

Localization in the Agile Environment

How Client- and LSP-side Localization Managers Can Better Connect through Agile

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I. SUMMARY

Agile development tackles large software and documentation projects in small pieces. The approach is both a blessing and a curse for the translation vendors and language service providers (LSPs) who localize the content generated in

agile brings to the forefront for both clients and vendors in a localization relationship. Readers will find ways to take advantage of agile's long string of incremental releases to improve quality, reduce costs, and add value in localization.

Agile has allowed 27.3% of respondents to improve the quality of localized products and 25.3% to increase their rates of simultaneous shipment (simship) of products in various languages.

SOURCE: "GLOBAL PRODUCT LOCALIZATION," JUN10, COMMON SENSE ADVISORY, INC.

an agile environment. After years of asking clients to involve them as early as possible in the process, they now have the opportunity to make the difference in quality, turnaround, and savings that they have promised all along.

Should they have been more careful in what they asked for?

This Venga Red Paper examines the changes that

II. WHAT AGILE MEANS FOR GLOBAL BUSINESS

Several software trends - agile, Software-as-a-Service, other smaller applications like mobile apps - have resulted in the shortening of time between the beginning and end of a project. To meet the demands of specific customers more effectively, smaller product increments that deliver specific features have become the norm. While



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some argue that there is still a place in software development for projects 18 months in length, agile's penchant for two- and four-week sprints is changing expectations for even large projects to go fast and small projects to go faster.

Agile is also better suited to changes in technology and business landscapes. When this year's native software could be next year's Web application, it pays to work in small chunks that could more easily be repurposed in the face of a technology change. While geopolitical shifts and natural disasters do not change languages, they do change markets, and agile lets companies capitalize on these opportunities.

From the perspective of service and support, fixing language-related bugs in the programming or testing phase saves money by resolving them long before they leak out to customers and begin accumulating at the help desk. This is true for all software bugs, but it is common for localization-related bugs to linger far too long.

III. WHAT AGILE MEANS FOR LOCALIZATION

Instead of the waterfall (or bursting dam, in many cases) approach of handing off hundreds of pages and resource files in one or two deliveries, agile software companies comfortable with localization are more likely to hand off content to the vendor after each sprint.

Similarly, testing of the localized versions takes place much earlier in the project. Almost every sprint contains something new to test - user interface, functionality, global-readiness, documentation - so main product testing and localization testing can take place "in the same time zone" instead of several months apart as in traditional software projects. It is easier to ask a developer to fix localization-related problems in last week's code than in last year's code, so agile increases the potential for resolving these bugs in early development phases in the programming phase rather than in the product released phase after GA (general availability), as depicted in Figure 1.

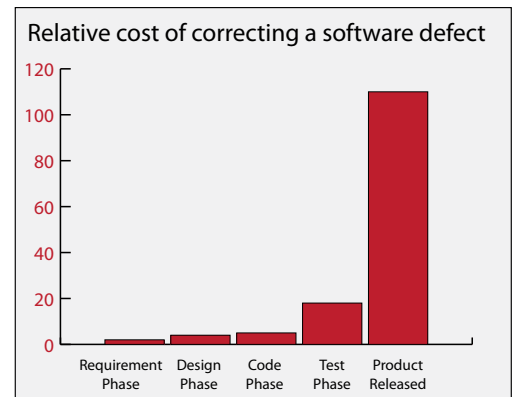


Figure 1 - Increasing cost of defect correction

Agile can help spread the workload of localization testing for more effectiveness. In the waterfall approach, most of this work falls to the vendor and, in larger companies, the client's localization team. Because main development and localization are occurring so closely in time, however, agile offers the prospect of including localization testing



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in the unit, functional and integration testing that developers and the QA teams perform.

IV. HOW AGILE CONNECTS CLIENT AND VENDOR

a. Planning

Because agile brings localization into mainstream development, client and vendor need to work out new logistics, such as reconciling the sprint schedule to the translation schedule, working out the mechanics of file handoff and hand-back, and assigning responsibility on each side for localization-related tasks. It is common to arrange for “n-minus-1” localization, in which developers begin work on, say, sprint 4 while translation begins on the content from sprint 3.

In the waterfall approach, planning is often limited to the question of when the client will hand the project off and when the vendor will deliver it. Under agile, planning ensures that nothing goes missing in the continuous back-and-forth of small pieces.

balance with volume.

The example in Figure 2 shows representative line-item costs under both agile (per sprint) and waterfall (per update) models: Because the project management cost is fixed and the recording item has a high minimum, the costs under agile are not perfectly linear. To save money, the client and the vendor could change the schedule from localizing after every sprint to localizing after every other sprint, or they could change the duration of a sprint from 2 to 4 weeks. On the other hand, the client could determine that simultaneous shipment is worth the additional cost and hand off at every sprint. The important point is that both client and vendor need to sit down together and complete a financial analysis of their new “agile reality.”

Agile Model - One Iteration

Loc Release Cycle	UI	Doc	PM	Total
Translation	\$60	\$60	\$100	\$220
Localization Engineering	\$100	\$100		\$200
Localization Recording	\$1,000			\$1,000
Document Publishing		\$250		\$250
Localization Testing	\$100	\$100		\$200
TOTAL				\$1,870

Waterfall Model - One Update

Loc Release Cycle	UI	Doc	PM	Total
Translation	\$300	\$300	\$100	\$700
Localization Engineering	\$700	\$300		\$1,000
Localization Recording	\$3,000			\$3,000
Document Publishing		\$750		\$750
Localization Testing	\$800	\$800		\$1,600
TOTAL				\$7,050

Figure 2 - Agile and waterfall cost comparisons

b. Costs and budgeting

It is important for both client and vendor to analyze cost estimates closely and strike a workable

This stream of small projects also affects how the vendor works with the client’s purchasing department.



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Internally, the shift to agile involves employees on a payroll, so the lack of a clearly defined start and finish makes little difference in cost; externally, however, the localization budget can look to a purchasing department like an indefinitely long series of one-off purchase orders. Constantly negotiating these would defeat the purpose of agile and generate lots of extra work for both the client and the vendor.

Instead, the agile model lends itself to arrangements like a quarterly/annual purchase order or a contract. A good point of departure is to assume that the localization costs in the first year of agile will be on par with those from the previous year and build an agreement based on them. Agile's steady stream of small handoffs generally results, over time, in lower development and localization costs.

c. Cooperation

The only way to cope with the increased number of files and the quick turnaround is to automate workflow.

Project managers can try to use the traditional tools of File Transfer Protocol, e-mail attachments, and spreadsheets for moving and tracking files, but they will spend huge amounts of time at it. Cloud-based translation environments incorporating a content management system (CMS) are mature enough to support these projects and grant access to everyone involved.

Variety in file formats poses a big hurdle to quick turnaround. If a documentation project consists

of .doc, .xml, .html and .txt files, each handoff and hand-back requires manipulation, costing time and money. Agile provides ample motivation to standardize on file formats.

More people need to talk to more people more frequently in an agile project than in a traditional one, so the client and the vendor will both benefit from collaboration suites and forums that are easier to track than e-mail threads. Opening client-side collaboration tools to vendor-side access may seem radical by former vengared paper standards, but the pace of an agile project precludes old-think and leads some project managers to reflect, "Why didn't we put the translators in contact with the clients years ago?" A common starting point in the age of Web-based defect tracking systems is for the vendor and translators to submit localization bugs directly to the client's database.

d. Subject matter expertise

The continuous stream of small pieces of content on a short turnaround, combined with having the same dedicated team of localization professionals involved in the long term, builds subject matter expertise on the vendor's side. By working with a client in small pieces over a long time, project managers understand the project's pace, localization engineers can predict the file structure, and translators know the industry vocabulary and nuances. The results are fewer questions, higher quality, and greater throughput in the localization process.



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Consider the waterfall project depicted in Figure 3, with three handoffs for localization and significant changes between draft and final content (shown in red):

As a result, there is no major peak in workload, so localization can proceed more smoothly with fewer translators commanding greater subject matter expertise.

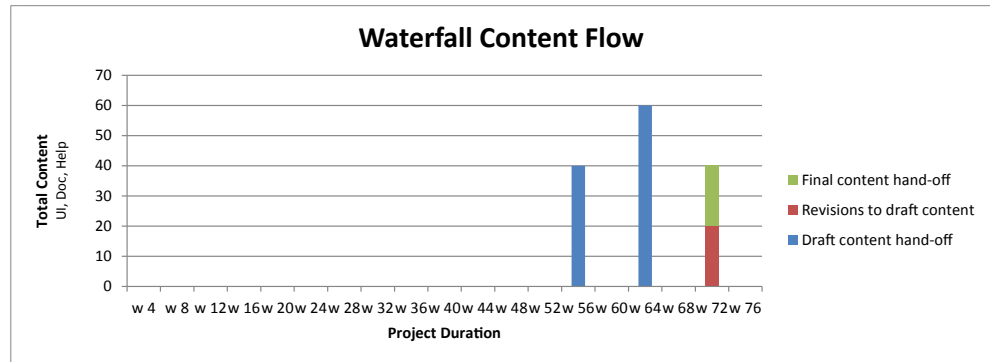


Figure 3 - Workload spike on waterfall project

The only way to meet this workload peak is to engage many translators quickly for a short, furious burst of work, a large percentage of which consists of changes to draft content. As professionally competent (and available) as they may be, these translators do not have much time to develop or apply subject matter expertise.

The quality of work is improved and the client may realize savings of 5-10 percent on the cost to localize the product.

In the agile project depicted in Figure 4, conversely, there is a constant flow of roughly the same amount of content for handoff and only minor changes to draft content each time:

Finally, this expertise results in an unsung benefit to the client. Translators are, in effect, the first and most probing audience for both user interface and documentation since, if they cannot understand them, they cannot translate them. The more a team of translators reviews the product and documentation over time, the more valuable feedback it has to offer. If translators submit bugs, the writ-

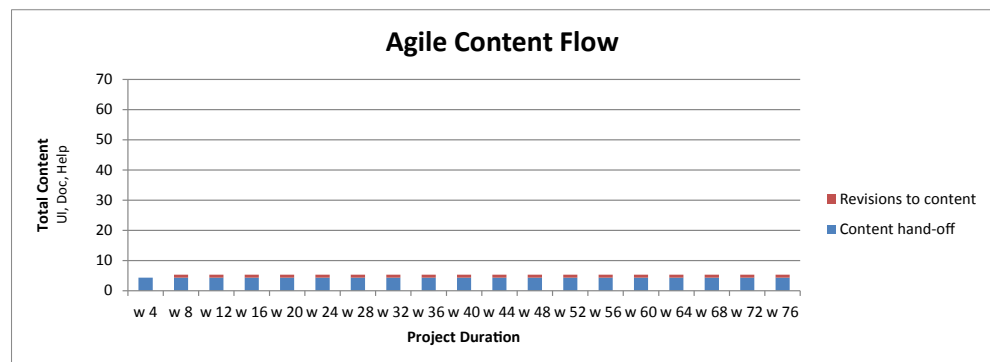


Figure 4 - Workload balance throughout agile project



ers have the opportunity to correct the text early in development, instead of after the product has shipped.

V. CONCLUSION

Localization in the agile environment often requires that the vendor retool internally to handle the steady stream of smaller projects that corresponds to the client's sprints. Traditional tools for moving and tracking files – e mail and spreadsheets – can break down under the traffic of agile

projects, and cloud-based translation tools with CMS are better suited to the volume and turnaround. As in waterfall projects, clients and vendors can adapt agile to conform to the available localization budget by changing the frequency and size of file handoffs.

In time, the tight client-vendor cooperation that is the ideal of agile can benefit both parties through higher translation quality, greater subject matter expertise among translators, lower cost over time and quicker turnaround of translation deliverables.

AUTHOR

Kåre Lindahl is CEO of Venga Corporation. This Red Paper is based on presentations he delivered in 2011 to the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) in Lisbon and the LISA Roundtable on Agile in Localization in San Francisco. Thanks also to NetSuite, Oracle, Autodesk, Symantec, Workday, Cisco, Computer Associates, and Hewlett Packard for their input into this Red Paper and presentations.

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Notes

This paper assumes a basic understanding of agile concepts (accelerated development and release cycles) and vocabulary (sprint, scrum, backlog, burndown, standup).

For more background on agile, please consider:

Books:

Agile and Iterative Development: A Manager's Guide by Craig Larman. His material is extremely useful to introduce people to agile.

For aspiring Product Owners: Agile Product Management with Scrum: Creating Products that Customers Love by Roman Pichler.

For project management a good introduction is Agile Project Management with Scrum by Ken Schwaber

Organizations & Training:

- Scrum Alliance (<http://www.scrumalliance.org/>)
- Connect with the local Agile community, such as BayAPLN.org (<http://www.meetup.com/BayAPLN/>)
- AgileLearningLabs.com (http://www.agilelearninglabs.com/wp-content/w3tc/pgcache/_index.html.gzip). They offer courses, a blog, and a recently published book.



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