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magazine for international information management

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JULY 2021

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The key behind designing intuitive products

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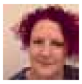

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From the editor

Ever wondered what makes successful people, well… successful? Looking through profiles of some of those who have risen to and perhaps beyond their aspirations, a few traits appear commonplace: Rather than waiting for the golden ticket, they know how to make their own luck – through hard work. They don't fear failure and don't give up easily. They know how to adjust to an ever-changing marketplace. Likewise, they are confident and aware of their place in the world. And perhaps most importantly: They understand how to market their skills and communicate their own story successfully.

Technical communicators – by their very trade – need to possess many of the characteristics of the great and successful: They are hard-working, persistent and, above all, flexible, to adapt to the fast-paced changes of the technologies they are explaining to their audience. Yet, if we were to pick an attribute that doesn't typically appear in profiles of technical communicators, it would have to be the ability to market themselves.

Although information management is at the core of it all in the age of digitalization, many in the profession have felt underappreciated for the work they do and the value they bring to their brands and organizations. Numerous technical communicators long for higher recognition, better visibility, and a stronger reputation.

In her article, our author Isabelle Fleury illustrates how tech doc departments can improve their reputation and visibility through effective teamwork (read the full article starting on page 12). Marketing our expertise is not just down to those who run their own business or are looking for work – it is a skill that everyone benefits from.

Our community will once again gather at the tcworld conference from November 8–19, 2021, and we look forward to meeting you all there. At this stage, the conference is scheduled as a hybrid event, with sessions offered both on site and online. However, with the ongoing travel restrictions and limits on venue visitor numbers, we expect many of our international sessions to be presented online only. So, whether you are free to travel or working from your home office, we look forward to bringing our community together for another inspiring event.

C. Melville

Corinna Melville

How to improve the positioning of your team

Information management is the key to success in the age of digitalization. Now is the time for technical documentation departments to shine a light on their skills and gain more influence within their organizations.

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Improv(e) your soft skills

Ever thought of advancing your skill set with some creative improvisation practice? Here is what we can take away from a performance in the unscripted plot.

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Cognitive concepts for usable design

To design usable products we need to understand what guides our users' expectations. A glimpse into cognitive concepts directs the way.

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Companies that revamped experiences excelled during the pandemic

According to research firm Forrester's US 2021 Customer Experience Index (CX Index™) rankings, 21% of brands saw a significant score increase compared to 2020. As the coronavirus crisis worsened in 2020, brands responded to evolving customer needs with digital transformation, new shopping options, and different ways to interact with customers that emphasized safety.

The increase in scores can be attributed to the goodwill the brands built with customers – their CX equity – in creating experiences that reassured customers of their safety.

The top-performing brands in the CX Index leaned into meeting core customer needs. They outperformed all other brands in effectiveness and ease. Additionally, the highest-scoring brands understood the key emotional needs of their customers and provided emotionally pleasing experiences. They also developed a core group of loyal customers or devotees: those willing to forgive these brands' mistakes, pay a premium for the brands' products, keep their business with the brands, and spend more with the brands over time.

Image: © CentralITAlliance/istockphoto.com

Industries in the pandemic's crosshairs had a mixed performance: Airlines, credit card issuers, health insurers, hotels, and retailers were especially challenged by COVID-19 because the crisis disrupted their business models or taxed their services. Against this headwind, health insurers performed best, with most providers improving their scores.

"Brands must build experiences that help them empathetically engage with their customers, especially during volatile times," said Harley Manning, VP and research director with Forrester. "We know this is important because experiences associated with positive emotions, such as resolving issues quickly and demonstrating empathy, create and sustain customer loyalty. To do this well, CX pros must have a disciplined approach to envisioning, designing, and delivering consistently high-quality experiences."

Conducted for the seventh year in a row, Forrester's CX Index results are benchmarked on a survey of more than 85,000 US customers across 220 brands and 13 industries. Forrester's CX Index methodology helps CX leaders grow revenue faster, drive higher brand preference, and charge more for their products. Forrester's CX Index helps brands identify the key drivers of a positive CX for their customers to prioritize efforts. Even a minor improvement to a brand's customer experience quality can add tens of millions of dollars of revenue by reducing customer churn and increasing share of wallet. Additionally, superior CX leads to reduced service costs and lowers the cost of customer acquisition through word of mouth.

go.forrester.com

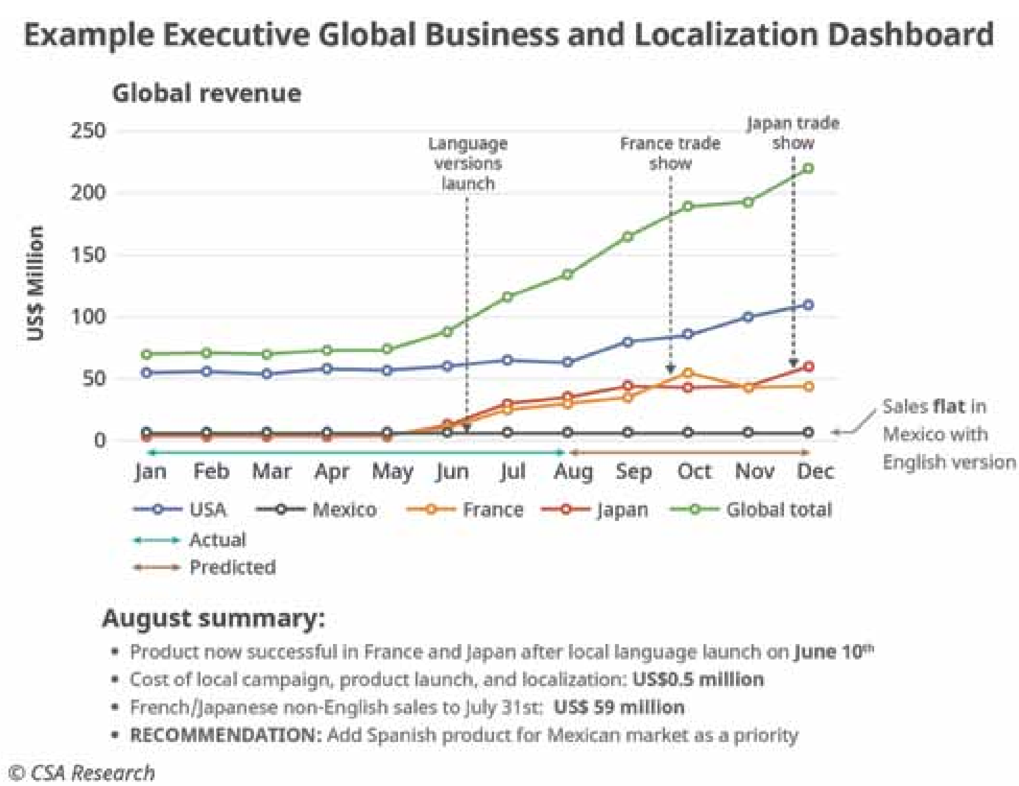
Planning, designing, and implementing dashboards for globalization success

Organizations struggle to define useful metrics and analytics to evaluate the international parts of their business in a form that is easily understood and digested. CSA Research's latest report "Dashboards for Globalization Success" has the data global enterprises need to plan, design, implement, and evolve dashboards incorporating localization data. Based on qualitative primary research and CSA Research's interactions with buyers, language service providers, technology vendors, and advisory and consulting engagements, the report includes data-based and business-oriented guidance to help enterprises interpret the degree to which local markets contribute to revenue and growth.

Global enterprises – from C-level to finance to marketing departments – can use this market research report and its companions, "Localization Analytics Maturity" and "Align Your Localization and Enterprise KPIs", to benchmark their dashboards and data analytics, identify new uses for localization data, and better understand internal reporting requirements.

As AI and machine learning with other forms of automation advance rapidly, dashboards and their underlying data will continue to evolve. In time, much of the information that dashboards passively report today will instead automate decisions – such as what to translate, how much, and when – and other actions such as provoking a quality review or signaling an escalation.

csa-research.com



MEMSOURCE INTEGRATES TENCENT MACHINE TRANSLATION

Memsource, the AI-powered translation management system, has expanded its support for machine translation by integrating Tencent Cloud's Tencent Machine Translation (TMT). It is now available as a fully managed engine within Memsource Translate, the platform's machine translation management hub. Users can immediately start leveraging Tencent Machine Translation in their translations with no set up and simple in-app payment.

memsource.com/translate

RWS ANNOUNCES REVIVAL OF LANGUAGE WEAVER BRAND

RWS, provider of technology-enabled language and content management services, has announced the return of Language Weaver, a pioneering brand in automatic language translation. Language Weaver – which combines RWS's linguistic expertise with SDL's and Iconic's technologies – will now represent RWS's machine translation platform. Founded in 2002, Language Weaver was first to commercialize new approaches to automatic language translation based on machine learning. Acquired by SDL in 2010, the Language Weaver brand was retired in 2015 and renamed SDL Machine Translation. The technology – through continual investment – evolved from statistical machine translation to neural machine translation, capable of instantly translating content across 2,700 language combinations. RWS acquired SDL in 2020, and is now bringing back the Language Weaver brand.

www.rws.com

INTENTO NAMED A 2021 COOL VENDOR BY GARTNER

AI integration platform Intento has been recognized as a Cool Vendor in the 2021 Gartner report: "Cool Vendors in Conversational and Natural Language Technologies". Intento helps to select, deploy, and improve best-fit machine translation and other cognitive AI services including sentiment analysis, voice synthesis, image tagging, and optical character recognition.

www.inten.to

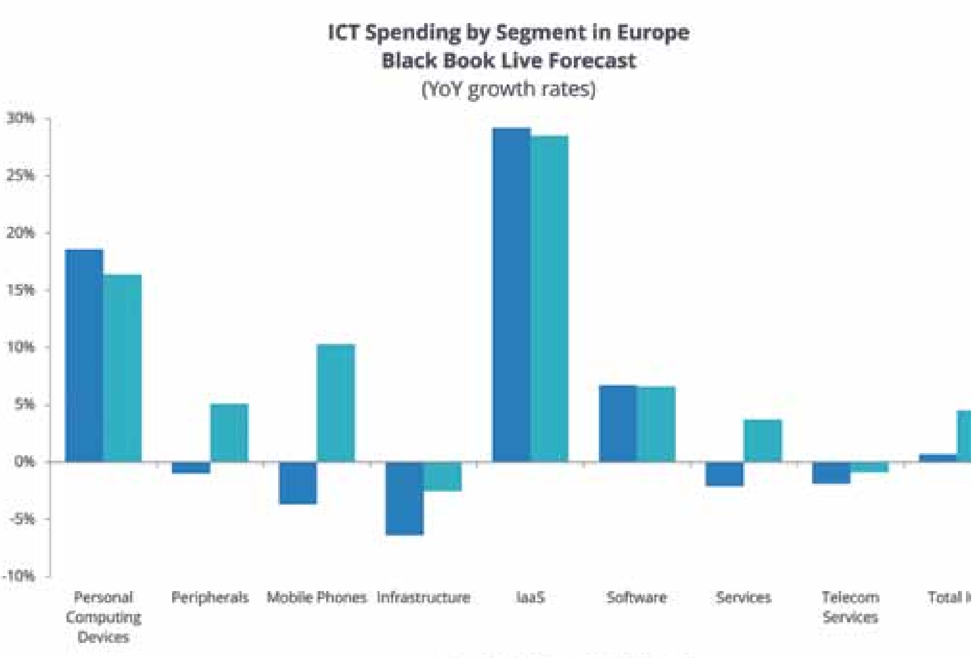
IDC predicts healthy growth of European ICT spending in 2021

The new monthly edition of *Worldwide Black Book Live* published by International Data Corporation (IDC) shows that ICT spending in Europe in 2020 ended with a slight positive growth rate of 0.7% over 2019, reaching US$ 945.62 billion. However, further improvement is expected in 2021, with an annual increase of 4.5% to total $988.29 billion, due to the continuing recovery in almost all technology markets.

Strong demand for notebooks and tablets

Devices and software both performed relatively well last year, given the unfavorable economic situation. In fact, they are among the technology segments that saved the overall ICT market in Europe from an annual decline. Furthermore, IDC's expectations for both technologies are optimistic in 2021. All subcategories of devices (PCs, tablets, mobile phones, hardcopy peripherals, and PC monitors) will see increased demand this year, with a combined year-on-year growth of 12.4% by the end of 2021. This is due to the ongoing strong demand in the notebook and tablet categories from sectors like education and government, as well as from some private organizations.

One of the issues that inhibited growth on the European mobile phone market in 2020 was related to supply chain disruptions. Nevertheless, this market performed much better during the first quarter of 2021, and together with the more positive expectations for the next quarters, IDC predicts that spending on mobile phones will increase by more than 10% by the end of this year. Continuing consumer demand will keep the hardcopy peripherals (HCP) market in Europe relatively stable in 2021, although issues like low availability in the channels will inhibit sales. IDC therefore predicts moderate year-on-year growth of 0.4% in this segment for 2021.



Source: IDC Worldwide Black Book Live Edition — May 2021 (V2 2021) (growth in constant annual 2020 exchange rate)

Digitalization will continue

"The economic recession caused by the pandemic delayed previously started DX initiatives in many companies last year," says Lubomir Dimitrov, senior research analyst for IDC Customer Insights & Analysis. "But digitalization processes will continue and even accelerate this year, and this includes cloud adoption. In terms of software, the strong demand for applications related to human capital management, advertising, marketing, and customer service is expected to continue throughout 2021." With this in mind, IDC forecasts the European software market to post stable growth of 6.6% in 2021.

The European telecom services market is expected to continue its recovery. Remote working, collaboration, and online media consumption are expected to remain part of everyday life, which will make connectivity very important for both consumer and commercial segments. However, the negative impact from COVID-19 on some sub-categories of the market in 2020 will continue to slow its recovery, and IDC forecasts European spending on telecom services to decrease by 0.7% year on year in 2021.

The International Data Corporation (IDC) is a global provider of market intelligence, advisory services, and events for the information technology, telecommunications, and consumer technology markets. Its *Worldwide Black Book: Live Edition* is updated monthly with the latest IT spending forecasts for annual growth across 100 countries. It will continue to evolve and capture the escalating impact of the coronavirus on market expectations.

www.idc.com

Translators without Borders chooses Memsource

Translators without Borders (TWB) has announced the switch to Memsource. TWB continues to expand its language services to better address the needs of people with lower literacy levels and for whom language technology is underdeveloped. Memsource allows TWB to integrate its own machine translation solutions, including glossaries and terminology database, and improve its quality assurance processes.

Memsource is available both online and offline, giving TWB's community of over 60,000 linguists the flexibility to work from anywhere.

"Many translators working in marginalized languages have told us that they really struggle with online tools, mostly due to poor internet connections," said Manuela Noske, TWB's Community Manager. "This new translation management system will greatly improve access to all of our community members, while also giving them new skills and valuable experience to further their careers."

translatorswithoutborders.org

The life lessons of language

The relationship between multilingualism and good TechComm practices

Text by Leah Guren

A few months ago, I had an extremely stressful experience while trying to navigate a government website for my desperately needed Covid stipend. My accountant was too busy or stressed to help, and I ended up floundering in a poorly designed interface. I kept ending up in the same place (not where I needed to be). During one of the many phone calls, I had to deal with a series of fast-talking young clerks, none of whom enunciated clearly, and all of whom used terminology that far exceeded my linguistic skills in Hebrew. I reached the frustration point where I automatically reverted to my mother-tongue language to try to explain something. It was an excruciating moment of helplessness, frustration, and anger. And while it was not pleasant to go through, it was a useful experience for a TechComm professional, because this is exactly the feeling that we need to remember whenever we develop content for our users.

Our global industry is multilingual

TechComm, by its nature, is needed all over the world. But more significantly, TechComm content is more likely to be *developed* in multilingual environments.

Many of us work in hi-tech companies with offices all over the world: We may have a corporate HQ in one country, but offices all over. We are used to English being the *lingua franca* of international business (particularly in technology fields). This seems normal and natural to us. Many of you create content in English but live your life in a different language. Your global meetings may be in English, but your coffee breaks with team members are in another language. For me, I develop content in my mother-tongue language (English), while living and working in another language (Hebrew). The situation is the same; all of us experience both the challenges and the benefits of being multilingual.

Image: © yuriz/123rf.com

Fluency loss

The challenge: Even after years of fluency, people living in another language may, at times of stress, revert to their mother tongue. Vocabulary seems to disappear at moments of pain, fear, or other intense emotion. Most of us have experienced this personally or witnessed it in others. In the 1960s and 70s, researchers in the field of Psycholinguistics, including George Miller and Susan H. Houston, made special note of this phenomenon.*

The stress of a car accident, severe illness, or even trying to meet a critical deadline, is rendered even worse as we suddenly lose the very language skills we need to survive.

The benefit: Experiencing this ourselves can give us great empathy for our users. Consider this: When do users look at our content? When they have a problem! They need to do something (and don't know how) or something is not working (and they don't know why). While this is certainly not as stressful as being in a car accident, imagine that their boss is impatiently waiting for a report, and this person has no idea how to print it (or why it isn't printing). Users are far more likely to look at our content when things are not going well and they are experiencing stress!

By remembering our own linguistic challenges, we can pay more attention to editing content according to the rules of simplified English, and doing anything else we can to reduce the cognitive load during stress.

Miscommunication

The challenge: You are trying to tell your host that you enjoyed the fruit salad but, due to a slight mistake with a vowel sound, accidentally tell her that you like her cow. It is embarrassing. However, as speakers of other languages, we have a huge advantage. When a native speaker hears our accent, they immediately recognize that we are not native speakers. They can then forgive us for grammar and pronunciation errors.

Sadly, when we write, the reader has no sense of our accent. The reader's brain does not instantly think, "Aha! Not a mother-tongue speaker!" and filter out mistakes or awkward, non-idiomatic constructs. Instead, our shortcomings make us and our company look foolish and unprofessional. Mistakes can cause the reader to question the quality of the product or even the accuracy of the information.

The benefit: Face it: these mistakes are often very funny. Most of us have our own favorite stories of embarrassing moments based on outrageous miscommunication. I still recall running into a work colleague at the mall, and exclaiming (much to the amusement of his wife), "Oh, I didn't recognize you with pants." (In case you were wondering, glasses in Hebrew are *mishkefayim*, and trousers are *michnesayim*. I'm probably not the first, nor will I be the last, to make that mistake!)

Multiple personalities

The challenge: You are not the same person in a different language. People who know you and interact with you in one language are seeing one perspective. Languages, of course, have their own flavor and feeling, often in sync with their national culture. Languages influence not only how we express ourselves, but how we think.

But the problem goes beyond linguistic subtleties. In other languages, I cannot begin to approach the rich mastery and control that I have in English. I'm smarter in English. I'm funnier in English. And I am definitely edgier. Friends who only know me in another language are experiencing a quieter, more conventional Leah, simply because I can't come up with the same speedy, snarky retorts.

I suspect that anyone who is multilingual has felt this at times. We slip in and out of slightly different personas that are dictated by the language of the moment.

The benefit: Ever-shifting personas are a real issue with our users. It is a big mistake to think that you can do a bit of audience analysis, create a few personas, and be done. In reality, our users may have different personas based on their current scenario, just as we do with our current language. Consider the level of urgency, the user's physical comfort (are they hungry or tired?), and what the user's experience with the product or company was immediately prior. Further, users evolve as they develop proficiency with our products and technologies, meaning that their needs and expectations continue to change.

By recognizing our own ever-changing personas, we can better help our users by focusing on scenarios – the situations, conditions, and events that lead a user to need information in our content.

The danger of the monolinguist

If you have ever worked on a project with someone who is monolinguistic, you may have identified some of their blind spots regarding the project:

- They don't think about potential localization issues when writing content.
- They use complex, locally-specific idioms without realizing it.
- They attempt to correct perfectly good English because it doesn't sound right to them.
- They often have an extremely poor grasp of grammar, syntax, and punctuation rules, relying totally on their ear.

Given the choice between hiring two TechComm professionals (when other factors are comparable), I will always give preference to the multilingual person. Their language skills often mean a broader global perspective, an awareness of potential problems in writing style and layout, and a different mentality when dealing with alternate solutions.

Conclusion

Remember that meltdown I had while struggling with an online government site? After the third call, I found the right person. She slowed down and used clear, simple language to explain the difficult path through the interface. She stayed on the line with me until I was in the right place, then talked me through the process. Success! Without being impatient or condescending, she solved the content problem and left me feeling massively relieved and appreciative. And isn't that how we want our users to feel?

Being multilingual has many obvious advantages in life. The ***surprise*** is how much linguistic skills can help us develop better sensitivity for content usability.

Do you have an amusing language communication story to share? Let us know!

* Houstan, Susan H., *A Survey of Psycholinguistics,* Mouton, 1972

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leah Guren

is the owner/operator of Cow TC. She has been active in the field of technical communication since 1980 as a writer, manager, Help author, and usability consultant. She now devotes her time to consulting and teaching courses and seminars in technical communication, primarily in Israel and Europe.

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How to improve the positioning of your team

Profiling without profile neurosis: a guide to improving your reputation and gaining more influence

Text by Isabelle Fleury

Image: © alvarez/istockphoto.com

The ubiquitous discussion of digitization is spotlighting technical communication's very own topic: information management. How can your team take advantage of this opportunity and position itself within the company for current and upcoming developments? How can you improve the visibility of your team and gain the power to shape the information management processes in your company?
Technical documentation teams work particularly hard and do everything possible to meet the scope and deadlines of projects. Yet, they often struggle to gain recognition for it, while other departments seem to get a quick answer to their questions, an appointment with upper management, or additional budget almost effortlessly. According to my experience, performance and competence alone are rarely enough to be acknowledged in a company. Still, how others reach their goals with ease involves no witchcraft. It is the result of their reputation and positioning within the company.

Deciding to act

Self-marketing is good

Fact is: If you don't position yourself, then others will assign you a position. The latter makes you a pawn in the company. Many of us have learned that it is not a good trait to stand out and market ourselves. Well, let's be honest: If you don't make yourself known for what you are good at and what you contribute to the company – how are others supposed to know? We need to ensure both individual and team sustainability in our professional environment, agility, and resilience in complex and changing contexts as well as personal development.

The need for change

You can start working on your reputation and positioning at any time. However, to focus your change initiative and follow it up more consistently, a clear and energizing momentum is key. Take the time to identify why your team wants to improve its reputation:

- Are you tired of hearing that your job is only a painful and costly necessity? Are you looking for more recognition for your work?
- Do you no longer want to be only a "glorified spellchecker" for other departments – as one of my workshop participants at the last Evolution of TC put it?
- Do organizational changes, like restructuring, strategy shift, or change in personnel, force you to redefine your profile?

Working as a team

To find a common, coherent approach, teamwork is a given. You first need to reach a commitment that you want to improve the standing of your team. A sustainable effect is achieved, for example, through workshops facilitated by third parties, in which each participant, whether supervisor or coworker, contributes their perspective, interests, experiences, and ideas openly and on an equal footing. Experience has shown that such workshops boost motivation and identification with the team. They also ensure that each team member develops their own attitude towards the common goals and thus represents the team more confidently within the company.

Finding your position

Current situation

To stand up confidently and create a place for yourself requires steadfastness. You can achieve this if you know exactly where you currently stand, what you can do, and where you want to go. Therefore, the first step towards a new positioning is the analysis of your current situation. This analysis aims at determining what your team has achieved so far and identifying the starting points for targeted actions. Depending on the reason for your considerations, you can choose one or more fields of investigation: the environment, company, team, and/or individual level.

1 Environment and general context

Here you gather information and develop an understanding of your environment, the general conditions for your services, and the external stakeholders. You may conduct this part of the analysis with one-on-one interviews or surveys (e.g., with clients or partners), internet research about competitors and your branch, studies of legal and standards requirements, and inquiries in relevant domains such as tekom. This will help you understand the professional expectations and evaluation standards of your services.

2 Company level

I recommend you investigate three areas:

- Understanding the company strategy and structures is crucial to aligning your efforts and developing an idea of your future position.
- You also need to understand the management requirements and expectations regarding the role and responsibilities of your team – these are the rules for success.
- Great insight can be gained from the evaluation of cross-departmental processes in which you are – or should be – involved, and how your contribution is perceived (change management, quality assurance, customer management, strategic projects).

Be sure to gather both factual information and subjective perceptions of your performance, and the issues at hand.

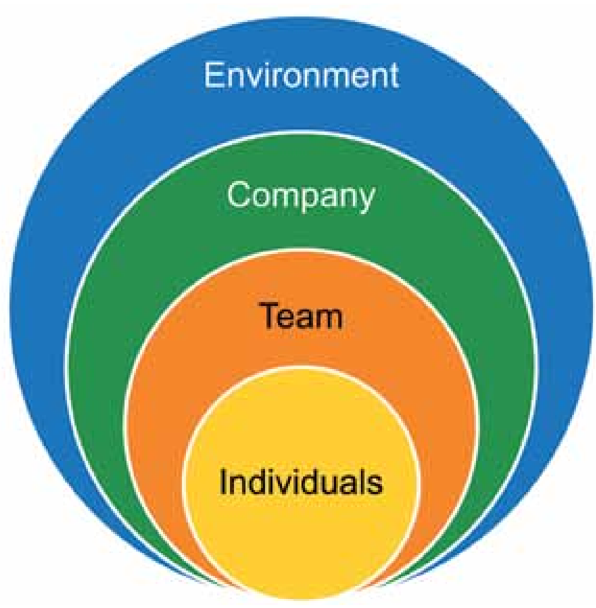

Figure 1: Fields of investigation

3 Team and individual levels

In the past, your team has gained experience and knowledge and can look back on successful projects. In short: You are not starting from scratch. For a comprehensive review of your performance and assets, you can look at the following aspects:

- Core processes of your team: delivery reliability, costs, and productivity
- Resources: finance, personnel, technologies
- Portfolio of information products and services
- Skills and competencies

Controlling tools and key performance indicators (KPI) will give you some valuable objective hints for further assessment.

A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) will provide a comprehensive picture of your situation. In my experience, a team will do much better self-marketing if it looks to the future with optimism and courage. So, I encourage you to first focus on your strengths instead of the weaknesses. Use the following questions as a guide:

- What are your professional and personal strengths and assets?
- What has helped you to get where you are now?
- What are you already succeeding at now? What can be continued or transferred?
- What value do you create for which stakeholders?
- What is your current reputation and positioning good for (even if the situation is uncomfortable)?

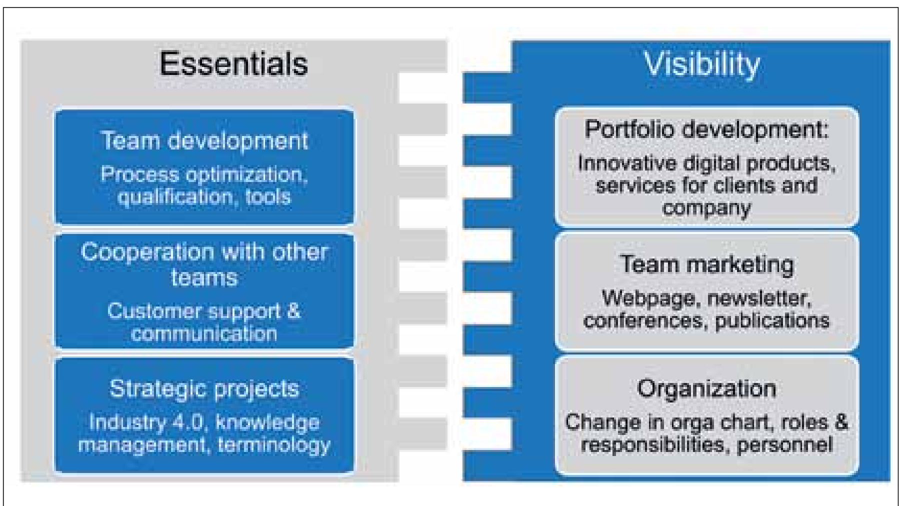

Figure 2: Select goals that are essential to demonstrate your reliability and that raise your visibility

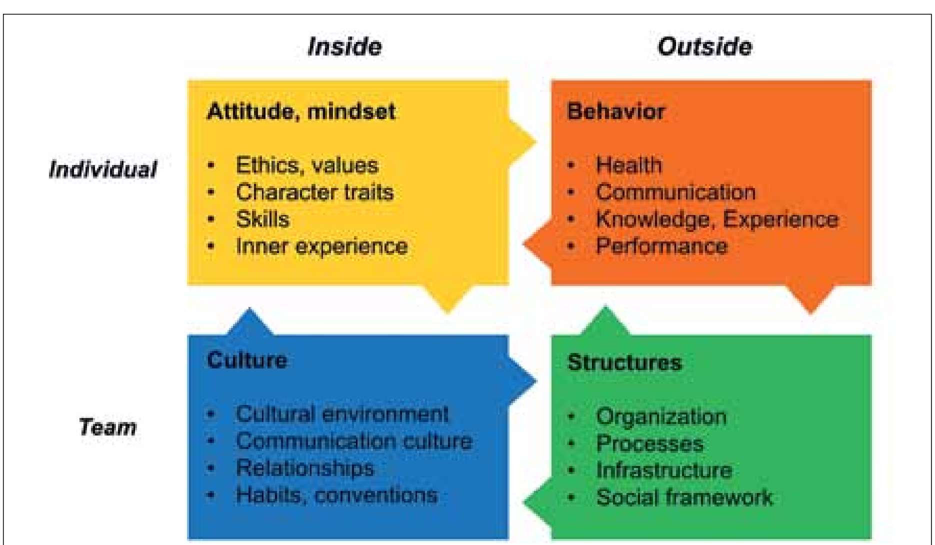

Figure 3: Interrelationships between attitude, behavior, structures, and culture allow you to start at any level to initiate changes in your image.

Exploring opportunities

Now compare your strengths and competencies with the professional and personal expectations of those around you:

- What makes you unique?
- Which of your skills, experience, and assets could be interesting for other divisions?
- What are the opportunities and benefits of new developments in your environment?
- Which new trends, topics, and requirements match your strengths?
- Which added value can you contribute to the company?

Setting goals

Above all: What does the team want to stand for? The vision, or claim, gives orientation to all team members as to how they should behave in the interests of the team. To prevent energy from dissipating after just a few individual actions, you also need a plan of what you want to do on an ongoing basis and what goals you are addressing in the short, medium, and long term. Reputation is hard to measure with metrics. As a bridge, and because factual goals are more tangible for most, you could define operational factual goals where your image and self-marketing are a main benefit (see Figure 2). Make sure to align your goals with those of the company and phrase them accordingly. The goals point out what team members should focus their manpower on. Goals do not have to be highly ambitious, but rather clear and plausible.

Improving your reputation

By now you have hopefully come to the realization: Yes, we can really make a difference! So, what exactly could you do to improve your position? To structure the different approaches to self-marketing, we like to use a model based

on Ken Wilbers' Four Quadrants theory (see Figure 3). This simple graphical model shows the interrelationships between the individual and their environment and how attitudes and actions influence each other.
For example: When I know what my interests and values are, I express my needs, goals, and ideas clearly and unambiguously. This behavior has a credible and trustworthy effect on others: good relationships can develop, and structures can be redesigned. This in turn influences the way people interact and identify with the organization: Culture change is possible... and you will be positively associated with it.

Attitude: Be convincing personally

The first target group of your self-marketing is yourself! You have laid the foundation for your attitude during the analysis – now you know what drives you and what makes you tick. Maybe you have found out that your previous attitude towards yourself, your work, your team, or the other departments requires some adjustments. Ask yourself what qualities people display with whom you enjoy cooperating, and strive to reinforce these. We usually hear the following answers:

- Sympathetic
- Empathic
- Positive and constructive
- Confident and assertive
- Loyal and reliable
- Committed

Behavior: Build trust

Based on your behavior, others draw conclusions about your personality and abilities and assess how valuable you are to them and the organization. Their behavior and decisions in relation to you and your interests are linked to this. So, by your behavior, you are fueling expectations in you. The point is not to just fake image-enhancing behavior and manipulate others. That would contradict the principles of a good attitude and would undermine trustful relationships. This is about developing behavior that reflects your attitude and is consistent with your vision. When people have few touch points with you, they use all the information available to form an opinion about you. Consider and discuss how each team member might address the following aspects:

- Appearance (clothing, accessories, posture, gestures, facial expressions, use of space)
- Voice and language
- Communication skills: A balance should be achieved between active listening and responsiveness to the other person on the one hand, and the ability to articulate your own ideas and interests clearly and without pressure or aggression on the other hand.
- Dealing with criticism and conflicts

Structures: Improve visibility

In our experience, the following self-marketing measures have proven successful. They can support you to make a positive, memorable, innovative, and professional impression:

- Each interaction and meeting provide new opportunities to shine.
- Support your supervisor: Reporting is free and desired advertising.
- Develop your portfolio of products and services together with stakeholders and make it visible to your clients.
- Offer your help. Those who have been helped speak positively about the helper. Word of mouth works like referral marketing.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities in cross-departmental processes. The content creation process with its interfaces in several departments offers an excellent opportunity to live out your new attitude.
- Use classic marketing tools to promote your team, your products and services, and make your presence felt: intranet pages, articles in the company magazine about a special challenging customer project, newsletters with tips on content management, language and terminology, a roadshow about a new information product, surveys among colleagues and customers about the use of tutorials, etc.
- Repositioning in the organization chart might be a good move when associated with a representative team name.

Culture: Develop relationships

Building relationships is the final piece of the puzzle to raise your department's and company's profile. Your objective is to create and maintain a network of people who challenge, inspire, and benefit from each other.

- Whom could you win over as fellow workers, allies, mentors, or multipliers? Which of your characteristics make you attractive to these people, and how can you strengthen that?
- Motivate your personal network to support others and be remembered for your support.
- Seek to build alliances with other departments. What support could you ask for and what could you gain?
- What opportunities do you have to join the circle of influential decision-makers and secret opinion leaders?

Summary

Making your competencies and skills visible is part of the cornerstone of professional success. A team's reputation influences its positioning in the organization and its ability to shape it. Self-marketing is a continuous task that can start on several levels. By clarifying your desired image and defining clear goals, you create the framework for effective sustainable positioning. There is no better time to start than now. Wishing you delightful and successful self-marketing!

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Improv[e] your soft skills

As a technical communicator, you might sometimes find yourself in what appears like an unscripted drama, full of diverse characters and an unforeseeable plot that you – the protagonist – have to perform in. So, why not advance your skills with some creative improvisation practice? Our author Maryland Sara has given it a go.

Text by Maryland Sara

Image: © ViewApart/istockphoto.com

In my experience as a technical writer, I realize that for the greatest part of my day I am not writing content. I spend much time liaising with subject matter experts, product managers, and my fellow writers. I also spend time figuring out the pieces to structure and create content. Some days, I spend time putting myself in the user's shoes and finding ways of how to meet their needs and expectations. I might be a technical writer, but that surely doesn't mean that I write all the time. Instead, I wear multiple hats at work depending on the situation and project. And with each hat I wear, I must possess a different skill to collect the information I need to write content and to complete my project.

The long list of required skills

More than the ability to understand technical topics and write clearly, technical writers are expected to possess excellent communication, collaboration, and listening skills. We must be fearless in navigating through ambiguity and asking questions from subject matter experts. We must also have the attitude to be able to continuously and quickly learn the ever-changing technology, processes, and tools.

As in many roles in the tech industry, technical writers are required to have critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. They must also be open to receiving and giving feedback. Finally, a technical writer must be flexible enough to accommodate last-minute changes and adapt to unexpected requirements or situations.

All these skills are needed to thrive and succeed in our fast-paced, complex (and today often remote-work) environments. However, none of us enters the work field checking the box for each and every skill. In fact, the list can be quite overwhelming, especially for professionals who are new to the field or who are changing careers.

Writing and technical skills can be easily taught and learned while doing the job. However, this is not the case for many of the soft skills that are paramount to getting our job done well. So, how can technical writers improve their soft skill set?

Introducing the Improv Theater

One effective method to improve and learn useful soft skills is through practicing Improvisational Theater or Improv. Improv is a form of theater where scenes are created on the spot. Performers act in scenes that are unplanned or unscripted. This form of theater dates back to 391 BC when it was first performed in the Atellan Farce in Ancient Rome.

The Improv community has grown through the centuries and become increasingly popular throughout the last few decades. Apart from the theatrical enjoyment, many improvisers have witnessed positive effects and learning that Improv brought them. This art is applied in different areas, including psychology, education, personal life, medicine, and business.

If other fields are using Improv, why don't we as technical communicators? From my own experience in improvisational acting, here is what Improv provides:

- **Improv teaches you the values of being collaborative and creative.** When playing Improv, we always play with a partner or a team, and we start our scenes following a suggestion from the audience. We only play with our bodies and our words – no props!
- **Improv helps you become more positive.** The basic tool we use in Improv is called "Yes, and." This means that when a performer puts their idea out there, the partner performer agrees to the idea, embraces it, and builds on it.
- **Improv teaches you to be comfortable with failure and mistakes.** As everything is created on the spot, sometimes we fail to create a story or scene that makes sense. However, practicing Improv teaches us that failing can be fun! And being okay with failure can be truly useful in difficult work situations.
- **Improv helps you improve your communication, listening, and spontaneity skills.** To fully create meaningful scenes, performers must listen to each other. They listen and look for opportunities to help each other build or tell a story. When their partner presents an idea, they immediately jump into it without hesitation and without thinking too much about it. They go with the flow.
- **Improv builds your skills in navigating through uncertainties.** Anything can happen while doing Improv. There is no certainty. Performers must trust their instincts and skills when they go on stage without knowing what the topic is about, what the game will be, or how the story will unfold.
- **Improv keeps you mentally focused.** When we practice Improv, we have to be 100 percent present, both physically and mentally. If our mind wanders off, our ability to respond and think rapidly decreases.

As you can see, all of these skills that we learn from Improv can be applied in all aspects of life. I started practicing Improv in 2017 and since then I have applied all my Improv skills to my technical writing career. It all comes down to treating every scenario and situation at work as similar to an Improv scene. If I sit at a meeting and colleagues present their ideas, I keep an open mind and inspect the idea. The "Yes, and" spirit grows within me. I never immediately say "No" to any idea, but rather look at it from different angles. If I like the

Image: ImpAct Improv workshop participants play the Mirror Dance exercise © *Maryland Sara* idea, I express my interest and then find ways to improve it. Alternatively, I try to find ways to build an idea on top of that first idea.

Improv has helped me focus better and become an active listener. A few years back, I was interviewing for my current role. In preparation for my job interview, I did some Improv exercises. I would like to believe that Improv played a crucial role in helping me score my dream job.

Another useful skill that Improv has taught me is the ability to solve problems and uncertainties. If a challenging project is brought to my desk and I have no idea how to get started, I use my collaboration and creativity skills to find subject matter experts who can provide me a better understanding of the project.

When a topic is too vague or unclear, I do not get discouraged easily. Instead, I ask the silliest questions (with lots of confidence) in the room. I have developed an attitude of being okay with occasionally making myself the idiot who desires to learn.

Improv trained me to develop empathy. At our Improv workshops, we listen more than we talk, and we never dismiss anyone's ideas or feelings. At work, when I write documentation, I listen to my customers, their feedback, and their needs. I put myself in their situations and assess how I can effectively address their needs in the most structured and understandable way. Showing empathy to our audience does wonders not just for our documentation, but for the entire customer experience.

Part of my work as a technical writer is to receive feedback and constructive criticism. This feedback can come through peer reviews and performance reviews. Improv has taught me to embrace each form of feedback and take it as a gift – a gift that can help me improve my work and help me achieve my professional goals.

Now that I teach Improv at work and through ImpAct Improv, I use it to widen my network and foster culture. I have met many smart, talented, and wonderful professionals at work and outside of work, with whom I have shared many laughs. I have led Improv sessions for various teams, such as program managers, software engineers, localization experts, customer engineers, salespeople, marketers, technical communicators, and teachers from across the globe.

This pandemic didn't stop me from building new relationships and networks (virtually) or from developing useful interpersonal skills.

How you can get started with Improv

The best way to get started with Improv is by joining an Improv Theater workshop. Improv workshops are available across the globe and in every language – even gibberish!

Each Improv group has a different style of playing Improv, so it is important to look around to find the one that suits your taste. I highly suggest asking around your local community or even joining virtual Improv workshops for a trial, although nothing beats an in-person Improv workshop.

It is important to know that Improv workshops must be built around a safe and welcoming environment. Facilitators start with easy and fun warm-up games and then increase the level of difficulty in each game to challenge the participants. These challenges are all done with fun in mind without trying to be funny!

Improv Theater is for everyone and anyone who likes to have fun. It is suitable for all ages, too. This theater form can be truly life-changing or career-changing.

If you are a technical writer looking for ways to expand your soft skills or to become a well-rounded person, give Improv a try. Experiencing it is what it is all about!

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Maryland Sara is an experienced technical writer and Improv theater coach. Based in Dublin, Ireland, she currently writes technical documentation for the engineers working at the Google Data Centers. She has led more than 80 Improv theater workshops for her colleagues and through the ImpAct Improv group.

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Cognitive concepts for usable design

We all want to engage with technology intuitively. But what is intuitive to our users? What stimulates their action? A glimpse into the cognitive concepts that guide our users' expectations will help us design more usable products.

Text by Kirk St.Amant

Image: ©ersinkisacik/istockphoto.com

Usability is about interaction. When we use items such as apps, we perform certain activities and expect responses to these actions. Our use of technology involves us interacting with them through systems of input and responses. Such interactions guide how we use everything from automobiles to mobile apps.

We use this process to interact with different objects every day, yet the complexity of these interactions often goes unnoticed. These situations arise from how the brain processes information, and these processes are central to successful usability and effective design. By understanding the cognitive factors underlying these dynamics, technical communicators can design materials to promote interactions and enhance usability.

Initiation and conclusion

How we use items is not random. Rather, we expect our actions to lead to particular responses. Moreover, we are often unaware of how we interact with items during a process. This is because such interactions often operate at a subconscious level where certain stimuli initiate and drive how we interact with tools and technologies.

We see, hear, or feel a particular thing and respond with a related action. To make a phone call, for example, we take out our mobile phone, see the "call phone" app, and instinctively tap it to begin using the technology. This process does not involve conscious thought. Rather, we encounter a stimulus (the app) and reflexively perform a related action (tap it). In this way, certain stimuli trigger an action at a subconscious level.

This initial action often causes some change in the item we are using. For example, an icon might illuminate, the device might emit a sound, or a new interface might appear. When such changes occur, we reflexively stop the action we were performing. Essentially, this new stimulus is our cue to terminate the action triggered by an earlier stimulus. This process of initiating stimulus, resulting action, and terminating stimulus constitutes a task – the foundational unit of cognitive processing in interactive designs.

Developing interaction expectations

We are not born knowing these relationships and reactions. Rather, they develop through repeated exposure over time. The first time we use an item, we focus our attention on the process and become acutely aware of the features the item has. Each feature represents a stimulus our senses take in and our conscious mind registers. We then interact with these features by pressing buttons, clicking icons, tapping apps, etc.

When our actions cause a change in the item (e.g., something lights up or emits a sound), our mind consciously registers that performing certain actions causes particular changes in the item. Through these interactions, we learn that using a feature in a particular way causes a change and that change is an indicator that the item has registered our actions. This association of item (stimulus), action, and result (stimulus) is how we learn the core activity in a process. The more we encounter the same features (stimuli), perform the same action, and get the same results (stimuli), the stronger this association becomes.

As we continue to use an item, these associations become stronger until we no longer need to consciously focus our attention on certain features, actions, or responses. Rather, our minds have created automatic associations that allow us to use specific features reflexively. This shift to the reflexive frees our conscious mind to focus our attention on new things in the world around us when we use familiar objects.

Experience, extrapolation, and expectations

The dynamics of interacting with items begin with a conscious decision to use an item to perform a process – such as using a mobile phone to make a call. We then review the features of an item to determine how to perform that activity – such as examining the interface of our mobile phone to find an app for making a call. Once we locate the feature we associate with that process (e.g., a "call phone" app), we begin to interact with it automatically based on the stimuli we encounter as we perform the related process.

The relationships that drive these interactions are often connected to the features an item has. We know that to use features like apps, you tap the app. This is because our experiences have helped us create an association for the actions required to interact with, or use, apps. Similarly, we know to click on an icon on a computer screen to access a program because our prior experiences have created expectations for how to interact with such features. In these relationships, the feature serves as the stimulus that triggers us to perform an action – the action associated with how we use that feature. Without such stimuli, we often fail to start a process.

Central to these dynamics is identifying the features an item has and using that identification to guide our actions. This association is important, for it allows us to extrapolate how to interact with new things. If, for example, I wish to create an app for my ride-sharing service, I must design the app to mirror other apps my audience has previously encountered. This parallel design allows the audience to easily identify the app (i.e., what it is) and triggers the related action (i.e., tapping the app) essential to using it. Accordingly, effective interaction involves designing features users can identify in terms of a category of item (e.g., app) and trigger the corresponding action for using that feature.

The same is true for the stimuli that conclude activities. We expect certain changes to result when we use features. These changes can be general, such as the clicking of an icon causing a new program to open. They can also be more specific, as in expecting a number pad to appear after tapping a "call phone" app. What is common across these situations is we expect our actions to result in a response from – or a change in – the item we are using. We rely on this second kind of stimulus to note that our actions were recognized and to stop doing something. We also rely on such stimuli to note if we performed an action correctly (e.g., a "Login successful" vs. "Login failed" message). As with initiating a process, the stimuli we rely on to stop an activity are often extrapolated from prior experiences using certain features. This is why we will often repeatedly tap an app, click on an icon, etc. until we receive a response from the item.

Overlapping stimulus and cascading interactions

Most processes involve more than a single task comprised of a trigger stimulus, action, and terminal stimulus. Rather, using items often entails performing a series of actions in an overall process. In these instances, a series of trigger stimulus – action – terminal stimulus tasks occur in a sequence to produce the interactions needed to use tools and technologies. These situations do not mean we engage in jarring start-and-stop activities when using different products. Rather, each task seems to flow easily into the next, creating a smooth process where we rarely notice the stimuli guiding our actions. These seemingly fluid situations result from the trigger and terminal stimulus for a process overlapping in a way that stops one task while simultaneously starting the next task in a process. When we call someone on our mobile phone, for example, the "call phone" app is the trigger stimulus that prompts us to tap the app and start the process. The resulting keypad that appears in response to that action becomes the terminal stimulus that lets us know to stop tapping the app. That same keypad also serves a second function: It becomes the trigger stimulus that initiates the next step in the process by prompting us to type in a number and make a call. After we type in the number, we encounter a "calling" interface that indicates the device has registered our actions and the process has moved to the next step (waiting for the person to answer). The overall interaction then concludes when we encounter a terminal stimulus (e.g., the person or voicemail answers our call) or we receive no response and have no option but to end the call – the only feature available on this new screen.

In this example, the same stimulus – appearance of the keypad – concludes one task (tap the app to initiate a call) and initiates a new task (key in a number and make a call). Such situations reveal how the terminal stimulus that ends one task can also be the trigger stimulus that initiates the next task in a sequence. This overlap allows us to smoothly move from task to task in an overall process. These situations represent a cascade, where overlapping stimuli prompt individuals to flow from one task into the next.

Some processes, such as the phone call example, involve only one cascade point/overlap of terminal and trigger stimuli. Others, such as withdrawing money from a bank machine, might involve several. Many of our interactions with technologies, however, rely on overlapping stimuli to start and stop different tasks in a process.

Based on these factors, fostering successful interactions central to usability means designing features to effectively start, stop, and transition from action to action in a process. Understanding such situations involves identifying

- the initiating stimulus that triggers the task that starts an overall process
- the cascade points where terminal stimuli that end one task initiate the next task in a process
- the concluding terminal stimulus indicating individuals have completed the overall process

These factors reflect users' expectations based on their prior experiences with trigger, terminal, and cascading stimuli. Accordingly, the more closely an item's features mirror the terminal, trigger, and cascading stimuli audiences associated with certain activities, the more easily the audience can interact with and use an item.

Mapping audience expectations for interactions

Fostering effective interactions involves addressing the stimuli audiences associate with different activities and processes. To achieve this objective, technical communicators should follow the steps outlined below:

Step 1: Identify the tasks in an overall process

Interactions are initiated and concluded as independent tasks – or actions – with each task representing a step in a process. Technical communicators, therefore, need to begin the design process by identifying the tasks involved in a process in order to determine the stimuli central to each task.

Step 2: Identify the stimulus-action relationship for each task

Each task is comprised of a trigger stimulus that initiates an action, the related action, and the terminal stimulus that stops the action. Technical communicators need to identify each of these factors to understand the interactions central to a process.

Step 3: Identify the design factors associated with task-based stimuli

Not all aspects of a design trigger or terminate actions. Rather, core design elements initiate and end actions. These elements are the minimum design aspects (i.e., stimuli) that start or stop actions. By understanding these concepts, technical communicators can design features that guide users' actions.

Step 4: Identify points where cascading stimuli occur in a process

Often, the same feature terminates one action and triggers another. This overlap involves using features that facilitate such stop-start dynamics. Knowing where and how such overlap occurs to create cascades can help create designs that effectively stop and start different actions.

Step 5: Identify the initiating trigger stimulus and the concluding terminal stimulus for a process

The interactions facilitating usability only work if individuals know when to start an overall process and when that process is complete. Understanding these factors can help create designs that initiate the correct overall process and lead to the successful completion of process-related activities.

The approach outlined here identifies cognitive elements central to interactive design. Technical communicators can use this approach to research audience expectations and develop products that foster the interactions essential to usability.

Concluding thoughts

Creating effective interactions through designs is not easy. The dynamics guiding such processes encompass numerous elements and can seem overwhelming. Understanding the cognitive concepts upon which interactions are based allows technical communicators to identify elements central to usability. The ideas discussed here can help technical communicators enhance their understanding of interaction and usability as related to audience expectations. Technical communicators can then apply this knowledge to create products individuals can easily interact with and use effectively.

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Further reading

For more information on the ideas discussed in this article, see

- Duhigg, C. (2012). *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. New York: Random House.
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Improving your documentation project with "Docs as Code"

Software development has faced many challenges over the past few decades, and all too often technical documentation teams need to overcome similar hurdles. Which solutions have proved their worth over the years, and how can we apply them to documentation projects?

Text by Alex Jitianu

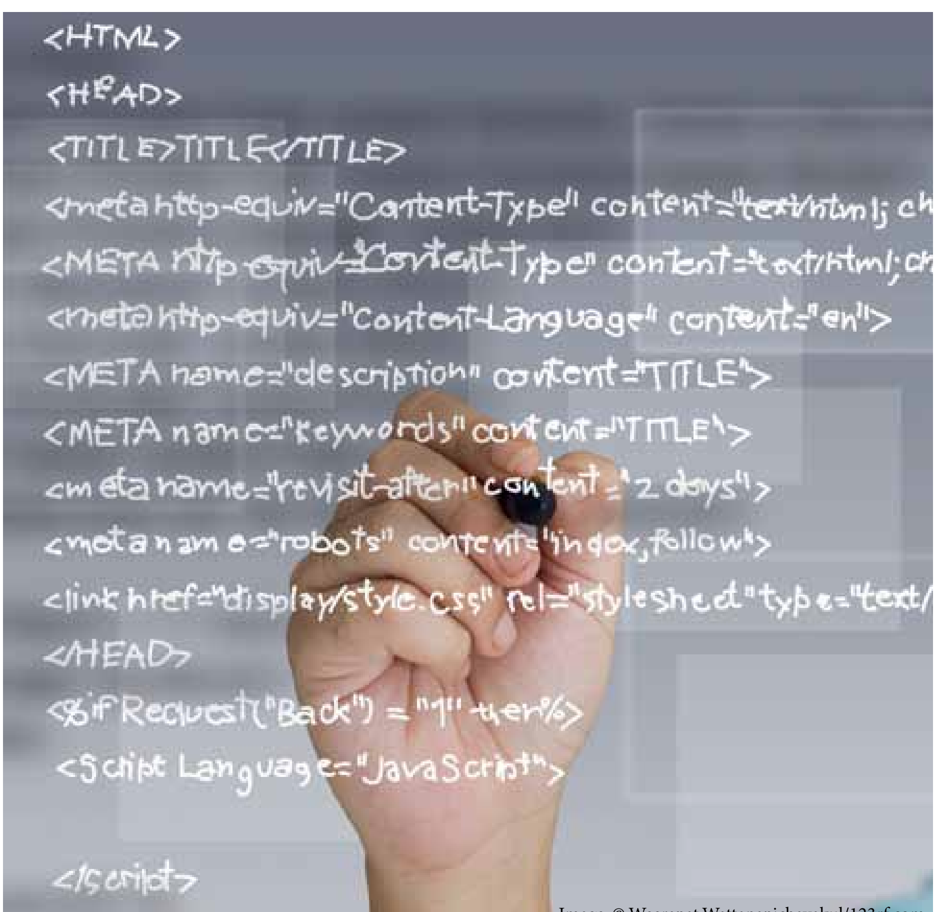

Image: © Weerapat Wattanapichayakul/123rf.com

Docs as Code, as it is defined, refers to a philosophy that you should be writing documentation with the same **tools** and **workflows** as code. Although the workflows are of great importance here, if the documentation is for a software product, using the same tools as the developers can bring additional benefits, such as an increased willingness to collaborate. Also, chances are that the software team already has these processes set up, and it is therefore even easier and more logical to use the same tools and workflows for the documentation process. In my company, both software development and documentation teams are employing the same workflows and tools. A story is not complete until documented!

In this article, I will talk about what you need to take into account to implement a proper **Docs-as-Code** workflow.

Version control system

Does anyone remember those times when we kept multiple versions of documents in folders on the local file system? When you discovered that the current version was broken and you didn't know why or which of the previous ones to revert to?

The primary scope of such a system – as its name suggests – is to record all the changes made in your documents, giving you easy access to all previous versions. These previous versions can be labeled as you make releases (v1.0.0, v2.0.0), for easy access at any time. A question that I have often encountered is: How and when should I release my documentation tag versions? Well, a good choice is to keep in line with the release flow of the product you are documenting.

Another benefit of version control is that for each block of text, you will be able to see who changed it and a description of the change. Last but not least, the simple usage of a version control system empowers collaboration and review, as the documents are accessible to all members of your team.

There are many version control systems out there, but some of the most popular ones among software development are Git, Mercurial, and Subversion.

Another aspect to consider when choosing the right system is to decide if you want it on-site or in the cloud. Git, for example, is available in both variants:

- On-site: GitLab Community edition
- Web-based: GitHub, GitLab, Bitbucket

Choosing a suitable text markup

First of all, a plain text markup language is needed because a version control system works well and offers full features for plain text documents. Markdown is a popular choice, being minimalistic and easy to learn. Another great fit that might have eluded you at first is XML. XML is a markup language in which you define your own markup, or tags, creating a rich semantic layer. If you want to avoid creating your own, you can choose one of the existing XML vocabularies that have proven themselves over the years as good fits for documentation (for example DITA or DocBook).

Continuous Integration (CI) and Continuous Delivery (CD)

Continuous Integration is a technique in which changes are validated as soon as they are committed, by creating a build and running automated tests. It helps avoid the so-called "integration hell" when the software works on developers' individual machines, but it fails when all developers combine (or "integrate") their code. Developers automate their unit and integration tests, but what can be automated for a documentation project? Well, there are quite a few things:

- You can create and automate quality checks. If you use an XML vocabulary, it means that you can create your unit tests using Schematron. If you use Markdown, you can use a linter (such as Vale).
- You can create and automate integrity checks. These will check things such as broken links or profiling conflicts (cases when certain content is missing from a deliverable).
- You can automate the reuse of metrics, a report on the tagging use, how much content is reused, etc.
- If you translate your content, you can automate the building of translation packages.

Continuous Delivery takes you one step further. Its goal is to make sure the software is always ready to go to production. This means that you have automated your release process and can deploy your application at any time by clicking on a button.

When choosing a CI/CD platform, first consider if you want to install it on your own server or if you want one in the cloud. Some CI/CD platforms popular among software developers are:

- On-site: Jenkins or GitLab CI/CD
- In the cloud: GitLab CI/CD, Travis CI, Netlify

Collaboration

Collaboration and review are paramount to having high-quality content. The simple fact that you are using a version control system facilitates collaboration. All interested parties now have access to the documents. If you've chosen GitHub, for example, you can opt for using the powerful Pull Requests. There are also commercial solutions out there to explore that offer interesting collaboration workflow possibilities (such as Oxygen Content Fusion or Oxygen XML Web Author).

Issue trackers

An issue tracker binds all the work done on an issue into one place of truth. It displays not only messages but also the documents that have been changed in the version control system while working on the issue.

When referring to the documentation of a software product and both the developers and writers are using the same tools, it means that the same issue will be used by both. On the same issue, any user can see the changes done to the code by developers while working on a feature as well as the changes done to the documentation by writers when documenting the feature.

Again, you can have your pick. Both GitHub and GitLab have their own integrated issue tracker. Atlassian Jira is a popular commercial tool that can be integrated with SVN, Git, etc.

Editing tools

You can't write documentation without an editing tool. Because you've chosen a plain text markup, it means that you can use any text editor you like. Some of the version control systems also offer web-based built-in text editors with support for Markdown (e.g. GitHub or GitLab). If you use an XML vocabulary (such as DITA) and you need more help from the editor with advanced concepts such as reuse or profiling, then you can also opt for commercial XML editors such as Oxygen XML Author or its web-based variant, the Oxygen XML Web Author.

Conclusion

Whether you choose just the workflows or both tools and workflows, software development can offer valuable insight for documentation projects. Employing techniques such as Continuous Integration, collaboration, and review will increase the quality of your content and make your job easier in the long run.

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has been working for more than 15 years as a product evangelist and development lead for Syncro Soft Ltd., the producer of the popular Oxygen XML Editor. During this period, his main focus has been in XML technologies, in the development of technical documentation tools and DITA specific support.

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Global communication plays a key role in ending the pandemic

Skepticism and mistrust continue to hamper the vaccine rollout. What local communities need right now are clear messages in their local languages.

Text by Dustin Cheung and Afaf Steiert

Image: © ktsdesign/123rf.com

The negative coverage of the COVID-19 vaccine has significantly impacted levels of confidence in the vaccination rollout. Media outlets across nations have been quick to highlight the tragedies of those who have suffered the unforeseen side effects of the vaccine, however rare they might be. This has deterred many people from getting vaccinated, especially if it's the only news they see. Towards the start of 2021, the NIH reported several surveys on the hesitance in taking the vaccine, signifying low numbers of people who are willing to have the vaccine injected. [1] The study revealed that only around 48 percent of people had agreed to be vaccinated in October, an astonishingly low number considering that this is the key to ending a global pandemic. This reluctance presents a direct threat in the battle to defeat the virus. It is clear that the presentation and communication of the vaccination rollout have been flawed since the get-go.

Language barriers

In addition to the negative press, nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom have struggled to overcome the language barriers of their diverse communities. Both countries display their cultural diversities in stats revealing that they are home to over 140 languages. The multicultural mix is reflected in every aspect of life – from house decorations and food to the people we meet on the street. With such variety across these countries, one would expect to see a much greater assortment of coverage, across different communities and languages.

As AP News reported in February 2021, many communities across the United States – in this particular example Latinos – fear taking the vaccination due to language barriers. [2] Information is not available in different languages, triggering fear of getting vaccinated. There are millions of Americans who speak different languages – over 100 languages are spoken between families and communities. The lack of localized content on essential government pages represents an utter ignorance of this diversity. Ignoring its multicultural nature provides a clear obstacle in the country's intended path of vaccinating a vast number of its population.

Another example of the language barrier faced by parts of our communities was shown when Virginia used Google Translate to broadcast information on COVID-19 vaccination. [3] Despite being a convenient free translation tool, even Google Translate itself warned that it wasn't suitable for translating important matters. As Google Translate uses a bot translator, it is bound to make certain mistakes that could be avoided by a human translator. For example, "the vaccine is not required" became "the vaccine is not necessary" in the Spanish version of VDH's frequently asked questions page. Considering that Spanish is the native language of 21 percent of its population, one should surely have expected a better translation outcome.

A similar situation came to light in New York. As one of the most robust and diverse areas not only in the United States but in the entire world, New York had its non-English-speaking residents scrambling to find their language on the state's main COVID-19 page. [4] Page visitors had to scroll all the way down to the bottom of the page and past multiple charts and infographics to reach the button that would let them change the language of the website. Considering these problems, it seems as if they could have been easily solved if only the right people had sat down and discussed it, right? Web design and translation errors surely shouldn't hinder us on our path to ending a pandemic on a global scale. Yet this seems to be the case, not just in the U.S., but also in the United Kingdom.

The strain on trust

In February 2021, the United Kingdom released an official statement, saying that anyone in the U.K. – even those undocumented – could get the vaccine without triggering any kind of background check. [5] British health administrators explicitly and publicly stated that, as the virus itself wasn't looking for immigration status, neither would the government. This statement was meant to settle the nerves of those fearing for their lives if the virus was to hit their communities. It was a message that was definitely necessary in the battle against the virus. However, with such a strong and concise claim, why were immigrants still facing issues when trying to get the vaccine?

The United Kingdom, just like much of Europe, has had many different stances and mind changes when it comes to immigration. This includes refugees as well as those who are living in the country undocumented. The government claims to "provide protection to persons seeking asylum," [6] while denying protection for certain refugees. [7] This sloppy approach raised much distrust in many undocumented immigrants and refugees, making it harder for them to believe the government's claims about the vaccine.

This distrust in the government became even more pronounced when undocumented immigrants were asked for proof of address and identification when presenting for their vaccinations. According to *The New York Times,* many people attempting to get the vaccine were denied registration when entering local doctors' offices. [8]

Whether this is a lack of communication or a type of racial profiling, it is not acceptable in the battle against the virus. This ultimately instilled the fear in immigrants and refugees that getting vaccinated could lead to their deportation out of a country they call home. It's all well and good to say that everyone is allowed to receive the vaccine, but actions will always speak louder than words.

Provide clear communication

Seeing these communication problems affecting lives and postponing the end of the pandemic, one must wonder about steps we can take to fix this.

First off, if we want the vaccine to end this pandemic, governments must work on providing clear communication and instructions. Sensationalizing news that showcases the tragedies of the vaccine will continue to drive vaccination fear. Our only weapon against this is to provide accurate, consistent information on the overwhelming benefits of mass vaccinations across all required languages. Second, both countries should look for better ways of communicating intentions and guidelines. With the U.S. and the United Kingdom as diverse as they are, these countries cannot rely on sources such as Google Translate for the essential task of spreading information across all of its various linguistic groups. Hiring professionals to not simply translate words, but to get messages across will go a long way towards guiding people to the finish line in the race against COVID-19.

Thirdly, both countries must find ways to regain the trust of their residents. The contradictions that have been witnessed in both countries have been detrimental to gaining the trust of those in need. For example, the United Kingdom must be clear in its protection of immigrants, allowing them to deny the disclosure of information when receiving their vaccination.

Lastly, laziness and irresponsibility must be cut out when directing people towards the end of the pandemic. Inept translation jobs and unoptimized web pages will only lead to confusion, leaving many people confused about whether the vaccine is safe or not. Many people look to the government for guidance. Better communication must be provided across all resources.

To conclude

After nearly 18 months of the pandemic with many lasting economic and health effects, we might finally be seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Many different vaccines are now readily available, and in many countries, the vaccination process is well on its way. But despite this welcoming news, many communities remain hesitant in becoming vaccinated, while others still lack the resources to access the vaccine. This is where factors like language and culture consultancy come into play, solidifying our need to communicate and come together to end this pandemic on a global scale.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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afaftranslations.com

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Why you need localization experts to grow your company

Localization goes far beyond the translation of a product's user instructions. It involves placing customers – their language, culture, and preferences – at the center of your business strategy.

Text by Sophie Jones

Image: © Natthapong Khromkrathok /123rf.com

The continuing trend of transferring production to countries with low-cost labor and the ever-increasing globalization of markets are leading companies around the world to increase their presence in foreign markets. As any forward-thinking executive knows, localizing products and related documentation is the key to international success. In this article, we'll look at some of the many obvious and less obvious benefits of localization and translation.

What is localization?

Localization is the quintessence of user-friendliness: Across the globe, people feel more comfortable and confident when using products in their native language. Yet, many organizations – particularly those based in the U.S. – assume English to be the universal lingua franca.

Localization shouldn't be an afterthought – it should be an integral part of the development process. Therefore, embedding your localization strategy in development planning and development cycles is critical. Companies that do not plan for localization often make mistakes that could have been avoided. Problems can arise from poor communication between developers, localization managers, and translators. Texts submitted for translation (usually the user interface) and localized versions are not updated synchronously. As an example, some languages need more space than others. If this isn't taken into consideration from the get-go, certain text areas might need to be adjusted and corrected manually. It is more than just a nuisance: In some cases, the launch in a new geographic region will have to be postponed. Often, managers are late to learn that not everything has been translated or that the developed product has not been fully adapted to local standards. Then the rush is on, and this can have a significant impact on quality.

Considering the need for localization from the beginning and choosing the right software and localization specialists, translations can be automated and accelerated on a technical level. In this case, translators will be able to deliver better and more contextual results. Translation companies can often advise on processes and user-friendly translation management tools for a specific task. Well-established processes and specific instructions are essential in a localization strategy to ensure effective localization in digital product development.

Competitive advantages

If your competitors have already localized their products, you can't afford not to follow suit. If your competitors haven't started localizing yet, you can gain a real competitive advantage by taking action now. Don't underestimate the value of selling to and serving customers in their native language when your main competitors offer English-language products only. Ultimately, the language of business is not English but the language of your customer.

The best way to demonstrate your attention to existing and potential clients abroad is to localize your website. When overseas buyers and potential customers visit your website and find information in their language, their experience of your company changes for the better. Visitors to your site will not only understand what services you provide, but they will also have more confidence in your company and the resources that your web page offers. Professional language service providers will help you find the right localization experts.

Good reputation across markets

In business, the company's reputation plays an important role. Localizing for your target audience will extend your reputation beyond borders. Customer trust is key here: Seeing the information in their native language increases the users' confidence in your company and its services.

Localizing your website will help you to establish a strong international reputation. English to Spanish translation services are becoming more popular in the United States as demographics change in many states. In Canada, along with English, the French language remains of great importance. In the European Union, new member states and the redistribution of labor resources across Europe drive many companies to consider the linguistic needs of the newly emerging market segments.

Effective communication with foreign clients

Localizing your software product will allow you to reduce the cost of user support where it costs the most – abroad. Properly conducted localization will not only reduce the number of support calls. It will also help foreign users to better understand the features of your product, which, in turn, will increase the level of satisfaction of your customers.

Many companies already selling their products overseas are looking for ways to increase sales in overseas markets. There are two possible ways to achieve this goal: by increasing market coverage or selling in new regions. Localization can help you by providing customers with a compelling case for purchasing your products and providing market coverage not otherwise possible.

Reducing legal risks

Many states require that goods sold on their territory are labeled in their native language(s). In addition, the translation of contracts, agreements, and user agreements helps to minimize potential conflicts associated with misunderstandings and language barriers. Users are required to comply with the terms of the copyright agreements in their language.

Localization project and examples

Localization goes well beyond translation. It involves the whole process of defining the target market and adapting to the local language and culture. Translation is only one of the elements of localization. The overall message, color schemes, designs, and images should reflect the target market's specific language and cultural preferences. So, if you are trying to localize your product, don't just translate the copy, but ensure that it is contextual in terms of language and culture.

Below are a couple of examples of localization projects in which I participated:

- *Jooble* is a popular international job aggregator. It allows users to search for offers from employers on a huge, constantly updated database collected from the most popular job sites worldwide. Today the Jooble service operates in 60 countries. The platform offers a localized user interface as well as translated help and legal materials for the Jooble.org website into 16 languages, including Tagalog. The source materials were provided in .docx files containing texts mixed with HTML code and links to screenshots that explain the context of certain lines. The translation was done right inside the HTML code while the translators left the original markup intact. Thanks to this, the integration of translation took minimum time from the customer. All work was carried out by native speakers, professional translators with extensive experience in working with texts in HTML format. When the addition of the translated texts to the site was completed, full linguistic testing of the site was carried out. Thus, the problem of "long lines" that did not fit in the space allocated to them was solved. Also, the translation of some lines – the meaning of which was unclear without context – was corrected. You can see the result on the Jooble website by selecting the required country from the drop-down list at the top right.
- *Skyscanner* is a metasearch engine and travel agency based in Edinburgh, Scotland. The site is available in over 30 languages and is used by 100 million people per month. Even though this product is somewhat unusual, the principle of its operation is so simple and easy to understand that our native translators were able to complete it in a short time. The site (resource .po files) was localized into three languages (French, Spanish, German), and the integrated translations were then checked. You can see the result on the official website by selecting one of the above languages in the combo box.
- *Viber* is one of the most popular apps for free calling, messaging, pictures, and video over Wi-Fi and 3G. At the end of last year, the app was used by over 260 million people worldwide. The messenger is available for smartphones and computers. The first version of the application was released in December 2010. The developers are constantly updating the messenger to make the interface more convenient, add new features, and quickly fix bugs. In this regard, Viber was looking for a team of localizers capable of adapting to the high rates of updates and performing high-quality translation into any language as quickly as possible. The task is not a trivial one, but thanks to the use of cloud technologies and translation memory, a solution has been found. For Viber and other large localization projects, the cloud-based translation management platform Crowdin was used. With its help, a whole team of translators and editors is working on a project simultaneously, without interfering with each other.

Final word

Years of experience of our clients in foreign markets confirm that business is carried out in the buyer's language. Localization is one of the deeper and more complex types of translation, but it cannot be used interchangeably with translation. These are two different approaches to solving various problems. While localization always includes translation, translation does not necessarily include localization. When introducing a product to the global market, it is vital to have a localization strategy, use best practices, and automate all possible processes.

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Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through language

Indigenous communities are often overlooked in public communication, leaving them ill-informed and vulnerable. In culturally and linguistically diverse Australia, engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities comes down to two essential points: the ability to listen and adapt.

Text by Tea Dietterich and Rhian Ferguson

Image: © stanciuc/istockphoto.com

Minorities in many countries are often forgotten in public communication campaigns due to their cultural differences. This is the unfortunate truth for many hard-to-reach populations, yet it doesn't have to be. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples make up 3.3% [1] of the total Australian population. They are holders of unique languages and knowledge systems. To improve communication delivery and understanding among these communities, there are proven engagement strategies, along with quality Indigenous interpreting services. But before we dive in, let us consider *why* traditional communication approaches fall short for hard-to-reach communities.

The bottom line is that communicating is complicated. Words can mean different things to different people, which is why a sender's intentions are not guaranteed to resonate in the same way for a target audience. Couple this with cultural diversity and existing societal biases and things can get tricky.

Cultural norms generally determine how hard-to-reach communities find and digest public messages. Public messages often fail to take into account differing audience values and perspectives. This explains why certain audiences may react differently to messages than expected, or disengage entirely. Cultural awareness is the key tool to guide how messages are formed and delivered to improve reach within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Now that we have established the shortcomings in traditional messaging strategies, we must ask ourselves: What are the foundations for creating an effective communication strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences?

Choosing the right channel

Understanding the local information system helps to determine the preferred communication channels for a certain community. This is important because information delivered via the wrong channel is virtually ineffectual. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community information and channel preferences often vary according to education, place of residency (urban, regional or remote), access to technologies, and socioeconomic status. For example, educated people living in metropolitan areas statistically prefer to receive important information via digital channels. Those living in regional and remote areas possess lower English proficiency and have limited access to mainstream media, and therefore statistically prefer to receive information face-to-face, as well as through local audio and verbal communications.

A study conducted by the Australian Government Department of Finance [2] revealed the communication preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences for awareness-raising health information: 49% of respondents preferred receiving health information via letters, with a higher preference evident among older respondents (56%) aged between 35-54 years old. The next most preferred channel was television, with 42% of respondents reporting they preferred to receive information via this channel, especially younger respondents aged 15-24 years old (46%). Respondents also listed leaflets/pamphlets (32%) and face-to-face communications via a community representative or service (33%) as preferred communication channels.

An important point to make note of is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities usually share a mistrust of the government due to past negative experiences of segregation and marginalization. These issues, along with cultural and traditional differences, can be barriers to effective communication. [3] Acknowledging this engenders trust and familiarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities needed to ensure important messages are heard, accepted, and understood. Providing accurate and tailored messages has also proven to influence marginalized groups' health behaviors and outcomes among Native Americans in the Midwestern United States. [4]

Back in 2002, Aboriginal Interpreting WA (previously Kimberley Interpreting Service) echoed this point in its newsletter. [5] Findings revealed that Indigenous patients are more likely than other patients to leave the hospital against medical advice due to inadequate information transfer. As Dr. Joan Cunningham from Menzies School of Health Research explains, "Informed decision-making by patients requires adequate understanding of available options, and for some Indigenous patients this may be limited by communication difficulties."

Translating when relevant

Along with choosing the right content type and strategy, communicating clearly and effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires simple, succinct messages. In the context of health messaging, Tea Dietterich, who in 2002 worked as the Manager of the Kimberly Interpreting Service, notes, "It is not acceptable that people's health is suffering because of a lack of understanding of medical terminology when the solution is right there: use an interpreter." Evidence shows that patients with low English proficiency (LEP), who experience language discordant clinical encounters, have poorer quality of care and health outcomes. [6] This is where Indigenous interpreters can reduce adverse health outcomes by enabling access to government services.

This means that we should focus on translating only the relevant information for maximum reach. The key is to know what message you want the audience to hear and how to form that message in the clearest manner possible. Consider two or three key points you want to get across in your translation and apply them to the three W rule:

What are you trying to communicate? Prepare your message in the simplest form to have complete clarity in what you want the audience to understand.

Who is the audience? The way you formulate your messages changes depending on the audience. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, you should always keep in mind their identity, values, and needs.

Why are you communicating? Understanding why you are communicating a message can help in defining what the relevant information is, how best to communicate it, and how to make it memorable.

Cultural appropriateness

Systematic discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continues to resonate in Australia today. Decades of control and exclusion have deprived Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of the right to participate in society as equal citizens. Such experiences are linked to debilitating mental and physical health impacts and growing distrust of governments and authoritative bodies. Since 2012, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) has been making moves to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as equal citizens within Australia by developing the Indigenous interpreting industry to meet the current need for highly skilled Indigenous interpreters. [7]

Breaking down these walls calls for a level of respect and cultural sensitivity in cross-cultural communication. In the context of COVID-19, for example, rules about social distancing or visiting family are hard to communicate to a collectivist culture, and thus can be misinterpreted or ignored. BMC Health Services Research found that an enabling health care system that places interpreters at the forefront of information delivery was essential for culturally safe care. [8] Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, establishing strong connections and building rapport are extremely important in opening a two-way dialogue between message senders and receivers. There is great value in taking the time to tailor messages to those communities because messages that consider cultural context inspire trust in the recipients. Tea Dietterich comments, "It's not about knowledge transfer anymore – it's about knowledge sharing." Exchanging information between communities and learning from past experiences are critical to constructing culturally sensitive messages that meet the demands and expectations of hard-to-reach communities.

It should be noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be extremely diverse. For example, each community has their own protocols, and what is important for some communities may not be important for others. Keeping these different communication needs in mind is paramount to promoting full understanding and meaning of information.

Addressing communication recipients and Elders

Respectful and inclusive terminology assists in defining positive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Using accurate and culturally sensitive addressees demonstrates respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and, in turn, suggests that messages are more likely to register. Using the term "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders" in full is best practice when addressing Australia's collective Indigenous people. To refer to groups separately, use the terms "Aboriginal Australians", "Torres Strait Islanders", or "Indigenous Australians" respectfully. Appropriate geographical identifiers or demonyms also exist, such as "Murri" for referring to Aboriginal Australians of Queensland and northwestern New South Wales or "Koori" for referring to Aboriginal Australians of southern New South Wales and Victoria. If using such identifiers, though, it is important

Image 1: Yirrganydji Aboriginal woman and men in Queensland, Australia *© Raarael Ben-Ari/Adobe Stock*

to never make assumptions about identity and to always apply the correct context.

Using simplified English

There are more than 250 Indigenous languages, including around 800 dialects, in Australia, see Figure 1. [9] This means English may be a second or even third language for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This can give rise to substantial communication challenges.

Using plain and simple English is an almost foolproof strategy to tackling such challenges. Succinct and clear language makes messages easier to understand for people with low English literacy. The use of linguistic expressions like jargon, acronyms, or technical terms should be avoided, as it can be a means for confusion or even irreversible health outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light how important access to healthcare information is, especially for vulnerable communities such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who experience higher rates of non-communicable diseases and a distinct lack of access to health services. So far, one-size-fits-all communication strategies for dealing with COVID-19 have led to disinformation and exacerbated health inequities around the world. [10]

Have we made any progress?

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the Australian government has developed resources and materials targeted towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to better inform them about COVID-19 vaccinations.

Since 2018, 2M Language Services has been the provider of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages for Australian Government agencies, healthcare systems, and the private sector. We are aware of the associated challenges, yet we constantly strive to do our part to service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders languages and low-resources languages such as Pacific Islands languages and rare Southeast Asian and African languages.

We have assisted countless public sector agencies and private corporations in communicating effectively with those hard-to-reach audiences. Covering more than 350 languages and leveraging the latest language technologies, we aim to make information accessible to everyone regardless of language and cultural background.

Following a pilot project beginning in 2018 (first in the nation) and ongoing advocacy and support from Aboriginal Interpreting WA, WA's Kimberley, and soon Pilbara, now has interpreters working in each hospital from Monday to Friday.

We recognize that increasing access to Indigenous language services is a collective effort. To quote our colleague Deanne Lightfoot, CEO of Aboriginal Interpreting WA, "Progress has been made, but the battles don't stop."

2M Language Services proudly provides interpreting and translation services into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Pacific Island and other low resource languages with the overriding goal to enable access to essential services, such as health, justice, and social services.

Image 2: 2M Team with Walmajarii Interpreter Annette Kogolo © 2M

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tea Dietterich is the CEO and founder of 2M Language Services and has been active in the language services industry for more than 20 years. Before founding 2M, she was instrumental in establishing the Kimberley Aboriginal Interpreter Service in Western Australia now known as Western Australia Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

Rhian Ferguson is in charge of all things related to content and marketing at 2M Language Services. She has been involved in several publications related to the language industry.

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events

tcworld 2021

Machine Translation Summit XVIII 2021
August 16-20, 2021
Orlando, FL, USA
www.gala-global.org

tcworld China
September 16-17, 2021
Shanghai, China and online
www.tcworld-china.cn/en

Languages & the Media 2021
September 20-22, 2021
Berlin, Germany
www.languages-media.com

Content Marketing World 2021
September 28-October 1, 2021
Cleveland, OH, USA
www.contentmarketingworld.com

MadWorld 2021
October 3-6, 2021
Austin, TX, USA
www.madcapsoftware.com/madworld-conferences/madworld-2021

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November 1-3, 2021
San Jose, CA, USA
www.taus.net/events/conferences

tcworld conference
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www.technical-communication.org/tekom/conferences

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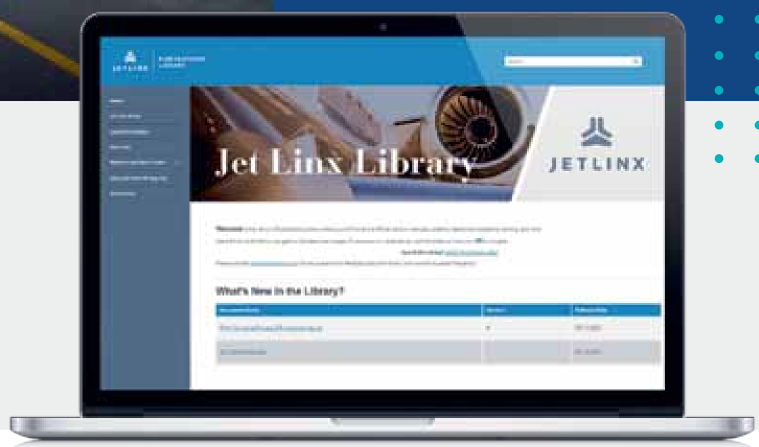

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