What is Localization Engineering??

For some, the term "localization engineering" evokes certain expectations based on traditional software engineering. And, in the context of a software localization project, one may understandably ask, “My product has already been engineered, why do I need localization engineering? Don’t I just need translation?”

This FAQ is designed to help clarify the role of localization engineering and help you obtain the maximum benefit from this function.

The Localization Engagement

The professional translation industry is in many ways a world unto itself, comprised of its own unique characters, history, practices, pricing paradigms, expectations, and idiosyncrasies. In a word, it has a culture. When a company developing a globally-targeted product engages in business with the translation world, it brings to the table its own culture, and more often than not, unique requirements.

+ Is appropriate for the target locale business and cultural conventions
+ Appears custom built for the end user’s cultural and linguistic background
+ Does not change the original intended meaning

If translated material does not meet the needs of the local culture, it has not been properly localized. This is no trivial task, and may go a long way in explaining why localization is costly.

Often, businesses hoping to go global ask: “Do we have to localize for each country the deliverable is going into?” Not necessarily.

There is a form of each language that is generic or standard enough to be understood by all countries and cultures of that one language. A client can choose to do only ONE Spanish translation, and send it to Spain, Mexico, 

Translation

Translation is the process of changing a source version (usually English) of software, documentation, multimedia, or web material into a target-language version (any language) by simply changing the words from one language to another. Unfortunately, it is rarely a word-for-word swap. A word-for-word translation yields many of the funny or offensive literal translations we’ve all seen in the marketplace!

Here are a few examples:

**In a Tokyo Hotel**
Is forbidden to steal hotel towels please. If you are not a person to do such thing is please not to read notice.

**In a Bucharest hotel lobby**
The lift is being fixed for the next day. During that time we regret that you will be unbearable.

**In a Leipzig elevator**
Do not enter the lift backwards, and only when lit up.

Source: http://www.jnweb.com/funny/
Argentina, Chile, and Puerto Rico. Deliverables are “neutralized” before localization, and what remains is adapted generically for all target cultures speaking that language. In-country review is utilized to make sure there are no country-specific inflections in the documents. However, it could be important—depending on the target locale, your product, and your localization strategy and goals—to localize for THAT specific market. The main differences will be in terminology.

Example

A toy manufacturer has had wild success in the United States selling humanized cat toys for children. These toys speak slang, eat food, and are interested in fashion. The company now wants to sell these toys in Europe. However, a direct translation of the marketing materials (and even of the recorded voice inside the toy) could be inappropriate. Localization is required here, not mere translation. Also, a market analysis may be required to determine if this product will be well-received in the countries the company hopes to target.

What you Should Know

1. Localization and translation are not the same things; translation is a sub-task of localization.

2. Localization should be completed by an in-country bilingual linguist who knows intimately the language, customs, and cultural biases of the target culture.

3. Localization also involves technical knowledge of the deliverables themselves.

4. Word-for-word translation is often ineffective, and at times, utterly inappropriate or offensive.

5. Appropriate localization is a complex task requiring highly skilled resources; as with many services, you get what you pay for.

About Lionbridge

Lionbridge enables more than 800 world-leading brands to increase international market share, speed adoption of products and effectively engage their customers in local markets worldwide. Using our proprietary cloud technology platforms and our global crowd of more than 100,000 professional cloud workers, we provide translation, online marketing, content management and application testing solutions that ensure global consistency and local relevance across all touchpoints of the customer lifecycle. Based in Waltham, Mass., Lionbridge maintains solution centers in 26 countries. To Learn more visit www.lionbridge.com.