

Translation at SonyBPE

How SonyBPE cut costs by more than half, increased the quality of its translations and kept knowledge in-house.

by Salomé López-Lavado



Translation may not be a core area of business at Sony Broadcast & Professional Europe (BPE), but it is one of the factors enabling the company to offer its multinational customers the information they need in the language they understand: their own.

BPE is the B2B arm of Sony and although a majority of its customers speak good English, the company realizes that the key to better understanding, and ultimately better sales, can be achieved by showing respect to the customer's language by offering translated information.

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Until three years ago SonyBPE's Web site was only in English. These days the site, www.sonybiz.net, offers product information, customer stories, press releases and product manuals in German, Italian, Spanish and French. The local country

sites, such as www.sonybiz.net/nl, offer all the core information in English, plus news in the local language.

The translation operation that made all this possible started in November 1999 but was, initially, a cumbersome and costly process. In the absence of in-house translators, everything was outsourced to agencies but with more than five million words translated every year, the costs were prohibitive. In addition, finding proof-readers to approve copy could take months; there was no company glossary so the content lacked consistency and online and offline content on the same subject often used a different terminology or tone of voice because translations were done by different agencies.

A powerful, scalable solution

After a year, Salome Lopez-Lavado, Language Consultant at the Customer Information Group (CIG), set out to find a solution that would not only cut costs, but also improve the quality of the translations.

"We wanted a powerful, scalable solution that would allow the company to share knowledge, reduce cost by recycling translation and improve the turnaround times. We had to opt for a computer aided solution, but with so many in the market we were not sure which to choose".

After reading an article about translation packages in *Language International*, Ms.

Lopez-Lavado chose TRADOS as the easiest to use and manage totally in-house. Ms Lopez-Lavado says: "We knew that some of our external translation agencies used this tool and therefore we would be able to re-use the existing memory database that

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the agencies had been building over the years."

With the backing of CIG Management, work started on setting up a virtual in-house translation department. General Manager, Mike Crawford says of the project:

"Faced with large amounts of translations and increasing costs it became imperative to find another solution, we knew that many of the articles we had translated were similar to previous ones. By bringing the translations in house we could save money, improve the quality, reduce the time taken to translate and build a knowledge base of translated words and Sony terms that could be used for future translations."



Building the team

The project started in April 2001 and the aim was to have a team of translators by the beginning of September. Every translator would be a native speaker and would first be based in the Basingstoke office for a 6-week training period. They would subsequently be transferred to the local country office where they would work, surrounded by the product specialists and marketing colleagues.

"I believe translators need to be working in their own country to be able to keep up with the developments in their own language," says Ms. Lopez-Lavado. "Languages are live elements, and the moment a person leaves their country, their vocabulary becomes heavily influenced by the language of the country of residence. Besides we knew that the best way for the translators to learn as much as possible about the Sony language and culture would be for them to be part of the every day conversations in the product specialist departments."

Building terminology and translation memory

After all translators were hired, the first step was to build the translation memory with previously approved translations. This was a laborious and monotonous task but it was essential to the success of the project. Only by building a database with the translations they had published during the previous years, could the translators start learning about Sony products and about Sony style.

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Some of the translators were very experienced, such as Anja Goldmann and Guiomar Perez, German and Spanish translators respectively, who have masters degrees in technical translation and were already working as translators before joining Sony. Thierry Chevallier and Ilaria Galliussi, French and Italian translators respectively, had a marketing background and a strong interest in translation. All of them were given training in using TRADOS 5 whilst still in the UK.

A contract was also taken out to make sure there was telephone support: "I think the support contract was indispensable during the first year, as sometime we came across

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problems which we didn't know how to solve. A quick telephone call put us in touch with a TRADOS specialist who would then either provide a solution directly on the phone or offer to have a look at the file causing problems and would email us later on with a solution. Without the support contract we would have spent lots of time trying to solve simple problems", says Ms. Lopez-Lavado.

One of the most important tools for the translators is the Sony Standards & Guidelines document produced by Debbie Roberts in the Knowledge Management team. According to Ms. Roberts: "This document is the basis to all writing activity within sonybiz.net. It helps translators and journalist to learn about the tone of voice and style that retains the consistency throughout our Web site. It also gives specific instructions about the length of any document that is going to be published online. Writing for online purposes is very different to offline writing. Reading from a screen is much slower than from a printed copy, and we want to make sure that the visitors to our site get to the bottom of the story without developing "scrolling nausea".

TRADOS 5 comes with a tool called Workspace, which is specially designed for complete project management. However, Ms. Lopez-Lavado, now Project Manager of all online translations, explains why they chose not to use this facility: "This tool is very beneficial if you're working with large projects, but in our case we tend to get several documents every day, but relatively short ones. Therefore we are not using Workspace. The translators use Workbench and MultiTerm for all their

translations. MultiTerm is the part of TRADOS that holds the terminology database. When a translator comes across a word that is stored in MultiTerm, this is underlined on the screen so that the translators can immediately click on it and read the description and find the approved translations. MultiTerm was obviously empty when we first started using TRADOS and it was down to the Product Manager to make sure that the existing glossaries were put into the right format and uploaded onto MultiTerm for the translator's benefit."

Dramatic improvements

The translation project has now been running for 9 months and already the results are impressive. Sony BPE has achieved a dramatic improvement in the quality of its translations through standardization of terminology. The turnaround time has been substantially reduced and whereas in the past it could take up to a week to complete a translation, plus a very long time afterwards for the translation to be approved, these days any translation project is started, completed and proofread within 3 to 4 days. Since new product versions tend to differ only slightly from the previous ones, the translation team recycles up to 60% of translations in some cases. This has clearly improved the turnaround times,

Hiring in-house translators has helped the company to reduce the translation costs by more than 50% and they are now thinking about expanding the service to other groups in Sony BPE which normally deal with the translation of manuals and contracts. It may mean hiring more translators, but the important thing will be that SonyBPE will keep on enhancing the quality, achieving greater consistency and keeping the knowledge in-house.

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