Brand Finance, Alexa, Mozilla, and Forbes. In 2017, our analysts visited 3,169 sites using human researchers to identify language versions of the site with enough content that a visitor can gather information about products and services or take advantage of main features. Every year, CSA Research sees spikes in the data, indicating that clusters of companies stop at predictable places, as if held back by invisible walls. These "ROI Walls" correspond to natural breaks in the value of language markets, as benchmarked in our report: "Digital Opportunity: Top 100 Online Languages for 2017."

Year after year, with minor variations, the data shows four persistent walls at 10, 20, 30, and 40 languages – even as the number of sites in the study increased from 1,000 to more than 3,000. In 2017, ROI Wall #3 was extra choppy, with buttresses at 26 and 32 on either side of the customary spike at 29 (see Figure 1).

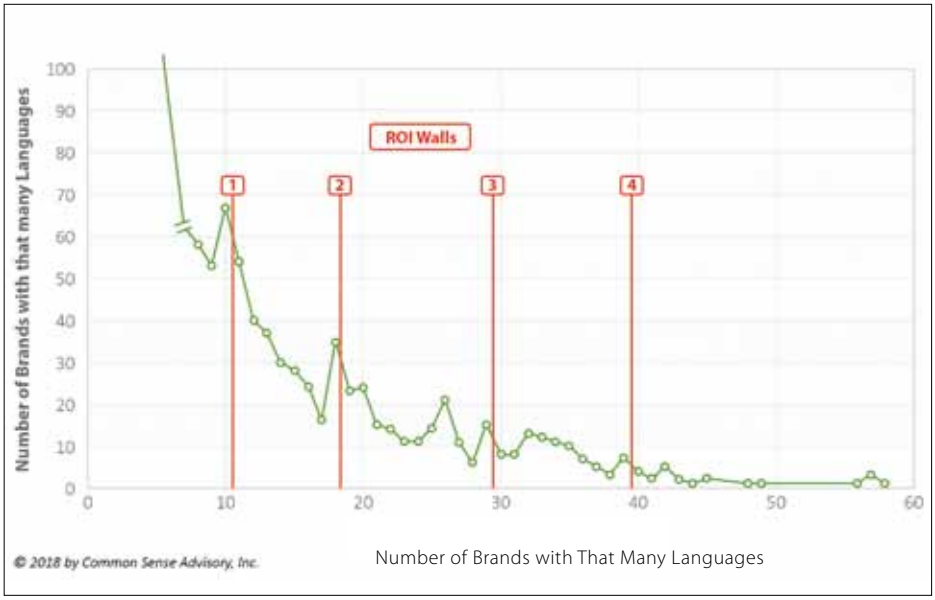
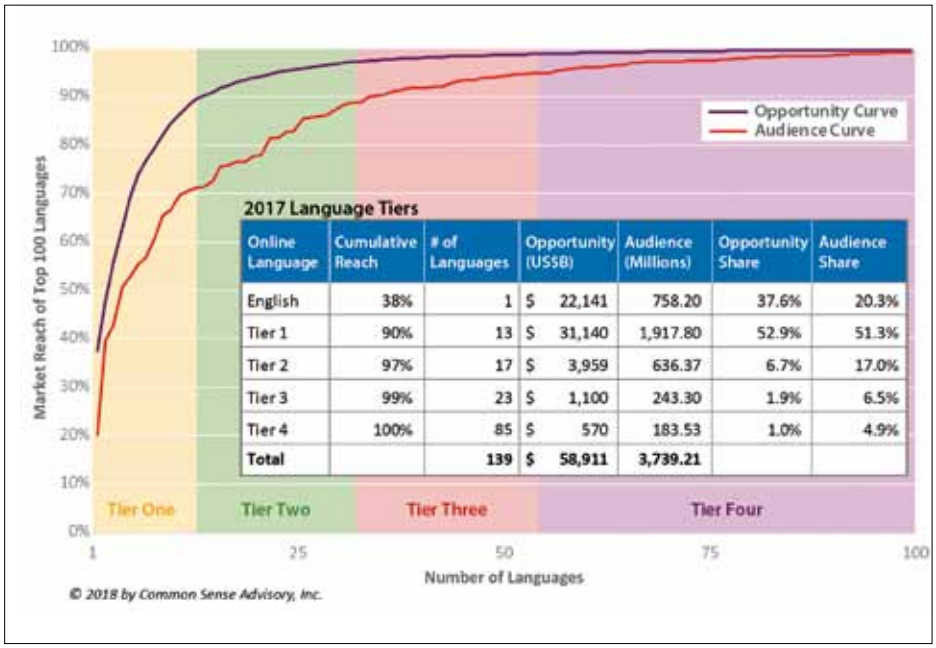


Figure 1: ROI Walls for multilingual digital experience management

Source: CSA Research

The data shows where companies get bogged down in their pursuit of global audiences, unable to capture sufficient return on investment to go further down the long tail of languages. These ROI Walls appear in our data going back to 2010 and correspond to language tiers and known use patterns. To understand why we refer to these spikes as ROI Walls, let's look at the long tail phenomenon. When organized in sequence based on economic opportunity for global brands, each new language offers a smaller and smaller market size (see Figure 2). Brands that can find ROI in supporting the ten languages with the biggest economic opportunity – based on per capita GDP multiplied by number of speakers online – can't necessarily justify the cost of translating into the eleventh language. Those that can streamline costs and boost return on content enough to keep going may expand to 18 languages, but then get stuck again as the ROI diminishes – they can't get to 20. And so it goes for each wall.

Companies making it past ROI Wall #4 often extend coverage rapidly to 60, 80, or more languages. How are these sites organized to deliver ROI at such a scale of languages, each contributing such a small piece of the overall market? The answer lies in mobile-forward design.



2017 Language Tiers

Online Language	Cumulative Reach	# of Languages	Opportunity (US$B)	Audience (Millions)	Opportunity Share	Audience Share
English	38%	1	$ 22,141	758.20	37.6%	20.3%
Tier 1	90%	13	$ 31,140	1,917.80	52.9%	51.3%
Tier 2	97%	17	$ 3,959	636.37	6.7%	17.0%
Tier 3	99%	23	$ 1,100	243.30	1.9%	6.5%
Tier 4	100%	85	$ 570	183.53	1.0%	4.9%
Total		**139**	**$ 58,911**	**3,739.21**		

Figure 2: Total market reach of online language tiers

Source: CSA Research

What is mobile-forward design?

Innovative brands like WhatsApp, now owned by Facebook, grew up with "mobile-first" development and responsive web design (RWD). The emerging trend of mobile-forward design assumes an app-like approach for brand.com

customer experiences. It affirms mobile-first development but takes that notion further by eliminating everything else, using RWD. It puts the mobile experience "forward" as the only experience, available across PC, tablet, and mobile platforms.

Mobile-forward design delivers one customer experience on all screen widths, with no device-specific interfaces. It also puts that same experience forward for all markets, in all languages. The content and features delivered may vary by market and audience, but the differences are plug-and-play within the design, based on country, language, and other personalization logic. MFD builds on existing approaches by:

- **Utilizing adaptive web design principles.** Mobile-forward websites rely on responsive web design, which allows a single design to dynamically resize according to the window or screen size. RWD results in customization of the experience according to window size, rather than screen size. MFD websites are responsive, but they go further by enforcing a consistent CX across all platforms and screen widths – different functions or content can appear depending on screen size, market, language, or other personalization factors, but the experience remains consistent, coherent, and convincing.
- **Extending mobile-first best practices for global websites.** Because the smallest screen imposes the greatest challenge for designers, it gets drafted first. In a mobile-first scenario, layouts for tablets, laptops, and large-screen monitors build off the small-screen look and feel. However, these later iterations often end up as distinct layouts that must be managed separately and may preserve device-specific functions. Branching and maintaining separate code bases for .com experiences adds cost, delay, and complexity for site development and content creation. Delivering the same experience on all devices reduces code maintenance efforts and allows a brand to introduce new features – and launch new content – faster.
- **Delivering one CX for all devices in all markets.** Taking mobile-first development and responsive web design to their logical conclusion, brands adopting this practice don't waste resources on developing inconsistent experiences across their various regions and channels. The principles of mobile-forward design are especially relevant to a global brand because they help streamline support for international markets. MFD is device- and platform-agnostic. Originally, the approach was applied to sites built around web- and mobile-delivered apps, but corporate information sites can also benefit.
- **Local content experiences don't go away.** The point is not to eliminate device-specific apps or country- or culture-specific experiences. All of those will always be relevant. The point is to deliver brand.com experiences everywhere, in addition to those things, to the extent that each is needed. If it's a global brand, this usually involves global content. In how many languages and markets can the brand deliver those core experiences?

Principles of mobile-forward design, in practice

Based on an analysis of the customer experience, rather than on any underlying code, CSA Research arrived at an initial set of criteria for evaluating whether a website meets the test of mobile-forward design:

1. User controls for content and interface

The first criterion demands that a site functions as a web-based app, offering user-controlled settings in the interface based on GUI-style architecture and design. Onscreen widgets are common for such sites, allowing anonymous visitors or those not logged in to set preferences. These choices may change the language of the interface, the country of interest, or other options, such as currency (see Figure 3). For sites with log-ins, additional preferences may appear on an account settings screen.

User and brand benefit: Users want and expect to tailor their own experience. Companies maximize the value of their digital assets when users visit more often and stay longer. By allowing users to customize their experience but see the same content regardless of channel, MFD improves customer experience, increases engagement, and raises the value of digital content.

2. Same experience on all devices

Users encounter the same features, content, and design on all devices. Even for non-con-

Figure 3: AccuWeather.com offers user-controlled settings just like the app.

Source: AccuWeather.com, Common Sense Advisory

tiguous visits, brands should not expect their users to learn several versions of features or navigate from a different look and feel (see Figure 4). RWD is the easiest way to accomplish platform- and device-agnostic CX, but consistency is the test.

User benefit: Visitors want to swap screens and devices without changing how they interact with a site. MFD boosts success as customers perform tasks on multiple devices.

3. Same experience in all markets

This criterion is not obvious, because single-language or in-market apps might still meet the two criteria above. This test determines whether changing language, country, or other settings results in a re-direction along the customer journey – or simply refreshes the user's current position. If changing preferences results in navigation to a different page – thereby moving the visitor to a different moment in the journey – this does not qualify as MFD. The screen may reload and the URL may change, but continuity in the customer experience is the test: The user remains on the current screen, in the same moment, but now with different parameters applied (see Figure 5).

Brand benefit: Global brands depend on scale and velocity. One app for all markets allows companies to scale across more markets, accelerate product development roadmaps, and increase content velocity.

Reducing cost and complexity

Brands adopting this approach reduce their cost and effort – and accelerate the velocity of feature development and content launches – by limiting device-specific versions. The benefits are hard to miss:

1. **Users appreciate the consistency, simplicity, and familiarity of one design.** They're already screen-hopping, so why confuse them by switching the design just because they picked up a different device?
2. **Mobile-forward design unburdens the site owner.** The benefits to site owners include streamlined internationalization, development, localization, and testing routines. For the young hyper-global companies that surpass 40 languages, this capability proves decisive – in fact, it already matters if you're still trying to break through ROI Wall 1. The biggest outcome of "same experience all devices, all markets, all languages" is the speed at which new experiences reach the global audience.
3. **MFD increases agility.** Just as in the past, CX design in the future must adjust to ongoing changes in digital infrastruc-

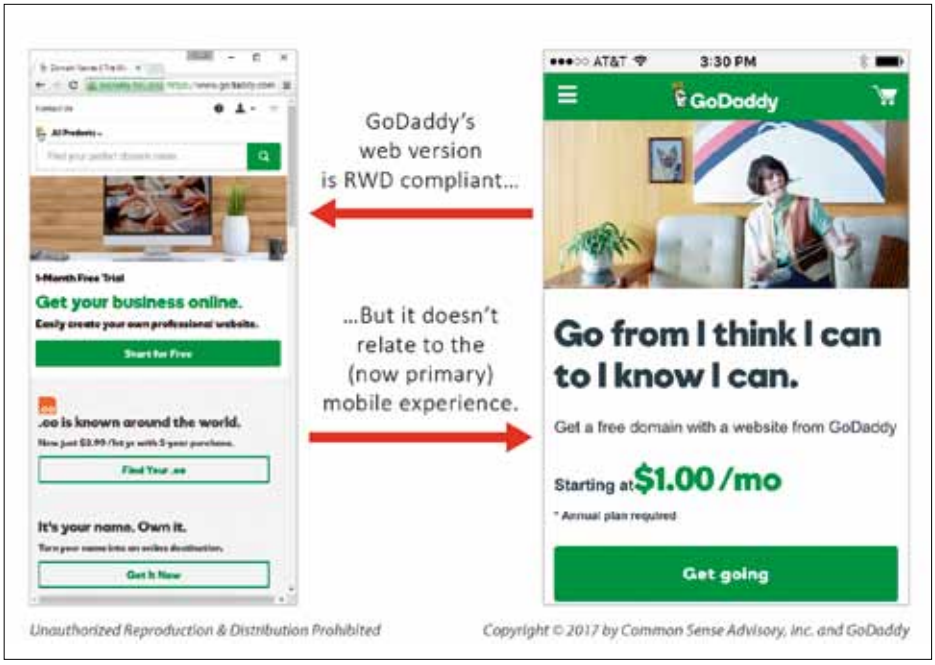


Figure 4: The GoDaddy website and app display a different look and feel.
Source: GoDaddy, Common Sense Advisory

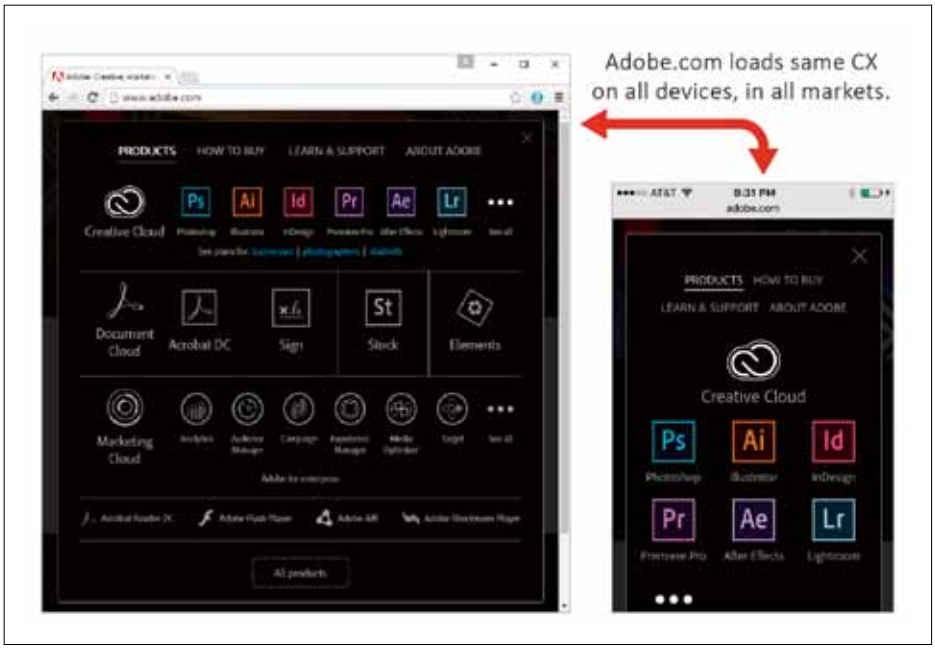


Figure 5: Adobe offers the same user experience regardless of device and market.
Source: Adobe.com, Common Sense Advisory

ture and consumer pathways. From smartphone adoption to Google algorithm changes, brand managers and marketing practitioners regularly respond to changes in the practices required for effective participation in the digital economy. Businesses must adapt immediately or suffer consequences in the marketplace. MFD protects core business operations by eliminating code branches and enabling code and content teams to focus all available resources on one CX.

4. **Streamlined development helps position companies for screenless interfaces.** New frontiers are opening up in voice-controlled applications, hybrid voice and screen environments like cars and the Internet of Things (IoT). The emerging intersection of IoT, gaming consoles, wearables, and voice interfaces will force brands off-road into a screenless world. It's time for global brands to batten down the hatches on graphical user interfaces and web CX. Global companies must reduce complexity now around visual content by upping their brand.com experience as a universal, multilingual app running on all devices.

Focusing on one CX designed to function in any language on any device is already the chosen path for many digital brands. Mobile-forward design helps enterprises achieve a competitive advantage by improving CX, enhancing the value of digital assets, and accelerating the global launch of features and content. MFD should be considered the best practice for global brand websites. It's time to drop device-specific interfaces, build a universal web CX, and smash through those ROI Walls.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Sargent is a senior analyst at independent market research firm Common Sense Advisory (CSA Research). For over 15 years, CSA Research has provided trusted research findings based on verified statistical data, proven methodologies, and insight from experienced analysts. Ben's primary focus is website globalization, translation management systems, and content management technologies.

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Tales from a traveling interpreter

Thinking of working as an escort interpreter?
Or hiring one for your next business trip?
Here are the skills that any interpreter should possess.

Text by Afaf Steiert

Image: © oneinchpunch/istockphoto.com

Interpreting is somewhat like Yin Yang in Tai Chi: a precious balance and flow of energy between body and mind. While we need to remain physically fit to meet the demands of interpreting – prolonged sitting, extended walks with delegates to satisfy their sightseeing needs, standing on our legs for long periods of time – our mind has to be focused, quick-thinking, yet calm at all times.

Even when taking a break from traveling with delegates or doing conference interpreting for a few months (or in some cases even a couple of years), we need to keep our mind and body fit during this downtime, rather than vacationing and just switching off. Taking a Zumba class, going on a hike or biking are easy ways to keep your body fit. Keeping your mind sharp is not as straightforward and might include studying glossaries of subjects relevant to your specialization or upcoming assignment.

Keeping the mind focused is perhaps the most important skill to help you get through long days of accompanying a delegate group and avoiding burnout during an assignment. Certain activities such as yoga, walking alone, or even just calling a friend or family member can be very helpful during an assignment to switch off the brain and help you relax before the next day.

Unfortunately, some clients, i.e. program organizers, need to be reminded of the fact that you need lunch breaks and food to fuel your brain. Quite regularly, I have found myself in assignment situations where the group seems to have forgotten that the interpreter is a human being in need of food, while delegates are indulging in a lunch presentation meeting. You might even be expected to interpret while eating and drinking – something that after years of experience might become less challenging both for your mind as well as for your digestive system. Luckily enough, these types of meetings are often easy and informal.

The highlights and the challenges

As an interpreting contractor, you can see the entire world traveling, meeting different people from various cultures, and connecting with people from your home country. Despite all its challenges, it is a very exciting career, particularly during the first few years when you are learning and gaining experience. You may face many challenges during your first travel assignments, but there is always the chance to learn from colleagues who are more experienced in the field.

It can be a great effort to keep focused, calm and pleasant with everyone at all times. During more than ten years as an interpreter, I had the opportunity to work as a consecutive Arabic interpreter, simultaneous Arabic interpreter, and project manager for interpreting assignments.

As a simultaneous interpreter, it is important to make full clear sentences to deliver the meaning of the words, instead of following the speed of the speaker. A skilled interpreter can actually make the speaker follow his speed. While this is not an easy technique, it is very useful during simultaneous interpreting.

A typical assignment

For both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting traveling with international delegates, it typically starts with an email or phone call by the organizer checking for your availability and pricing. The excitement of the moment is only enhanced by the fact that – for confidentiality reasons – often at this stage no details whatsoever regarding the program or the people in the group are disclosed. You might have to respond quickly in order to secure the project. Then you have to wait until the date of travel approaches.

You should use this time to read as much as you can on the subject, provided, of course, that at least this has been revealed to you. Finally, the agenda arrives with the details about the presentations and the program, giving you a good opportunity to study the specific terminology and prepare a glossary. At this stage, the adrenaline and excitement are very high, but remember to keep your emotions under control and your mind focused on the assignment. Also, try to avoid getting sick before, during or after the trip. Multivitamins, exercise and meditation have proven to be very beneficial during this time.

On the first day of the traveling assignment, everyone is usually very excited to get to know each other, and you are busy trying to answer all questions raised by the participants. The group will review the program together. This is still the "honeymoon part" of the assignment. About halfway through the assignment, you will start to hear complaints and experience frustrations and lack of patience: This is the time when diplomacy, together with organizational skills, come in handy to the professional interpreter.

It all may sound like a school trip, but more often than not you are dealing with very important visitors and rather critical subjects. This puts quite a burden on the shoulders of the project managers and the interpreters – and there should be no complaints about them and their work style. They are often the key figures defining the success of the entire assignment and travel program.

It is very important to get to know the delegates/visitors and to be aware of their needs sooner rather than later: Among the group, you will usually identify the "leader", the "demander of medical check-ups", and the "complainer". Remember that we, as interpreters and interlocutors, have to treat all of them with respect and a happy smile. The best way to work as a team is letting the visitors be part of it and sharing a common agenda. This is much more pleasant than trying to manage and lecture everyone during the entire trip, which typically lasts two to three weeks.

As an interpreter, it is good to get to know the leader of the visiting team, as he or she will be able to help with organizing the group. This way, the whole group will be happy and feel more like a family.

Returning home is always an emotional time, as some visitors wish to return sooner, while others wish to stay longer. Most importantly, be sure to finish the scheduled agenda in time and not to miss any planned meetings, as this is crucial for the success of the assignment.

The feeling at the end of a successful assignment when returning home is priceless, and to me it feels like finishing a marathon. This is now the time to rest and enjoy, but in fact, you might feel so pumped up from working more than 12 hours a day over a long period of time that you might just wish to go on to your next assignment.

My advice is to practice in between periods of traveling assignments in order not to lose your interpreting skills: Attend depositions, school meetings, or other local assignments to practice your speed in interpreting, patience and being a good professional listener and cultural consultant. These are all skills well-needed for the next three-week assignment that might soon come up.

What makes a successful interpreter?

It is always great to refresh your techniques and see which interpreting skills might be useful by attending workshops or practicing during TED talks. It takes years of experience and training to be comfortable as an expert escort interpreter. Image 1 summarizes the characteristics that will distinguish you as a successful escort interpreter and get you ready for your first (or next) assignment.

What to look for in an escort interpreter

Taking a look from the other side of the table, when hiring an escort interpreter, you want to be sure that your interpreter is an expert regarding the local language, culture and locations.

1. Language(s) expert

Knowing a language is one thing, but knowing the local idioms and dialects is quite another. When hiring an escort interpreter, make sure your escort interpreter is not only bilingual, but also fully fluent in both languages. Ideally, you want an escort interpreter who was raised as a native speaker of both languages.

2. Culture(s) expert

Beyond language, there is also an abundance of local nuances that come with any culture. You want an escort interpreter who is well-versed in both your own as well as the target culture. A good escort interpreter has in-depth experience living in both cultures and can interpret cultural differences back and forth seamlessly to avoid any cultural confusion. In this role, a qualified escort interpreter can give advice and help clients navigate cultural divides in order to avoid embarrassment that can come from cultural misunderstandings.

3. Location(s) expert

It should go without saying that when hiring an escort interpreter, you want one who knows in detail the area to be traveled. A good escort interpreter can not only get you from the airport to your hotel and to the scheduled meeting, but also recommend places to eat and even give you background information on the respective location along the way.

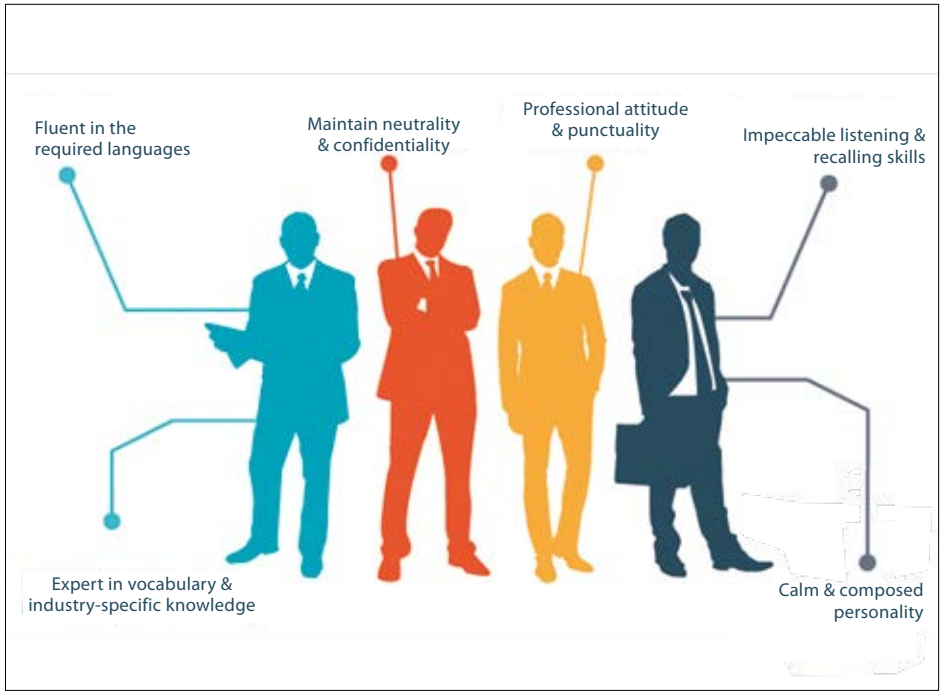

Image 1: What makes a good interpreter? *Source: www.cmmlanguages.com*

4. Personality, professionalism and trust

You typically spend a lot of time in close contact with your escort interpreter. It is important to look for one who is friendly, personable and trustworthy. After all, you will be depending on him to be your voice as you travel. You will also want an escort interpreter who maintains professionalism throughout all interactions.

Escort interpreters can help make your international trip a success, giving you the confidence and self-sufficiency to navigate any location for business reasons.

Like a duck on water

While interpreting, I often imagine myself as a duck paddling hard with its legs under the water while it sits gracefully and seemingly still above the water, radiating an air of tranquility and control. Without a doubt, it is great to get paid for traveling and for using your language skills. However, it is vital for any traveling interpreter to keep his Yin Yang balance, where the brain, health and emotions are in harmony, allowing him to enjoy the journey and to return with knowledgeable memories of interesting people and places around the world.

Further reading

- www.languagescientific.com/what-is-escort-interpreting
- www.cmmlanguages.com

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Can I have the cake and eat it too?

Positive intelligence can dramatically change our lives, both personally and professionally. And while hard skills and experience take many years to build up and hone, positive intelligence can be improved with just a few focused exercises every day.

.

Text by Prarthana Ajith

Image: © swissmediavision/istockphoto.com

"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."
John Milton, Paradise Lost

We go through a myriad of emotions during our lifetime, many of which leave a gnawing feeling inside us for not having done justice to what life has to offer. How many of us feel that we have reached an optimal state of happiness and performance when it comes to work and personal life? I for one feel the constant need to question if I am good enough or not. I find myself setting higher levels of achievement to reach that elusive state of happiness. On achieving what I think will make me happy, I always end up feeling that there is something lacking, and end up placing my conquest for permanent happiness further away.
How do we cope with situations like these? We read one self-help book after another, but the period of change lasts for a very short while. Learning from expensive training programs at exotic locations does not last too long either. So why is it that in spite of all the tools, technology and books, we have not been able to reach significant levels of happiness? It seems as if we are focusing on maintaining only the leaves of the tree of our lives, and we have forgotten how to water the roots.
Positive intelligence is a term that has been coined by Stanford professor Shirzad Chamine. Behind this term are strategies that can be used to dramatically change our lives. Positive intelligence helps us to put together the puzzle of what is at our root level and how we can tend to it more effectively so that we can reach significantly higher levels of happiness and performance.

Research

Here is the summary of the powerful research that has been conducted over the past 15 years on four different areas of human psychology.

Positive psychology

After centuries of thinking that higher performance leads to higher levels of happiness, researchers have turned this assumption on its head to say that only higher levels of happiness can lead to higher levels of achievement. A happier brain is much more capable, resourceful, and creative.
Studies also say that 90 percent of the variation in the levels of happiness among different people is only dependent on what is happening inside their heads. It has nothing to do with occurrences or situations in their lives, such as wealth, possessions, relationships, job position, and so on.

Neuroscience

With the help of powerful MRIs, neuroscience has been able to pinpoint the exact areas of the brain that, when activated, generate all these positive, wonderful feelings that collectively create our happiness.
In addition, this discipline has taught us that the brain is like a muscle and, with some simple exercises, you can command the parts of the brain that need to be activated and those that need to be soothed.

Cognitive psychology

Studies in this discipline show that people have some dysfunctional, automatic habits of the mind that not only create their unhappiness, but also get in their way of performing at the highest level. Cognitive psychology has also shown us that there are some relatively simple ways to reprogram the mind and replace some of these dysfunctional habits with positive habits. This will not only make you happier, but much more effective.

Behavioral science

Many years of significant research have proven that emotional intelligence is the key to achieving your highest level of performance when it comes to professional accomplishments. Hence, it is clear that competencies in the soft skill domain are far more important than hard skills or IQ.

Psychological analysis

Positive intelligence combines the best of these four disciplines of psychology to create a framework that is:

- Simple
- Actionable, helping you to react differently to challenging situations
- Measurable, so that you can track your progress

At its very root, positive intelligence is about a battle that is raging inside the head of every human being – a battle between the two voices of the brain: One that serves you and one that sabotages you. As much as we hate to accept it, every one of us spends a considerable amount of time in self-sabotaging mode. The voice that sabotages comes from the so-called saboteurs, while the voice that serves you is called the sage. The sage is actually your true, unique voice, and it is the voice that you must trust. Using positive intelligence strategies, you can measure the strength of the saboteurs against the strength of the sage. The balance between these two powers forms the root of the greatest level of happiness and performance you can achieve.

Neurological analysis

The brain is composed of the survivor brain and the positive intelligence brain. The saboteurs are the agents of the survivor brain and the sage is the agent of the positive intelligence brain. The survivor brain is made up of the brain stem, the limbic system and parts of the left brain. The positive intelligence brain is made up of the cortex and parts of the right brain. Both parts are wired differently with regard to neurochemicals and produce different chemicals.
The emotions generated by the survivor brain are anxiety, anger, and disappointment, whereas the emotions generated by the positive intelligence brain are creativity, empathy, and peace. It is important to understand that your level of happiness or unhappiness is not based on particular circumstances in your life, such as having a bad boss or losing your job. These are simply the events that are happening in your life. But if you can respond to these events by activating your positive intelligence brain, you can deal with difficult situations without feeling anxious or stressed.
The survivor brain's job is to survive, which is extremely important from an evolutionary perspective. Thousands of years ago, our ancestors' survival depended on their ability to remain highly alert and in a state of constant panic to endure the rough conditions they lived in. As a result, the survivor brain developed. It is particularly good at working out what is wrong and sensing danger. The problem is that it tends to sense danger even where there is none. The other problem is that the survivor brain is not very good at

being creative or thinking outside the box. In survivor brain mode, we tend to develop tunnel vision, mentally and physically.

Positive Intelligence Quotient (PQ)

The Positive Intelligence Quotient (PQ) measures the percentage of time that you spend in sage mode versus in saboteur mode. You can measure it based on the time that you feel different emotions, indicating the mode that you are in. You want to aim to use your survivor brain as little as possible, because negative feelings such as fear or disappointment act only as a wakeup call to help you figure out what you need to do next. So while there is definitely a time and place for feeling angry, anxious or irritated, this should really only take up about 5 percent of your time! There is nobody with a positive intelligence quotient of 100 or 0. The questions are: How can you shift the scale and what dramatic improvements to your personality can happen while you do so? Research has shown that people with a high PQ live ten years longer. The neurochemical that the survivor brain produces is cortisol, a stress hormone that is intended to be released only during actual danger. However, nowadays, cortisol is being produced 24/7. The positive intelligence brain, on the other hand, produces hormones such as endorphins, which give you a happy high. Think about it: If you run on naturally-produced hormones that make you feel better, is it not all but natural that you would live ten years longer?

Formation of saboteurs

All of us are born with endless access to our own positive energy. So how and when do saboteurs take over? Saboteur formation is a normal process, and the first stage of our mental development, when we develop survivor strategies. The best parenting and upbringing cannot save us from this mental drama. For a child, survival is beyond just physical survival. We also need to survive emotionally, as we make it to reproductive adulthood. Even if you did not have a chaotic childhood, there are enough challenges such as the illness of a parent, sibling rivalry, and peer pressure at school. Your saboteurs help you to sense and protect yourself from danger. When we look at the different types of saboteurs, there is one that all of us have: the judge. This saboteur has the predisposition of exaggerating the negative and assuming the worst. Early on in life, the judge helps us to sort the world around us to create a coherent mental construct. The judge uses at least one of the following accomplice saboteurs to ensure your early physical and emotional survival:

- Controller
- Hyper-achiever
- Restless
- Stickler
- Pleaser
- Hyper-vigilant
- Avoider
- Victim
- Hyper-rational

I strongly recommend that you go to www.positiveintelligence.com to learn about the characteristics of each of the saboteurs and take the test to understand the saboteurs that govern your mind.

Strategies to increase your PQ

Weaken your saboteurs

After you have identified the saboteurs that govern your mind, create a "Wanted poster" for them so

that you can catch them when they show up. Give each of the saboteurs a name and list its characteristics. After this, when a saboteur appears in your head, recognize it, label your thought and let it go, instead of trusting it or pursuing it. This will take away the power and credibility of these saboteurs.

Strengthen your sage

It is not enough to just weaken the bad guys; you also need to strengthen the good guys. One key aspect about the sage is achieving the sage perspective, which tells you that every outcome or circumstance can be changed into an opportunity. An easy way to strengthen your sage is to actually begin to embrace this perspective. Once you assume the sage perspective, your brain actively shifts from the survivor brain to the positive intelligence brain. Accept your mistakes and use them as an opportunity. The sage perspective is not a matter of a spiritual leap of faith; it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you believe in the sage perspective, your brain shifts into the region that will be able to turn the challenge, difficulty, failure or mistake into an opportunity.

Build PQ muscles

Building your PQ muscles will take you automatically to the positive intelligence brain rather than the survivor brain. The traditional way of strengthening your PQ muscles is meditation. Unfortunately, it is not a tool that works for more than 10 percent of the people, even though it is very profound if you can manage to use it. A more manageable way to train your PQ muscles is to get about 100 PQ reps in a day.

A PQ rep means ten seconds of bringing your full attention, as much as you can, to any physical sensation. You must recognize that personal transformation is more of a fitness model. You will need to care enough to achieve those levels of sustained happiness. Here are some sample techniques that you can employ to get in those 100 PQ reps per day:

- For ten seconds, feel the rise and fall of your chest when you breathe
- When you are having a meal, for a few mouthfuls, feel the texture and taste of the food on your tongue
- Rub your fingertips with each other in rapt attention

Sage powers

So what happens when you have weakened your saboteurs, strengthened your sage and built your PQ muscles? It simply gives you unlimited access to five sage powers, which help you to handle whatever life or work throws at you:

- **Empathy:** Can you be compassionate in difficult situations?
- **Exploration:** Can you be excited about the opportunities in life?
- **Innovation:** Can you truly think outside the box?
- **Navigation:** Can you navigate to find the path that is aligned to the purpose and meaning of your life?
- **Activation:** Can you take action with complete focus?

Achievement and PQ

Your PQ determines how much of your actual potential is utilized, as described by this straightforward formula:

Achievement = Potential x PQ

This is a common sense formula and not intended to generate specific calculations. It is simply meant to illustrate the relationship between potential, achievement, and PQ.

Your potential is determined by many factors, including your cognitive and emotional intelligence, skills, knowledge, and experience, networking skills, and so on. At higher PQ levels, most of your energy gets channeled through the five powers of sage and is focused on creating the outcomes you desire. At lower PQ levels, some amount of energy is used to sabotage your efforts, leading to less desirable results.

The formula confirms that only 20 percent of individuals and teams have PQ scores compatible with reaching most of their true potential. The fastest and most efficient way to increase achievement and performance is to increase PQ, and not potential. This is because part of your potential, such as your IQ, is fixed, and the rest of your potential is built over many years of acquiring skills, knowledge, and experience. Your PQ, on the other hand, can be increased dramatically in just a few weeks or months.

Conclusion

The American poet and philosopher, Henry Thoreau said "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them". Let's say "no" to that! Using the science and technology of positive intelligence, you can be singing all the way until the end!


Image: © FatCamera/istockphoto.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a technical communicator, **Prarthana Ajith** has over 13 years of experience in writing across several technical domains for hardware, storage, and automation products. She strives to look beyond the horizon of her job and take up challenging assignments. She believes that in life, change is the only constant, and that those who are able to adapt well to change are the ones who will lead rich, fulfilling lives.

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events

tcworld 2018

tekom spring conference (in German only)

April 19-20, 2018
Koblenz, Germany
http://tagungen.tekom.de/f18/startseite

Content Connections 2018

May 7-9, 2018
Los Gatos, CA, USA
www.acrolinx.com

tcworld China

May 15-16, 2018
Shanghai, China
http://tcworld-china.cn

Plunet Summit 2018

May 24-25, 2018
Berlin, Germany
www.plunet-summit.com

CIUTI 2018

May 30-31, 2018
Edinburgh, Scotland
http://ctiss.hw.ac.uk/research/ciuti-conference-2018.html

Evolution of TC 2018

May 31-June 1, 2018
Sofia, Bulgaria
https://evolution-of-tc.com

Evolution of TC is the annual gathering event for all technical communicators in Bulgaria with a focus on innovations in software documentation. The event will draw technical writers, information developers, technical editors, and translators, mainly with a software background.

Image: © tekom

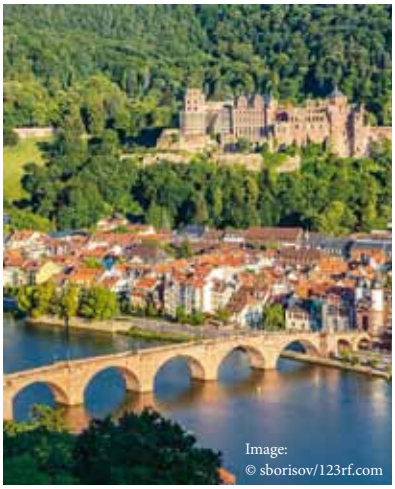
Madworld 2018

June 3-6, 2018
San Diego, CA, USA
www.madcapsoftware.com/conference/madworld-2018

UA Reloaded

June 13-14, 2018
St. Leon-Roth (near Heidelberg), Germany
http://ua-reloaded.de

UA Reloaded is a new conference format that tekom has developed together with the UA experts of SAP. Instead of back-to-back PPT lectures, interaction, improvisation and inspiration take center stage. The topics go beyond the classic portfolio of technical communication. We are now dealing with what User Assistance could disruptively change in the future. Here, international experts unveil the newest options: from video documentation to machine learning to Virtual Reality.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LocWorld37

June 6-8, 2018
Warsaw, Poland
https://locworld.com

Content Marketing World 2018

September 4-7, 2018
Cleveland, OH, USA
www.contentmarketingworld.com

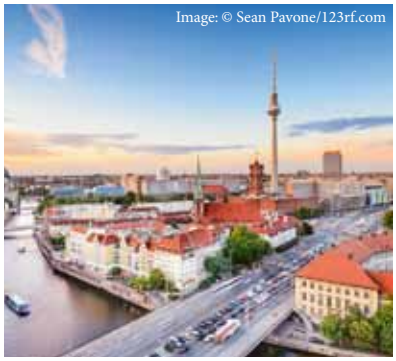
NORDIC TechKomm

September 26-27, 2018
Copenhagen, Denmark
https://nordic-techkomm.com/

Languages & The Media

October 3-5, 2018
Berlin, Germany
www.languages-media.com

"The Fourth Industrial Revolution – Reshaping Languages in the Media" is the overriding theme of Languages and the Media, which will be held at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Berlin. In its sessions and workshops, the conference will examine in detail the various developments, innovations and changes that are setting the framework for the future of the audiovisual media industry and the role of languages in it.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TAUS Annual Conference

October 10-11, 2018
Vancouver, Canada
https://taus.net/events/conferences

tcworld conference 2018

November 13-15, 2018
Stuttgart, Germany
http://conferences.tekom.de

tcworld conference 2019

November 12-14, 2019
Stuttgart, Germany
http://conferences.tekom.de