



To Build or To Buy? Re-evaluating your Translation Support Model

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Key Points

- **Traditional In-house or ad-hoc support models for translation need to be re-evaluated in line with other functional processes.**
 - **Internal staffs result in higher fixed costs, and boutique suppliers limit flexibility and impede response time to new global opportunities.**
 - **New developments in the translation services industry offer new alternatives to improve time-to-market and return on investment while reducing the risk and exposure due to poor quality translations.**
 - **LT leads the industry in designing and delivering custom, scalable and flexible support models for leading enterprises.**
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Build vs. Buy: A Good Debate If You Can Have It

When considering any business function, the core question comes down to “build or buy?” Do you hire an IT staff to build a new CRM system or do you buy one from a vendor? Do you grow your direct sales force or engage a channel partner? Do you hire translators or find a firm who handles your target language?

This exercise and ensuing debate is very constructive as it ensures that your firm continues to achieve the proper balance between cost and return. It also helps to solidify your vision around what is truly core to your business. With the first two situations listed above, an objective decision could be made based on an evaluation of the various alternatives. You can measure and compare the cost of developing your own CRM system versus purchasing one and weigh this against the productivity benefits of a custom solution versus deploying more of a “one-size-fits-all” tool. Likewise, you can measure and predict the potential costs and benefits of hiring a small direct sales team who focuses only on delivering your message and product versus working through a channel who may offer better coverage but dilute your discrete offering among many others. These decisions are not always easy, but the availability of viable alternatives makes for a more comprehensive, more objective analysis whose efficacy can be measured over time.

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In the case of the latter decision regarding translation, many companies have resorted to staffing an internal team of translators which cover just a few markets and they either forego translations into broader languages or they identify and engage specialty translators on an ad-hoc basis. This awkward model evolved not because it was deemed to be the best approach, but because it was the only approach. A viable, enterprise-level service provider simply did not exist. Until now...



Traditional Translation Support: Ad-Hoc means Added Risk

When your firm first “went global” years ago, it was probably in response to a particular opportunity in a single location. A big contract in Germany or a buyer with offices in three locations who wanted you to provide coverage for all of them. Whatever the reason, the value of the deal was such that you made the leap and did what was needed to deliver. In most cases, this meant finding a solution to that particular situation. Little or no thought was given to how that approach might scale in the future or what cost synergies it might provide. At the time, such consideration was not necessary--after all, it was a “big” deal.

Flashforward through the past ten years--you are now a global powerhouse. You are selling in a dozen or more countries, you have operations and plants in many of those same locations, you have consolidated your supply chain and you have established local channel partners to improve your sales coverage. You’ve matured, your global business model has evolved. So why are you still handling your translation work the same way you did when that first order came through?

In most companies today, translation is still an afterthought. It is taken for granted by people responsible for global sales, marketing, and production. Most don’t even know who handles it or how it gets done and many would be surprised to find out just how antiquated their support system is. Approaches vary widely from one firm to another and even across divisions or functions within the same company (e.g. Marketing and HR have different approaches to handle Spanish translation requirements).

A common approach still in use at many leading firms is to rely on bi-lingual employees (and their relatives) to serve as the translation department: the “German woman over in Finance” or the “guy in marketing whose parents speak Japanese.” More likely, though, is the hybrid model referenced earlier whereby companies rely on a staff of translators located in a few main sites to handle the bulk of the effort and then engage a small network of external shops (likely sourced through the Internet or Yellow Pages) to address specialty languages.

These simplistic models are wrought with obvious inefficiencies and risks. Chief among these is capacity. Although your internal resources and small, local vendors may have carried you this far, as your global markets continue expand, you will quickly outstrip their ability to deliver, creating frustrating bottlenecks in your production schedules and ultimately causing costly time-to-market delays.

Equally disconcerting relative to response time is the potential risk exposure arising from inconsistent quality across these ad hoc methods. Due to time and resources constraints and a lack of available support technology, most firms and internal teams today use only rudimentary quality control procedures to double check the work of their translators. Multiply this by the number of different language teams you are working with, and you begin to get a sense of the risk to your product, brand, and image in the global market.

Example

Leading US software firm is told by internal team that global market editions of new application will take one year to develop. LT can get them to market in half that time.



Example

Leading soft drink manufacturer releases Italian campaign promoting “toilet water” instead of “tonic water” due to lack of translation quality control.

In the worst of these instances, product recalls are required, resulting in massive hits to your brand integrity and good will with new customers (not to mention the embarrassment of becoming a marketing case study in “how not to do it”). Some firms are unable to overcome these issues and are forced to abandon the market altogether, others rebound only after substantial time and investment. More often than not, these errors are discovered by your own in-country sales or production teams before they can impact customers. Though far less damaging, you still lose valuable sales time and waste capital while producing products and documents to correct the issues.

With the obvious shortcomings of these traditional approaches and all the advances in global business today from supply chains to sales and distribution channels, you might be questioning why someone hasn’t worked out a better way to handle one of the most fundamental barriers to global success: language. Now, someone has.

The LT Approach: One Partner, Comprehensive Support

Recent events in the translation and “localization” industry have occurred which afford companies the opportunity to revisit their existing support structure and evaluate it against a new alternative: enterprise-class translation services.

We at L10N Technology define “enterprise-class” services as flexible, scalable, solutions that cover a broad range of client issues. Until now, translation companies tended to be small organizations catering to a few key, geographically local accounts. Their coverage is typically limited to a few languages and their capacity is constrained due to the size of their staff (typically less than 50 people).

At the ever-accelerating pace of global business, companies can no longer survive with such a restricted services model. Your need to rapidly respond to changing market dynamics dictates that your translation provider be able to react as efficiently and effectively as you do. We recognize this requirement and have specifically built our business to address the needs of today’s expanding enterprises.

Through a series of recently completed acquisitions, L10N Technology has developed a global production platform that is able to rapidly scale and respond as your products and plans evolve. With 2,000 professionals operating in 24 countries and a network of 15,000 qualified linguistic resources, LT is able to cover more than 60 languages and dialects offering global companies a true “one stop shop” for their translation requirements. From marketing collateral to customer support documentation; from employee communications to regulatory filings; the LT team is able to cover your multi-lingual projects regardless of the language or subject matter.

Facilitating this comprehensive support is a variety of innovative production and workflow tools including Elcano™, our client-friendly translation portal that streamlines our interaction with clients by enabling real-time, file transfers, issue resolution and project tracking via the Internet. A key feature of Elcano is its ability to integrate with many of today’s leading content management tools, providing a

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seamless conduit between your various departments and your LT production team, further reducing our turn-around-times and accelerating your release.

At the heart of any enterprise-class solution is effective project management. Whether it is one language or forty-one, our ability to seamlessly integrate the talents of our global team and the functionality of our technology is central to a successful delivery. We are continually developing and refining our processes as we seek to perfect the balance between flexibility and efficiency and our Reo™ project management methodology achieves this balance. Reo™ enables us to respond to your dynamic and evolving needs while consistently exceeding your expectations and maintaining our reputation for high quality production.

LT would welcome the opportunity to explore the value our enterprise-class solutions can bring to your organization and would invite you to contact us for an initial discussion about your global objectives and how we might be able to help you achieve them.



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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