



University of Wisconsin-Madison

***UW E-Business Consortium***

*"Helping Industry Gain Competitive Advantage Through E-Commerce and E-Business"*

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Project Report

# Multilingual Technologies for Customer Interaction

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# Executive Summary

This report investigates multilingual technologies which are available to enhance a company's interaction with its customers. The report focuses on the following communication channels: interactive (telephone, web chat, and e-mail) and published (website, printed material, and web/print synchronization). Research primarily consisted of interviews with multiple vendors of multilingual technologies and services, UWEBC member companies, Content Management System providers, and other businesses that have a need to translate materials from English to other languages.

One of the key reasons for the increased growth of translation services here in the United States is due to the rapidly changing demographics. Looking at the Spanish speaking demographics, there are currently 43.5 million Hispanics in the U.S. that make up 14% of the overall population. This population, which is the fastest growing in the U.S., is expected to grow to 100 million by the end of 2050. 12.6 million Hispanics were online in 2004, an increase of 43% from the previous year, yet 75% of all U.S. businesses still have English-only websites. With the majority of worldwide internet users browsing in languages other than English, 62% of Language Services Providers (LSP) have seen an increase in demand for their services in 2004.

Methods for translating information can be divided into three general categories: 1) all-machine, 2) all-human, and 3) a combination of human and machine. All-human translation is generally considered to be the most accurate and is used when the exact meaning is important or when perfect translations of technical or compliance documents are vital to success. All-machine translation is primarily used when speed is the most important factor (usually as a result of having a high volume of translations to perform) and conveying just the general idea of a message is acceptable. All machine translation systems (powered by translation software) are increasing in sophistication and are able to deliver improved accuracy at lower costs compared to their predecessors. Combination strategies, which employ machine translation followed by human review for modification, also exist. Depending on the accuracy of the machine translation, these systems can decrease the total time involved in the translation process when compared to all-human translations. In general, translation costs directly increase with the degree of accuracy achieved. In recent years, machine translation speed has greatly improved while maintaining the same level of accuracy.

Through our research we determined a number of best practices for companies with a need to translate information. It is important to select a translation solution that both fits the company's current translation needs and is scalable to meet future demands. It is optimal to center translation management responsibilities around one individual (or small department) in the organization and keep translation materials (and archives) in one location. A clear policy for what information will be translated can help avoid confusion and decrease added translation costs. A customized "dictionary," comprised of frequently translated words and phrases, used as a reference tool enables increased consistency in

repeatedly used translations. Cheaper translation solutions which sacrifice quality for quantity should be avoided if the customer receives the final version of the translation product. Since translation is not about words, but rather about conveying the same message in another language, an advisory board consisting of native speakers of the translated language and management personnel, should be created to approve and review translations to ensure that messages are consistent across languages.

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# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
	3.1 Project Motivation .....	1
	3.2 Company Background .....	3
	3.3 Why Translate?.....	4
	3.4 Objectives .....	6
	3.5 Goals .....	6
	3.6 Report Organization.....	7
<b>4</b>	<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>7</b>
	4.1 Vendors Contacted.....	9
	4.2 UWEBC Companies Contacted.....	9
	4.3 Content Management (CM) .....	9
	4.4 Additional Research.....	9
<b>5</b>	<b>Translations</b> .....	<b>10</b>
	5.1 History.....	10
	5.2 Text translation .....	11
	5.2.1 All-machine translation.....	11
	5.2.2 Part machine, part human .....	12
	5.2.3 All-human translation .....	13
<b>6</b>	<b>Communication Channels</b> .....	<b>14</b>
	6.1 Published Communication .....	14
	6.1.1 Web .....	15
	6.1.2 Content Management .....	22
	6.1.3 Companies with multilingual sites.....	27
	6.1.4 FAQ.....	29
	6.1.5 How it all ties together.....	31
	6.1.6 Print.....	33
	6.1.7 Keeping Printed and Website Materials In-sync with each other.....	33
	6.2 Interactive Communication.....	34
	6.2.1 Telephone.....	34
	6.2.1.1 One on one with company employee.....	34
	6.2.1.2 Third Party Translation .....	35
	6.2.2 Interactive-Written Communication .....	36
	6.2.2.1 Introduction.....	36
	6.2.2.2 E-mail.....	37
	6.2.2.3 Replies Provided by Bilingual Staff .....	37
	6.2.2.4 Web Chat .....	40
<b>7</b>	<b>Best Practices</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>References</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Appendix A-Company Profiles</b> .....	<b>48</b>

## Figures Table of Contents

Figure No.	Figure Description	Page No.
1	Spanish Speakers Online	7
2	Fortune 100 Companies Offering Multilingual Sites	8
3	Language Service Provider Survey Results	9
4	Maps and Figures	10
5	Report Organization	13
6	The Interview Process	14
7	Multicultural Internet Users	16
8	Translation Comparison	20
9	Product Level Packages	29
10	Automated Workflow for Translating Materials	39

## Images Table of Contents

Image No.	Image Description	Page No.
1	American Family Insurance Webpage	11
2	WMATA Website	18
3	Schreiber Translations, Inc. Website	23
4	Instant Website Translation	25
5	The Localization Institute Webpage	35
6	The Swiss Colony Webpage	37
7	WorldLingo Interface	46
8	Lingo1 Webpage	47
9	SDL Web Chat	48