

Designing e-courseware for maximum local impact



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By some accounts, e-learning is already a US\$56 billion global business, and set to double by 2015. The US and Europe account for 70% of the market, with Asia-Pacific contributing to aggressive global growth.

In South Africa and the continent, a growing percentage of companies of all sizes and industries are taking up e-learning for its low cost of delivery and high success rate in territories with low levels of English fluency and literacy.

Retailers, financial services providers, mining groups and fuel companies are only some of the early adopters, with applications ranging from sales and customer service training to induction courses, professional board exams, and even flight and surgical procedures training.

Local relevance and accessibility

But in a world of linguistic and cultural fragmentation, courses must have local relevance and accessibility. South Africa, it bears repeating, has 11 official languages and many different cultural experiences. Thus, to maximise the effectiveness of e-learning (or any other form of learning), providers must undertake broad localisation of the course, accommodating at least some local languages, as well as accents, images, references and so on.

Of course, it may not be possible or practical to produce courses in all the local flavours, but it is possible to design courses in a way that makes localisation reasonably easy for a language and localisation service provider.

E-learning companies traditionally design courses with the help of a creative agency. In the (increasingly frequent) event that a translation is needed, the agency will instruct a translation company to do this.

Once translated, the content is incorporated into the courseware and the finished product is passed back to the translation company to proof the outcome, and back again to the creative company to make any further changes, until both are happy and the product is signed off by the client.

This process is deeply inefficient - both in terms of process and technology, and the project management of it is left up to the creative agency and client, who do not have this capability. When other localisation components, such as voice-overs and images, are added to the material, the to-ing and fro-ing increases and inefficiencies are compounded.

Cost-saving efficiencies

By contrast, a full-service language and localisation service provider offering software automation and project management skills can greatly speed up the process and introduce cost-saving efficiencies.

A Language Service Partner (LSP) approaches translation from the point of view of repeatability by removing duplicated effort, introducing automation and making use of computer-aided translation (CAT) techniques, including using a translation database to avoid translating unmodified parts of texts in iterative project phases.

Some work natively within learning management systems, eliminating the cut-and-paste of working in a third-party text editor. This gives the LSP a uniquely integral perspective on activities, allowing it to take on project management for the entire effort. This, in turn, speeds up the process as the above-mentioned back and forth of co-ordinating multiple agencies is taken out of the equation.

The benefits of this approach add up as the variety of content types increases. For example, when a soundtrack in the form of a voice-over of a course slide comes into play, a creative agency may learn the hard way that the length of the translation must match the timing of slide-ware. Bearing in mind the cost and co-ordination burden of studio time and resources, inefficient processes can have severe financial knock-on effects.

An LSP with experience will ensure the translated audio segment does not have a different duration from the original audio. This could take the form of technology or process alerts to changing parameters.

An industrialised approach to localisation

As more companies realise the power of e-learning, the significance of a partner with an industrialised approach to localisation will give their training efforts maximum impact.

The way to take this winning partnership to the next level is to make localisation easy for your language and localisation provider, with courseware designed for custom local conversion. This need by no means be a restrictive step, but an enabling one that introduces valuable sophistication and control to the process.

Specify time and other parameters - provide upfront information on any length requirements of audio recordings accompanying course content. This will cut out unnecessary repetition.

Think like an editor - the text elements of the courseware must remain editable - Adobe Flash is one of the tools used in designing courseware. Using Flash in a way that incorporates text material in easily editable XML format rather than image formats makes it far easier to translate.

In following the basic principle that localisation - or localisability - should be in the DNA of your courseware, e-learning design can become a slick and repeatable process that eases health and safety compliance in the fuel industry, speeds up time to value for candidate attorneys taking the bar exam, improves customer service, and much more.

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