

Trends in automated translation in today's global business

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SDL

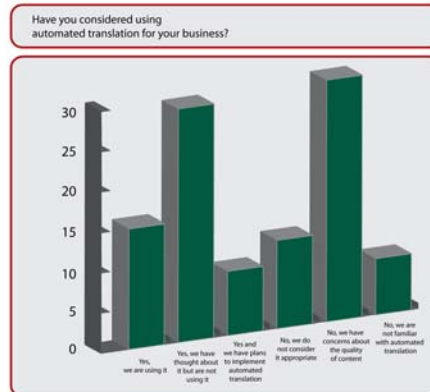
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SDL, in association with the International Association for Machine Translation (IAMT) and Association for Machine Translation Americas (AMTA), ran a survey which was completed by over 385 individuals in global businesses. The results were fascinating and definitely show an increased interest in the use of automated translation over the last two years.

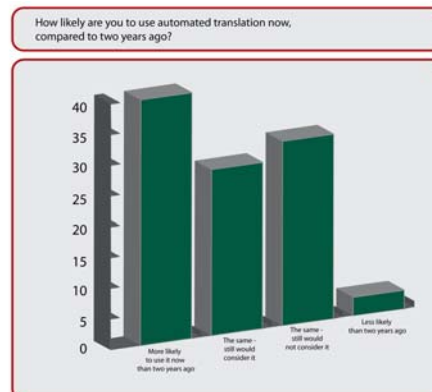
Those surveyed included individuals from companies such as Cisco, Dell, HP, Motorola, Oracle, Panasonic, Philips, Siemens, Sun and Vodafone. 71% of respondents were of managerial level and above, including Vice President and Senior Vice President from different parts of the business – sales and marketing, technical documentation, localization and IT and engineering.

Business motivation and utilization

Most of the respondents were familiar with the concept of automated translation, with only 7% being unfamiliar with it. 52% of respondents have considered using automated translation in business. Making up that number, 15% are actually using automated translation and 8% plan to use it – so 23% - nearly a quarter of respondents - are either using it or plan to use it. Interestingly, and possibly surprising low, only 30% say that they do not have plans to use it as they have concerns about the quality.



The question was asked, “How likely are you to use automated translation now, compared to two years ago?” 40% of respondents said they were more likely now versus two years ago to use automated translation. That is a substantial industry shift and shows quite a development in interest and trust in this technology and its uses. Additionally, 27% said they felt the same as two years ago and would plan to use it, with only 3% less likely now than two years ago. 30% did not change their opinion and would still not use it. So 57% of respondents would currently be in the position to consider automated translation.



The business motivations for using automated translation – the benefits that have always been provided by this technology – are the requirement to translate at less cost and in less time. However, nearly 40% said that a business motivation for using this technology would be to provide consistency of brand, since the technology always translates the same terms consistently.

Content and applications of automated translation

When asked for which types of content respondents would consider using automated translation, the main anticipated usage (62%) was for technical documentation. Websites and virus alerts were also things that companies would consider.

In terms of the actual type of application they would use, the majority wanted to generally use it for producing foreign language versions of company content (55%). Fairly evenly distributed responses were shared amongst use of automated translation integrated with chat tools, in e-mail, Word documents, on wikis and blogs, integrated in a web page and for conducting research on foreign language documents.

Expectations

When asked what types of output quality people would want from automated translation, 77% would want it to be of high quality, as though it had been written by humans. 23% said they would be happy with it producing a gisted output – to provide customers with a rough idea of contents' meaning.

In terms of the barriers to adopting automated translation, quality was the overwhelming factor preventing companies from adopting the technology. 75% of respondents said that was their barrier. 44% considered they had the wrong type of content for automated translation – again a concern that the output would not be correct for the intended use of the content. 23% did have concerns about how the technology would integrate with their other business process around localization.

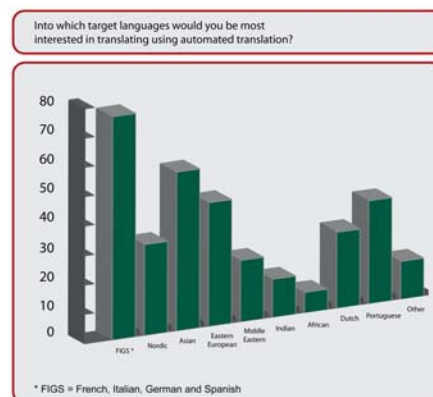
Market and vendor awareness

It seems that not many respondents are familiar with the fact that businesses today are using and getting benefits from automated translation. 43% have not heard of it being used in other businesses. However, 37% have heard of one or two companies using it and 19% have heard of many that are using it.

In terms of vendor awareness, this was an open question where respondents were asked to just mention anyone they had heard of in terms of automated translation. The majority had heard of SDL as providers of automated translation - but of course SDL did send out the e-mail – so this will have raised their awareness. Other main vendors cited were Systran and Language Weaver, with a small awareness of other providers such as Google and Promt.

Target languages for automated translation

Over 70% of respondents named French, Italian, German and Spanish (FIGS) as their main target for usage. In second place at just over 50% was the use for Asian languages and in third place (42%), Eastern European languages. Next and around a similar preference, were Portuguese, Dutch and the Nordic languages.



Survey pool in terms of regions, industries and roles

The majority of respondents (59%) were from North America and Europe (33%), with a small number of respondents from Latin America, the Middle East and Africa and Asia Pacific and Japan.

The results across Europe and North America were compared and showed very similar results.

Respondents were cross-industry – from manufacturing, life sciences, aerospace, finance, electronics and telecoms. The highest number (28%) came from IT and software, 14% from manufacturing, and the rest were distributed amongst life sciences and medical, government and electronics, high-tech and telecoms.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, 71% of respondents were of managerial level and above, including Vice President and Senior Vice President. These came from sales and marketing, technical documentation, localization, IT and engineering.

In summary

In summary then, there is a much greater awareness and interest in automated translation than there was two years ago and a larger number of organizations using or planning to use automated translation, than would have been anticipated.

Expectations and demands about the quality remain high, with a large number of participants requiring high-quality content as an output of automated translation. Quality is also still considered the main factor in terms of barriers to adoption.

In terms of market awareness, a large number of respondents are not aware of its uses in business. However, more than 50% are aware of companies that are using it.

These are interesting results, all showing a definite trend towards companies planning on using automated translation in the coming years. It is SDL's belief that this technology is here to stay and that more and more companies are seeing a benefit from it.

Companies that want to gain from the benefits of automated translation however, should look at its best application within their business and whether they can benefit from using it in ways they had not considered before. These include its uses to improve communications internally, to give a gist

of understanding to customers that would not have had content in their own language and to combine it with human skills to provide high-quality output but still at less cost and with faster turnaround. A combination of any of these uses can provide immense benefits for organizations doing global business today.