Technology Spotlight

Are You Outsourcing Too Much?

by Pierre Blais

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Many organizations choose to concentrate on their core competencies and outsource their translation needs thus eliminating internal positions and relying on language service providers (LSP's) to support their multilingual communications. Others are driven by budget restraints and by attrition of key internal translation resources. Regardless of the reasons, some executives may decide to outsource their translation needs without closely examining the complexities and the resulting effects that may be impacting the value of their existing multilingual assets. If the Multilingual Assets are there, then decision makers have additional alternatives available to assist them in better managing multilingual communications.

This article is not intended to promote or retract from outsourcing nor is it an exercise to diminish the value added services that an LSP delivers. This article is intended to assist decision makers and internal managers in their thought process before they decide to outsource their translation needs so that they don't end up throwing out the baby (their Multilingual assets) with the bath water.

If outsourcing, what and how?

We see four clear and distinctive processes in managing translations while executives may only be focusing on one, the actual translation. While it may be true that it may make sense to outsource translations, there are certain situations where the core technology associated with managing Multilingual Assets is better kept in house – in your control.

The four processes we have identified are: (1) controlling the value of Multilingual Assets, (2) managing the translation projects, (3) the actual translation and (4) the delivery process. These should be examined separately so that an organization can determine if projects should be outsourced, what projects should be outsourced and to whom they should be outsourced.

Before deciding to outsource, the technology component should be isolated from the translation expertise as technology competencies may already exist within the organization or the organization may choose to select a service provider that has the competencies to deliver on all the requirements.

Controlling the Value of your Multilingual Assets

By Multilingual Assets we mean the resulting value that comes with the process of pairing the entire source documents with their translated equivalents so that the terms, sub-expressions, sentences and paragraphs can be retrieved for reuse. This process is known as the "alignment" process and is typically considered a tedious and labor intensive process. Because conventional Translation Memory (TM) systems require near perfect alignment to work, a lot of human intervention is required to verify the alignments.

While most TM systems extract segments of paired documents and isolate them in a database, MultiCorpora's

(corpus based) TextBase TM technology works differently by extracting the text of paired documents and indexing the entire text in a repository. Because the alignment process is completely automated, does not require any human intervention, and any misalignments can be realigned on the fly, all your documents can be added to the TextBases whereas with a conventional TM you must be more selective about what you wish to align manually. Since the TextBase TM technology delivers more reusable content from previously translated material, the likelihood of a good return on investment is very high. Because this method facilitates the retrieval of terms, sub-expressions, sentences and even paragraphs, it also allows you to view these texts in context. Having access to the context eliminates the need to have a perfect alignment because any misaligned text can be realigned on the fly. Many executives using conventional TMs choose to outsource because manual alignment takes time, costs money, and uses resources. However, those that are familiar with the TextBase TM technology are free to consider various options before deciding to outsource their Multilingual Assets to a third party.

During his presentation at the Localization World conference in Seattle last month, Mr. Muegge from Medtronics pointed out a few additional reasons for an organization to get control of their Multilingual Assets.

''After 20 years of a tendency towards outsourcing, many companies start to recognize the importance of their multilingual assets, some reasons being:

- independence from service providers
- critical data in-house
- cost control and transparency
- use of data for authoring and terminology work
- multilingual documentation as a competitive advantage and therefore core competence
- intellectual capital and knowledge management''

Centralizing the Multilingual Assets at your organization's level instead of outsourcing this responsibility to one or several LSP's allows you to control your Multilingual Assets. In this case, there are many advantages to keeping all your eggs in one basket. Having it in one place, allows organizations to use multiple providers thereby eliminating dependencies. It also helps protect organizations from typical bottlenecks at peak times. Extracting the existing assets for a new translation project against a centralized repository provides more reusable content than fragmented databases and therefore reduces translation costs. Having a centralized pool of information to draw from, ensures that all translation providers use your lingo and it promotes consistent terminology as these resources all have access to the same database which can be updated in real time.
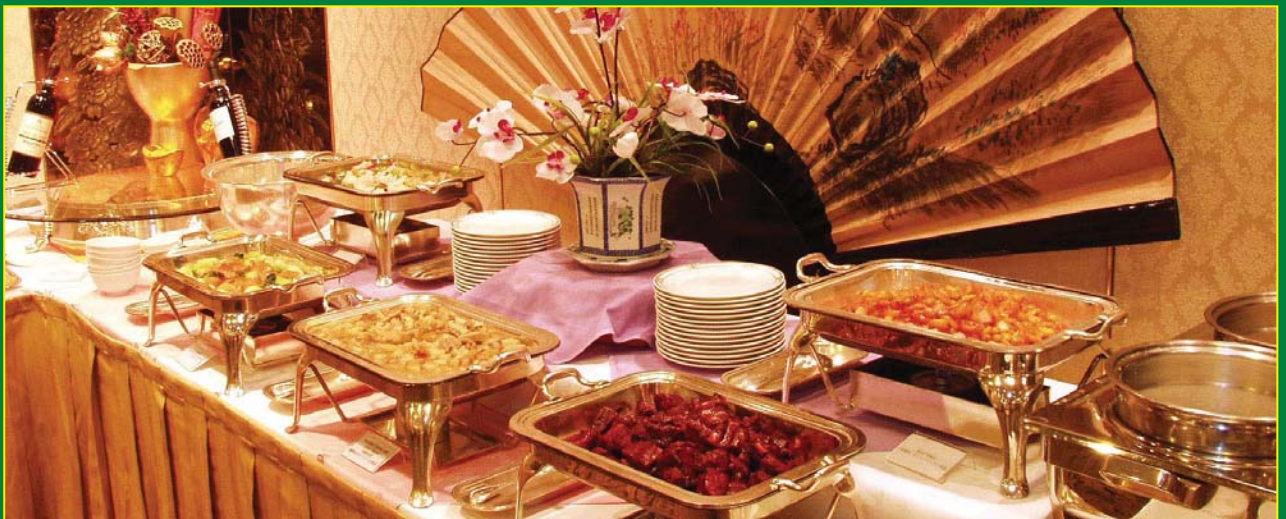
Most important in all of this is that your multilingual assets make up your intellectual property and you may be exposed to risk by disseminating this through outsourcing without a centralized Multilingual Asset Management strategy.

MANAGING THE TRANSLATION PROJECTS

Managing translation projects typically requires some translation expertise. This is particularly true if this process is not automated. Today, integrated web-based workflow solutions exist which makes it possible to build end-to-end processes that control the flow of a translation project from start to finish with very limited human intervention.

Although the process requires some up-front effort to set up the rules and parameters, once it is done, the integration of a workflow solution with an organization's Multilingual Assets means that an organization can automatically analyze and preprocess (pre-translate) a translation project before sending it off to a service provider. The administrative task of tracking projects, ordering, reporting, and invoicing are also all handled automatically.

Managing translation projects also provides you with the flexibility to transact with several translation providers concurrently. Multilingual assets can then be integrated to an organization's in house workflow through the use of Application Program Interfaces (API's).

An integrated software workflow solution that combines the management of translation projects with control of your Multilingual Assets puts you behind the steering wheel and can deliver numerous benefits to your organization.

THE ACTUAL TRANSLATION

The decision to outsource or not becomes one that is not necessarily based on technology but rather on the return gained by an organization. After the decision is made, however, technology can then be leveraged to ensure that both in house and external translators have access to the same centralized Multilingual Assets to deliver a complete project that uses consistent terminology.

There are various ways to facilitate this.

As mentioned earlier, when managing translation projects with a web based automated workflow solution, once a translation project request is entered, the automation triggers a series of events that builds a translation package. This package is what is automatically distributed to selected external translators and it includes a pre-translated document and all the reference material required for the project. The formats of the files within the package can be saved so that they are compatible with the tools that the external translators are most familiar with. Once the external translators receive the package, they are provided with secure access to the organization's Multilingual Assets via the web. These assets are accessed in real time and the

organization may wish to allow certain external translators the right to update and maintain the terminology. The Text-Base TM technology promotes collaborative working environments since both internal and/or external translators can use the translation agent to access an organization's Multilingual Assets in real time.

The advantages of this technology lie with the integrated access to the context and the ability to correct misaligned segments on the fly. With the TextBase TM approach, several translators can work in real-time on the same translation project thereby leveraging each other's efforts while avoiding retranslating the same segments.

This technology protects an organization's intellectual property by providing translator's access to their Multilingual Assets without limiting the translator's capacity to use their own preferred productivity tools.

THE DELIVERY PROCESS

Once a translation project is complete, with an automated web based solution, the translators upload the final translated project and it is automatically sent to the client. The review process can then be coordinated with or without a project manager.

At this point, an integrated model can automatically align and add the new project to the appropriate TextBase TM and an API can be used to save the files to the appropriate location in the documentation management system.

As technology vendors, we are obligated to inform executives and internal managers of the latest advances in software technology. This is beyond translation and any solution that promotes improved efficiencies and that eliminates risk to intellectual capital is a good one and this is what you should consider when deciding to outsource multilingual assets.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pierre Blais is the CEO of MultiCorpora.

MultiCorpora is a leading provider of multilingual asset management solutions that enable corporations, government organizations, and language service providers to cost-effectively translate global information and streamline their multilingual communications. MultiCorpora empowers language professionals by delivering innovative software solutions that drive market segment leadership and enable its customers to differentiate themselves from traditional TM users. Its flagship product, MultiTrans, is an innovative tool that combines MultiCorpora's unique TextBase TM technology with its best-in-class Terminology Management System.

For more information, please visit www.multicorpora.com or contact: info@multicorpora.com