



Simultaneous Shipment: Making the Leap from Theory to Practice

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Key Points

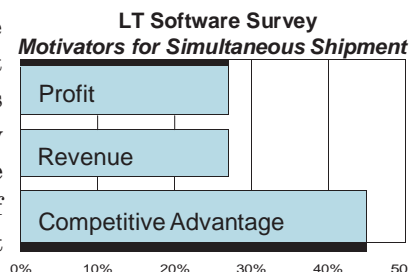
- **Maximizing the return on your development investments means capturing your share of the global applications market.**
- **The increased capabilities of your competitors require you to accelerate global release cycles through the achievement of simultaneous shipment.**
- **A software organization cannot achieve simultaneous shipment unless it has prepared both strategically and tactically to do so.**
- **Achieving simultaneous shipment of global products requires coordination of development, marketing and training.**

Executive Summary

Until recently, software companies were often able to coast on the strength of their “blockbuster” products. Being the first to market with an innovative solution secured strong share and a loyal client base who would wait patiently for each new release, and willingly pay the maintenance and upgrade fees to gain access to the new features. Competitors often were left far behind as they struggled through lengthy development processes and were forced to play “catch up” with each subsequent release by the market leader.

Based on this historical competitive lag, many market leaders viewed international markets as secondary profit centers. They would place their emphasis on the domestic release and then slowly roll out international editions, mainly as a means to offset declining domestic sales as the latest version matured and clients began to anticipate the new release. There was little competitive threat, as the in-country developers lacked the bandwidth and skills to match the heavy investments of the leader.

Today, advances in the development cycle have enabled local competitors to play more aggressively in their home markets, and often beat the well known international developers to market with comparable features weeks or months before the latest edition. As shown by a July 2004 survey of L10N Technology’s software client base, simultaneous shipment of products into global markets is no longer just about competitive advantage - it’s about competitive survival.



This white paper will serve to highlight the benefits of simultaneous shipment and to cover the three primary points of global coordination that often pose the greatest barriers to achieving this aim:

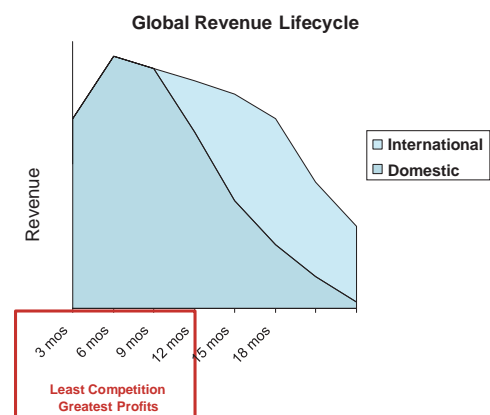
- Product Development - parallel development of localized versions of applications.
- Marketing Support - translation of brochures, Web sites, sell sheets, ads and trade materials to support non-domestic sales.
- Sales and Service Training - availability of training materials and user support content in local languages to ensure effective customer service upon release.

The Pressure Mounts

Over the past decade, product release cycles in the software markets have accelerated aggressively as offshore resources and improvements in developer tools have dramatically increased the productivity and output potential across the industry. This acceleration and efficiency, coupled with on-line distribution and international marketing options, has facilitated explosive growth in the number of new software developers competing worldwide and dramatically reduced the average lifespan of an application. According to Microsoft Business Solutions, some software products now are obsolete in as little as 12 months.

Well into the late 1990s, software companies could often ride the momentum of their core "blockbuster" product, releasing a new edition every 24-36 months. These editions were released domestically with great fanfare and then slowly, over the coming months, local market editions would be released for sale in other countries. At the time, this lag posed little competitive threat as the development time was so long that the leading company was able to distribute their localized versions before an in-country competitor could replicate their core features from scratch.

As depicted in the revenue lifecycle below, this method of "staged" releasing actually worked to the companies advantage as international sales filled in the gaps of declining domestic sales while the edition reached maturity at home. This lengthy cycle, in turn, helped mask the risk of long development cycles. The downside, however, was that most of the international revenue was generated toward the end of the product's maturity when competitors were gaining ground, differentiation was becoming more challenging, and prices were declining.



The acceleration in development processes, however, has now created a clear market exposure within this legacy model. For the IT players on Fortune's Global 500 list for 2003, over 40% of their revenue is now generated in non-domestic markets, meaning their ability to compete effectively in these countries is critical to their overall performance. In today's hyper-competitive markets through, the innovations and value-added features of a domestic release are quickly matched by global competitors. In this environment, the ability to simultaneously release a product into each target market is not just a competitive advantage, it is rapidly becoming a competitive necessity.

Enabling your organization to meet these demands requires strategic alignment of goals and metrics across the organization, tactical execution designed to eliminate or mitigate common barriers and bottlenecks, and the support of an integrated, experienced vendor organization.

After years of heady sales growth, IT providers are now engaged in bare knuckles competition as the industry faces sated customers and overcapacity. The cumulative demands of innovation and globalization...will force IT providers to 'rightsized' themselves by focusing more sharply than ever - in particular on their own productivity.

-Manyika & Nevens, McKinsey Quarterly, 2002

Simultaneous Shipment - The Theory

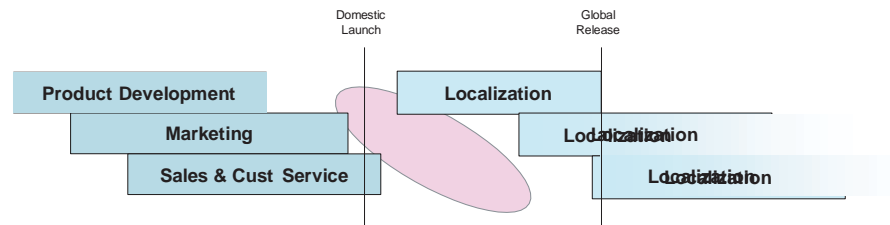
Webster's On-Line Dictionary of Computing Terms defines "simultaneous shipment - (simship)" as: the release of international, localized versions of software at the same time, or within a short period of time of the original release.

The theory of simultaneous shipment is relatively new in relation to the general software development industry. Its emergence is due in part to the shifting market conditions as outlined above, but its slow adoption is attributed to the historical lack of focus and production discipline employed by developers and support vendors around preparing the organization strategically and tactically to achieve this goal.

The issue with this rather simple description is that it fails to articulate the true meaning of "the release." For some organizations, this can be interpreted to mean only that the product (and supporting documentation) need be available in the native languages of the target markets. Unfortunately, having a localized product is only a piece of the overall global sales model. Domestic releases must also include all requisite marketing collateral, and are supported by in-depth sales and customer service training. If a "successful" launch domestically incorporates each of these elements, so too must the definition of a successful simultaneous shipment. It is only by adopting this broader definition that you can hope to capture the full competitive potential within your international markets.



The barriers and challenges to achieving true simultaneous shipment are not insignificant. The efforts required span three primary areas of an enterprise which have traditionally operated as autonomous workstreams following their own paths and timelines for localization:



Typical Evolution of Product Development and Localization

In this traditional model, it was unclear when, or even if, elements such as marketing collateral and sales training would ever be made available in the local language of the international markets. As a result, in-country reps were forced to learn the subtleties of their product and its differentiated features by reviewing training materials in English. They were then asked to go out into the market and compete with brochures, case studies, Web sites and pricing models that were developed for the company's primary market. The content and positioning did not reflect the needs of the local consumers, or the competitive landscape, and as such often failed to resonate with international buyers (assuming the materials were even shared with buyers and not discarded).

The theory behind simultaneous shipment, therefore, is the overlay of localization and the core development efforts such that all aspects—product, marketing, and training—are developed for both the domestic and international releases in parallel:

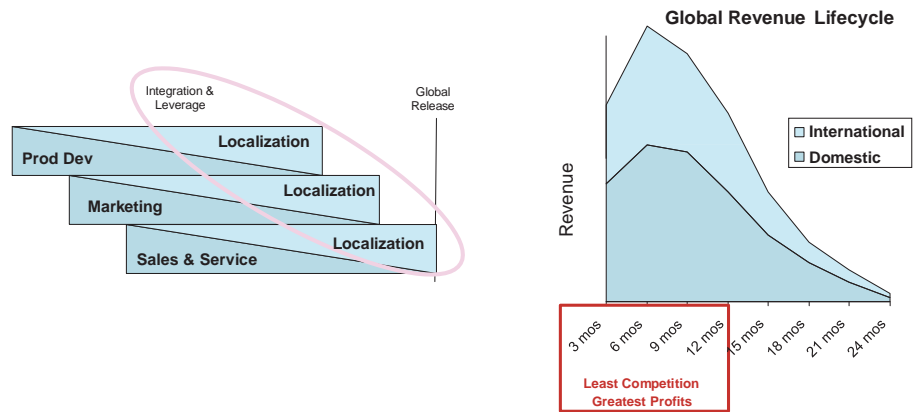
- Product Development - parallel development of localized versions of your applications.
- Marketing Support - translation of brochures, Web sites, sell sheets, ads and trade materials to support non-domestic sales.
- Sales and Reseller Training - availability of training materials and user support content in local languages to ensure effective customer service upon release.

Achieving this degree of alignment across a highly fragmented model requires both a strategic and tactical focus. However, the market motivations and resulting business case for such an effort is compelling.

As depicted in the workflow and revenue models below, by approaching the development efforts initially from an international perspective and integrating the domestic and localized workstreams, the overall production times are cut dramatically, global lag is eliminated, and revenue from the international editions is maximized



during the critical first 12 months when profits are at their peak versus trailing 12 to 24 months behind when competition is the most fierce and profits are suffering due to cost cutting and defensive positioning:

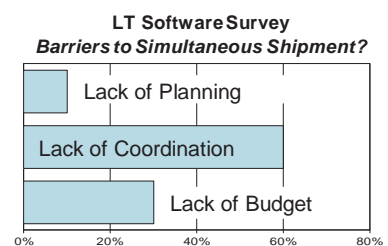


Theoretical SimShip Development Model

Until recently, this model has remained “theoretical” as the various process control elements, vendor support structures, and underlying technical infrastructures did not exist. Advances in each of these areas, however, have been made in just the past few years and, when integrated, can enable the efficient execution of the model. The remainder of this paper will highlight some of those traditional barriers and the new innovations that are quickly overcoming them allowing leading firms to move from theory to practice.

Simultaneous Shipment - The Barriers: Planning and Coordination

While each of the three operational work-streams presents its own barriers to the achievement of simultaneous shipment, the more fundamental challenge lies in the overall coordination across the enterprise. The recent L10N Technology survey reflected this frustration as respondents cited a lack of coordination as their primary challenge, far greater than securing the necessary budgets or planning for the discrete project elements. We will therefore begin our analysis of the barriers with this pan-enterprise concern and then drill into the challenges within each of the work efforts themselves.



Top Three SimShp Barriers for Coordination

- Lack of awareness of other team's programs and personnel
- Engagement of multiple localization vendors
- No standardized glossaries or style guides

Top Three SimShp Barriers for Product Development

- Regional vs country-specific requirements
- Extrapolations and assumptions of requirements
- Loss of time due to required reengineering for local markets

Barriers to Coordination

In preparing for a domestic release, these teams are brought together to settle on a single “drop” date and they then align their efforts against that target. Internationally, however, this common target is rarely established owing to the different priorities and resource constraints within each of the three areas. While each team likely has a dedicated person or group working on the issues of localization, these individuals rarely connect to discuss the overall progress. Localization is treated as a “follow on” action in each discrete development area, and the focus is on linking with the horizontal team only. This isolationist approach fails to identify and leverage the natural synergies that exist across the various streams, increasing the production time and cost and impacting the overall quality of the local market versions.

Lacking this insight and coordinated approach, the teams often engage in multiple, independent localization efforts. This fragmented approach exponentially increases the amount of resource time spent on vendor management, query responses, and quality control. Since vendors are typically unaware of the work of their colleagues, they cannot share their insights or collaborate to ensure consistency across the various elements. For example, different teams working on the localization of a wireless network card may invariably call the computer a “notebook,” “laptop,” or “PC.” While these may seem like innocent synonyms, compounding these three variations across a dozen or more languages can prove confusing as the product manual describes the components one way while the help files describe them differently.

Later in the paper, we will address some “best practices” to achieve the appropriate degree of internal and vendor integration to capture these inherent synergies.

Barriers in Product Development

Requirements for product development are typically generated according to domestic demand with limited, if any, design input from global customers. When global input is sought it is typically at the “regional” level versus “country” level for the sake of ease and expedience. For instance, input is solicited from colleagues and clients in the United Kingdom and Germany and this is extrapolated as the “international” requirements. However, Europe is not a homogenous area, and input from Germany and the U.K. will likely miss unique needs in France, Spain and nearly every other target country. As a result, the back end localization efforts prove more time consuming and more costly as substantive reengineering is often required to conform to these local market needs.



**Top Three SimShip Barriers:
Marketing**

- Need to capture the subtleties and nuances of language and culture
- Domestic-market "bias" inherent in content and images
- In-country preference to create original local materials erodes global brand

**Top Three SimShip Barriers:
Training and Support**

- Domestic bias in training and service materials
- Proficiency and knowledge test structures vary
- Lack of global acceptance around emerging multimedia training tools

**Top Three Strategic Alignment
Mandates for SimShip**

- Common goals and metrics across stakeholder organizations
- Compelling, ROI-based business case
- Understanding of interdependencies and end value by all resources

Barriers in Marketing

In the marketing area, the challenges are often greater. Little global input is sought around the creation of names, logos, or taglines. As a result, these brand creation “tools” often face stiff challenges when attempting to go global where the nuances of culture and language can generate substantially different, and sometime embarrassing, reactions to the content. Promotional materials often contain language and images that also convey a heavy bias towards the domestic culture. Though unintentional, the authors and creators cannot help but imprint their own domestic cultural stamp on these materials. Lacking sufficient global input during the early design phases results in massive amounts of rework to these items before they can be made to appear “native” enough to compete effectively. In some cases, the work to update the corporate brand and support pieces is so overwhelming that the country offices find it easier to simply create new materials from scratch at the cost of severe erosion of the “global” brand.

Barriers in Training and Customer Service

On the training and service side, the core development investment tends to be domestic. Since these efforts often rely on the content created in the product documentation and supporting marketing materials, they too become infused with domestic market biases. Analogies, metaphors and parables rely heavily on historical context which can vary greatly by country. Testing conventions such as multiple choice may not resonate with sales personnel and resellers in certain parts of the world. Failing to capture these perspectives during the early planning phases often results in low participation in these programs outside the home market. Since reps and resellers don’t learn how to properly position the new product, opportunities are missed and revenue growth is constrained.

Simultaneous Shipment - Putting Theory Into Practice

Securing Strategic Alignment

Achieving simultaneous shipment requires both a strategic and tactical approach. At the strategic level, the organization must commit itself to the program, and bring functions that often work at an arm’s length together. It must develop appropriate market expectations and the supporting business case in order to secure senior management buy-in and sustain the momentum of the program during the unavoidable “bumpy” stages. Common metrics and delivery targets need to be established with input from each of the stakeholder organizations. The country markets must be identified and their input and requirements collected and accounted for in the project timelines.



Only by securing this commitment upfront will any program be successful. Without understanding the interdependencies and contribution to the end value, it would be too easy for the various work teams to become disenfranchised and slip back into their “silo” mentalities, thus derailing the entire effort. Once this macro-perspective is understood, only then can the independent efforts begin to be operationalized and optimized.

Achieving Tactical Integration

At first it appears that these internal barriers could prove insurmountable for many software developers. The teams may be separated physically by time and distance or metaphysically by politics and organization charts. Whatever the cause, attempting to coordinate a simultaneous shipment effort alone too often relegates it to the “theory” bin.

L10N Technology has created a Virtual SimShip Workflow Model to demonstrate how the benefits of simultaneous shipment can be achieved without massive reorganizations or process overhauls. Under this design, each organization optimizes their discrete workstream, while a virtual organization supported by a common localization partner achieves the leverage and synergy across the total workflow.

Key to this model is the ability of the localization partner to cover the various content and engineering requirements from products to marketing to training and support. Their ability to work across and with each of these organizations and apply a common back-end process to the total effort essentially forms the “glue” that facilitates the achievement of simultaneous shipment with undo disruption or time consuming internal “team meetings.”

An example of this independent but leveraged model could be seen where the product team may want their localization resources alongside their developers while the marketing organization is more comfortable working remotely and collaborating via the Web. Regardless of the individual touch points, the localization partner’s production platform integrates the various efforts behind the scenes to ensure maximum leverage and reuse to save both time and cost.

Although working with a single vendor will indeed capture a substantial portion of the benefits, it is not until the fundamentals of each workstream are modified to address the unique global requirements and enable parallel localization efforts that the full potential of a simultaneous shipment model will be realized.



Product Development

From the product development perspective, the greatest challenge is sufficiently capturing global input during the requirements development phase. Working with a team of in-country resources, these contacts can be made locally, and the requirements drafted collaboratively and submitted to the primary development team as a single, comprehensive document. This enables more effective planning and ensures coverage for all markets versus relying on the input of one or two to represent a multitude of unique countries.

During the planning and development effort, localization engineers can provide valuable input into the architecture and user interface elements that will enable a more seamless transition into the localization variants. Working in this way also allows your partner to develop a core base of knowledge around your product which can be applied during the real-time localization efforts to accelerate turnaround times. As a best practices approach, this knowledge also would be captured in a collaborative workspace system and shared with the other teams working on the marketing and sales/service efforts to maintain alignment and reduce the number of queries.

With this type of real-time collaboration between developers and the localization team, the localized versions could be ready just days behind the domestic edition as opposed to weeks or months. Once completed, the language variants should be subjected to the same QA tests as the domestic versions, ensuring 100% compliance to the established performance standards.

Marketing

On the marketing side, the need to collaborate with in-country teams is even more crucial as the impact of culture and language on the overall subtleties of the brand (versus the physical product) can be dramatic. Early on in the planning stages, as initial ideas and concepts are being raised, a dedicated team from the localization partner should conduct a cultural assessment and alert the marketing team and their creative agency to any potential risks for the concept outside the domestic market. For instance, a brand name that is available in the U.S. may already be taken by an entity in Italy. A name that is completely made up and therefore presumed “safe” from negative associations may sound harmless when spoken in English but be mistaken for a local slur when a German attempts the same pronunciation.

Similarly, the use of images and colors can have a profound effect on the local markets’ receptivity to the product and positioning. Early intervention on the part your partner can avoid such mistakes as using Chinese people in a campaign covering only the Japanese market.

During the development phase, your partner should be working closely with the creative agency to provide advice around the architecture of elements such as web pages and sell sheets to ensure a more efficient localization effort. As an example, Web page menus must have sufficient room to allow for word expansion (e.g., many German words are longer than their English counterparts). Embedding text into



graphics files versus layering it can increase the time and desktop publishing expense for the client, as these images must be deconstructed and then reconstructed in order to complete the translation.

At the end, all materials must be given a final quality review for linguistic accuracy and adherence to the brand identity. Source materials should then be made available electronically to facilitate multiple distribution formats in the countries to best conform to local practices (e.g., preference for printed sheets versus e-mail attachments).

Sales and Service Training

At the end of the development cycle is the training of the sales and customer service teams. As this is the first “face” the customer will associate with the product, it is crucial that these resources are able to effectively convey the value and benefits of the product’s features, and to evangelize the differentiators and positioning created by the marketing organization. Given the synergies between the product and marketing content with the training content, it is not surprising to learn that this is a strong point of leverage with the localized content from the previous efforts.

As with marketing, a partner’s role in the planning stage should consist primarily of providing counsel and guidance to ensure the programs accommodate the unique needs of a global audience. During the development phase, the localization team should be working closely with your content development team to provide direction on the use of various multimedia, video, and voiceover approaches. Developers often fail to take into consideration the limitations of the technical infrastructures in some of their target locations, which can dramatically impede the delivery and ultimate effectiveness of the training.

As the modules are created, the localization teams complete the translation and recording of multilingual video or voiceovers as needed. When your partner is engaged throughout the planning and development periods, these time-consuming elements can often be completed in parallel with the English recordings since there is no requirement to have the English completed prior to recording the other languages as long as the scripts are approved.

At the conclusion, the text, videos, and voiceovers must be reviewed for accuracy and adherence to the source material, while the technical elements such as streaming video are tested against the local infrastructure constraints (i.e., bandwidth) to ensure similar performance and usability as found with the domestic editions.

Conclusion

Simultaneous shipment is no longer a theoretical future-state, it is a mission-critical strategic imperative, driven by the accelerating market forces and hyper-competitive global software industry. Achieving the levels of integration and coordination may appear daunting given the typical organizational “silos” and historical models of isolationist design and creation efforts found in most development companies.



However, with the right levels of strategic and tactical planning supported by a strong, globally aligned localization partner, the benefits of rapid localization can be leveraged to achieve the lasting market value associated with simultaneous shipment.



About LT

L10N Technology (LT) is the leading provider of translation, localization, technical writing and interpretation services that enable businesses to deliver locally relevant and culturally connected products, services and communications anywhere in the world. Companies throughout the world use our solutions to help grow their businesses in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Latin America.

Our scalable end-to-end solutions can help accelerate a company's time to market while improving the quality and consistency of the company's products and services. Our wide range of clients include leading businesses in information technology, automotive, e-learning, life sciences, entertainment, telecommunications, aerospace and power and utilities industries.

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