How to Prepare a Localization Kit
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Today, companies need to localize their products in order to compete effectively in the global markets. Preparation of a complete localization kit is the first step in a successful localization project. A localization kit serves both client and localizer to streamline the process from the onset and allow for optimum allocation of resource, time and budget management.

GROWTH OF THE LOCALIZATION INDUSTRY

The English speaking market has been challenged by the projections that by 2002 more than half of worldwide internet users' primary language will be a language other than English. Localization is a powerful marketing avenue that still remains underexploited. Many companies have enjoyed high levels of ROI by localizing their documentation, web sites, software applications, and multi-media products.

LOCALIZATION KIT BENEFITS

A localization kit is a tool provided by the client to the localization vendor, containing files and detailed specifications of the project for the purpose of localizing a product into specified languages as well as addressing cultural and regional differences. The three key challenges that must be addressed in taking steps toward well-prepared localization are addressing the (1) time constraints that may delay the speed-to-market of the product, (2) the realized budget and resources available, and (3) the best maintenance, quality, and consistency between the appropriate management teams. At the onset of the process, a little effort on the part of managers and technical communication professionals in preparing a localization kit can go a long way in forestalling unexpected roadblocks in the future.

To ensure the project is localized properly, instruction must be provided for the localization vendors who need specific information that answers their clients' problems to best assist them with their needs. For example, the localization vendor must be kept current about the purpose, function, and vision of the project.

Localization kits are important because they help clarify the expectations of the client in a timely, organized manner. Informed clients are better equipped to save their company's time and money because they implemented the localization kit to prevent misunderstandings, and negotiate better prices and time estimates. Relationships grounded with clear and precise expectations accelerate the growth of trust, thereby benefiting both client and vendor. It is true that human error cannot be completely eradicated. However, with a localization kit, clients and localization vendors can anticipate challenging areas before they have a chance to materialize. The outcome is realized in the bottom line for both parties involved. Localization vendors are able to concentrate on the project without wasting time, thus saving their clients' money. A localization kit helps alleviate miscommunication between the client and vendor because business partners know the entire scope, expectations, and limitations of the project beforehand.

ELEMENTS OF LOCALIZATION KITS

The main elements of a localization kit include the sections related to different parts of the project, such as GUI, documentation, and help and web files.

ELEMENTS OF LOCALIZATION KITS: GENERAL

The primary element of a localization kit is the previous translations. The new localization vendor will make appropriate notation of the stylistic and technical preferences of the client. If the client was not sure of the quality of the previous translations, the vendor will evaluate and report discrepancies.

A useful tool that keeps terms consistent is a glossary agreed upon by the management teams. Simply providing previous translations and their originals facilitates project management and ensures consistency across glossaries. If previous terms in the glossary are unsatisfactory, the teams

can make adjustments as needed before the word or terms are confused (i.e. multiple terms, abbreviations, trademarks, slogans). This also gives the localization vendor the opportunity to become better familiarized with the client's segment of industry. A more specific monolingual glossary clarifies any highly technical, abbreviated, or trademarked concepts for the translator. This glossary defines terms that are impossible, even for a native speaker, to translate without the input of the client. Clients gain the advantage of saving time and resources by creating a monolingual dictionary.

The third general element of a localization kit includes the client's language list, more specifically the target country's language, any regional dialect(s), and the specific region as applicable. For example, if Spanish is the target language, the localization vendor must know if the target audience is in Spain, Mexico, the United States, or elsewhere. Attention to the variances of the language in each region and dialect are central to a quality translation. In order to retain consistency, the client notes whether the International Standards Organization (ISO) abbreviation or preferred abbreviation is included. Ideal translations reflect the style and tone of the original language. However, clients can specify in the localization kit any stylistic adjustments or changes concerning the target audience.

A contact list is an invaluable tool for clients. This enables the localization vendor to have quick access and reference to the parties who are responsible for the particulars of a project. It is not often that technical writers alone can answer clients' queries appropriately. Clients are empowered by a contact list of the management team provided to the localization vendor in order to assist them with any needs they may have along the localization process. These contacts include the Project Manager, Lead Developer, Localization Manager, Technical Writer, and In-country reviewers.

The last general element of a localization kit includes information pertaining to the software and hardware. By including the software's platform, manufacturer, version, and purpose, the client helps the vendor be proactive by answering the commonly anticipated questions before taking the time to resolve each item at a time. This

information helps vendors smoothly execute the transition between project manager to translation team.

ELEMENTS OF LOCALIZATION KITS: GUI

The first element of a localization kit, concerning the Graphical User Interface (GUI), is incoming files. Clients sending hundreds, sometimes thousands, of files at a time may face lost, corrupted, missing, or misplaced files stalling a project into days or weeks to rectify. Fortunately, the use of screen shots immediately solves these challenges. Capturing the screen can be built manually, via a macro, or simply with screen shots. The file list contains the names and locations of all output files, source files, and files that should not be translated. Incoming files have dates, a clear description, and text marked for translation help to expedite the process time. This very simple, yet extremely effective, "screen shot" method saves the client and localization vendor valuable project management time because all incoming files are organized by description, date, and file size.

Other components of a localization kit, concerning incoming files, deal with files with text for translation vs. files that are not meant for translation. Clients can clean up their files for vendors by creating a list for translation or placing them in a pre-specified file folder. String sizes are another issue to include in the localization kit. They are best left at the maximum length, or unlimited, in order to prevent the elements of the text from being lopped off in translation.

Another component of a localization kit regards the clients file extension. Localization vendors' applications allow binary files(.EXE, .DLL, VBX files) to be tested and engineered real-time and in-house. The client sending binary files eliminates the build cycle and validation is possible without compiling. Vendor and client resources are wisely allocated by using binary file extensions.

Once a project is completed, the vendor needs to understand the client's preferences concerning the outgoing files. The localization kit includes the client's preferred method of directory structure, delivery method and dates, as well as any file naming conventions. These elements are crucial,

especially when considering Unix and Mac to PC platforms.

Build instructions that encompass engineering concerns are another element of a localization kit. If the client prefers to have engineering done in house, the particulars should entail the name, version, and compiler, as well as any known defects, a bug report, and compiler errors. Tool lists include the compiler name and version as well as the resource editor name and version.

The last step concerning the GUI includes validation of the format as the text appears on screen in real-time. A test plan provides users with instructions on how to reach a particular screen. The vendor needs to identify the screen capture software and applications used, files for future reference, changes or percentage of changes, date of code freeze, units of measurements and abbreviations, as well as the date of code freeze.

ELEMENTS OF LOCALIZATION KITS: DOCUMENTATION

The first elements of a localization kit concerning documentation includes a list of files with text, list of image files, and explaining the differences in relation to the software. If the online help lags, validation is a good solution. Validation allows one to make sure that online help and software are in sync. It is preferable for the client to complete this part of the project in-house rather than employing the vendors. It is important to proactively make decisions as early as possible in the localization process.

The on-line and application help menu is synchronized; this includes the authoring tools, building instructions, differences in relation to the software, as well as any list of files (hh, hpj, dlls).

The most common issue with localizing graphics is that no proper source files are provided. Most localizable graphics consist of text on top of some sort of structured background. In order to localize the text, the vendors need to access the document in "text only". In GIF or JPEG files, the text and the background are embedded in the same layer. Changing the text means touching up the background as well. If the background is just a plain color, one can easily replace the text.

Graphic artists most commonly use Adobe PhotoShop® to create graphics for Internet. This application supports layers, which means localizable text can go into a separate layer and the other components of the file do not need any engineering.

Protocol must be a main focus of the initial process. It is important to specify in this step when status reports are due, how internal and external milestones are to be marked, specific availability of management teams involved in the project, as well as the delivery method for the translation memory.

Keeping in mind the globalization force that is taking place and gaining momentum, localization project managers and technical communication professionals must realize the necessity of creating a comprehensive localization kit. Businesses need to bridge the language gap in order to compete in ever increasing multilingual world markets

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