

Translation and Localization

Does your product “speak” your client’s language?

by Nabil Freij

Successful companies—such as SolidWorks and many of its partners—derive about half of their revenue from international markets. This is not inconceivable, considering that the European and Japanese economies combined are larger than the U.S. economy. If you factor in Australia and emerging economies in the rest of Asia, South and Central America, Eastern and Central Europe, South Africa, and the Middle East, you can see that opportunities overseas are tremendous.

SolidWorks Office, SolidWorks’ flagship product, will support 12 languages in its 2004 release, simultaneously (see screenshot next page). Immediately after the product’s release, users in many parts of the world will run the product in their native language. Most can enter design data using their native scripts and characters—Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Korean, French, German, etc.

PDMWorks and 3D Instant Web Site allow global engineering and design teams to manage and share design data online securely, harnessing the full potential of concurrent

design. The tools also work in 12 languages, giving many users around the world the ability to access design files, by navigating the application in their native language. The content, however, is only in the language(s) in which the user decides to store the data.

3D PartStream.Net enables online 3D cataloging, offering its users global reach and a worldwide audience.

What SolidWorks has done, you can do, too.

With well over half of all Internet users logging in from outside the U.S., the potential to sell to an international audience is becoming a reality for many design houses and manufacturers that historically only focused on local or national markets.

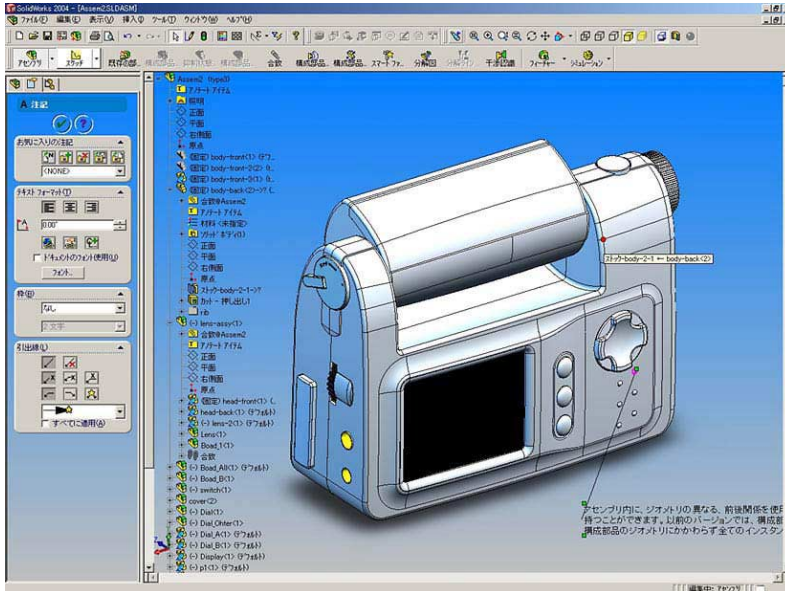
Yet many design and manufacturing companies are not taking advantage of what localized CAD tools and global economies are offering them. This could be due to the obstacles companies face while exporting products—export duties, currency exchange rates, local and

foreign regulations, and international support. But another leading issue that is holding many companies back is the lack of product localization.

Localizing a product requires undertaking special efforts specific to local needs. This may require addition of special features and capabilities to meet international requirements. In addition to standard imperial/metric conversions, one very important locale requirement is language; i.e., presenting the product in the native language of the user.

As the requirement for localization becomes increasingly justified, partnering with the correct localization vendor becomes critical. Unless your vendor can understand your product and terminology, any localization effort that is undertaken will be unappreciated by your international end users.

Choosing a partner like GlobalVision (see www.globalvis.com) that understands your industry’s requirements and languages is key to your success.



Localization: A threat?

Many countries are starting to enforce laws requiring that imported products be provided in the local official language. You may have heard of incidents in France, Canada, and Mexico involving U.S. affiliate companies that use English on their websites, product labels, and literature.

Since 1994, the Toubon law in France has imposed compulsory, but non-exclusive, use of the French language in all documents used to inform the user or consumer. This includes labels, leaflets, catalogs, brochures, guarantee certificates, and instructions. Similarly, French-speaking Quebec has strict laws and regulations regarding the use of English and French on products sold on its turf.

Some executives view such laws

and regulations as threats. They may reconsider their global vision, and focus closer to home—but savvy executives think differently.

An opportunity?

Many prominent companies have realized that to succeed internationally, they have to localize their products and literature to meet international prospects' needs. Along the way, they have discovered many compelling benefits to product localization, leading them not only to embrace it, but also to depend on it.

For one thing, it gives them a tangible and competitive edge over companies that insist on making their international customers buy products or services as they are sold locally.

How would you feel if the part that perfectly fits your design is

made in China, and requires you to read technical data or purchasing instructions in Chinese? Not very good—and yet some companies do it to their customers all the time.

Localizing your products and literature also gives your company an international image that is hard to ignore. It is estimated that visitors to websites spend five times more time browsing the site if it is available in their native language, and are three times more likely to buy its services.

Many companies already are selling internationally, but are looking for ways to expand their sales. They can do that either by market penetration, or by selling to new international regions. Consider localizing your products for both. It can be a compelling reason for customers in new markets to buy your products, as well as enable a market penetration otherwise unattainable. Localization also creates entry barriers to foreign competition, and levels the playing field with local ones.

Last, but not least, are your international customer-support costs very high? When you localize your products, literature, documentation, support material, and particularly the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and their answers, your international users will reach a new level of understanding of your product's intricate details. Questions that are already answered in your documentation will cease to overload your support staff's time. Furthermore, with a more thorough understanding of your product, your product

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users will be empowered to figure out on their own workarounds to problems that they may face. Localization reduces your support costs where they are the most expensive, overseas.

What language to speak?

To succeed in today's economy, companies have to think globally. Those that do not will ultimately be taken over by the ones that do think in worldwide terms—or perish. To succeed globally, companies have to cater to international customers' needs.

Ask executives, “What is the language of business?” and many will respond without hesitation, “English!” Take a closer look at their companies: you will find that those executives sell the majority of their products in English-speaking countries. What about the rest of the world? To many, English may be the leading answer, but it is not the only answer.

Your product source files can be regularly e-mailed or ftped to your translation or localization partner who can turn around translated versions into all required languages within days or weeks from receiving the source. Once a company commits to localization, the entire localization process can be set up so that it is almost seamless.

Listening to you, the user, the CAD industry realized the benefits of localization and embraced it many years ago. Shouldn't you do the same? After all, the language of business is not English. It is the language of the customer.

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