A PROCUREMENT GUIDE TO GLOBAL CONTENT PURCHASING

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1. INTRODUCTION

LOCAL LANGUAGE CONTENT IS BECOMING A NECESSITY FOR MORE AND MORE COMPANIES AS THEY SEEK INTERNATIONAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Internet connectivity is growing across the world, with the demand for digital multilingual content being driven by exponential growth in multimedia and e-commerce. This has been further strengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Common Sense Advisory's '**Can't Read, Won't Buy**' study, consumers from non-Anglophone countries overwhelmingly prefer content in their mother tongue.[1] Approximately 74% of respondents also say they're more likely to purchase from the same brand again if the after-sales care is in their language.

Leading Markets for Ecommerce Growth

Calculated by 2018 to 2023 ecommerce revenue (projected)

Market	Five-Year Growth
China	70.7%
France	45.6%
Russia	44.2%
Germany	35.6%
Japan	26.8%
South Korea	25.9%

1. Can't Read, Won't Buy, CSA Research.

At the heart of any international growth strategy is the need to execute a communications programme which drives growth. There is increasing pressure on global brands to be sophisticated with their local marketing approach in order to achieve customer intimacy, meaning a complex array of formats and channels have arisen. Traditional suppliers of language services have picked up on this trend and are keen to sell as many words as possible. Indeed, over the last ten years, the global language service industry has doubled in size, reaching a total value of $46.9 billion in 2019[1]. However, as brands recognise the increasing cost of this, conversations are turning to ROI and cost reduction. Increasingly, procurement departments are being engaged to help drive down language service costs and purchasers are looking for **tech solutions to help keep content budgets under control**.[2]

Despite this rapidly evolving landscape, the most commonly used model for purchasing localisation or copywriting services is still a per-word rate based on the known or estimated number of words to be localised or written. In a bid to keep pricing 'simple', word rates are becoming highly opaque as they fail to represent the changes taking place in how multilingual content is delivered at scale, particularly for media and marketing. Purchasers are being subjected to hidden costs and suppliers are trying to make the numbers work behind the scenes.

This white paper seeks to further understanding of the processes through which effective multilingual content can be created, by explaining what is driving costs for suppliers, and helping purchasers ask more informed questions during their procurement processes. Locaria

believes in only creating content that drives performance, not in content for content's sake. We also see it as an important part of our client relationships to ensure transparency and control over localisation spending. "We Grow Together" is one of our core values by which we work to push ourselves, our clients and our industry forward. This paper is one initiative to improve pricing transparency in multilingual content and marketing services, build trust, and increase understanding of the true value that multilingual content brings.

Who is this white paper for?

This paper is primarily designed to help purchasers of multilingual content or marketing services. These services include but are not limited to multilingual PPC, SEO, social media, website localisation, multimedia, and market research. At the production level, this can include translation, localisation, transcreation, copywriting, transcription, subtitling, dubbing and voiceover.

Procurement teams are increasingly involved in the supply management of content service providers, particularly as larger organisations seek to bring together all the different streams of content production to maximise any economies of scale, or streamline their processes, while also driving content consistency. For many brands, this is a relatively new endeavour for their procurement function. As such, this paper seeks to help keep procurement teams up to date with the myriad processes and considerations involved in purchasing content or multilingual marketing services, so they can better evaluate potential suppliers and increase purchasing transparency.

2. Market size of the global multilingual marketing industry 2009–2021, Statista.
3. AI, Machine Translation and the Future of Language, Locaria.

The key stakeholders and decision makers for purchasing these services may be many, even within one organisation. Marketing Directors, Editors, Brand Managers, Ecommerce Managers, Media Planners, Paid Social Planners, and Heads of Planning are typically all involved in creating brand or advertising content using external suppliers. Likewise, Customer Service, Legal, Compliance, and even Distribution teams create content that may need to be consumed by speakers of multiple languages, be they customers or internal employees.

Where there is a significant volume of regular content being created that requires translating into other languages, companies may employ Localisation Managers to oversee this process either by handling the content internally, or outsourcing to suppliers, or a mix of both. This paper may also benefit Localisation Managers when seeking to manage their stakeholders and increase internal understanding of the economics driving language and content services.

Lastly, the principles of transparent pricing apply regardless of industry vertical, so this paper is relevant to all purchasers. However, it will be particularly relevant to those seeking nuanced, creative content that supports brand awareness, and customer acquisition across borders, as those processes tend to be more complex, evolve at speed and have a direct impact on revenue generation.

What this white paper covers

The paper begins by looking at the building blocks of cost within the content production supply chain. As a first step we will review the global nature of the industry and the relative costs of languages. Then we will review if and how economies of scale can be utilised to better manage costs.

The second section looks at a key point of pricing negotiation for any purchaser of multilingual content and marketing services: output quality. We will discuss how best to assess and manage content quality and make realistic trade-offs between costs and desired business outcomes, utilising a broad range of content creation methodologies. We will cover the specific needs of online content that must be addressed in order to deliver quality outcomes and how digital marketing KPIs can be used to put the customer at the heart of quality decisions.

We will then cover pricing models, looking at where word counts drive costs and therefore should be the main purchasing unit, but also at other content types that accrue cost in a different way and need to be priced and managed accordingly. In particular we will look at marketing content and a performance-driven approach to its production and pricing. We will also examine how new technologies are changing the content production supply chain and driving different costs for suppliers that are not always clear to purchasers.

Lastly, we will look at the shifting skill sets required to respond to the complex nature of multilingual content creation in an efficient way, making the case for continued investment in human expertise to support the effective use of all the methodologies and new technologies now available.

Throughout the paper we will make **recommendations** to purchasers of multilingual marketing and content services, highlighting the right questions to ask when looking for a supplier and negotiating contracts. Lastly we will summarise the key points of the paper and call for both suppliers and purchasers to work together to increase transparency on the value-add of each step of the content creation process, ensuring pricing is meaningful for both parties.

# 2. THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF CONTENT PRODUCTION PRICING

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ALL PRICING MODELS ARE BUILT ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE RELATIVE COST OF LANGUAGES, THE VOLUME OF CONTENT TO BE PROCESSED AND DELIVERED, AND THE METHODOLOGY OF DELIVERY, WHICH DRIVES THE EXPECTED QUALITY OF THE OUTPUT

The relative cost of languages

As this paper will discuss later, technology and automation continue to make an impact on content production processes, but as a rule of thumb, and certainly for creative or marketing content, the majority of language production is built on human expertise and has human endeavour at its foundation. Arguably all language service providers employ people to write or localise content, often across a wide range of languages. These individuals often work on a freelance basis, any may have specialisms such as legal translation, medical translation, or social media copywriting. They tend to charge language service providers a fee based on their word rate or hourly rate. While their experience, training and industry expertise will have a bearing on their rates, in general the biggest driver of differences in pricing is the language pair they provide the service for.

Most localisation is still carried out from English into another "target language", with the target language being the driver of the cost. Broadly, language costs map to relative GDP, but there are always notable exceptions for "rare languages" and dialects, where there may be fewer qualified linguistic resources, or when demand for a certain language spikes. An example of a rare language could be Norway which is a wealthy market, however the population is small and has a scarcity of linguists which means that demand outstrips supply and inflates pricing. Similarly, events such as the Chinese New Year or the Olympics may attract a spike in demand for certain language combinations.

The word or hourly rates charged by the individual writers or translators form the basic building blocks of the cost of production, so underlie all pricing models.

Average Price per Word vs Language for Media Localisation
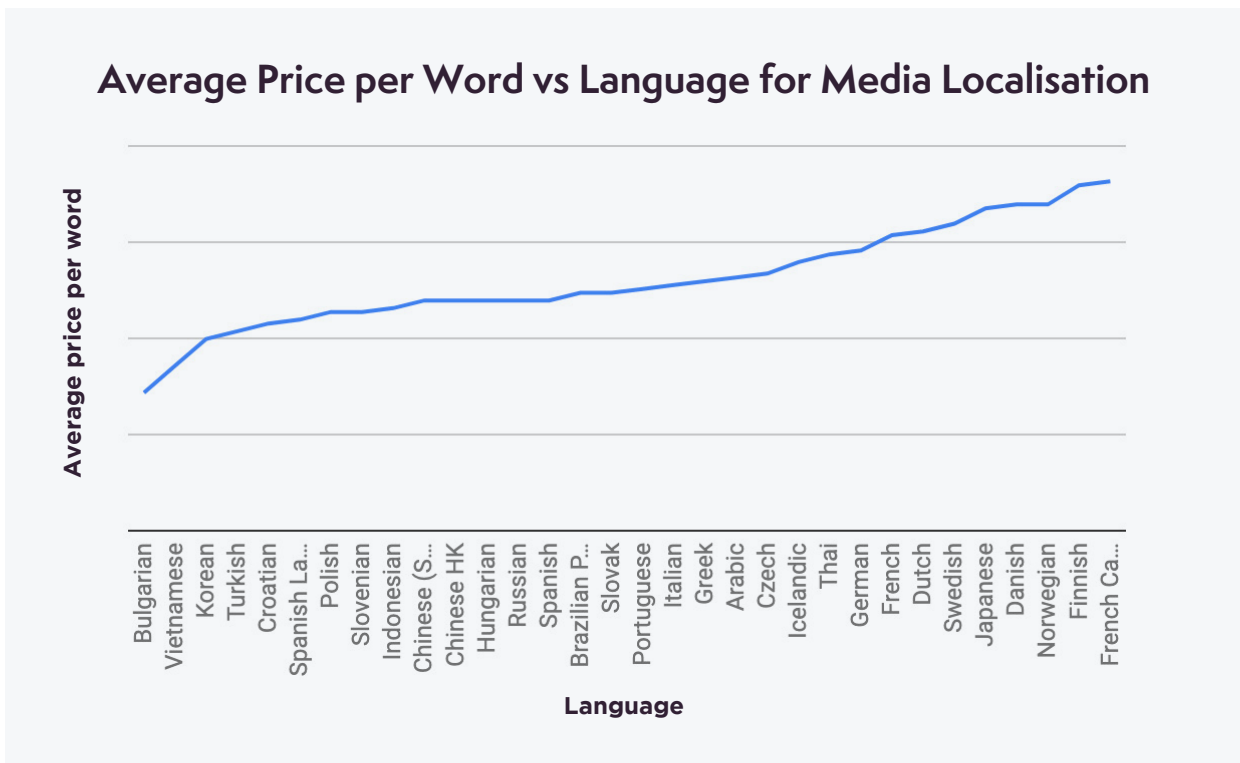
As an example of the way rates can differ across languages, the above chart refers to linguists with media localisation experience. There is a disparity in the cost of similarly skilled linguists, due entirely to their specific language skill. A similar trend is evident in hourly rates.

When procuring multilingual marketing or content services, it is worth considering which languages and markets will drive the highest demand. **Purchasers must also understand that the cost to suppliers of serving Nordic markets, for example, will be significantly higher than Latin America. If this is not evident in pricing, it is worth asking why. As the rates vary by market, this should be considered in the business case for creating content for a specific market.**

ECONOMIES OF SCALE? WHEN THE WORD COUNT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

ELLEME
Madeleine leather tote bag
£315.00

www.selfridges.com

BOTTEGA VENETA
Small leather tote bag
£1,185.00

LOEWE
Cushion leather tote bag
£1,550.00

The concept of a word count seems simple enough at face value. It is essentially a tally of all the words in a piece of text. Take for example the short product descriptions highlighted above.

The total word count would be 4 + 4 + 4 = 12. However, you can also see that all three descriptions repeat the phrase "leather tote bag", so if we only count unique words, we actually get: 3 ('leather tote bag') + 1 (Madeleine) + 1 (small) + 1 (cushion) = 6.

This is important because many straightforward translation projects are still priced per word on a word rate, so as a purchaser, if you count repeated words only once, the total number of words reduces and therefore lowers the cost.

This is called the "weighted word count" and can drive significant cost reductions. It is facilitated by a piece of software called a Translation Memory (TM), a database that records all content that has been localised, including both the original "source" and the resulting localised "target" content. Over time as more content is accumulated in the TM, more repetitions occur and with the use of additional technology, the localisation of new content can be partly automated, again reducing the cost and increasing delivery speed.

When purchasing content services, it is important to consider the repetitiveness of the content you're creating or localising and to ensure that the right technology is used by the supplier to maximise the benefits of any repetitions. It is also wise to ensure you have ownership of the TM, so you can move this database between suppliers as required and continue to benefit from it, rather than having to build it up again. **If purchasing on a word count basis, you should always ensure costs are calculated on the weighted word count.** In this way large volumes of repetitive content in the same language can drive economies of scale over time.

However, it is important to be realistic about how repetitive your content is. If it is highly tailored, literary, or editorial, it is unlikely that there will be as many repeated phrases that can be reused. Likewise, it takes time to build a TM, so the efficiencies will not be immediately available. Lastly there are no economies of scale across languages, so a high volume of content made up of lots of small volumes across multiple languages will not reduce costs.

The above is a simplified explanation of weighted word counts and TMs. For more detail on how this might be calculated for your content needs, Locaria can offer a tailored estimate.

Buyers need to understand what the purpose of the delivered content will be in order to make a sound decision on the investment required. It is important to work with a supplier who can facilitate a variety of methodologies and, more importantly, can advise on which methodology is best suited to which context, language and platform. It is possible to develop a portfolio approach where a suite of methodologies can be employed at different times, in different languages and for different content types, that flexes along with commercial goals and quality expectations.

Content providers love to talk about quality. We go to great lengths to show we take Quality Assurance seriously, often with teams dedicated to managing a whole process around quality. Indeed, the below illustration of content creation methodologies uses "quality" as a way of differentiating between the types of output purchasers can expect. When it comes to defining what we mean by quality, however, there is still no simple explanation. Even leaders in the fashionable field of **AI and machine translation**, where statistics drive outputs, cannot agree on a single metric to reliably measure the quality of their output. Given this challenge, how can buyers of multilingual content services assess whether the deliveries they receive are acceptable and worth their investment?

The good news is that there are some objective measures of quality. While languages continuously evolve, there are widely accepted norms that can be objectively measured such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, orthography, and to some extent vocabulary. Many, but not all major world languages have organisations dedicated to preserving their 'linguistic purity' and standardising linguistic rules, as well as monitoring developments within the language.

The most well-known bodies are the **Académie Française**, which is tasked as the official authority on the French language, as well as the **Accademia della Crusca**, the official body of the Italian language. Linguistic quality for those languages can be measured against the norms put in place by such bodies.

Looking beyond relying on linguistic regulators, there are many tools which can pick up objective errors that linguists can use to check their own work – for example, **Verifika**, **Xbench**, **Grammarly** and spell checker software. As such, language service providers should easily be able to evidence how they identify and remove objective errors from the target content they deliver.

Ultimately, if purchasers lack expertise in the target language it can be difficult to assess the linguistic quality of the content they receive from vendors. Unfortunately, there are many unscrupulous companies and individuals posing as qualified translators. They use free online tools to localise content quickly and cheaply, knowing full well that the purchaser will find it hard to assess the quality. When purchasers discover these 'translator scammers'[4] and refuse to pay, the scammers often threaten them with reputational damage.

With this in mind, purchasers need to pay close attention to identifying legitimate content service providers with robust processes in place to manage quality. One way is to check that suppliers are accredited with international standards such as ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 17100:2015 (Translation Services). These standards ensure that the services provided will consistently meet customer requirements and the provider will strive for continual improvement.

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4. **Translators Scammers Directory**, 2019.

3. 'QUALITY' EXPECTATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON COSTS

When creating multilingual content, there is a plethora of methodologies available to use, beyond just "translation". Broadly speaking, these can be broken down into six types, from Statistical Machine Translation & Human Post Editing (SMT & HPE) through to Copywriting, although new approaches are emerging all the time. Different methodologies result in different outcomes in terms of content quality, delivery cost and lead time. A summary of these is given below.

Content Creation Methodologies

Statistical Machine Translation & Human Post Editing
- Very cheap and fast
- Very low quality
- For simple, repetitive, non-creative and non-critical content

Increasing Quality, Cost & Time

Human Translation
- Entirely based on the source, no adaptation to format
- May include review
- As close and direct as possible
- For simple, standardised content with limited local nuance

Increasing Quality, Cost & Time

Localisation
- Translation of core messages
- Adapt and optimised to target format
- Includes review and support local nuances
- For a more natural, authentic feel, but limited results for creative content

Increasing Quality, Cost & Time

Transcreation
- Extract tone of voice, style and intent
- Recreate in target language and format
- Authentic and nuanced
- For creative and commercial content expected to drive engagement or emotional responses

Increasing Quality, Cost & Time

Origination
- Background and data research of topic
- Originate target without source, directly into appropriate format
- Highly fluent and nuanced with no influence of another language or style
- For creative and commercial content expected to drive engagement or emotional responses
- Important for branding or humour

Increasing Quality, Cost & Time

Copywriting
- Research subject and devise topic independently
- Highly fluent and nuanced with no influence of another language style
- For creative and commercial content expected to drive engagement or emotional responses
- Important for branding or humour

Increasing Quality, Cost & Time

Online content quality

Online content is growing at an exponential rate. Internet users now make up 57% of the world's population, with **4.4 billion people being connected to the internet**. On average, 1 million new users join the internet every day. Social media users **grew by 328 million** between October 2018 and October 2019. Video content has also seen a boom, with 78% of people watching online videos every week and 55% watching every day. Approximately **72 hours of video** are uploaded to YouTube every 60 seconds.

English has enjoyed the status of the 'language of the internet' for some time but is being increasingly challenged by other languages. In 2009, a study released by UNESCO looking at languages used online between 1996 and 2008 found that in 1998 the percentage of websites in English was almost 80%, but by 2005, this dropped to 45%[5]. According to the British Academy for the Humanities and Social Services and the Guardian, English's relative share of cyberspace had shrunk to around 30% in 2015[6]. Chinese online usage, for comparison, grew by 1277.4% between 2000 and 2010. French, German, Spanish and Chinese are all in the top ten languages online, and collectively out of nearly 6000 extant languages used globally, the top ten languages presently make up 82% of the total content on the internet[7].

However, in order to ensure that online content is of high enough quality to meet business objectives, and represents brands in a positive light when entering new markets, several other challenges exist. Content service providers also have to ensure channel compliance, tone of voice and cultural alignment in addition to linguistic accuracy, before they can claim to deliver "high quality" online content.

Online channel compliance

The world's leading search engines (Google, Baidu, Yahoo, Naver, Yandex) all have rules designed to ensure that the web pages that appear in their search results are of good quality and relevant to the user's search intent. These rules are continually changing. In addition, there is a wide variety of digital advertising formats, which are also constantly evolving, each with their own character limits, rules around punctuation and other quirks. In order for a brand's content to be displayed, it must meet both linguistic and formatting standards. As such online channel compliance must be a factor in any quality measure for digital content.

5. Twelve years of measuring linguistic diversity in the Internet: balance and perspectives, UNESCO, 2009.
6. The digital language divide, The Guardian, 2015.
7. Ibid.

Tone of voice

The more subjective measures of quality such as tone of voice, style, humour and brand alignment are equally hard to manage. Style guides and termbases can act as tools to help vendors and purchasers reach a consensus on these matters. For example, it can be agreed that certain terms are never used to refer to a client's products or services. In one case at Locaria, a luxury fashion retailer that specialised in selling off-season branded products for a reduced price, specified that the word "discount" should never be used in its content, as it felt that this would undermine the brand's luxury positioning. These kinds of guides need to be produced in the target language and regularly reviewed, updated and signed off by the purchaser. Once an approach is agreed, vendors should be able to demonstrate a consistent implementation of it throughout the content they deliver.

Cultural alignment

When it comes to content intended to support marketing objectives, creative quality is also highly important. During the COVID-19 pandemic, different brands' **creative responses** have helped them stand out. However, misunderstanding cultural sensitivities can make or break the success of online marketing content, as evidenced by **Dolce & Gabbana's** continuing challenges with the Chinese market. Content service providers should be able to tell purchasers if the messages they want to champion in their content will work across cultures.

For example, gender neutrality is a hot topic across the Western world, with much discussion around **how to make sure content is inclusive**[8]. Some studies suggest that "avoiding masculine pronouns can play a significant role in decreasing gender bias and increasing support for minority genders."[9] Vendors need to come to an agreement with purchasers as to what extent the principles of gender neutrality should be included into their writing. Below you can see how different approaches work better for different languages depending on their grammar.

In English, for instance, most nouns and adjectives are not gender-specific. Some nouns were traditionally gendered, but usage of these terms is being phased out in favour of more neutral language. Feminine forms of nouns like actress, chairwoman and headmistress, are slowly being replaced by neutral forms such as actor, chair and headteacher. Alongside this, gender-neutral pronouns like 'they' are gaining traction in some areas.

8. Inclusive Writing, S'il Vous Plait, Locaria.
9. Language influences mass opinion toward gender and LGBT equality, by Margit Tavits and Efrén O. Pérez, published on PNAS.

However, languages like French, Italian and Spanish are heavily gendered, which presents a challenge for those looking to make content more inclusive. More recently, the demand for gender-neutral language has grown in Spain, Italy, Germany, and France. In France in particular, many believe that the gendered aspect of French disadvantages women and gender-fluid people. There have been many calls for inclusive writing[10] to become part of common French parlance. The neutral pronoun *ille/iel* (equivalent to 'they') has been gaining traction among many younger French speakers. *Elle* has started rising in popularity in Spanish, and *hen* in Swedish is already relatively common. As the demand for more gender-neutral language increases, brands need to decide whether they will adhere to traditional conventions or opt for a more inclusive perspective.

It is important for purchasers to understand where the cost of the consultative effort of ensuring channel compliance, getting the tone of voice right, and providing insights into cultural sensitivities is covered in the fees charged by the vendor. Is this an expected value-add, or something that requires ring-fenced investment and effort? If the content delivered fails to align to the cultural norms of the target market, is it still good enough? Are providers prepared to conduct this additional quality check? Can they provide bolt-on consultative services or projects that can ensure cultural alignment? If so, how is that charged?

10. The Push to Make French Gender-Neutral, The Atlantic, 2017.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS? CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AS THE ULTIMATE QUALITY MEASURE

With such an array of objective and subjective data points to consider when assessing "quality", how can purchasers know if they are getting value for money and effectively performance manage their vendors? Assessing the quality of content delivered by a vendor for online use can be challenging for purchasers, if they lack the in-house expertise to assess all areas. For instance, marketing managers can become frustrated with too much time being spent on subjective conversations between their internal stakeholders and suppliers about what the 'best word' is for something.

The good news is that when it comes to digital marketing content, there is a useful community of stakeholders who can and will tell you if your quality is up to scratch: the end customer. How target customers engage with your content, and the content they themselves create around your products and services, will tell you if the quality of your content is good enough. While branding preferences should be respected, using marketing data that acts as a proxy for customer preference, such as keyword research, can expedite decisions on quality by showing what words are being used by customers to describe a particular product or service. Including these words will increase customer intimacy and relevancy, supporting a better return on content investment.

Furthermore, poorly written advertising copy, that is truncated or fails to stay within the format, and copy that lacks locally relevant creativity, will be overlooked and suffer a low click-through-rate (CTR). Social media content can suffer by receiving fewer likes and shares.

Drop-off rates from videos and website bounce rates will spike. Ultimately, conversions will suffer from poor-quality content. Importantly, what constitutes good content can vary significantly depending on the language, culture, platform, and target audience. This adds complexity beyond just language expertise and demands a wider understanding of the marketing context.

The beauty of online content is that customer engagement can be tracked with a variety of KPIs. **With access to digital marketing data, performance against these KPIs can be fed back into the content creation process to ensure that content is continually optimised towards increased customer engagement. Purchasers should look to find vendors that can evidence this feedback loop in their content creation processes.**

Summary: the cost of "quality"

When comparing commercial offerings from vendors, purchasers need to understand what the definition of "quality" is, how this will be tracked and managed, and how this is covered by the fees. The effort and resources required to run a spell check are very different from providing cultural consultancy or regular reporting on content performance against specific marketing KPIs. This should be reflected in commercial agreements.

This paper goes on to look at the different commercial structures that are evolving in multilingual content services and where they work best to reflect the actual service purchasers are receiving.

4. MAKING SENSE OF PRICING MODELS

WHEN WORD RATES WORK: SIMPLE LOCALISATION PROJECTS

The per word pricing method can be effective for traditional translation projects where large volumes of content require translation, with little complexity in terms of target formats. It also works well for highly repetitive or standardised content, such as post-purchase content, high-volume product copy and in-the-box paperwork. It should be used where little analysis is required to ascertain that the content produced is both necessary and will definitely be effective. For example, the recent introduction of GDPR legislation has required companies to add clauses to their contractual terms, privacy statements on their websites and other key pieces of information. A legal obligation is a clear business need, so localising based on word rate would make sense. Likewise, distance selling regulations require online retailers to provide a returns service. It's not hard to work out the information needed to make the returns service effective, as it is likely already available in English and the content driven by outside parties like distribution partners. This means the case for investing in localisation is clear and easy to make.

The workflow for such projects is relatively straightforward. While there is effort in the set-up, quality assurance and sign-off processes, the majority of the work is in the content creation phase. Therefore, rolling up the costs of set-up and QA into a price based on the number of words simplifies things for purchasers, and broadly reflects the value-add . Often, technical set-up and project management can also be automated, so do not drive much additional cost and so can be blended into the word rate.

Content Creation Process

| SET UP & BACKGROUND RESEARCH | CONTENT CREATION | QUALITY ASSURANCE | CLIENT REVIEW & SIGN-OFF |
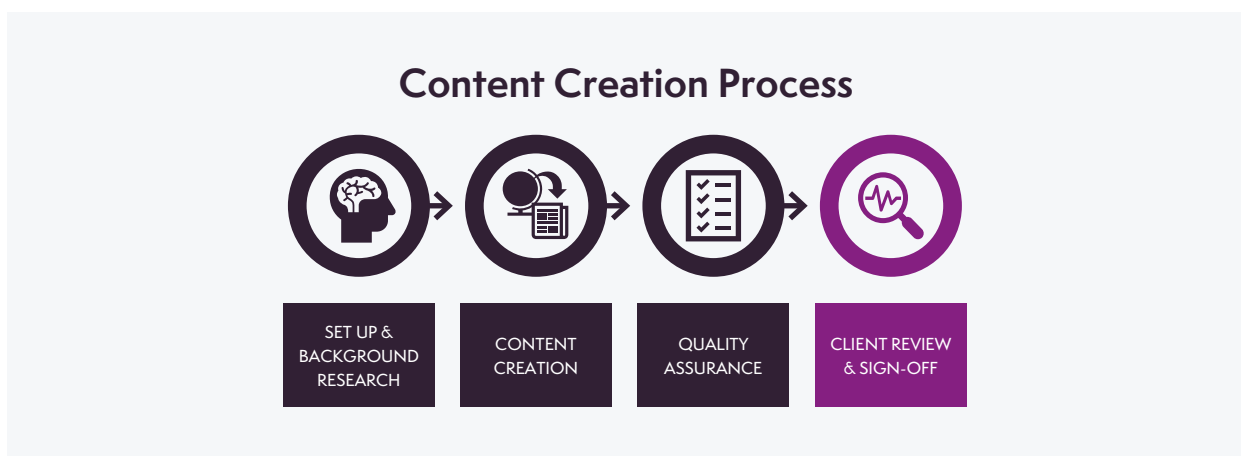
WHERE WORD RATES FALL DOWN

Digital channels such as websites, search engines and social media have revolutionised our understanding and tracking of how customers engage with content. We can now see how many impressions and clicks various content types get, and how this flows through to conversions or purchases. This type of "performance" data applies to any sector and can be used to indicate what content is really required to drive commercial objectives. If purchasers simply use a word rate to translate all words, with no analysis of the KPIs available through online channels, they run the risk of creating content that is neither required nor effective.

Utilising a simplistic word rate-based pricing model was common in the early years of international e-commerce. It aligned with the idea that everything must be translated and that translation is a one-off production exercise to get something launched. Often there would be content that was highly relevant to one market, but unnecessary in other markets, but because it existed in English, it got added to the word count and localised. Purchasing content through a word rate model incentivised suppliers to sell more words than were needed, regardless of the commercial impact of the content created.

Today, a website localisation project may have significant word counts in repetitive structures such as product and category descriptions,

and straightforward functional copy in English, all of which has been carefully finessed for SEO. Indeed, any unnecessary content for the target market may also have been identified and stripped out. However, if the English terms used are directly translated, with the failure to research and map appropriate target language keywords to the site ahead of the bulk content creation work, search visibility and therefore traffic from the target market will be affected. This SEO work requires linguistic skills different from translation, and not easily reflected in a word rate.

Likewise, localising paid or organic media copy without first utilising the data made available by the advertising platforms, runs the risk of creating content that at best fails to be found or engage your audience, and at worst actively damages quality scores and alienates customers. A properly skilled analysis of the data surrounding the topics to be localised not only avoids waste, it also identifies opportunities to create content that may have otherwise been missed. A good example of how powerful the combination of online data analysis and localisation is can be found in our blog post **Pants vs Trousers**, and we call it Performance Linguistics™.

THE PERFORMANCE LINGUISTICS™ PROCESS

SET UP & BACKGROUND RESEARCH	CROSS-CHANNEL KEYWORD RESEARCH	CONTENT CREATION	QUALITY ASSURANCE	ON-GOING ANALYSIS & TESTING	REPORTING & OPTIMISATION

As shown above, the Performance Linguistics™ process is more involved than the simple localisation process. It is also best performed in an iterative fashion, where consumer behaviour, interpreted through the proxy of online KPIs, is constantly fed into content production processes. This not only ensures purchasers avoid creating content for the sake of it, but also provides an opportunity for competitive advantage. For example, through this process for one hospitality client we identified that while "roof-top pool" was a high-performing term in the UK, deserving the creation of additional content, the same was not true in France. Simply by identifying that the term "cabana" had a much higher search volume in France,

and adapting the content accordingly, the client both avoided creating ineffective content and harnessed a demand they had previously not been aware of.

The Performance Linguistics™ approach is a consultative one, and like SEO, is best delivered by retained expertise that becomes intimately familiar with the client's business and objectives. With this knowledge they can help purchasers navigate the myriad data points, content creation methodologies and linguistic nuances of different languages and markets to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of multilingual content creation.

Some suppliers may still attempt to roll up the cost of any analytical effort into word counts, but this should be questioned, for the following reasons:

1. Much of the research which could be done has no end point. An analyst could keep looking for associated words with good search volume ad infinitum. If this effort is covered by the word rate, how much time is actually being spent on this and who decides how much is enough?

2. Most translators do not have access to the tools nor the expertise to perform keyword research or other types of performance analysis. A specialised team is required to do this, combining digital marketing and linguistic expertise. This has a different cost profile, which may not map to language costs. If there is no transparency on this, how can purchasers be confident the output is fit for purpose?

3. Transcreation, origination or copywriting based on a solid understanding of the client's business, target customer and objectives is much more effective for creating copy that is recognised by search engines and customers as authentic and relevant. However, these methodologies have a significant research element, meaning they drive different content throughput rates compared to straightforward localisation. These throughputs are better priced according to time or output (e.g. number of URLs per hour)

Where suppliers claim to be offering digital KPI analysis and optimisation as part of a simple localisation service, but not showing it separately in their fees, at best they are failing to represent their value-add, but at worst they are simply translating keywords from English, which will not perform.

Finally, if you've pursued a simple localisation process and are wondering why you are not seeing the performance you expected from a certain market, what can you do? It is never too late to take a performance-driven approach to your content, be it existing or new. Retrospective correction projects are possible, where content is audited against commercial expectations using both performance KPIs and traditional quality measures, and a series of recommendations can be made to optimise existing copy. Again, the use of a word rate to price this fails to demonstrate that the volume of words is not the driver in securing engagement with your content, nor representative of the process required to understand what the consumer of the content needs.
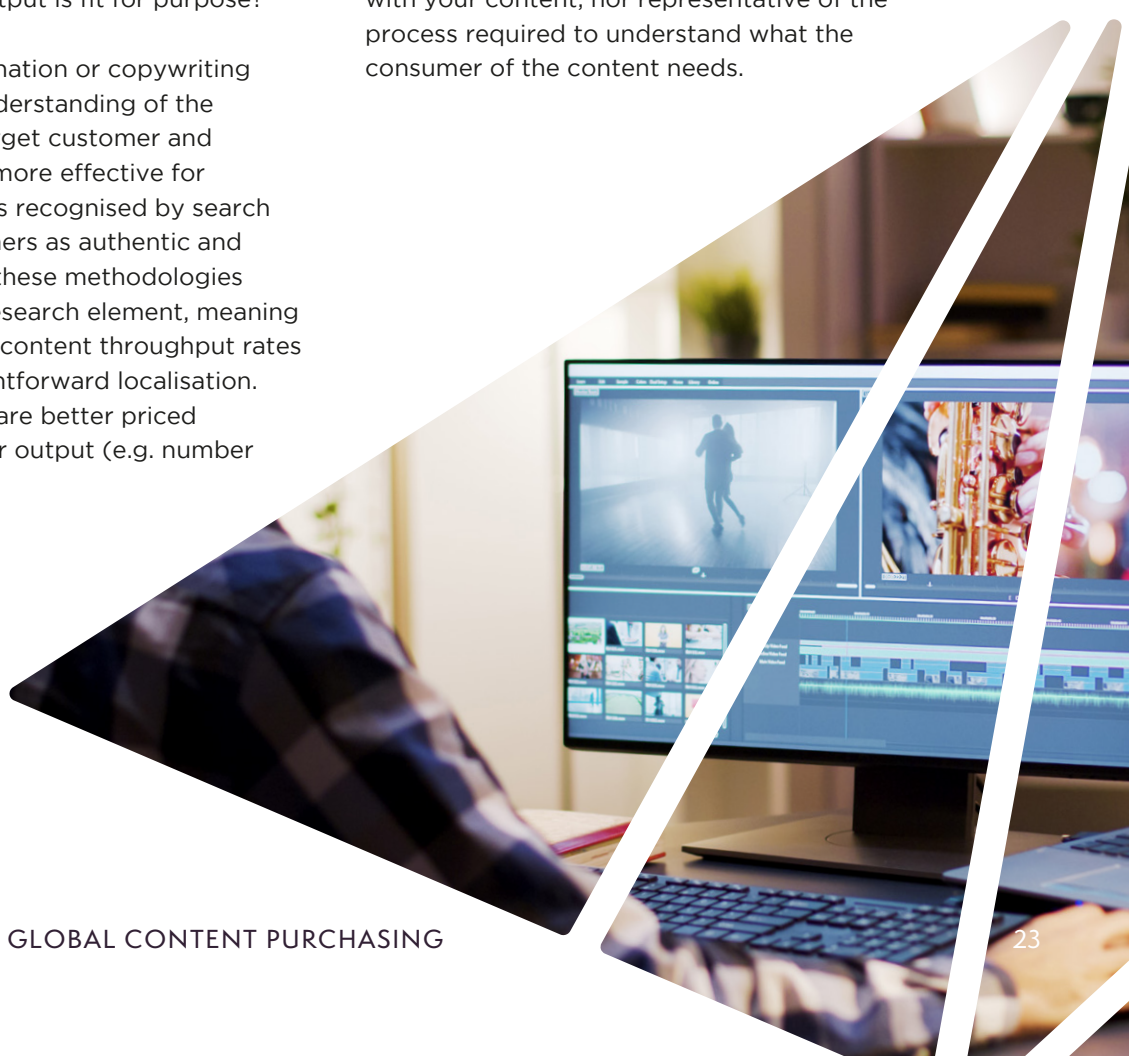
THE UNSEEN COSTS OF MACHINE TRANSLATION

Multilingual content services are also undergoing widespread digital transformation. Developments in AI have increased the viability of machine translation (MT), which is already having a significant effect on industry dynamics and expectations around pricing. In our previous white paper, we reviewed the use of AI in language services and directly interviewed linguists to see how they thought it would impact the industry. The results showed that while there is widespread awareness of changing dynamics, the need for human input is expected to remain. While it would be reasonable to expect linguists to fear MT as a competitor to their services, it is increasingly seen as more of a tool than a threat, with the linguist's role becoming more focused on delivering final quality.

The main advantage of machine translation is that it can reduce the cost and time spent on large volumes of simple text translation. Repetitive work such as word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence translation can be processed almost instantaneously, which allows for the streamlining of translation.

However, there are limits to machine translation. For marketing content that is consumed at speed and aims to garner an emotional response, AI technology has not yet developed the ability to write with a consistent tone of voice or replicate the cultural nuances of a target market in its copy. Some automatic translations still make grammatical or syntax mistakes, or fail to find an understandable translation for colloquial or well-known phrases.

New technologies will continue to drive production innovation, but as discussed above, currently all content production services are built on human foundations. Even machine translation requires a significant corpus of existing material in order to start to work, which will have been created by a human. As more content is created by the MT engine and fed back into the translation memory, over time there is more and more machine-driven content, but an initial volume of content is always required to start the process. This is why machine translation output quality varies so much across languages. Simply put, "smaller" languages have less content for the machine to learn from, and so are less likely to deliver fluent results.

Furthermore, there are still very few instances where clients are happy to use machine-translated content without a degree of review or human post-editing (HPE) to ensure the content is at least readable, if not perfectly fluent. Depending on the source and target language, the creativity and technical nature of the text and the desired business outcome, the effort of HPE can outweigh the savings of using MT. Indeed, the MT part of the delivery process is just one step amongst many human processes, as the below image illustrates.

Machine Translation Process

CONTENT CREATION	FILE PREPARATION	APPLY MT ENGINE	REVIEW BY HUMAN TRANSLATOR	QA	DELIVERY
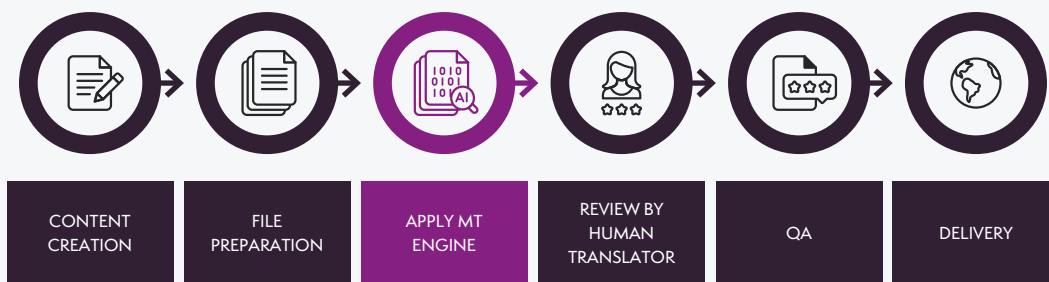
While there can be a degree of automation in requests, file preparation and delivery, the overall production process still requires a significant degree of human intervention, driving costs for suppliers. As such, **purchasers need to be realistic about the cost savings of MT, or prepared to make concessions on the quality of the output. It is wise to see an example of the output from the supplier's MT engine and agree on the level of HPE required before starting any project. If projects are simply priced on an MT word rate that is lower than a human translation word rate, with no additional costs included for post editing and project management, purchasers should ask how these processes are covered by the supplier.**

MT is a valuable tool for language service providers that can deliver benefits to clients, but must be considered as part of the overall arsenal of content creation methodologies and applied appropriately depending on business needs. This leads onto the most important role that the humans in multilingual marketing and content services can perform for their clients: being the expert consultant that can make sense of the dizzying array of methodologies, linguistic considerations and digital regulations, and come up with the best approach to multilingual content creation for their clients' business needs.

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5. A SHIFTING SKILL SET TAKING CONTENT SERVICES FORWARD

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WHEN GLOBALISATION STARTED TO DRIVE THE NEED FOR TRANSLATION FOR MANY BRANDS, THE INITIAL RESPONSE TO THIS WAS TO FIND LANGUAGE SPEAKERS WITHIN THE COMPANY AND ASK THEM TO TRANSLATE CONTENT

Gradually, there was an increased appreciation for how qualified translators could do a better job, improve customer experience, and better protect the brand. This increased opportunities for language service providers and allowed internal staff to return to what they were best at.

As (predominantly Western) brands gained greater exposure to international markets and local customer feedback, the next phase of development was the inclusion of market and cultural preferences and a drive for more creative and colloquial outputs, meaning many brands moved from a translation to localisation approach. Some brands also chose to decentralise content creation and trust local teams with local language content development, but this has proved challenging to manage at a global level and resulted in a lack of consistency of branding and customer experience.
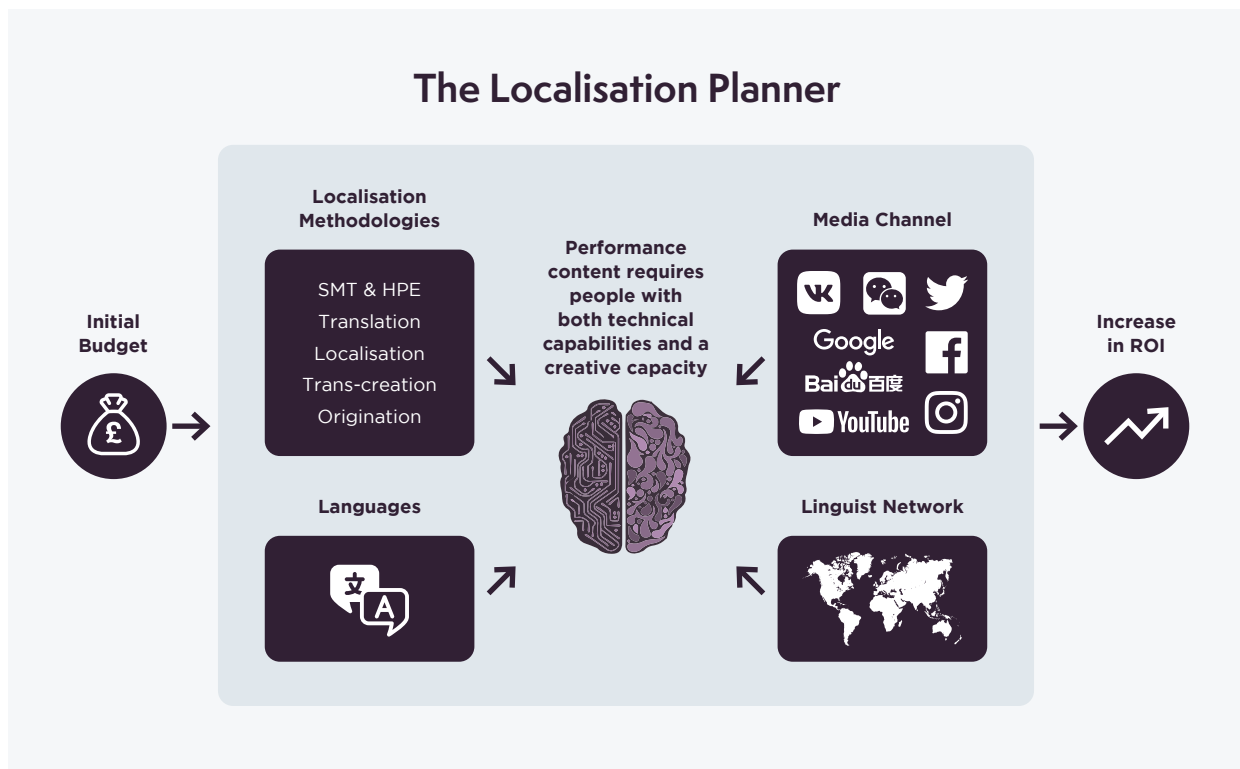
Many global brands are now several years into their multilingual content creation journey and have found the right balance of local vs central control, and in-house vs external expertise to

create content that is both globally consistent and locally resonant. Those that have been later to internationalise their content, have also benefited from lessons learnt and a greater variety of methodologies available to them, not least with the recent innovations in machine translation and AI.

In the last few years, brands have continued to move their focus to online channels and digital marketing has helped cross-border commerce become accessible to many more companies. As search and social media platforms have evolved, placing increasing focus on content quality, and ensuring content speaks to user intent, an additional layer of complexity has been added to the multilingual content creation process. Getting this right or wrong has a huge impact on the ROI of localisation spend, and is key to avoiding waste. **It is therefore important for purchasers to identify multilingual content service providers who have also responded to online requirements and invested in developing the necessary know-how within their teams to ensure this is considered.**

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Creating a team that understands the nuances of language, culture, production methodologies, localisation technology and online performance levers takes time as there are still only a few people who combine all these skills. However, it's not just about training teams in multiple skill sets; it's about identifying creatives with a data sensibility who have the humility to accept that content production choices should be about

business objectives and customer preferences, which may not tally with the subjective views of individual linguists. With such a team in place, multilingual content production becomes much more than a cost, but the ultimate enabler of international competitive advantage, directly impacting local business performance and driving revenues.

The Localisation Planner

Initial Budget

Localisation Methodologies

SMT & HPE
Translation
Localisation
Trans-creation
Origination

Languages

Performance content requires people with both technical capabilities and a creative capacity

Media Channel

Linguist Network

Increase in ROI

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6. SUMMARY AND A CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY

ONLINE CONTENT IS BOOMING

Online content is booming, with growth in non-English markets fuelling the need for smart approaches to multilingual digital content production that avoid spiralling costs and low ROI. At a basic level, pricing is still driven by the varying costs of skilled translators, aligned to the relative GDP of the market they serve. There can be economies of scale within languages, utilising localisation technology, where there is enough volume, but not across languages. Where economies of scale are possible, this should flow through to pricing and deliver increased value over time.

A variety of content creation methodologies are available, each with different results in terms of output quality. It is important to ensure both purchasers and suppliers have a thorough conversation about the definition of acceptable quality for deliveries. This conversation can be greatly aided by ensuring business outcomes drive the choice of methodology. Decisions can be made more objective by building

customer expectations, via the proxy of online performance data, into content production processes. It is not always necessary to localise everything, but more important to deliver appropriate quality for the desired outcome. This may not reduce overall costs, but increase ROI on content production spend.

When it comes to pricing models, word rates are still relevant for simple projects with repetitive content and significant volumes. However, to really drive customer engagement, a more consultative approach to content creation is necessary, with ongoing research and optimisation utilising marketing expertise and hard data. This effort cannot be well represented by word counts. Instead, expected throughputs or time spent should be reflected in commercial models. Retaining a team can be a better investment than purchasing on a project basis, and will ensure your content is both consistent and competitive.

While advances in machine translation are exciting, it remains only one part of the content production process. The effective use of this new technology requires careful planning, management, and quality control, which again requires human resource, so cost savings may not be as appealing as initially expected.

Multilingual content services have seen a huge evolution over the last twenty years, with new methodologies and technologies, an increasing number of languages requiring content, and the need to adjust to the requirements of online platforms. Navigating this landscape is complex and requires a multi-skilled team that can fuse data with creative skills to deliver the best ROI on localisation spend. Companies like Locaria provide such skilled teams who can help brands ensure that content production meets business needs and is not focused on simply creating content for content's sake.

As a result, the human contribution to multilingual content production is more important than ever and should be clearly and transparently indicated in commercial negotiations. This means moving away from simplistic word rates to more sophisticated pricing models, such as retainers with rate cards that can be monitored in real time and give brands control over where effort is focused. At Locaria we believe that providing pricing which truly represents the value-add of our services not only leads to better commercial decisions, it also allows purchasers to ensure all the steps required to deliver high-performing content are actually being done. We are passionate about taking the subjectivity out of multilingual marketing and helping purchasers make informed decisions, even when they "don't speak the language".

To learn more about how Locaria can help you build consumer trust through **localisation and translation**, call us on +44 (0)20 3948 6800, or **request a quote** online today.

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