A SEA Change – software localisation in Australia

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Less than a year ago Australia was not a player in the global localisation industry; now through Software Engineering Australia (SEA), it is a recognised localisation partner that specialises in Asian languages. SEA Language Translation Laboratory Manager Tanja Hill describes the challenges of establishing a start-up localisation service.

The task of establishing a new localisation industry is certainly daunting. When I started with Software Engineering Australia (SEA) in March last year, this non-profit technical support organisation was itself only a few months old. In addition, I was new to Australia, having recently arrived in the country after working as a marketing consultant in Fiji for four years. Before that I had been employed in the information technology (IT) industry in Germany and the UK. This included five years as AEG's Regional Manager, International Marketing, where I was responsible for 55 foreign markets. In this role I was involved in all stages of the product development process of a number of successful worldwide releases; from market-specific product definition analysis of both hardware and software, through drafting of the operating manuals, production planning of country product versions, creating advertising material, and organising conventions and roadshows, to operating and sales training for the products.

The SEA Vision

Still, building an entire industry is different. The

SEA's vision is to build a localisation industry with a specialist knowledge of Asian languages. We are ideally placed to do this because of Australia's geographic and time-zone proximity to Asia, recognised project management skills, understanding of Asian cultures and markets and large population of native speaking Thai, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese migrants. SEA was designed by industry and co-funded by the Australian Government and information technology industry contributions. We had the task of establishing a whole new suite of services focused on promoting software engineering excellence.

The Australian initiative was partly modelled on the European Software and Systems Initiative (ESSI). ESSI is a coordinated group of software best practice actions aimed at helping European organisations, in all sectors of the economy, to increase their efficiency and provide better quality and better value for money through improvements to their software development processes.

SEA has offices in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Hobart, Adelaide and Perth. The Language Translation and Localisation Laboratory is headquartered in the SEA Brisbane office.

SEA itself is also a multicultural organisation. Many of the people working for both it and the co-located incubator companies are native speakers of a range of languages that include German, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Swedish. For example, our technology lawyer recently completed her Masters on International Copyright Law at Seoul in Korea and speaks both Korean and Japanese. However, when we get together for lunch it is to dine on the global IT industry's universally accepted cuisine - pizza and Coke.

SEA Services

In building the business from scratch we had to decide on our participation level - would we be a broker or would we do as much as possible in-house? And what would be our growth strategy?

We knew there was a definite market gap in the provision of translation services for small- to medium-sized Australian software companies. Larger companies had the resources and contacts to track down overseas providers, but smaller companies were missing opportunities to expand their market reach into non-English speaking markets. In addition, the Internet was also driving demand for high-

quality translation for Web-based marketing.

Other SEA services identified by industry as critical to software industry development included:

- Advice on intellectual property protection, patenting, trademarks, contracts and copyright
- Technology incubator program for startup software developers
- Technical Library
- Software Compatibility and Portability Test Laboratory
- Software Process Improvement Program
- Training
- Technology Transfer Program
- Software Engineering Scholarships

All these services have now been established and are being delivered to a growing client base of Australian software developers.

The Incubator

The Incubator Program helps start-up companies to grow by offering flexible, low-cost rents. Minimal-term leases eliminate the burden that long-term lease commitments impose on small companies.

Incubator companies also have the advantage of having SEA services and staff expertise on–site for support and advice. We have ten start-up companies in our Incubator with two about to move to new premises because their staffing levels have outgrown the space available in just one year.

SEA has a number of technology transfer programs with university-based software engineering centres of excellence. The programs focus on improving software development methodologies and tools.

Our programs are aimed at fast tracking the uptake of the latest management techniques and tools by small to medium software developers.

SEA Language Laboratory Services

The SEA Language Translation Laboratory supports the following project categories:
The translation of:

- Web site localisation
- Documentation
- Localisation of software

Services include:
1. Consultancy in regard to any stage of internationalisation.
2. Localisation workshops.
3. Development of language variants: software, Web, documentation.
4. Preparation of product documentation.
5. Quality testing to commercial standards.
6. Alpha and beta trials.
7. Development of a demonstration product version.
8. Technical writing.
9. Preparation of product plans for localisation.

10. Sales and support of key internationalisation tools.
11. Provision of qualified international developers to train software developers in internationalisation techniques or to work with them on-site as part of a team.
12. End to end translation project service.

Market Challenges

In Australia we rarely have the luxury of selling our translation services to companies who are in the market for software localisation. Since our market is characterised by small companies developing niche products, we have to actually drive the market for localisation by selling the increased market reach that can be achieved through localising software and web sites.

Australia has a large number of software developers who are successfully marketing vertical industry applications around the world. Our developers have a well-earned reputation for excellence in software. For example, we have recently undertaken localisation to French and German for a company that manufactures cardio-vascular monitoring equipment and for another that has developed an electronic document management system for the utility and finance industries.

However, to many small Australian software developers language translation services means porting C++ to Java, or they envisage machine translations. We have to lead the market by promoting the concept of the business value of translation before we get to actually market the service. This means we have to play an educational role in encouraging companies to target non-English speaking markets.

Selling the Opportunity

We are about to take two high profile global software product development experts from the USA on a speaking tour of major centres around Australia. Sybase's Director, Global Products Group, Tim Fallen-Bailey, and MapInfo International Release Project Director, Ricky Thibodeau, have decades of internationalisation and localisation experience in developing products for world markets. Both companies make around 50% of their revenues from foreign sales.

In their talks they will focus on the needs and expectations of software markets around the world and those of Asia in particular. It will be a great opportunity for Australian software developers to hear first hand about the business and technical issues entailed in localisation of software. We hope that real life success stories like this will encourage Australian developers to consider increasing their market share and revenue by localising their software for non-English speaking markets.

Tanja Hill with
Sharon Denness
of SDLX

Business Growth Plan

When setting up the Language Lab, we decided to adopt a business development path that would initially entail outsourcing localisation work. This low-risk approach enabled us to offer clients the benefit of a single point of contact in project managing their translation project while we built our own capacity to deliver localisation services.

To that end we compiled and distributed SEA's Language Translation and Localisation Laboratory marketing material. After two and a half months we had our first customer, a software developer exporting a mining application to Chile. While the development firm is small with less than 20 employees, its software applications are used by the world's biggest gold mine and the world's biggest copper mine.

We outsourced the Latin American Spanish translation work to a firm in the States. This was the first in a stream of work for this firm, which is now largely undertaken through our own contract resources. We are now even providing the firm's Australian staff members with intensive Spanish courses prior to their departure for Chile.

Having repeat work like this is the best feedback possible on our service. We now have a number of clients who after an initial "toe in the water" project have gone on to major localisation projects.

We have also recruited and established a local network of localisation experts, many of whom have been trained overseas and who were working in other IT fields because there was no avenue for their expertise.

Internationalisation Training and Tools

It did not take us long to realise that not only was software localisation virtually non-existent in Australia, but so was localisation training. The only software localisation training identified through the LISA Education Initiative (LEIT) in this region was a one-week course in Singapore. Obviously, the sourcing and provision of localisation training was going to be an important factor in developing this industry.

The development of localisation training in

Australia has been linked to our success in gaining the Australian and in some cases Australian and Asian distribution rights to internationalisation and localisation tools. To meet our goal of developing a globally competitive industry we need access to this technology. The tools we distribute include:

- Internationalisation tool: I18n Expeditor,
- Translation memory tool: SDLX
- Localisation tool: Loc@le
- Project Management tool LTC Organiser

We asked these tool vendors to each donate copies of their software to ten universities around Australia. All kindly agreed and last year SDLX representative, Sharon Denness, and I visited universities across Australia to formally donate the software packages, guidelines on teaching software localisation and LISA and LEIT contact information.

All participating universities have agreed to include software internationalisation and localisation courses in their 2000 curriculum offering. This is a fantastic achievement -as many of you might know, getting universities to make changes or additions to their curricula is not an easy process. To have obtained a commitment by a number of universities to launch new courses in less than six months is wonderful. We are very grateful to the companies who played a critical role in making this happen through their generous donations of software.

In September last year we also funded two university representatives to attend LEIT at the LISA Pre-Forum Workshop at Monterey, USA.

We will also develop and deliver recognised internationalisation and localisation training to existing IT professionals through SEA's Training Department. This will ensure that we have a growing pool of skilled professionals available for recruitment as we grow our business.

Teaching the Basics

We also have to educate developers about the importance of utilising professional internationalisation and localisation services, rather than using the linguistic skills of their next door neighbour's au pair. This may be obvious to LISA members but small developers are not aware of how using amateur translators can ruin a company's credibility when entering a new market.

Payment Models

Developing export markets from Australia is an expensive process for small companies because of the cost of travel entailed in establishing and maintaining distribution channels. When you add the not inconsiderable cost of localising product it represents a significant investment for the firm.

We recognised that this was a barrier to companies accessing our services. In response to this we have developed low-cost entry and delayed payment strategies to reduce the cost for small to medium

Tanja Hill presenting donated software to a representative of Griffith University

companies.

Companies can get one module of their software or section of their Web site localised to get a look and feel for the translation service. They can then go on to get the whole package or Web site localised as they can afford it.

We also offer finance packaging, whereby companies pay 25% after signing the contract, another 25% on completion, 25% after one year and the final 25% two years on. As we build market awareness of the value of localisation services and publicise localisation case studies and client testimonials, we anticipate the need for these special deals will reduce.

Tool Time

Selling localisation services is a breeze compared to selling tools. Obviously tools can reduce both the time and cost considerably.

However most Australian software developers are unaware of the existence of tools like SDLX that can save them significant amounts of time and money. We have also found many translators are sceptical about the value of tools in terms of time saving. Many have not encountered software tools for this purpose before.

The donations of the software to the universities and the development of new localisation and interna-tionalisation courses will hopefully play a role in educating new and existing software developers and translators about the value of these tools.

LISA is a Lifeline

When setting up the Language Labs I quickly realised that LISA would be a vital source of information, training and support in building our translation service. In fact, I e-mailed LISA for information on my second day in the job.

It was a great move. LISA has proved to be an invaluable source of contacts, information, training and support. SEA formally joined LISA in April last year as its first Australian member.

SEA is actively promoting LISA in Australia. I have attended recent LISA Conferences in China, Monterey and Budapest and will continue to attend the conferences to stay abreast of industry developments and in touch with localisation providers.

What's Ahead

We have lots of interesting localisation projects scheduled and will continue to actively promote the business benefits of professional localisation services to Australian software developers. ■