

DESIGNING GLOBAL E-LEARNING MATERIAL

There is more to going local than the translation of language but it is a good idea to start early on, not just when you are ready to roll out your program. You might need to localize some content, adapt other content to part of your audience, and create unique local content for another.

While preparing your content think as if you were wearing “global glasses”, which allow you to put your US culture and your US learning habits in the background and instead bring the “world” culture and learning habits to the forefront.

Slang, Idioms and Jargon

When you are writing for a global audience, avoid US specific slang, idioms, and jargon, or words recently “created” for a particular industry, as they are difficult to translate and might not have the same impact in another language.

Humor

Humor should be avoided too, although it is tempting, especially to try and liven up a class or capture the attention of some of the audience, to throw in a “funny sentence” or a quick joke. Remember humor is very culturally subjective and therefore difficult to translate and often deemed inappropriate by some audiences in a classroom setting.

Measurements, Dates and Calendars

Remember measurements, dates, and calendars are different outside the US, so allow for the necessary modification in the local versions. Additionally, keep in mind that the first day of the week is not always Sunday in a calendar in other cultures. Below are several examples of locales where Monday is the first day of the week.

ITALIAN

Ago		2008								
Lu	Ma	Me	Gi	Ve	Sa	Do				
28	29	30	31	1	2	3				
4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
11	12	13	14	15	16	17				
18	19	20	21	22	23	24				
25	26	27	28	29	30	31				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				

SIMPLIFIED CHINESE

八月		2008								
一	二	三	四	五	六	日				
28	29	30	31	1	2	3				
4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
11	12	13	14	15	16	17				
18	19	20	21	22	23	24				
25	26	27	28	29	30	31				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				

TURKISH

Agu		2008								
Pt	Sa	Çr	Pe	Cu	Ct	Pz				
28	29	30	31	1	2	3				
4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
11	12	13	14	15	16	17				
18	19	20	21	22	23	24				
25	26	27	28	29	30	31				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				

Tone of Voice

The “friendly” manner in which Americans sometimes conduct classes might not be perceived as such in other cultures which could be “suspicious” of all that is American, or all that comes from the US Headquarters of the large multinational they work for.

EXAMPLE: *This Test on ACME’s Culture of Ethics will prove your knowledge of the policies outlined in our Code of Conduct. Read each question and then select the best answer. Good luck, we know you can “do the right thing”!!*

In some cultures the words used in the last sentence are inappropriate, it would be considered trivializing the learning of something very important like the Code of Conduct of a company. The best solution is for the localization company to analyze the material before hand and create a style guide with an appropriate Tone of Voice for the audience and its culture for each country where the elearning material is to be used.

Sports References

Sports permeate culture to such an extent that everyday language incorporates game images and metaphors, especially here in the US. It must be remembered, though, that those images and metaphors are not always understood in other countries. Some sports are not so popular in other countries (take Baseball for instance).



Entering Personal Data

If users need to sign up, you need to consider the personal data that will need to be entered during the logon and registration processes. Address fields need to be studied for the different part of the world that the product is going to. Here are some examples of address information for different locales.

〒170-3293
東京都中央区銀座5-2-1
田中太郎様

Hans
Schmitt
Jubiläumsstrasse 93,
3005 Bern,
Switzerland

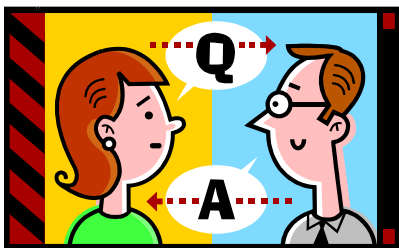
John
Smith
6550 Fairways Drive
Longmont
CO
80504

Additionally, for the format of names for Asian countries, the character sets used need to be considered. It may be necessary to modify your character entry method to accept non-Roman characters.

Moreover, when the course requires the registration of the student with personal data, a clear policy of secure data retention and storing must be in place to comply with Privacy regulations in other countries (especially European Union countries, Australia and Japan).

Graphics and Images

Graphics and images are an integral part of an elearning course, but create them or choose them with care. If there is text in them, make sure they have layers, so the text can be stripped out to be translated, make sure the translated words will fit on the image in the correct position and make sure the image is relevant to the non-US audience as well. Keep in mind that many languages use words that are much longer than their English counterparts.



Instead of this graphic, where the letters Q and A (for Questions and Answers) would be out of place in another language, or where those words might begin with a different letter, consider using another graphic, (like the one illustrated below), but avoiding the question mark, which in some alphabets does not exist at all.



UI Layout

If your course is web based, pay attention to the user interface. The screen layout might be attractive to an American audience, but it can become too full and confusing when translated, as text grows around 30% during translation.

THIS SCREEN IS TOO FULL. WHEN THE TEXT IS TRANSLATED IT WILL NOT FIT. REDUCING THE FONT SIZE MIGHT NOT BE AN OPTION

Interaction Model Name: Adaptive Scenario with Text

Meeting Etiquettes

Steve is a Project Manager and needs to organize a team meeting for the latest updates on an ongoing project.

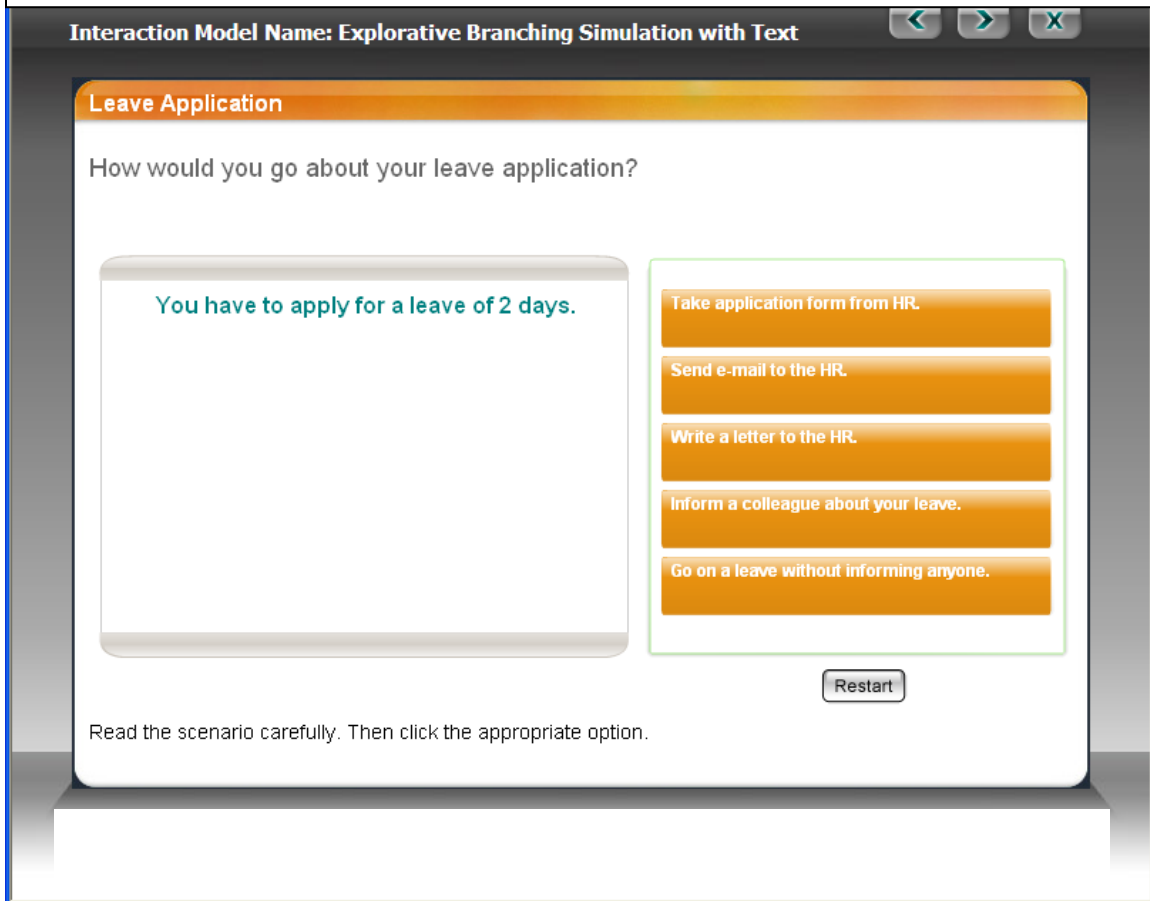
He meets with his team once a week but the usual timing was proving a little inconvenient for a few. Select the most appropriate way in which he should schedule and preside over the meeting.

- Send out the scheduler and meeting agenda five minutes before the meeting.
- Send out a mail to his team telling them they should all get together (without Steve) and have a general discussion about all their live projects.
- He should simply shoot out an email asking all team members to come over to the conference room.
- Steve should send out a scheduler to all the team members stating the time, venue, agenda, and duration of the meeting.
- He can walk over to the conference room and assume that everyone else in his team will follow.

Restart

Read the scenario carefully. Then answer the question by clicking the appropriate option.

DESPITE USING THE SAME DESIGN, THIS SCREEN HAS MORE ROOM FOR EXPANSION DURING LOCALIZATION OF THE TEXT.



Voice and Video

Voice and video are very effective ways of conducting an elearning course, but the Localization Process becomes much more demanding and has to be planned in advance, managed with knowledge and adherence to the time line and the project goals.

The tone of voice used in the US might not be the best for a specific country. In other cultures, for technical topics, a male voice is preferred rather than a female voice, or a more quiet tone is better than a more solicitous one.

Anyone who has seen dubbed foreign movies knows that dubbing a video is not the most effective way to render it in a foreign language by simply re-using it with voice translation, as lip synch becomes an issue.

Sometimes a good solution is to have the original video running on one side of the screen, and have the translated text scroll on the other. This is particularly effective when you have a notable figure speaking (for instance, the CEO of the company explains why it is important that all employees complete a “Company Ethics” course) and instead of dubbing his speech, it is better to scroll its translation and lower the volume of his voice, while still having his presence on the screen.

Authoring tools

Authoring tools are a very efficient and rapid answer to creating an elearning course. There are authoring tools that will shave 40-50% of the time needed to create a course from scratch, using Java or Flash. Unfortunately a lot of them are very US centric and would not fit well into a “Global” situation. Some of them contain “game” packs called “Jeopardy”, “Million Dollar Quiz”, and “Wheel of Fortune”. On the other hand, some programs feature videos with a “ticker style” running commentary which allows the translated text to run and be visible to the user.

When using an authoring tool, make sure that it has “multilingual capabilities” and therefore takes into account accented and extended characters, double byte characters (if the intention is to localize into Chinese, Japanese and Korean) and bi-directional scripts (if localizing into Hebrew or Arabic).

508 Compliance and the European e-Inclusion Initiative

Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. The law applies to all US Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology and to any company that does business with the US Federal Government, to give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others. Moreover, the European Union has a similar access initiative, called e-Inclusion.

Therefore, any elearning course that could potentially touch this sphere needs to be designed to give such accessibility to its users.

Conclusion

Translation is definitely a necessary part of having your elearning course ready for the world, but preparing it for other cultures while designing is a much more important step, and starting while you are still in the storyboard phase is paramount for a successful project. Finally, having an experienced globalization partner that can assist you from conception to final publication will ensure the success of your globalization effort.