

Business Collaboration Software Breeds Productivity in the Localization Industry

By Beth Walsh, Across Systems

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In an information society, maintaining knowledge worker productivity is a common problem. How do companies focus the attention and gain the best results from their experts?

According to [Basex](#), a research firm specializing in the knowledge economy, the US economy in 2007 suffered a loss of more than \$650 billion due to information overload and unnecessary interruptions. Specifically, this figure is comprised of "unnecessary interruptions plus recovery time." Recovery time is the time it takes the knowledge worker to return to where he was before the interruption (not merely to resume work) and typically takes 10 to 20 times the duration of the actual interruption.

Language service providers (LSPs), in particular, understand these challenges. LSPs face the overriding issues of productivity and quality on a daily basis, especially in such a subjective area of expertise as human communications and translation, which requires attention to detail. Add to that the challenges of collaboration within multiple business components – that of client, vendor and support systems – and effectiveness becomes a tangled web, indeed. How can these challenges be overcome to result in a productive workflow, high quality translations and solid localization work, as well as to produce happy, productive workers whose output can be measured?

The key is collaborative business environments, or the intersection of content, knowledge sharing and collaboration within the enterprise. The research firm, Basex, looks specifically at processes and tools that provide an infrastructure for knowledge sharing and communications that facilitate efficient collaboration and increased productivity.

"The best collaborative business environments are those that allow knowledge workers to easily locate expertise, information and resources, including people," says Jonathan B. Spira, CEO and chief analyst at Basex. "Software that offers a single environment, friction-free knowledge sharing and embedded community has the best chance of being successful and actually enhancing productivity."

Daniel Nackovski, president of the American division of [Across Systems](#), agrees with the relevance of the statement to the language services industry. According to Nackovski, a translation management system such as the one developed by Across, which integrates authoring tools as well as automatic workflow and quality management, all (human) resources involved in the process, plus upstream and downstream corresponding systems, is the type of collaborative environment needed by LSPs and their customers to create a smooth linguistic supply chain and comprehensive, high quality output.

"When all personnel have access to the same approved knowledge base and work in the same environment, with clear business rules to set workflow, it resolves issues of information overload

and inconsistency, eliminates inefficient email chains, and makes accessible the experts who can solve problems and provide support,” said Nackovski.

At Localization World in Madison in October 2008, Gerald Salisbury of SMA Solar Technology and Peter Argondizzo from Argo Translation participated in a workshop panel with Nackovski. In the panel, "Linguistic Supply Chain - Buzzwords or Reality," the panelists, who represent the enterprise customer side as well as technology and translation service providers, shared lessons learned from the implementation and use of Across Language Server platforms that support translation needs of customers, service providers and sub-suppliers in a single environment.

[SMA Solar Technology](#), a solar inverter manufacturer with highest sales in this technology worldwide, manages about 3,000 translation projects annually using the Across Language Server and a recently added collaboration tool called crossGrid. According to Salisbury, SMA works with 19 LSPs, has five internal translators and also uses about 25 freelancers. SMA's primary concern is being able to maintain control and to integrate corresponding systems.

“We want to be involved at the beginning and end of the process,” said Salisbury, “and we like to know what’s going on in-between, so transparency to project managers is very important to us. In addition, we have the requirement to update memories on the fly, capture permutations of memories across languages, and make them available to everyone.”

Using Language Server and crossGrid, SMA and its translators have been able to work in a common network on real-time creation of product-related documentation, in nine languages simultaneously. Translators receive tasks automatically through the system as soon as a new project is initiated and can use comment functions to coordinate work directly with project managers and reviewers. External language service providers, using their own Language Servers, are directly connected to SMA by means of the crossGrid module, facilitating the exchange of relevant data from server to server. Even freelancers can connect to the Language Server at SMA to seamlessly exchange tasks and use the translation and terminology system.

Terminology is now much more consistent and time-to-market has been shortened, according to Salisbury. “Formerly, it might have taken us up to two months after product release to do the translations of an 80-page operating manual, for example,” he said. “Now the final version of the translation is available within a few hours of release, even if modifications are made to the product at the last minute. So now we even equip prototypes with multilingual information.”

Peter Argondizzo of [Argo Translation](#), a Chicago-based translation agency with a network of more than 800 professional translators, explained that Argo’s concern is one of simplified processes with maximum efficiency. Argo knew it needed an enterprise solution in order to acquire new customers and elevate the level of service they provide. Because they do a substantial amount of work in the medical and healthcare industries, a system with strict terminology management was critical to the company.

“We wanted an independent technology solution, however. It didn’t appeal to us to use a solution that came from a company that could later compete with us for the services business,”

said Argondizzo. “We also thought that additional capabilities, like translation-oriented authoring assistance and even some forms of machine translation, could be helpful to us now and in the future. And ideally, we wanted a system where clients can review the work in the same environment.”

So, Argo also decided to try the Across Language Server. With a concurrent license model, they can enable and disable each translator as each project completes, saving money by allowing them to purchase a block of licenses but not more than they need at any given time. Client reviews can be performed online in side-by-side comparisons with comments made in the margins or as actual edits by any person in the chain who has been identified as having editing functionality. As a result, productivity has been enhanced and costs minimized.

This concern for independence from the LSP is not surprising. In a just [released report](#) from Common Sense Advisory, more than 60% of translation buyers indicated that technology independence was “somewhat important” or “very important” to them. Over 80% of buyers indicated that a “guarantee of independence” from a vendor would influence their purchasing decision.

Across Systems stands to gain from this indication. Since the acquisition of Idiom by SDL, Across is the only remaining independent technology provider with a comprehensive enterprise level solution and that does not provide translation services. Nackovski said the company is committed to remaining independent and to ensuring the backwards compatibility of its software as they add features.

“Independence is an important differentiator for us and our technology. It wouldn't make any sense to abandon that. Because we are privately held, we can make decisions based on a long-term view without regard to short-term shareholder value,” said Nackovski.

For LSPs, the main advantage of translation management software that meets the Basex criteria of a singular environment, friction-free knowledge sharing and an embedded community is that it allows the service provider to eliminate or minimize non-value tasks so that knowledge experts can concentrate their focus and efforts on quality improvement, consistency, and faster completion of projects. With these goals met, cost savings from increased efficiencies and happy customers are certain to be the result.