money as a *localization* *driver:*

By Hans Fenstermacher

Toward a Better Cost-Saving Strategy

It's refreshing to see brutal honesty in the localization business these days. There's not much sugar-coating in conversations between service providers and buyers anymore. You don't hear a lot of small talk about quaint, old-fashioned notions like quality and service. Business discussions don't get all choked up about hard-to-swallow concepts like value. The focus is squarely on money, and the less money we're talking about, the better.

Some decry this "commoditization" of localization. We service providers are forever trying to move the conversation away from money to avoid becoming commoditized. But it's too late. Money is in the driver's seat, and it has a death-grip on the steering wheel. Money's search for savings will take buyer companies in many different directions, but with varying degrees of success.

Re-scoping is a perennial favorite for localization buyers. This is a simple procedure, a sort of ambulatory surgery for content (no institutionalization required.) To reduce costs by re-scoping, companies can: excise parts of the product in its localized form (only the U.S.

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audience apparently needs that bulky User Guide;) shut down language requirements on the fly (the Germans speak notoriously good English, anyway – at least for this rev;) or simply wait for markets to respond (we'll localize if enough people ask for it – and remember, gang: don't ask, don't tell!) Re-scoping saves some money in the short term, but big-time savings come only by applying this strategy in a big way. This leads to huge discrepancies between deliverables, markets, product components, and releases with each new re-scoping effort. The result over time is a true mish-mash of offerings, making long-term savings in other promising areas (like Translation Memory or Content Management Systems) really hard to achieve.

Another tried-and-true approach to cost-cutting is, of course, just to pay less money. The localization industry has not only been living under this particular sword of Damocles, but has been dying the death of a thousand cuts by it for well over a decade. Localization buyers negotiate lower word rates from service providers using classic commodity rationales – buying in bulk, purchasing contracts, reduced production costs, whatever – but also through more brutish techniques, like fear (we'll buy from your competitors,) intimidation (we know how to do this better than you do,) and uncertainty (there's lots more work where this came from ;-). Since these word-rate pressures have passed right through the service providers' supply chain (what choice was there?), there is little room left for price negotiation to squeeze out much more in the way of savings.

Another dream-(about-to-)come-true for saving money is Machine Translation. MT has been five years away from perfection since 1953. It's automated and it's fast, and, boy, does it save money (how does a penny a word sound?). Even the bean-counters, though, can't ignore the truth about MT's return on investment (patience is a virtue, but not to CFOs,) performance (not exactly plug-and-play,) and quality (spotty.) The advantage of Machine Translation is its speed; for high-churn, micro-drop content localized basically in real time, MT is the only option because all other localization methodologies are just too slow, making MT the ideal alternative to 0T (no translation.) The areas of application for this technology are growing, and MT's acolytes continue to proselytize, but as a money-saving strategy it is unlikely to provide successful performance by most buyers' standards for quite some time.

How about insourcing, bringing some or all of the localization process in-house? In-sourcing has been around as long I've been in this business (don't ask) and every few years it

comes back up the yo-yo string as the "in" thing to do (pun intended.) Precious few companies have made the approach work, but for most buyers the success of insourcing will vary widely (hence the yo-yo effect) because it depends so much on volume (how many products,) consistency of language requirements (how many markets,) and, of course, budget (how many dollars.) Insourcing also means having a firm grip on what the true in-house costs and capabilities are – a metric many companies don't understand even for their core competencies. Any buyer considering insourcing need only ask themselves why service providers have always relied so much on outsourcing (we seized on that trend long before it became fashionable.)
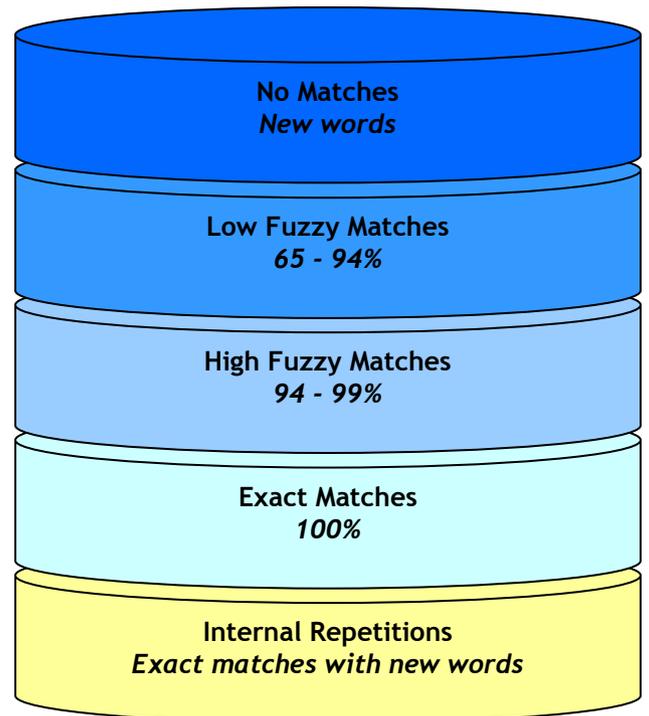
ArchiText developed ABREVE® in response to an expressed need for new ways to reduce localization costs while preserving the integrity of content. ABREVE® addresses these issues directly while improving content usability.

ABREVE® is a patent-pending methodology that enables low-risk step changes that can provide drastic localization cost reductions.

When it comes to sustainable, long-term cost-savings strategies, Translation Memory, the technology for harnessing translated text for re-use, is where you'll find it. Most companies have justifiably made the implementation of TM their cornerstone for reducing localization costs. But a cornerstone does not a building make. Having laid the foundation with TM, most companies have stopped constructing a cost-saving program and are content to let TM dictate their entire content strategy. Having invested heavily in their TMs over the years, localization buyers now live in fear of doing anything to upset the delicate cost-savings balance. Little do they realize that this balance is entirely dependent on steps taken long before localization – during the development of the content, itself. Used in the traditional sense, TM doesn't actually generate cost savings, it simply quantifies them at a particular moment.

Buyers are also now turning toward another cost-saving strategy in the same quadrant as TM: translating less (this is different from re-scoping). They invariably end up focusing on content re-use, leading them straight to Content Management Systems and such. But CMSs largely miss the point. Translating less is as much about having less to translate (less volume) as re-using what you have (content management.) To drive top cost-savings results, Translation Memory becomes more than a passive metric, but starts operating in the full context of multilingual content. Cost (and content) management then becomes a broad strategy to shape source content so it can maximize the value of TM as a corporate localization asset. To do that, everyone in the content supply chain must understand the building blocks of content:

No Matches
New words

Low Fuzzy Matches
65 - 94%

High Fuzzy Matches
94 - 99%

Exact Matches
100%

Internal Repetitions
Exact matches with new words

Some of these building blocks are more equal than others. The stack goes essentially from most expensive, least consistent (top) to least expensive, most consistent (bottom). By understanding these building blocks and actively managing them, saving on cost means not simply measuring what you get when content arrives from authoring; rather, it is an active strategy to drive text down through the stack as much as possible. No-match words are reduced to near zero and exact matches are pushed to the maximum. At its extreme, the ideal content consists entirely of parts assembled out of exact matches and internal repetitions. (This may look like you're scraping the bottom of the content barrel, but looks can be very deceiving.)

Combining the strength of Translation Memory and a highly specialized volume reduction strategy results in maximum content efficiency and consistency, lowest content volume, and highest value for each content building block. In this way, Translation Memory moves away from its traditional role as a passive localization savings metric (good) and becomes a growable corporate asset (ideal.) Much more than other cost-cutting strategies, this blended approach is the best way to keep money from driving us all off the road.