



Build a business case to get financial support for multilingual communications

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Our clients range from organizations that are in the reactive stage to organizations that are in the brute-force and high risk stages. Each phase in the Global Communication Maturity Model presents unique characteristics and challenges for the organization. However, one continuous struggle that an organization has at any stage of maturity is obtaining financial support for their localization projects.

Many studies support the measurement of Communication ROI (either internal communications or external communications). These studies have shown that companies should consider tying budgets to the impact that their communications have on their ability to achieve the organization's overall objectives.

However, when it comes to deciding on a budget for translation of their communications, we have found that the ROI of *multilingual* communications is hardly considered. Even when ROI is considered, we have yet to see organizations that determine what really influences the return on the investment. The focus tends to be

after the fact, rather than looking at the leading indicators that predict the outcome.

Organizations also do not spend a proportional budget for creating multilingual communications as related to their budget for domestic communications. One figure that organizations should consider is their investment in domestic communications related to their investment in communications in foreign markets. How much money is spent on the development of communications per domestic customer (external) or employee (internal)? How do these costs relate back to the total investment for communications developed for each target market based on their population size?

“Multilingual communications hardly ever becomes an integral part of an organization’s global strategy”

This could be a good benchmark for organizations to promote a budget for translation, but keep in mind that is still a lagging indicator.

LSI has leading measures in place to help organizations determine the potential impact of multilingual communications on their goals. The steps leading up to that is to look at the organization’s objectives for each



target market and consider how much translation can contribute to the overall success of the target market. With this information, the organization can start building a business case for their multilingual communications.

The two main leading indicators for building a business case for any target market are:

1. **The need to translate.** This deals with the *language* of the target market.
2. **The need to internationalize or localize source copy before translating.** This deals with the *culture* of the target market.

These two indicators have a great impact on the effectiveness of the communications and the impact on the overall goals of the

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organization.

When budget is a factor in the decision to translate, it is important to identify which target markets really need translation and which markets can do without. Each target market will have different requirements and an organization's ability or willingness to

invest in meeting those requirements may determine whether the organization has a presence in a specific market. For example, if an organization would like to sell their product in Canada, they will need to consider legal compliance. Canada has two official languages and the government has strict requirements that both languages must be used on all communications. An organization that cannot invest in bilingual communications may not be able to sell their product in Canada.

Buyer behaviors related to language are another consideration. Common Sense Advisory, a leading research company in the global communications industry, released a report in 2006 which concluded that online buyer behavior is very much influenced by the language used to communicate to the buyer. Knowing your audience's language preferences is a leading indicator to communicating effectively and achieving your goals.

Another indicator is that most organizations do not adapt their source messaging to address the cultural differences. This approach will prevent an organization from providing truly effective communications.



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We propose three options for addressing cultural differences between source and target audiences:

- Internationalization
- Regionalization
- Localization

Localization is the most expensive option, but could provide the highest potential in those countries that are culturally very distant. Localization is where the communication is adapted to fit the culture and values of the specific target market.

Regionalization could be a good compromise if the budget does not allow for localization. If your organization wants to communicate to several ASEAN countries but the budget does not allow for localization for each market, consider adapting communications to fit shared values across the specific region.

At the very least, any organization should consider internationalizing their communications. **Internationalization** is the process of stripping the source communication of any idiomatic terms, cultural-specific references and country-specific imagery.

LSI has developed a metric around the initial assessment of both the language and the culture components. Our approach begins with a high-level overview where we assess

the languages and cultures of the target markets. We benchmark the proposed target markets against the domestic country to determine the language needs and cultural distances. We look at the official language(s) used in each market and the second language proficiency of that country. We also examine five cultural dimensions and rank the target markets' cultural distance from the domestic market.

This high-level overview gives the organization a good starting point for choosing where to spend their budget. By

“A structured approach ... is the first step in creating effective global communications”

visualizing the language needs and cultural distances of each target market, we are able to define localization, regionalization or internationalization strategies that align with an organization's available budget. This also provides a start for an organization to document their global communication strategy.

This metric is a good starting point for obtaining financial support for a multilingual communication directive. Budget restraints can be dealt with strategically by consolidating markets that have similar cultural patterns or language needs. The impact of multilingual communications on the



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overall success of the organization in their target markets can be quantified.

Further analysis of an organization's communications can be done to determine whether their messaging will be culturally acceptable for each target market. Together with our one of our clients, an HR global communications group, we can then determine whether an organization's messaging will need to be modified to address cultural differences.

We can also determine whether the modification should be tailored to a particular culture or rewritten in a more generic way. In addition, we can look at strategies in HR communication as to how the communication is delivered and from whom it is received. Further metrics can be assessed from that and tie it to the behavioral outcome that the communication is trying to achieve.

During a consultation with one of our clients, the question that came to the table was how to measure the impact of culture on HR communications for one of their clients. This conversation gave us a good opportunity to present our metric around cultural distances and how it can impact your business case for translating for a particular market.

A structured approach towards auditing an organization's content readiness for international markets is the first step in creating effective global communications. In further [white papers](#) and on our [blog](#), we will address how organizations can assess whether they have the necessary success factors for effective localization.