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Developing the Relationship between Translators and Localization Companies

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Localization companies are the intermediaries between translators and global clients. To be successful, we have to understand our clients' commercial objectives for low cost, fast turnaround and linguistic quality and be able to realise them through rigorous processes and quality assurance (QA) practices that add value and support our translators whose skills are the foundation of effective communication.

From our perspective as marketing communications (or marcoms) localization specialists, we believe that effective communication should always be the number one priority for global companies who want to sell their products and services in local markets through a wide range of media such as advertisements, packaging, literature and web sites. Unfortunately, our quest for linguistic excellence is not always recognised by clients as the most important priority and the pressure is increasing to find ways of reconciling our passion for quality with the client's needs for speed and cost-reduction.

Inevitably, this continual pressure is also experienced by individual translators. Our 2,500 in-country translators are a very valuable part of the localization supply chain and we acknowledge our dependence on them to produce good quality work for us. We believe that our relationship should be more of a partnership than a supplier/client one and, therefore, needs to be underpinned by constant communication.

Our existing communications programme for linguistic suppliers includes a quarterly newsletter, rewards for consistently good performance, and a survey to find out translators' views about their relationship with us.

The key survey findings revealed that the main issues are the relentless shortening of deadlines, the squeeze on rates, and the translators' need for feedback. While it is almost inevitable that most linguistic suppliers would welcome more time and money to undertake translations, editing and proofreading, they are equally concerned about the communications aspects of their relationships with us.

For example, nearly three quarters (71.3%) would like more specific feedback on the quality of the work that they produce; one in four respondents would like more personal contact with Wordbank staff; and one in three would like to meet with us on a regular basis (although many recognise that this would be difficult due to geographic locations).



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Meeting our linguistic suppliers' needs

As a result of the survey, Wordbank is putting in place a Total Supplier Management communications programme which will include workshops and web seminars to improve suppliers' knowledge and understanding of the Wordbank localization process, their role within it, the standards that must be met, our procedures, localization tools, and support and feedback mechanisms such as the extranet.

Increasingly, we need to become more prescriptive about punctuation to ensure consistency and reduce the time needed for QA. We also recognize that we need to extend our suppliers' understanding of the commercial pressures imposed on Wordbank by our clients and the global marketplace and to help them to work more quickly and efficiently. For example, we make use of proprietary automation tools that leave linguistic suppliers more time to concentrate on the quality of their translations.

.... and reconciling them with client demands

In a "best practice" scenario, quality should always take priority over speed and cost but in real life it is, inevitably, the client who drives the agenda and if their main goal is speed or cost, we have to adjust our process and quality assurance approach accordingly.

At Wordbank, we have developed ISO 9001-certified QA practices for each of the four localization stages - translation, editing, internal QA and proofreading. This is essentially about repeatability and standardisation. If all our project managers adhere rigorously to the process, then it is easier to track down and identify the source of any quality issues. Ultimately, these processes enable us to provide our clients with natural, accurate and persuasive marketing communications.

Our baseline for quality is that everyone involved in translating, editing and proofreading fulfil the following rigorous performance criteria.

Criteria for achieving linguistic excellence

- Freelance in-country linguists working only into their mother tongue
- At least three years' experience of freelance translation/localization work
- Specialised in a variety of fields such as marketing, IT, automotive, finance etc.
- Rigorous selection process for inclusion into supplier database: translation tests assessed by trusted long-term suppliers and high pass scores required
- Ongoing performance monitoring and feedback via complaints/compliments log built into proprietary project management system and bi-annual quality and creativity audits
- Language graduate-only recruitment policy for Wordbank Project Managers, with many having a second translation-specific degree

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Bringing home the global message

A flexible, pragmatic approach

Despite the use of a wide range of automation and file-engineering tools to save time, the concepts of achieving high quality and speed are not always compatible.

So what has to give? As service providers, the onus is on us to meet our clients' demands and we will always try to develop a 'fast-track' QA process to meet their needs.

As a general rule, it is safer to omit the editing phase for projects such as datasheets, packaging and labelling which have significant amounts of repeated text. For texts containing new material with a creative content, the editing phase will be crucial to improve on the first translation and ensure adherence to the client's style guides so, when the pressure is on for these projects, it makes better sense to forgo the internal QA phase.

Whilst the heart of any localization service will always be the linguistic ability of talented translators, we can help to reduce turn-around time through an ever-expanding suite of tools for extracting text from and re-inserting back into its technical environment; maintaining up-to-date client glossaries and translation memories; and automating parts of the typesetting process.

For us at Wordbank, it is essential that our processes for recruiting, briefing, monitoring, supporting and giving feedback to linguistic suppliers can produce the high quality service required to meet our clients' demands and that we can all enjoy a successful and profitable working relationship. Our translators are valued and trusted members of our team and we welcome their constructive input and suggestions on how to improve the translation process, as we continue to evolve our services to meet changing market needs. At the same time, we all need to understand the real commercial pressures that we are under and it is up to us as the localization company to ensure that our processes, communication and support systems enable translators to deliver high quality translations, on time and on budget.

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