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# NCR

## Computer-Aided-Translation in the Real World

**W**e're quite happy with the ALPS installation," reports Alain Linden, head of NCR translation services at NCR France from his office overlooking Paris at La Défense. "While we are not up to full speed yet, the monthly figures are quite close to our projections."

NCR bought the entire ALPS package, called TransActive. It runs on a DEC MV 4000 (about to be switched to an NCR Tower) with six megabytes of memory, a 354 megabyte disk, seven terminals, and two NCR PC6s (AT equivalents), one of which is equipped with an optical reader.

### **What is this brave new world of computer-aided-translation like?**

After installation of the hardware and software at NCR, the first step in the process of automating translation with TransActive was the preparation of two company dictionaries, one for computing and the other for telecommunications. Three linguists worked for two months compiling an English dictionary with 18,500 English words and 26,775 French equivalents. The dictionaries are essential to insure consistency, by removing ambiguity and reducing the scope for translators to use more than one term in translations.

Translation itself is a three step procedure: document preparation/analysis, dictionary building and translation. For example, documents coming in on paper have to be prepped, then scanned. A document dictionary is created to find out which terms are not already included in the company dictionary. Those which aren't are checked with engineers and developers for exact meanings, then integrated in the company dictionary. Finally, the translator works with the program to translate the text.

Work procedures with TransActive are radically different from translating with a batch system, or on a PC with only a word processor. The screen is divided into two halves. The source text appears in one, sentence by sentence. In the other half appears the suggested translation.

If the translator finds it acceptable, he or she presses a key and moves on to the next sentence. If the program comes across an ambiguous word, term or reference, it queries the translator, offering a selection of alternatives across the bottom of the screen. The translator then presses a key corresponding to one of the alternatives, the program integrates it into the sentence it is working on, then continues.

"Translators like the system," Alain Linden says, "especially the younger ones. They no longer do a translation, they manage it. They prepare, make dictionaries, organize. And since it's not complete machine translation, they have none of the drudgery of post-editing."

### **Bottom line realities**

Installing a TransActive system is not cheap. It cost NCR France 1,450,000 French francs (about US\$ 200,000) just for the hardware. Software and support for the first year cost 1,150,000 francs.

Is it a good investment? According to NCR, output for the first year is projected to be 2,700,000 words, or 61,000 per translator per month, for a cost per word estimated to be in the range of a franc. Skeptics might point out this represents no cost saving over independent translation bureaus.

Of course, NCR's first year costs include the one-time costs of dictionary building and learning while getting the system up and running. They also include equipment costs which might be less if the DG mini computer was replaced with a 386 machine. And outside agencies might not be able to maintain the same standards of consistency, nor provide text formatted so as to be ready for desktop publishing, and the attendant savings it provides. NCR intends to install its own desktop publishing system. Problems? The lack of collaboration from other divisions and plants writing software.

"There are fourteen plants producing documentation and products," Alain Linden replies. "Each uses different equipment. Some even use typewriters."