

# Machine Translations - An Important Part of Your Internet Strategy

By Alastair Lindsay - October 2000

Whilst bearing in mind the arguments surrounding Machine Translation, **Alastair Lindsay** of Worldlingo.com [1] explains how you can use MT as part of your Internet strategy.

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## Introduction

The accuracy of machine-translated documents has been a much-debated topic in the language industry—a debate that intensifies as machine translation (MT) becomes more prevalent in Internet applications. On one side you have professional translators saying MT will never replace us because it is not accurate. On the other side the scientists thrive on the challenge of perfecting MT and are determined to do so

This debate clouds the true value of MT to your Internet strategy.

First the facts of business:

- English is not the native language of 48.7% of internet users – *Global Reach*
- Users linger twice as long at a site in their native language – *Forrester Research*
- Users are 4 times more likely to purchase from a Website if it is in their native language - *IDC*

**So what's the implication for your Internet strategy?** - It means big opportunity for your business or research group!!!!

Second the facts of the language industry

- MT will never be as accurate as professional human translation
- MT will get better
- MT is fast and cheap
- Professional human translation is comparatively slow and very expensive
- MT is very useful to get the “gist” ( a general understanding) of documents
- Each has a role to play on the Internet

**So what's the implication for your Internet strategy?** – Use the right tool for the job, both have an important role to play on the Internet.

## MT Alone is Not Enough

Until recently, the language industry has been divided into those who provide human translations (HT) and those who provide machine translations. The problem with this division is that neither side has the perfect answer and it is the ecommerce companies that are suffering.

*"With the increased focus on the profitability of e-commerce businesses, these old prejudices have to be put aside," says Phil Scanlan, CEO of Worldlingo.com. "The fact is both MT and HT can make a substantial impact on your profitability if they are integrated appropriately – harnessing the strengths of each."*

Worldlingo.com is leading the way with seamless solutions that integrate the best of human translation and machine translation for maximum effect on your profitability.

*"The secret to our success in this area has been our willingness to sit down with clients and discuss their Internet strategy," says Scanlan. "It is not just a matter of identifying areas for translation, but more importantly working out the financial models that generate real profits from international ecommerce."*

Machine translations are used in a variety of ways by dot.coms, ranging from plug-in browsers to cut and paste boxes. Worldlingo.com, a recent addition to the market, believes MT should be used in combination with HT. The vision behind Worldlingo.com is to provide seamless and time-efficient international communication on the Internet. Worldlingo.com uses machine translation to complement its database of human translators, as is evident in the company's email translation service.

Businesses that communicate regularly with foreign language-speaking clients use this email service to automatically translate an incoming message into their own language. With each translated email, the receiver also gets a quote for what it would cost to get the email professionally translated. Therefore, users of Worldlingo.com's email service can receive a free machine translation that provides them with the gist of their correspondence. From this, they can decide if it is an important message (i.e. potential customer), and if so they can accept Worldlingo.com's quote for human translation delivered in Internet time. The email translations offered by Worldlingo.com cover 70% of the non-English languages on the Internet. This will allow communication with almost 90% (including English speakers) of Internet users through the medium of email.

The email system is a prime example of Worldlingo.com's philosophy towards translation - Machine Translations in combination with Human Translations provide a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

## **MT Used for Niche Work**

Online translation companies who use machine translation engines are not trying to compete against large localization companies such as Berlitz, LionBridge, and SDL. Instead, they are concentrating on smaller Web-based translations, such as Email and Web pages, which traditional translation service providers generally find too small to translate. In-house language translators at large corporations also find their large workloads leave little time for these smaller rush jobs, and find Internet focused translation services like Worldlingo.com's a useful overflow valve.

## **Do MT languages Match Internet needs?**

**The most prominent languages offered by machine translation software are:**

- German
- French
- Russian
- Italian

- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Japanese
- Chinese
- Korean

An examination of the biggest language growth areas on the Internet indicates that providers of online machine translations will have to put increasing emphasis on providing Asian language translations.

## Internet Growth Languages

The International Data Corporation [2] predicts that the fastest growth in Internet use will be in Asia, where the number of people using the Internet will grow from 20 Million now to 75 Million by 2003. Newsbytes Asia says that the growth will be even greater than this in the long run. Its recent report found that there are currently 43.6 million online users in Asia and a 62% increase is expected by 2006; which will reach 370 million.

Most of Asia's users are in Japan, however by 2005, China is expected to surpass all other countries in the region of Asia. 37.6% of Asia's online users will be Chinese in 2005; this signifies 85 million users. (Nov. 1999).

## What This Means for MT

As mentioned throughout this article machine translations are not 100% accurate. They are limited by the intricacies and culture of the world's languages. This is particularly the case with Asian languages. The sentence structure of Asian languages is the opposite of languages such as Latin based English. This means the machine translator has to rearrange the whole sentence as well as translating individual words.

Recently, companies such as Worldlingo.com have provided Asian language machine translations through its Web and email services. While improvements still need to be made, the gist of Asian Web pages can be easily obtained. It is going to be a challenge for MT scientists to work on this area, as Asia clearly is going to be a dominant Web player.

## Summary

The examples given in this article show that machine translations, despite providing only the gist, are very useful as long as they are used in combination with other translation techniques. The free services provided by Web translators can save businesses money by vetting junk email and other Web communications, and by highlighting whether there is sufficient demand for Web Site localization. The World Wide Web is an International medium, and language differences cannot be avoided. Therefore, Machine Translations will be an integral part of a business's Internet strategy.

## References

1. *Worldlingo.com*. URL: <<http://www.worldlingo.com/>>
2. *The International Data Corporation*. URL: <<http://www.idc.com/>>