



Getting Started with Localization: Launching your Software into a Global Marketplace

Unopened Markets

Creativity has a tendency to cluster. It's no secret that urban centers play home to a majority of startup companies and product launches. Silicon Valley and New York are the classic examples of this phenomenon. More recently, Austin, Raleigh and Oklahoma City have emerged as hotbeds of innovation¹. These locations are exciting places to live and work because of their personality and subculture. Many people who live inside of these settings for long periods of time struggle to see the market outside of their subculture, tending to overlook other markets. The result is a handful of condensed, highly-competitive markets, and a vacuum of innovation outside these centers.

The greatest strength of a startup incubator like Silicon Valley can also be its Achilles heel. The easier it is to launch a new product, the more competitive the market will become. While app developers and software designers pile up in Northern California, all focused on the same crowded corporate American marketplace, 32 other countries with more than 10 million internet users lie dormant, untapped, and mostly ignored². **In fact, the United States only accounts for 10.2% of today's internet users³.**

1 <http://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/on-numbers/scott-thomas/2012/04/austin-takes-us-small-business-crown.html?page=all>

2 <http://royal.pingdom.com/2010/07/27/top-20-countries-on-the-internet/>

3 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm>

Don't Worry, You Don't Have to Leave Silicon Valley...

The answer is not to move out of the valley. No, let the valley do what it has always done, nurture ideas⁴, but raise your awareness of the untapped potential that you will find abroad. A paying customer from eastern Europe or Bolivia is just as valuable as one from SoHo or The Mission District. **The key to unlocking those untapped markets is localization.**

The internet is universally available, which means that your products can be universal as well. The turbulence of the dot com boom has largely subsided, leaving behind a relatively stable digital marketplace even in corners of the globe that do not have stability of any other sense. Facebook has been available in both Hebrew and Arabic since 2009⁵. The Silicon Valley darling, Evernote, is available in 20 different languages and counting⁶.

...But Your Product Should

The digital marketplace is stable, but it is not dominated so completely by the US giants. Much like the iconic wild west, the playing field is quite a bit more level outside of the oversaturated United States. For example, Amazon's German Kindle store accounted for less than 1.4% of total book sales in German speaking markets⁷. The rest of the market share is held by smaller companies that are either local or more effectively localized.

Across the entire technology sector, startups are seeing great success against much larger established companies when the contest is moved out of the giant's backyard onto neutral ground. This reality is largely overlooked as most Fortune 500 companies currently involved in localization indicated they were doing so to meet the expectations of their existing customers and to reach new customers in markets where they already compete. Localization is the only way to both unlock untapped markets and to reach the many non-native customers living in open markets.

4 <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/23/whats-coming-out-of-silicon-valley/>

5 <https://blog.facebook.com/>

6 <http://translate.evernote.com/availability/website/>

7 <http://www.kindleboards.com/>

Top Reasons that Fortune 500 Companies Translate Content⁸:

79.45% To meet local customer expectations

71.43% To reach more customers in markets where they already compete

71.43% To maintain or increase the value of the brand

69.37% To meet local regulatory or legal requirements

Doing this requires more than a straight word-for-word translation. It requires a more nuanced approach known as localization.

What is Localization?

Localization involves a higher degree of finesse than standard business translations. It speaks to the heart of native source-language speakers in a way that makes your product seem as though it were designed with them in mind.

Translation is the process of converting written text or spoken words into another language. A good translation takes into account not just the meaning of words, but their tense, tone and arrangement in the syntax. While there are many very good automated translation tools, the best translations are still done by humans. Many companies use business translation for legal documents, manuals and technical publications, but software translation presents a unique challenge. Developers and translators have very different workflow expectations. Translators expect access to every jot and title while developers will emphasize security of the source code. Keeping both groups happy requires a delicate balancing act or a tool designed specifically for that application.

Localization goes one step beyond an accurate translation to consider linguistic nuances and cultural memory to achieve results that are not just accurate but relevant and culturally sensitive. **The goal of localization is to make the product, usually a document, website, application or piece of software, appear to be native in every cultural context.**

⁸ <http://www.common senseadvisory.com/AbstractView.aspx?ArticleID=2855>

Localization is especially meaningful in products that demand an intuitive user-interface such as software and websites. It is able to translate ideas, which is much more than a translation of words alone.

Why You Should Localize from Day 1 (And How to Do it Painlessly)

Chances are, you are in business because you have built a great piece of software or at the very least have an idea for one. Without a doubt, you are passionate about your product. You know it inside and out. You do not trust just anyone to tinker with the product that has become your life's work.

In the past, localizing meant that you would need to either buy a copy of Rosetta Stone and do the work yourself, or decide to trust someone else not to steal or ruin your product. Recently a unique third option has materialized. One that allows you to localize without monopolizing your attention or subjecting your product to fraud.

Even when it happens smoothly, localizing a fully developed product can be a huge undertaking that will demand competencies that are vastly different from anything your team has achieved through the development and launch of your product. A much more efficient launch plan is to bake localization into your workflow from the very first day and save you the headache of trying to retrofit for it in the future.

\$1 → \$25

Despite its challenges, localization is almost always a great investment. A 2007 paper by the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA), for instance, reported that \$25 dollars was returned for every \$1 invested in localization. Recent developments in localization technology have made the process more accessible

than ever before. Even if you do not plan to launch your product in a language other than English (you should), you ought to build it as if you do. The Transifex system that makes localization possible allow your designers and product managers to work on your software without touching source code⁹. The value of this cannot be overstated.

There are primarily three approaches to localization: manual, automated, and hybrid. All 3 of these have benefits and drawbacks.

3 Approaches to Localization



Manual

Hiring actual people, employees, or contractors to translate your software.

Benefits: Accurate, aware of brand identity, and sensitive to context, tone & style.

Drawbacks: Expensive, cumbersome and slow

Examples: Globalme, Argos Translations, XTRA Translation Services



Automated

Computer software is used to translate text from one language to another.

Benefits: Fast, efficient, and low cost

Drawbacks: Imprecise, lacks keyword recognition, and insensitive to style and tone.

Examples: Google Translate, SYSTRAN, SDL Language Weaver



Hybrid

Imagine a powerful translation database, wielded by professional translators that brings you the benefits of both and the drawbacks of neither.

Benefits: Efficient, accurate, and sensitive to context, style and tone.

Drawbacks: Initial learning curve upon startup

Examples: Transifex with Gengo, Sisulizer, OneSky

⁹ <http://xlatn.com/2012/09/09/what-every-tech-startup-needs-to-know-about-translation/>

The hybrid solution is the newest and most refined. After a few years of trying to build super-computers that understand human language like only a human can, the localization industry is now leaning toward the hybrid approach that still brings a great deal of processor power to bear. The difference though, is in the personal touch that only someone with skin on can provide. A machine cannot understand context or tone. A machine cannot understand the difference between ‘manual’ meaning ‘by hand’ or ‘manual’ meaning ‘book of instructions’. A machine cannot inject energy into a paragraph with an unexpected word choice. Those are things that only people can do.

6 Non-Negotiable Characteristics of a Quality Translation System

Regardless of which approach you choose, there are 6 non-negotiable characteristics that you ought to demand from your localization system.



Transparency

Some localization systems, especially those driven by people, do not like to show you how the work gets done. They want you to hand over your product, and go away while it’s translated. There’s no need for this. You have a right to know what is going on with your translation project. You should be able to see analytics in real time as translation progresses. You have the right to call for edits at any point in the process. You should demand absolute transparency.



Seamless Integration

Your localization system ought to play nice with whatever existing tools your developers use now (GitHub, Jenkins, Bamboo, etc.).



Efficiency

When you release an update with a few minor bug fixes, you should not have to pay for a whole new round of translation. Your translation system ought to be efficient enough to keep track of what has and has not already been translated in order to prevent redundant effort and expense.



Agility

The flipside of efficiency is agility. You don't want to overpay, and you don't want your updates and security patches to get bogged down at the localization phase. You need this thing to move in real-time. Your localization system should support fast iteration and dynamic content. Even if you do not have any of that now, chances are you will at some point. Demand an automated system with triggers that notify your translation team whenever changes are made to your product. You need one that moves as fast as you do, preferably faster.



Security & Privacy

There might be a world somewhere that would demand you compromise your security in order to have your software translated, but that isn't true here. If a localization provider offers you anything less than 100% security and absolute privacy, there's no need for that. Your product belongs to you, and it should stay that way.



Intuitive

Translators should not have to take a class in order to use the translation management system that you choose. They should be able to jump right in and start translating right away without you (or they) fearing that they might break something.

The Last Word

In today's market beating your competition to German, French, Chinese, and Portuguese might mean the difference between runaway success and failure. You've put your lifeblood into your software. We get it.

You've built an incredible product.

Why not launch into a global marketplace with Transifex?

To find out more about the hybrid method of translation, and how Transifex does it, visit:

<https://www.transifex.com/tour/>

Other Resources:

<http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/goglobal/bb688139.aspx>

<http://www.common senseadvisory.com/Resources/FactsandFigures.aspx>

<http://help.transifex.com/intro/index.html#intro-index>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internationalization_and_localization

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