Toshiba achieves simship for manuals

Toshiba uses simultaneous shipment (simship) to release 50,000 pages in 20 days for the Windows 8 launch, through its language and localisation partner Rubric.

Rubric has been involved with Toshiba since 1994, undertaking its first German, Spanish and French translations for product manuals. Over two decades, it has taken the client's translations from three languages to 24 for its manuals and 28 for its Quickstart guides.

Use of other languages

Simship is the ability of companies to ship other-language versions of their products and manuals on the same day as the original and is a desire of many companies. The market drivers include a move from print manuals to online, making it cheaper to produce multiple language copies (while removing none of the deadline pressure).

Another factor is ever-shortening product development life cycles, necessitating manual updates every few months. Add to that the decline in the bulk of manuals (thanks to the near-paperless example set by Apple), and companies have no excuse for not translating into multiple languages.

However, undertakings of this nature can exert enormous pressure on companies' engineering resources, to integrate multiple translation projects into company processes, and this often sinks such plans. Yet simship is precisely what helped PC maker Toshiba achieve this, by developing a range of process and technology reforms that far exceeded its remit and went on to become industry norms in their own right.

"The great thing about Toshiba is that they're engineers and as such are very interested in process optimisation," says Ian Henderson, Rubric's chief technology officer.

"They've been very open to our suggestions on how best to tweak their processes to make life easier for us, which has greatly assisted in us getting them closer to ideals like simultaneous shipment. We've also been able to refine and replicate these approaches for use with other clients."

Typesetting for all languages

The innovation that has had the greatest impact has been its 2006 proposal that Toshiba adopt XML/DITA, a framework enabling once-off typesetting for all languages, reducing costs significantly. "About half the cost of the translated manuals had been in DTP and then there were the delays it introduced to the production of manuals.

"We spent $40 000 on developing the concept, knowing we would have to hand it over to another supplier Toshiba had [for business continuity]. We knew it would help the client and ultimately pay dividends for us too. We continue to invest in strategic clients on that basis."

After four years of canvassing, Toshiba Europe's deputy manager of software development, Patrik Indola, managed to get the new framework accepted. Rubric helped Toshiba transition its content from FrameMaker to XML/DITA - an 18-month project that it finished in less than five months.

Computing reduces costs

In tandem with this, Rubric adopted a range of techniques that have helped it bring the time and cost of translations down

from tens of thousands of dollars to thousands.

One is computer-aided translation (CAT), in which automation plays a big part to speed up the process (and weed out error) by cutting out repetitive effort in the translate-edit-proof cycle.

CAT further involves building up a translation memory database of some 7 million terms for Toshiba, making subsequent translations easier and quicker. "As a result Toshiba has been able to produce many more variants of manuals," says Henderson.

"We perfected and packaged a reusable process whereby we seamlessly introduce new languages and teams into the client environment," says Françoise Henderson, CEO of Rubric.

Inner workings

Another feature of the Toshiba solution involved managing different translations for Windows and Android hardware. Instead of maintaining separate translation memory bases, it grouped terminology within one translation database with priority for different variants, depending on the model in question.

"Rubric proposed very practical solutions to our challenges," says Indola. "The more their understanding of us has grown, the better the solutions have been. Their approach is flexible, scalable and process-oriented, and they own high engineering skills - a big reason why I would recommend them."

For more information, go to http://rubric.com/za.

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