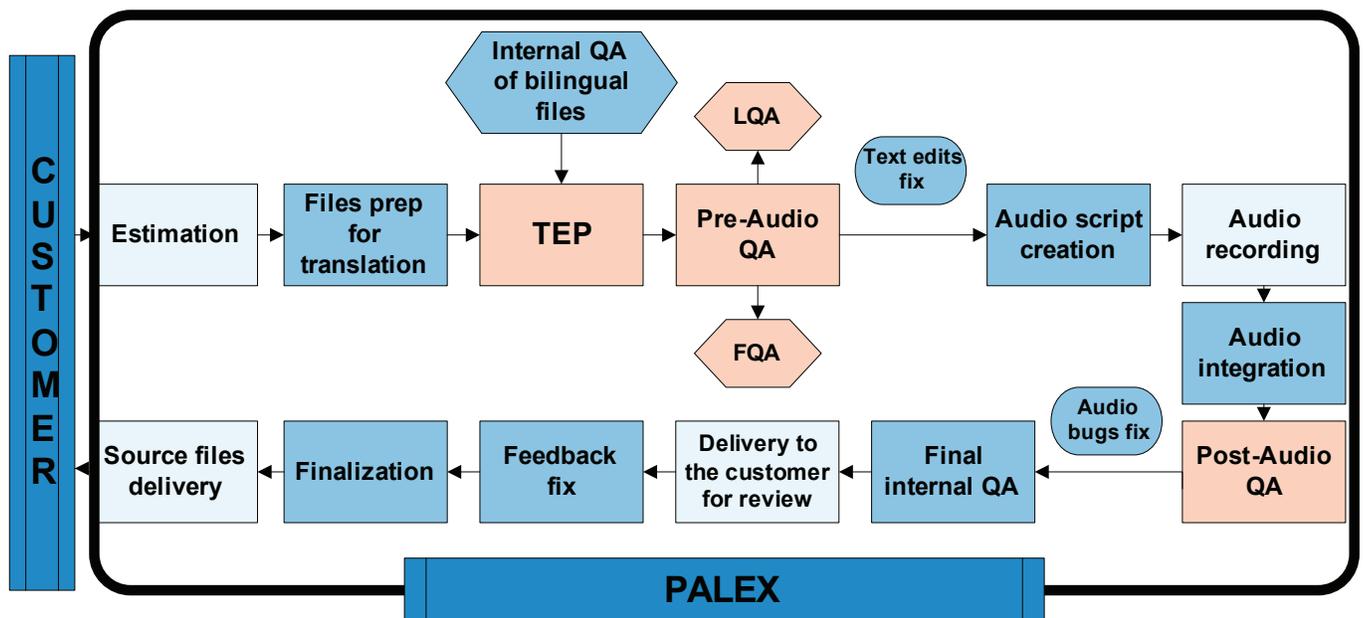


E-learning product localization: quality vs. project budget. Palex's solutions.

E-learning programs - especially those that are designed to be delivered around the world - have their own set of issues with localization. On the other hand it's no secret that the project budget and a good quality final product are the main factors when looking for a localization vendor. 'High quality - low price' localization seems to be the Holy Grail.

The Challenge

Palex offers a comprehensive e-learning product localization service and the workflow looks like this:



Even if the Translation-Editing-Proofreading (TEP) step is trouble-free when properly organized, it is always possible that there will be an engineering issue to face.

- The first challenge to be resolved here is the difficulty in estimating the time needed for engineering work. Unlike TEP (based on the wordcount) and Audio recording (based on the audio files quantity/spoken words) costs, the volume of engineering work is often unknown. All too frequently software developers contact their localization partners and ask for just an approximate engineering time value, having no idea themselves what to expect. As a result the total project cost may be inaccurate in the extreme and considerably exceed the real time needed. There may be an element of overpayment by up to 30% of the total engineering work cost, which is unacceptable, especially for large projects. The question of how to estimate the engineering work cost to avoid overpayment by the customer is a perennial problem.
- The second challenge is the budget restrictions customers have. In order to meet customers' expectations, project expenses must be minimized and it is not always clear how to bring down the project cost without sacrificing quality.
- The next issue is how to give the customer a clear, detailed view of the work completed and still required. De-briefings are always beneficial for clients, but they are rarely provided by localization companies. As a result, the quality of the finished product frequently fails to measure up but it is too late to fix it. Quality control is vital and also requires a great deal of attention.



The Solution

Estimation

The team at Palex encountered estimation issues as soon as they started working on major, long-term e-learning localization projects. One possible solution here was paying for the actual time spent on the project once it has been completed. But since many e-projects budgets are fixed beforehand, this was not acceptable for most customers, who need to know the cost before the start of the localization project.

In order to promptly react to clients' needs for regulating estimates Palex's project managers, in collaboration with our engineering team, suggested segmenting the whole engineering integration process into several steps, such as Preparing text for translation from flash, Video integration, Artwork, etc. and estimating the engineering time for each.

However at this point another problem arose: the courses themselves differ in content and type (traditional or rapid e-learning, Asynchronous or Synchronous studies, Business or IT courses, etc.), and therefore they can't be estimated in the same way. That's why the question of the amount of time required by the different types of e-learning first came up. In order to solve this issue, the idea of 'metrics' was suggested. Essentially, metrics are the exact time values defined for each integration step within each e-learning product. Metrics depend only on the course difficulty level which is determined dependent on the content by Palex's engineering team and approved by the customer before project is started. The only variable in this case is the quantity of files to be localized within the course. Knowing this, Palex's customers can always assess the engineering time required, and therefore the total project cost. Estimation according the 'metrics method' is particularly convenient for continuous or substantial e-learning localization projects.

The segmentation template and the 'metrics' methods of estimation were adopted in 2010-2011 and are still being used successfully today.

Cost savings

An e-learning localization budget is made up of four components:

TEP fee + Audio recording expenses + QA work expenditure + Engineering work cost = Project value

Since Palex deals only with highly-qualified and experienced Audio studios, recording expenses are usually firmly fixed. The only way we can help to bring the project cost down is to save on the TEP fee and Engineering + QA time. We value translation quality very highly and use only the best and most experienced linguistic experts. However sometimes it is possible to reduce the translation cost by handling the TEP internally (which is cheaper than outsourcing) or through agreements made with remote translators (discount rates for ongoing projects, concessions, etc.).

Engineering and QA work is all done internally at Palex. Due to our great experience in e-product localization and the groundwork we have put in it is possible to optimize some of the processes and therefore to reduce the time paid for by customers and increase the engineering team's productivity and capacity.

Benefits

- Groundwork put in by the company over several years has let Palex's customers save up to 15% on their budgets when localizing e-learning;
- Palex has successfully completed numerous global localization and engineering projects with no negative feedbacks from its customers;
- In-house engineering and QA teams have made it possible to achieve optimum quality for the final product.



Workflow optimization

- *Teamwork*
Since 2008 Palex has used teamwork for course localization projects. Due to the need to work to a tight schedule the engineering tasks for a course are handled by several different engineers at the same time. This makes it possible to double productivity and to shorten the turnaround time for course localization for substantial or continuous projects.
- *Transparent Workflow*
In order to save communication/cooperation time between PMs and the Head of Engineering, as well as within the Engineering Dept., status worksheets have been adopted for courses in the largest e-projects. Courses are divided into individual parts, and then the engineering tasks are defined for each part. This makes it possible to create status worksheets which reflect the segmentation and show who is responsible for each work item. At an individual course level, an engineer can assign himself to a specific task which is currently 'free'. After localization of that part is complete, the engineer checks it, completes the necessary check lists and sends a report to the Chief Engineer. This results in time savings when assigning tasks such as course content parts localization (~2 hrs per work day) and makes localization management much easier.

Technical innovations

Engineering

In order to make the time on task more effective and therefore to increase capability, Palex has been trying to optimize the engineering processes involved in the localization process. During 2008-2012 the following optimization processes have been adopted:

| Year | Optimization Done | Advantages | Time Savings Per Course |
|-------------|--|--|-------------------------|
| 2008 | Audio script generation/format conversion tool | Generates script for audio recording and converts it into a bilingual form in Excel format that is easier for studios to use. Previously time spent on generation/conversion depended heavily on the course size. Now this is automated. | 30 min |
| 2008 - 2009 | Macro for strings prep for translation | Previously files had to be prepared for translation using RegEx which was time consuming. | 40 min |
| 2008 - 2009 | Script for HTML glossary sorting | Time spent on sorting used to depend on the glossary size and could be up to 1 hr. | 30 min |
| 2009 - 2011 | Alternative editor for IT courses | Used mostly for IT courses: for quick shots placement within the course; 2/3 time can be saved on content integration in some of the most difficult pages (Try-It sections, etc.). | Up to 3 hrs |
| 2010 | SVN (Subversion) | Has made it possible to reduce human error when working with course integration (wrong location, version, etc. of files are excluded). Saves time duplicating files to several locations. | 30 min |



| Year | Optimization Done | Advantages | Time Savings Per Course |
|------|---|---|-------------------------|
| 2011 | Automatic search for very large files in course | Saves time searching for the names and sizes of very large files in order to report this to the customer. | 30 min |
| 2011 | Tool for “automatic artwork” of shots/ images | Program which defines the size difference between shots (in pixels) and therefore makes it possible to lay the shots over each other automatically; used only for some IT courses. Only fits some types of course pages, but can save 2/3 of the time for imaging artwork for some of the most difficult pages (Try-It sections, etc.). | Up to 5 hrs |

Quality Control Optimization

Our internal QA dept. assures the quality of integrated e-learning by taking an active part in localization. Text mistakes, audio errors and functional bugs are caught and fixed by our QA reviewers’ work. Optimization has also been achieved in the QA field:

| Year | Optimization Done | Advantages | Time Savings Per Course |
|-------------|--|---|-------------------------|
| 2009 - 2010 | Internal Check lists adapted for specific course reviews | Expected issues can be identified during TEP and course integration which saves time for the QA dept. during reviewing and improves the quality of the final e-product. | Up to 2 hrs |
| 2011 | Verifika™ | QA tool developed by Palex instantly corrects linguistic errors; it also suggests auto-corrections while reviewing bilingual files during the TEP process. | Up to 2 hrs |

Customer involvement

During localization work technical issues and difficulties may occur, however in most cases there is no need to involve e-learning developers in finding the solutions. Palex therefore tries to avoid troubling our customers and endeavors to resolve any issues independently. On the other hand, Palex’s customers are always kept aware of the project workflow and production status. Reports are delivered to the client for return or review if required. Meetings, business calls and conferences take place regularly to report back to the clients on the work done and any issues noted.

The Results

The segmentation template and 'metrics method' have systematized estimating the engineering time required for e-localization and made it more transparent for the customers. It is no longer a problem to estimate the cost of an e-project even when there is only a rough idea of the course components number. This method avoids overpayment and is already approved by our customers.

Palex never rests on its laurels. On the contrary, our management, in-house engineering and QA teams are continuously working on process optimization. Methodical instructions, internal check lists, and proprietary tools have been created to reduce localization time and improve the quality of the final product. As a result, the optimization processes achieved so far have made it possible to reduce the engineering time spent on course integration. This cuts the costs of e-projects for customers by making Discount schemes, Special proposals and Updated decreased metrics possible. Our customers have already noticed tangible cost reductions: according to Palex's project data base, annual budget savings for customers in 2009-2010 came to approximately 3,000 USD (savings of up to 5%) while in 2011-2012 this figure increased to 7,000 USD (savings of up to 10%) for substantial and continuous projects!



A separate knowledge base for e-learning localization as well as specific project portals, have been created to facilitate data transfer between team members. An entire dedicated team of engineers, programmers, QA experts and managers has been established for e-product localization which enables Palex to meet its clients' expectations and provide one-stop, comprehensive solutions.

Additionally, with our segmented e-learning localization workflow, and experienced, highly-qualified management and engineering teams, Palex not only provides good quality final products within the required timeframe, but we also make the project estimation and workflow processes transparent to our clients.

About Palex

From the very beginning, Palex has been focused on developing a powerful and intelligent management team, carefully selecting trusted vendors and thoroughly checking the quality of what we deliver to our clients. These efforts translate into the ability to handle complex, substantial projects without compromising overall quality. Palex has a strong position in the localization market as one of the few companies not only providing quality services into many languages, but also using smart systems to do so.

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