

# Translation in the social cyberworld

*Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo*

Business owners and marketing experts recognize the need to create user-friendly sites in other languages that are localized for consumers whose first language is something other than English. A demand for the translation and localization of web content is constantly growing, as immigrant populations' buying power increases and more companies reach across borders to a global community. Besides marketing campaigns and corporate websites, social media content is quickly becoming a fast and inexpensive form of marketing and communicating in real time.

Although the need for this niche translation market is more realized as social media becomes more advanced, the options that businesses and organizations have for obtaining translations of their social media content are many. How do business owners and social media sites know where to look to achieve accurate renditions of their original messages? Is the trend for quick turnaround translations causing more to trust in crowdsourcing and practically free outsourcing methods? How do businesses, translation agencies and freelancers measure return on investment (ROI) from social media marketing?

Some business owners believe that the translation and localization of their company website mean they will start to pick up customers and clients from other countries and language communities. A few years ago, this would have been a great step in reaching out to these target markets; however, these days, simply having a multilingual site or localized content is

not enough. Social media is taking over the marketing world at a rapid pace, and there really is no other choice than to jump on this cyber bandwagon. So, what's in it for me?

This is the million-dollar question that business owners, consumers, language service providers (LSPs) and freelancers are asking. At a recent networking event I started talking to a woman who asked me what I do for a living. When I told her that I am an LSP owner, she started to tell me how she knew so much about the need for reaching out to potential clients in foreign languages. She went on to tell me that she saw how her professional networking site of choice allowed her to post her profile in other languages, so she thought, "Sure! Why not? I'll put my profile into Spanish and French! I don't know what it says, but whatever."

This business owner thought she was savvy in putting her profile into another language, but she didn't question its quality, as a free service provided by the site might not be the best option for obtaining an effective, high-quality rendition of her qualifications. This is where we come in. Freelancers and LSP owners are dipping their toes into various fields in which they feel themselves to be experts, but what makes someone an expert in the niche of social media translation? Today, most people have a degree of participation in social media, whether it is personal, professional or both. Having a Facebook page is not cutting-edge anymore, but what you do with your page very much is, and there seems to be an application (app) for everything now. App creators are constantly thinking of new apps that people will find useful or entertaining in their everyday lives. Besides Facebook and LinkedIn, Twitter has taken off as a real-time social media service that updates you on what's going on with friends, family, celebrities, and local and international businesses. All of these things allow a business to build its brand and reach potential and current clients quickly and efficiently.

A common trend in social media and web content translation is crowdsourcing. Joe Kutchera defines crowdsourcing in his recent book *Latino Link: Building Brands Online with Hispanic Communities and Content* by using Facebook as an example of crowdsourcing at its best: "Facebook currently utilizes crowdsourcing via a translation app that allows volunteer translators to choose their language and translate content for free by making it 'available to everyone, everywhere, in all



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## Social media tools

Over the past few years there has been a significant increase in the number of organizations using social media tools to disseminate information. Although it is difficult for organizations to truly quantify the commercial benefits of social media, many are accepting that it is now an integral part of the marketing mix. Social media enables companies to create online discussions with targeted communities and also allows them to promote products and services at a relatively low cost. As Oscar Wilde once said, "the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about." According to research conducted by Burson-Marsteller ([www.burson-marsteller.com](http://www.burson-marsteller.com)) for its Global Social Media Check-up, in February 2011, 84% of the top 100 companies in the Fortune Global 500 index are using at least one of the main social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or corporate blogs. Twitter is the most popular social media tool among Fortune Global 100 companies (with two-thirds having a Twitter presence), and at least half are reaching audiences through Facebook (54%) and YouTube (50%). One-third of the companies maintain corporate blogs. Many organizations are beginning to realize the benefits of blogging. It's a quick, relatively inexpensive tool that enables you to share your expertise and build web traffic, and more importantly, connect with clients and potential clients. Companies based in Asia Pacific primarily use social media to communicate with their western stakeholders. In the course of 2010, there was significant social media growth in Asia Pacific and Europe, especially in terms of Twitter. In 2010, the number of companies being talked about on Twitter increased by 90%. Besides the four main social media sites mentioned, there are also many more sites available.

Site	Key Geography	Registered users
Badoo.com	Europe and Latin America	116 million
Blackplanet.com	African Americans	20 million
Cyworld.com	South Korean	25 million
Friendster.com	Southeast Asia	90 million
Orkut.com	India and Brazil	100 million

Many companies have multiple accounts, and these different accounts can be managed by different company divisions that may be located all over the world. Both HP and IBM have over 80 blogs apiece. *The New York Times* website has 59 blogs, all by different writers and journalists, all on different topics and all representing the brand and the company. This online content creates a continuous demand for rapid translations from social media providers and users all over the world. Millions of new entries, blogs and posts go online everyday. According to Techcrunch.com, September 2010, the market for web-based translation is estimated to be worth about \$3 billion. Even if an organization does not have a proactive social media presence, it still needs to monitor social media sites for content relating to them, their brands and industry – such as complaints, product feedback and trends. One of the unique qualities of social media is that it is multidirectional. An organization is a participant (a consumer) as well as a producer and publisher. It's not just about the content you are pushing out, but also the content that you and your business are attracting. Once social media gets hold of an interesting tidbit, the effect is nuclear, and your coverage could be worldwide. If that content is being published multilingually, then do you understand the content as well as all the cultural nuances that may exist within it? Some translation vendors provide multilingual social media monitoring services although the approach is fairly basic.

Most organizations do not have the resources to maintain multilingual blogs and monitor social media content. The most obvious low-cost solution that companies turn to for the translation of content is machine translation (MT). We all know MT has its limitations, but there are an increasing number of plug-ins for blogs and content management systems that allow the streamlined generation of machine translated content. Translation plug-ins (for example, GTS Translation and Wordpress Global Translator plug-ins) will automatically translate and update a blog each time a new post is added. The content is pushed through the MT system and then ideally into a post-editing workflow so that it can be cleaned up by human translators.

– Louise Law, Welocalize.

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languages.” All one has to do is click on the app, choose a language (and yes, it’s possible to choose one that you may not even speak) and begin. There are tabs for “My Translations,” “Style Guide,” “Glossary” and “Review,” among others. You can review others’ translations and vote on their accuracy and consistency. Although Facebook does pay for the platform development for the translation of its site, it does not carry out the translation in the traditional sense by utilizing paid translators and proofreaders. Most linguists and LSPs that I know are not willing to provide the services and processes they’ve worked so hard to perfect for years without payment (except at times, for a nonprofit as a volunteer service), and rightly so. This brings up the question of why someone would choose to volunteer to translate for a site that is a multibillion-dollar enterprise. The answers I have encountered range from putting valuable content into one’s own language, so that the community may benefit from the material on a site with such popularity among users worldwide, to simply having a love for the language. Even though crowdsourcing may make content available to a broader group of consumers at a rapid pace, those of us in the industry are well aware of the problems that arise in professional quality, accuracy and consistency when utilizing volunteers, many of whom do not have

proper qualifications or training. Most of us are in this to make a living. LSPs would love to make this social media mogul their client; however, a more manageable goal is to work with current or more likely customers who would like to promote their businesses in real time because, let’s face it – everyone’s going social, and luckily, with the growth and popularity that social media has seen, there is enough of this pie for everyone. So how do we go about tackling this task? There doesn’t seem to be any one specific solution or answer, but here are some commonly implemented methods.

One company that comes to mind is SpeakLike, currently supporting translation of 38 languages in real time. Although the company is not specifically marketing to customers who need translation of social media content, its design does lend itself for this use, as one can type in a block of text (much like an online translation feature) and receive the translated text back almost immediately, depending on the language, length and content. A customer can sign up and pay for translation services, most starting at \$.06 per word, with added services of proofreading by a second professional and so on. Another feature is the ultimate (but perhaps not so popular) discount for repeated words via its translation memory (TM). SpeakLike also offers a mobile, Twitter and WordPress

app, an e-mail notification service, and even a self-service tool (currently under beta testing). The strategy this company has taken to give customers options for rapid translation services for lower-than-average prices is innovative and can still cover a wide variety of content topics. And the part that perhaps interests me most is the fact that SpeakLike utilizes a combination of human translators and machine translation (MT). Freelancers can sign on when they wish to work and take on projects by being the first to accept a job in the queue. A downside of this business model is that the company expressly states that applicants do not have to have translation experience, although it’s preferred. Customers enjoy using the SpeakLike Strings service for IT translations. Market Wire published a blurb on the service in 2010 with customer feedback from Dennis Kashkin, CTO at Bedandbreakfast.com: “SpeakLike Strings has made it easy and fast for us to submit thousands of translation requests all at the same time. The fact that we can directly submit HTML with data fields has saved us a lot of time. I can even track the progress of each project as the translators work on them and download the results whenever it’s convenient for my team to immediately incorporate the content into our website.” Convenience, price and instant feedback appear to be top-selling points for SpeakLike and similar competitors, as the move for faster and less expensive translation for online content expands.

Lingotek is another innovative proponent of crowdsourcing. The company employs its Collaborative Translation Platform with endless services, including the option to choose professional, community or automatic translation. It rates these services on its site based on a content value index scale of 1-10 and indicates an estimated cost and time. Lingotek’s blog states, “By utilizing the crowd in translation projects, companies and organizations can not only expand globally at a fraction of the time and cost of traditional methods, but organizations and individuals can also contribute in fighting information poverty which severely limits societies across the globe.” It goes on to give reasons for crowdsourcing translations, and the main site’s description of the Collaborative Translation Platform openly mentions a real-time turnaround method

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with which traditional LSPs cannot compete. It seems that by allowing clients to choose the process in which they have content translated, companies are truthfully giving clients what they are willing to pay for in a fast-food world via the cyber drive-thru. Lingotek announced its new Jive App at the end of July of this year, and if the new app follows the trend of the company's other crowdsourcing and MT processes, it is likely to also be well-received among users. Marisa Peacock provided more information on Lingotek's community-based approach on CMS Wire, and mentioned that the company uses "qualified" translators.

Other options out there are MT software for purchase by direct clients. SYSTRAN presently supports 52 languages and offers customers hybrid MT software that will remember terminology from previous texts and can be customizable to one's particular field of business. The company offers home office, small business and enterprise solutions that can be integrated into various commonly-used computer programs. This feature can be useful for companies that wish to maintain files in certain programs to be later used as social media content for promotional material, as well as freelance translators who are looking for alternative terms when working on projects. One translator posted an online comment about using the software for Chinese to English translation and said, "It has some good features, like multiple custom dictionaries. The raw output is generally unusable, and every sentence has to be edited. But it is definitely a labor saving device." The translator added that he had only used the 5.0 version, however, and had no experience with any of the later versions.

Smartling offers customers a one-stop shop for recreating a website in another language in a short amount of time by employing a "suite of tools" in the process. Customers can choose from options such as crowdsourcing, using professional translators, MT or even providing (get this!) their own translators. Although I may not be on the bandwagon with some of these points as an LSP owner, I think that a lot of customers are open to seeing several options when choosing the right fit for their company, and trends such as crowdsourcing are definitely becoming more popular in the industry in meeting the needs of these customers. Translators, on the other hand, may not

appreciate the practices utilized by the company and others like it. Miguel Llorens Musso, an English > Spanish financial translator, mentioned Smartling in a blog post on July 28 of this year (<http://traductor-financiero.blogspot.com>) after a press release from the company that announced it had raised \$10 million to further develop localization tools. He blogged that the company's own website was not translated well into Spanish and added a screenshot of the site's Spanish version showing both English and Spanish text. Musso voiced a similar opinion to that of many translators on why some LSPs use crowdsourcing, saying, "I have a low opinion of these types of services. They are heavy on technology and low on quality, probably because they are usually founded and run by people who are not translators and often don't even know a second language. The quality is atrocious. As a sometimes-visitor of websites using this sort of technique, I am generally turned off toward the company advertising the product." He told me that he thinks crowdsourcing has been more successful for social media sites such as Facebook and TED because of their popularity and appreciation among users.

For other types of media, Jibbigo offers speech-to-speech translation through mobile applications for Apple and Android. Users can speak a phrase, see it in text

format on the screen, and hear the phrase spoken in the language the user chooses. This type of technology is appealing to travelers and business professionals who can use the technology on the go. Product reviews for the Android market on AppBrain vary from comments such as "Good voice recognition. The biggest app on my phone!" to "Useless. Not even close." Jibbigo's service has been likened to Google Translate's voice-to-text translation feature within Google Chrome, announced this year. Google allows you to speak the text you wish to translate, although there are many languages still to be added and hiccups to be worked out. The same translator who mentioned the contextual issues he found with using SYSTRAN for translating Chinese > English admitted that Google Translate's features are sometimes more useful due to the fact that Google has the ability to deal with entire web pages and access a broader amount of information at a phenomenally quick speed, allowing a translator to get a better sense of using terms in the proper context. Google Translate's app for Android is also getting a lot of buzz. One review posted by Tecksphere on Android App Review Source stated what those of us in the language industry already know: "While Translate is not 100% accurate it is accurate enough where you should be able to decipher

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what was being said. The translations are very literal so verb conjugations and slang may not be translated 100% properly.” Clearly, one’s expectations of a free translator determine how well an app or a free online version works, but Google Translate’s app is praised for its clean interface, easy usage with text messaging and extra features.

Other tools are more commonly used in our industry. LSPs and freelancers often use computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools to make the translation process more efficient and to maintain a TM for their projects for use later. In doing so, they work together to build the TMs, but they also can find ways of pricing translations to give discounts for clients. This is a topic often debated among translators, agencies and direct clients, as everyone wants to see ROI as a result of using these tools. I’m not so sure that not charging a client at all for repetitions is the way to go, as it takes time to make the TMs, and since many LSPs utilize contractors for different languages, one should not ask a translator to “give away” repeated words. Besides, those words, repeated or not, have to be checked anyway. Freelance translators are contractors and set their own prices, so LSP owners have to account for this when quoting on projects for clients. The ROI here is not simply making the money back on what you paid for your CAT tool(s) of choice or focusing on the profit from a project, but also for the time and effort spent on the project. Remember, a translator’s time could go into other projects for which clients are willing to pay, even at a discount.

In taking a look at ROI from a different perspective, however, there is a lot of talk lately among social media expert bloggers. One blog in particular that I enjoy reading is Smart Blogs on Social Media (<http://smartblogs.com/socialmedia>). Jesse Stanchak blogged on July 18 of this year about what Dell is doing and how it views its ROI from social media networking. I find the discussion intriguing, as Stanchak explains that ROI is not always about the dollar signs. He mentions Dell’s head of social media and corporate-reputation management, Richard Binhammer, who views social media as more than just telling readers about what your business is accomplishing and earning money. This goes back to the reason behind social media. It’s social – not a monologue. So, if you blog about your company, tweet about your company or your company has a Facebook page, you need to be thinking about forming a dialogue between your business and your current and potential customers. Binhammer adds that social media is about building one’s brand and maintaining a positive relationship with

clients. This, too, is a long-term investment of your time, and in most business, time is money. So, thinking of ROI in this way may change the way you view social media and its effect on your business and your brand. Stanchak notes that “Social media are just another tool” that businesses can utilize, and it’s important for the company as a whole to use them instead of any single department.

This brings us back to the translation and localization of social media content. It’s one thing to put your materials into a second language, but quite another to maintain a dialogue with customers who will build your brand and make you money. Building a brand is the basis of how we make our money. So, why not expect our clients to pay for top quality translation and localization for social media content as well? Think about it this way. We don’t expect the products and clothes we buy for our physical appearances to be free, and we’re willing to spend a little more on the creams, hair products and clothing we know will make us look nicer. These products are even more appealing when they work quickly and effectively. What we do in translation and localization helps our clients to build their brands – their business face, if you will. We have the power to make our clients look good, and offering the product that works best for them is our business.

Social media is a constantly-changing part of doing business that can be made dangerous when inaccurate or false information is made public. There is no doubt that apps, software and websites for the products mentioned and others like them will evolve in the coming years, and the rest of us will have to keep up. I think few people doubt that MT will ever surpass true professional translation, but the key seems to be implementing the best combination of tools and professionals to get the job done and serving it within a time frame and at a price that clients find appealing. Diving into the social media niche in our industry may mean having to do a little more client education, but convincing a client that paying for quick turnarounds and accurate renditions of their messages, instead of entering text into a free translation tool, may bring you and them more business in the end. It will certainly build your own brand and credibility, both with those you hire and those who hire you. **M**

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