

Ycomm applies KAIZEN to the localisation process

Nathalie De Sutter explains how Ycomm Europe takes inspiration for its new QA Distiller and ColourTagger tools from the Japanese philosophy of quality thinking



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Fighting the commodity magnet

All maturing industries try to beat the commodity magnet and localisation and translation service providers are no exception. In most cases translation does not pertain to the core business of the customer, who therefore considers it to be a “non-critical” purchase. This, combined with the declining complexity of the supply market, the increasing competition, and a more professional purchasing behaviour, results in the perception of localisation as a commodity. Customers demand increasing flexibility in handling higher volumes to be processed with shorter deadlines. One indicator is the practice of auctioning for the assignment of translation projects.

Many companies seek refuge by positioning themselves as a “high-quality provider” and strive toward a conscious commitment to quality as a differentiator. However, since we operate in a perceived commodity market, we should be aware that companies are not necessarily willing to pay extra for this and that the trinity of quality, on-time, and at a minimum price, is often considered to be an essential minimum requirement. Offering a better-than-acceptable level of quality without missing any deadlines, but at a reduced cost, requires a considerable process innovation.

Evaluation equals quality?

Industrial and academic publications have tried to define translation

quality. Studies on evaluation techniques, standards for distinguishing between severe and minor mistakes, and attempts to define what constitutes a good-quality translation have been argued and disputed by many scholars and industry professionals. And although the localisation industry should certainly strive toward the development of standards, what would really benefit translation companies, end-buyers and freelance translators is a useful, efficient and simple system to facilitate the struggle with day-to-day quality control.

Kaizen™ revisited

After having been out of style for more than a decade, and thanks to the great performance of companies like Toyota, there seems to be renewed managerial interest in Japanese management techniques and the Japanese philosophy of quality thinking. One of the principal concepts in the work of Masaaki Imai, the founder of the Kaizen Institute, is that quality improvement and cost reduction are, in fact, compatible.

What more has Kaizen taught us? First of all, that quality is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation and not exclusively that of the quality department. Indeed, fighting non-value-adding activities, or *Muda*, should be one of the key activities of all members of organisations striving for continuous improvement or *Kaizen*. A second insight relates to the fact that quality improvement, contrary to traditional belief, has a cost-reducing effect. “Doing it right the first time” may

require an initial investment, but the impact in the long term generates many advantages outside the limited framework of quality. It seems to be inevitable that money be spent on quality; how much money, however, depends on *when* you intend to spend it.

Go to Gemba

The first implementation rule in Kaizen is “Go to Gemba first!” *Gemba* means “real place,” but in quality lingo it refers to “the workplace.” So “go to Gemba” means go to the work floor, observe, measure and take immediate action. The translation industry is very good at taking quick action, we are flexible and will solve or fix any problem. However, Mr. Imai takes us a step further. The immediate action for Mr. Imai is a temporary countermeasure, next he wants us to find the root cause and then standardise and create the necessary procedures and tools to prevent a reoccurrence. This is exactly what our industry should do. In our hurry to consolidate and become a value creator, many companies have lost touch with the Gemba.

Doing it right the first time

Traditionally, in order to verify the quality of a translation, a revision by a second translator is carried out, a practice that is certainly costly and time-consuming, especially because this work has traditionally been performed by senior translators. It is also possible to have the more

