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**NOVEMBER 2005 FEATURE**

## ***Making Localization Lean and Agile***

The Business Journal  
for GILT Professionals  
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## Lean and Agile

By  
**Mika Pehkonen**

In the past, my team and I here at F-Secure have provided a few articles about dynamic localization and partnerships, concentrating on making the most of existing resources and partnerships. We have been happy with the net efficiency of our processes, and the pressure for changing our processes does not come from external sources. But, as the market gets more competitive, and product development cycles need to respond to the demand, we feel that we need to take an active role in ensuring that localization is able to keep up with the increased time-to-market pressure. With agile development processes being brought into use in our organization, this is the perfect opportunity for us to take our localization processes to the next level.

Instead of writing a success story, however, we decided to put ourselves on the line and write a two-part article. In this first part, we describe the philosophy behind our decision to change our processes and describe our implementation plan on a general level. We will follow up this article with a second part in a few months, in which we will let you know the findings from our pilot projects: what improvements to our initial plan we came up with, and which of our initial ideas worked and which did not. We will also give general information on the cost-effectiveness, regarding both outsourced cost and internal work.

### HOW IS AGILE DIFFERENT?

Localization has traditionally been very much a process based on the waterfall method (see "Figure 1"). We start working on localization once we feel comfortable with the level of completeness in the mother project, after which we go through the translation-validation-fixing cycle. Starting localization relatively late in the development cycle, however, leaves little time for some elements of localization quality.

The greatest stress on product development usually comes in the validation phase, when testing and bug fixing occurs.

Localization usually adds to this stress by creating most of the bugs and quality feedback during these late stages in product development. No matter how we as localizers feel about the importance of localization quality and bugs, it is still—compared to functionality bugs—a low priority as far as a working product is concerned. This usually results in either incomplete bug fixing or a delay in the mother project. See figure 1 on the next page.

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Figure 1



If we consider time-to-market the most important factor in localization, prioritized bug fixing is a logical choice, where minor issues can be fixed in the next release. If we consider linguistic quality the most important, a delay in the release is acceptable in order to enhance the user experience. In reality, a compromise between the two is commonly made, leaving us with a fairly good time-to-market and a good enough user experience so that minimal support demand is generated.

But what if this compromise could be eliminated? Could we create a much better user experience and better technical localization quality while also leveling the resource load all around?

#### *THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER INPUT*

In the traditional waterfall development method, the customer sees the product at a late stage, when making changes conflicts with the technical validation of what we have so far perceived as the customer's wish.

The main emphasis, at least as far as localization is concerned, in developing software through agile methods is to bring in the customer input at an earlier stage. Iterative agile development allows us to create frequent demo versions of the product, making it possible for us to show the output to the customer. This enables us to react to the customer's expectations throughout the project.

In localization projects, customers are both internal and external. In order to minimize the localization-related defects, we will need to make sure that development and the localization team get a steady stream of translation input throughout development. But functionality is only half of the equation. In order to ensure a quality user experience, the linguists, country offices, and external customers must still have a say in their respective languages, including cultural issues. See figure 2 on the next page.

#### *IMPLEMENTING ITERATIONS AND CYCLES*

Since our development will be working on daily cycles, weekly cycles, and monthly sprints, we will need to process localization in equal time spans in order to integrate smoothly into the projects.

#### *DAILY CYCLES*

Since daily development is also tested daily, we will aim for localization to happen on a daily schedule as well. Developers will be reusing existing validated English strings through our "TermBank" when writing their modules. This will allow us to minimize English validation, decreasing the time needed for internal reviews. At the same time, our developers will be using exact matches of previously translated material.

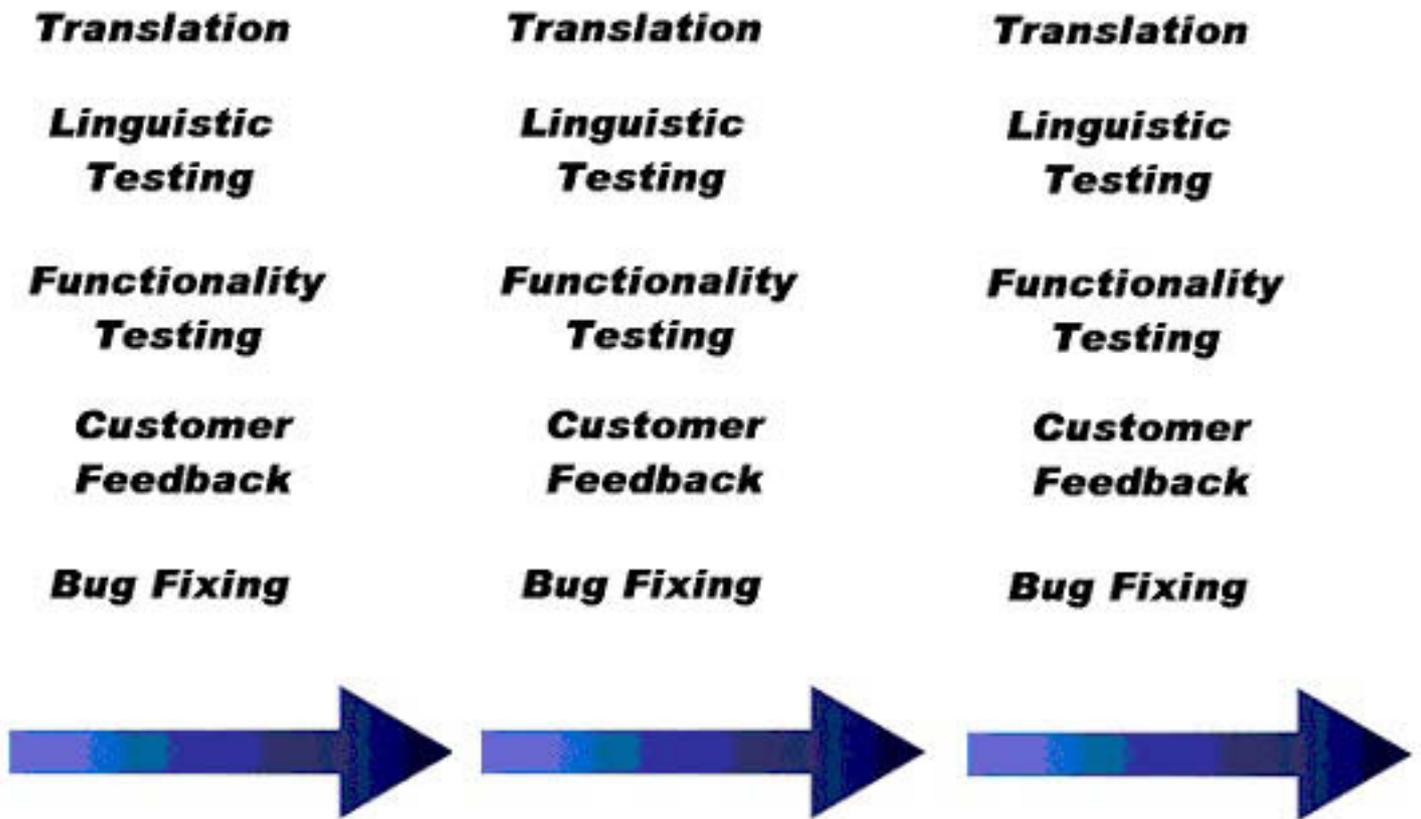
At the end of the day, the developer can place the resource files in a folder that will be automatically scanned by Multilizer, and the files will be pre-translated through our TMs. This allows the bulk of the localization work to be done during project downtime.

As an added benefit, since Multilizer is able to create reports detailing the percentage of pretranslated strings, we will have an accurate idea of the level of translation completeness. However, we'll have this insight not only for the project target languages, but also for languages that are outside the scope of the project. This gives us visibility into the cost of adding more languages into the project at any stage.

#### *WEEKLY CYCLES*

For strings that cannot be pre-translated, we will need translators' packages weekly. This should allow us to

Figure 2



maintain translation coverage of 90-100 percent on a weekly level. This will also allow us to update our TermBank weekly, so that the reuse of the previous week's materials will be available for different modules and projects with minimal delay. See figure 3 on the next page.

**MONTHLY SPRINT**

By creating monthly demos, translators and the localization team will have an opportunity to check contextual and cosmetic issues, and the external customers can take part in validating the linguistic style. The monthly validation is meant to be a miniature quality check. It will not replace traditional testing. However, we expect this to decrease the number of bugs found in the third-party tests during the final validation run.

**RELEASE-READINESS**

In essence, the new process of dividing a relatively resource-intensive localization sub-process into smaller cycles that incorporate feedback and validation is a change that should result in a near release-ready localized product, one that can be released at any time with the mother project. In fact, the delay

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between release-ready localization and release-ready English original will become shorter with each sprint, because the amount of new untranslated material should decline steadily as development moves from major features towards the lower priority items in the project backlog.

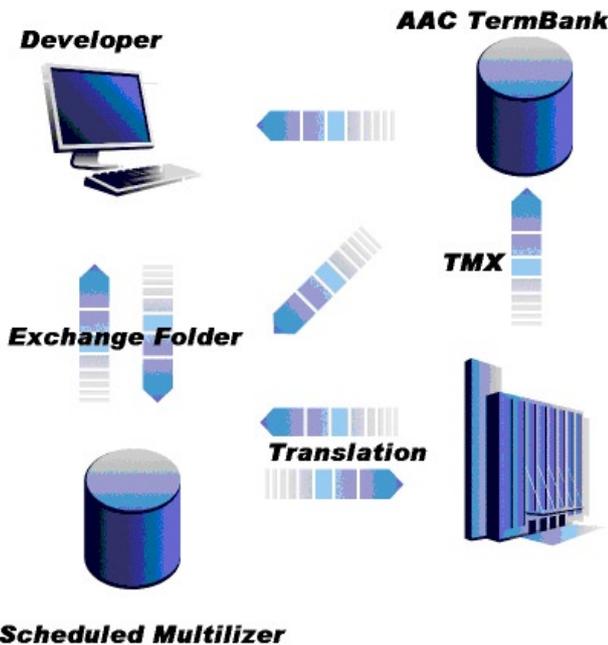
**IMPACT ON PARTNERSHIPS**

So far, we have detailed expectations and impacts related to our business. However, our partners are the significant other half in a working localization relationship, and we want to make sure that the process does not affect the way we treat our partners, especially with the pre-translation possibly making an impact on revenue.

Ideally, agile projects allow the translator to have more ownership over the localized product. The demo validation will allow the



Figure 3



translator to monitor the overall text flow and style, in addition to getting feedback regularly. In fact, the primary owner of cosmetic and linguistic fixes will be the translator. The first step in correcting a cosmetic fix will be to modify the translation. If that doesn't work, the localization team will modify the UI. Hopefully this will help in enabling the translator

to truly localize the product, instead of just translating non-contextual information. Of course, since we are expecting time consuming work that cannot be measured in words, we will compensate the translator for the actual work done, and not on the basis of the word count. For the partner vendor, having us work in weekly and controlled sprint cycles will bring better visibility to translation demand. Ideally, we can shift a sizable portion of our work towards purchasing scheduled bandwidth on an hourly basis, as opposed to on-demand word-based translation, which should even things out considerably.

**PILOTING**

We have a couple of projects lined up for piloting. One of the projects has been using the waterfall method for a while. Seeing the impact of agile localization should be interesting, as well as easy to quantify. And just to make sure that we do not pick easy projects, the second project that we have lined up is actually the largest we have ever done, in terms of number of languages, with possibly the tightest schedule. As an added bonus, it will include some traditionally difficult languages that we have absolutely no previous experience with.

In a few months, we will reveal how everything went; the good and the bad.