

Teaching Translation Tools over the Web

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Abstract

This is a description of an ongoing training effort to teach the use of translation tools like translation memories or terminology databases in live online seminars over the internet.

1 Introduction

Translation tools are very complex and usually require 1 to 2 days of training at the beginning. But most users do not have the time or financial means to go on a two-day training. Now, with a (not so) new development in web technology, called virtual training, the knowledge transfer can take place in easy sessions of 1 to 2 hours and each participant can access this live training with a phone and an internet connection.

This presentation will show how the material for a tools training had to be adapted to the situation of a live training on the internet and what the trainer should and should not do. The presenter will share personal experience on virtual training sessions with the participants.

2 The Idea

As a trainer for translation tools, I usually hold one- or two-day training classes to teach the participants how to use translation memory systems, alignment systems and terminology databases. It is a mix of overview presentations, hands-on training - either trainer and participants in parallel or participants on their own - and question and answer sessions on topics that arise out of the use of the tools or specific issues the participants have had in the past.

Many of my participants tell me that they finally decided to take a training class, after having tried to get along with the tools by themselves for quite some time and finding that they cannot use the tools efficiently as they don't know how to use all the features available. Some had used the tools for years and found during our class that there would have been an easier way of doing things if they had just known it.

Also, many would like to go to a training class, but either have no local dealer/training center that offers such a training or simply cannot afford to be away from work for 2 or 3 days. For freelancers especially, the cost of training, travel and time away from work is sometimes prohibitive.

3 The Technology

This was the starting point for me to explore, whether there was some kind of technology that would allow remote training classes for all those who could not participate in a regular training for whatever reason. Video conferencing was one possibility, but the equipment for that was just too expensive, so I turned to the internet. Taping classes was another idea, but here amount of time and money that had to be spent on keeping the tapes up-to-date was too high. And it lacked the interactive component that is crucial to software training classes.

I found a technology that is often called "virtual meeting center" and that promised to offer all the things I needed. The ability to meet on the internet in real time independent of country or time, an accompanying phone conference functionality and an "application sharing" feature that would allow me to show the software to be worked with.

A virtual meeting basically is a website where all participants log into at the same time, password protected of course. They come to a meeting space that shows a window where the trainer can load documents or presentations. Also there are usually a chat window for written conversation and a list of participants to one side of the screen. For collaborative work there is a whiteboard feature that lets all participants draw onto the same space in the presentation window.

To train software this way, the trainer can use the "application sharing" feature. Whichever application he/she starts will be visible on the screens of all participants (with a small delay depending on the speed of the internet connections). It is also possible to have some of the

participants show their screen to the rest of the group.

The voice part of the meeting can be managed by a phone conference in parallel or by also using the internet with so-called "voice-over-IP", so that no additional phone call is necessary.

The usage of the platform is usually billed per minute per user. Phone conferences are billed extra, voice-over-IP is included in the meeting minute price.

There are now many platforms that offer virtual meeting space. To find the one that suits trainer and participants best, I tested several of them (please find a list of some meeting platforms at the end of this document).

To be able to use this technology effectively, I found it useful for the trainer to use a headset instead of holding the phone receiver, to keep both hands free for typing and navigating the applications. For voice-over-IP this is a must anyway. Participants may use a headset as well, but don't have to.

3.1 Costs

Prices vary from platform to platform. Usually there is a fee per minute per participant plus an additional fee, if the phone conference system will be used as well. But everybody can use their own phone conference system, it is not mandatory to book it with the meeting platform. If regular sessions are planned, then there are also monthly or yearly arrangements possible for the use of the meeting platform. Per minute prices range between 8 cents to 45 cents per user, depending on the provider and the services used.

4 The Training Material

As nobody can sit in front of a computer fully concentrated for a whole day, the training had to be split up into several smaller sessions, so had to be the training material.

4.1 Preparing the Training Material

It was found that 1.5 to 2-hour sessions were the maximum that participants and trainer could comfortably sit through, so the training material had to be split up into modules of that length. Also, the training needed to include some time for presentation by the teacher as well as for hands-on time for the participants.

The modules were defined by a logical sequence of functionalities that might be shown during one session. Each module was broken down into

detailed steps, as in the following example of two Trados MultiTerm sessions.

MultiTerm	
Terminology database basics	Export / Import
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search methods • Exact search • Global search • Fuzzy search • Creating entries • Manual • With input model • By importing • Creating a database • Entry structure • Database definition • Index fields • Text fields • Attribute fields • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Export settings • Default settings • Creating an export definition • Printing database contents in Word • As a table • As a glossary • As a dictionary • ...

Table 1: Sample of MultiTerm modules contents

In the end the training schedule became a very detailed table of actions with specific times set for each action. The schedule was tested with two beta groups to see whether the combination of presentation and hands-on time and the overall session length was working for everybody.

Example schedule for a part of a session on Trados WinAlign:

No.	Action	File / Application	min
(1)	PowerPoint	WinAlign.ppt	10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WinAlign functionalities • Glossary with WinAlign specific terms 		
(2)	Application Sharing	WinAlign	10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project setup 	Eng01.doc,	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add files 	Ger01.doc	
(3)	Send training files	Eng01.rtf, Fre01.rtf, Jap01.doc, Ger01.doc	02
(4)	Hands-on		10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project setup Add files 		

Table 2: Sample of WinAlign schedule

The schedule needs to be as detailed as possible and the trainer should strictly adhere to it, that is, the amount of time needed to show a certain feature needs to be measured exactly.

To be able to hold a training session over the internet the training needs to be meticulously prepared and the trainer needs to be very familiar with the meeting platform so as to be able to help each participant if problems arise with log-in, screen resolution or other.

When structuring the material into modules, it can also be defined which modules are prerequisite for what other modules and which can be taken as stand alone modules, like in the following matrix:

Module sessions	Knowledge required
Sessions on Translator's Workbench	
Session 1 (basics)	
Session 2 (batch processes)	basics
Session 3 (administration)	basics and batch processes
Session 4 (TagEditor)	basics and batch processes
Session on Conversion of DTP files	
Session 1 (S-Tagger FrameMaker)	basics, TagEditor
Session 2 (S-Tagger Interleaf)	basics, TagEditor

Table 3: Knowledge required per session

5 Technical Requirements

Each participant needs a computer with access to the internet (a 56k-modem works OK but faster connections like ISDN or DSL are to be preferred). For a phone conference in parallel, an additional phone line is needed. Participants who only have access to one phone line can also use the chat functionality to ask questions or the class uses voice-over-IP altogether.

The trainer should use a headset to keep the hands free for typing in the chat area and showing the software features. Students can also use headsets which is particularly useful if the training session includes hands-on training time. If voice-over-IP is used, all participants need to have headsets connected to their computer.

6 Training

6.1 Classroom Training versus Online Training

The online training situation is very much different from a classroom training where the trainer can communicate directly with the participants.

6.1.1 In the Classroom

The trainer has direct contact to the participants and can see whether they are comfortable with the pace set by the trainer. Questioning looks, nods, frowns and gestures tell the trainer a lot about how the participants feel, whether they are following the topic, whether they need more time or if the speed of teaching can be increased.

Questions that can be answered with a nod instead of "yes" can give the trainer feedback on the situation in the class.

The trainer can walk through the classroom and work with students individually if help is needed or if there is an issue specific to one computer or one participant.

6.1.2 In the Virtual Classroom

The trainer does not see the participants, so has no way of knowing if the pace is too fast or too slow and whether the participants are still there, bored or just listening intently, when it is quiet at the other end of the line.

A question like "Can we go on?" usually does not get any feedback so the trainer has to rephrase the question into something like "Who does have a question so far?" or "Who does not see the picture of ... on the screen?"

The trainer has to request feedback actively much more often than in a face-to-face classroom situation, as most participants will only ask when directly spoken to. This is one reason why a 2-hour session is already a very demanding time span for an online trainer.

The trainer cannot observe what participants do. The participants must ask for help themselves, so the trainer must make it easy for them to ask. For example by talking about what can go wrong or recounting own experiences with the use of the tool at the beginning and asking frequently if there are any questions.

7 Trainer Skills

The trainer needs to be familiar with the technology of the platform that is used. Log-in difficulties, switching between windows/screens and other technical questions the participants may have, need to be addressed instantly and competently. (For technical difficulties at log-in and such the provider of the platform usually has a technical hotline - the trainer might need a separate phone line to contact this hotline without leaving the group alone.)

As the screen for the trainer and the participants may look differently (number of menus or buttons available), the trainer should know what the participants can see and what they can't see. For the first meetings it might make sense for the trainer to be logged in twice - once as a trainer and once as a participant. This will increase cost, as the platform has to be paid for by minute per participant, but it helps the trainer to control what the group can see or do.

As an absolute MUST, the trainer has to include a "get-to-know-the-technology" session for each group at the beginning of a new class or whenever a new participant joins the group. This should include a short introduction of the meeting window with all the functionalities that are available, i.e. chat area, participants list, question button (to signal the trainer that one wants to ask a question), menus and commands to share an application and so on.

Another obstacle might be screen size. If the trainer has a larger screen than the participants and works in full screen mode for application sharing for example, the participants will not be able to see all of the trainer's screen. This has to be checked in the first meeting as well, so that the trainer can adjust the window size of what he/she is showing, to the size of what all participants can see on their screens.

This can take up to 10 minutes and should be included in the session schedule.

On the first meeting a short round of introductions should be held. If available the participants / trainer can show a video picture or a picture in a graphics file to the group and introduce themselves. Most platforms offer a small window where the trainer can show his video cam picture during the training, but as this tends to distract people from the contents of the session, it should be used sparingly. Another thing to test in the first session is the connection speed of all participants. After starting a test screen the trainer should ask the participants for feedback at what moment they are able to see the whole screen as well. This time span has to be kept in mind during the complete session. Before going on to show a feature or going to the next slide of a presentation the participants should have enough time to take a look at each screen.

The chat area also tends to be used a lot during a session. Here the trainer can limit the use by only allowing the participants to either send chat information to all other participants or to the trainer alone. Chat amongst group members should be disabled, especially if some of the group members know each other already.

The trainer needs to do some multitasking - presenting the session content, explaining the session content verbally, keep an eye on the chat area as well as on the "raise hand" feature of the meeting window in case somebody wants to ask a question (this is especially true for sessions using the voice-over-IP functionality, as this does not really allow a good two-way communication because of the delay of sound which can be up to 5 seconds. In which time the other person might have decided that nothing was coming forth and started talking again. In this case the two sound information pieces would overlay each other, making it very hard to understand who said what. So usually the trainer has to give over the right to speak to another participant and he/she has to give it back when finished). This is a very demanding job so the meeting needs to be as well prepared as possible. All applications that will be shown, all documents and presentations that will be loaded to the meeting window have to be present and open before the meeting starts. Looking for a file to show during a meeting does not give a very professional impression as well as costing time and money.

All along the session, from the greeting of the participants, the introduction to the technology and throughout the session, the trainer will always have to explain what he/she is doing at the moment. Especially if some of the participants have a slower connection than others, the next screen to be shown should be explained until everybody can see it on their screens. Asking often if there are any questions or if anybody cannot see the screen or complete the task in a hands-on period, helps to bridge those silences that tend to come up in phone conferences when nobody knows what is coming next. And it also helps participants to ask their questions which they might not dare ask otherwise for fear of interrupting the trainer. Again this is very demanding on the trainer, so that a 2 hour session is probably the most an internet session should last.

Also the trainer needs to be very aware of his/her actions on the screen. Using the mouse pointer to show or circle some item on the screen should be done deliberately and slowly otherwise the participants will only see a fuzzy, uncoordinated motion on their screens. Mouse pointers should be used only if really necessary.

Another very valuable feature is the possibility to "tape" the session. A session can be recorded for later reuse, recap or for example if a presentation has to be given several times and should always look the same. These can usually be viewed with a special viewer that is provided by the platform provider.

8 Training Mix

Presentations using this kind of meeting place should not take more than 30 minutes as the attention span will decrease drastically after that time if no interaction of any kind is possible.

The training mix that seems to work quite well for a software training, is a session with introduction into the topic, possibly by some PowerPoint slides. Then followed by a short presentation with the application itself (about 15 minutes) with accompanying explanations. After that the participants get between 10 to 15 minutes to recreate what they have just seen on their own screen. Files or example material for these hands-on periods may be distributed before the session by email or can be sent to the participants directly via the meeting platform (if this feature is available). The steps to be taken during this hands-on period can be listed in a window of the meeting window, as a simple document or a slide of a PowerPoint

presentation, so that participants can look it up any time they need it.

After the session the trainer can use polling features to either ask session related questions (multiple/single choice) or this feature can be used to get feedback on the overall feeling about the session (Was the content useful? Was the session too short/too long?...). Mostly those polling features give back an anonymous result in form of percentages. The poll needs to be prepared in advance and can be saved as a file for later reuse.

9 Group Size

In face-to-face software classes you can have up to 20 people, but probably would not consider doing the whole course with only 2 participants. (OK, 6-8 participants is the ideal number of people for a group in software training but reality often teaches that this number is usually exceeded). Online training sessions should definitely not have more than 6-8 people, as it will be very hard to help each participant with individual questions in the limited timeframe. For presentation-only sessions, the number is practically only limited by the number of participants the platform provider allows per session (if such limitations exist at all). But a group of 2 or even an individual training session is still possible and much less expensive than doing this in a classroom.

10 Actual Training Sessions

The above experiences were attained by evaluating the technologies of virtual meeting platforms and holding several training classes on the use of Trados tools.

10.1 Sessions

Basically, the standard training class for 3 Trados tools, Translator's Workbench, MultiTerm and WinAlign which are usually taught within a two-day training were split up into modules with 2-hour sessions. 2 sessions for the WinAlign module, 2 sessions for the MultiTerm module and 4 sessions for the Translator's Workbench.

10.2 Training Sequence

Each session was started with an overview over the contents of the whole module and the contents of the individual session.

Each topic in each session was organized as in the schedule shown above (Table 2). An introduction with PowerPoint where necessary, a live demonstration of the topic, sending of prepared demo files where necessary, hands-on period with questions and answers if required.

The files that were sent to the participants either included a small step-by-step instruction sheet or the instructions were shown in the meeting place of the online platform for reference.

10.3 Timing

The sessions were held twice a week for 4 to 5 weeks depending on the availability of the participants. The trainer was located in Germany whereas most of the participants were located in the United States. This made it necessary for the trainer to hold the sessions in the evening between 8pm and 10pm, so that the participants were able to take the sessions during their workday.

10.4 Participants

Initially, the training was developed with the freelance translator in mind. This target group has to get acquainted with the tools but often does not have the time or financial means to also pay for travel and training costs. A mailing was sent out to freelance translators, project managers and localization managers.

The profiles of the participants showed that most of them were project managers instead of the translators that this course was targeted at in the first place. And it showed that the setup of the training, with its focus on hands-on training was interesting for project managers as well but not exactly the most efficient way for them. Project managers need a rather detailed overview, so that they know what functionalities are available and how they will make their life easier, but they do not necessarily need to know all the details of handling a tool as a translator would. Also, the hands-on phases were not so important for them, as they did not need to practice as much as a translator. Partly because they usually feel more at home with a computer and are very quick in understanding the underlying techniques and ideas. Partly because they will only use some few features of all the ones a translator might use.

10.5 Changes from Group 1 to Group 2

The second group also consisted mainly of project managers, therefore the contents and schedule of the sessions were adapted in such a way as to give an overview over all functionalities that might be helpful for project managers and only showing the ones that related to the actual translating. Also, in the introduction to each topic there was added a short example of where this feature might be used. At the end of each topic, the trainer added some advice about possible problems that might occur with a given functionality and solutions for them.

10.6 Trainer

It also showed that as a trainer you have to feel very much at home with a computer and the internet in order to enjoy live online classes and be able to switch between the hands-on part, where the actual application is running on the computer of the participant and the presentation part, where they only see the screen of the trainer, without confusing the applications.

11 Advantages / Disadvantages of Online Training

The following lists give an overview over the advantages and disadvantages of using live internet sessions for training purposes.

11.1 Advantages

- Easy to use
- Flexible
- Time zone-independent
- Less expensive than classroom meetings
- Short sessions that can be taken at the workplace
- Everybody works with his/her own computer
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Group size does not matter
- Sessions can be organized in such a way that participants need not take the full class but only modules that are useful to them (cutting cost and time spent for the training)
- Cuts down on costs (travel, time away from work...)

11.2 Disadvantages

- No direct contact between trainer and participants except over voice (phone or voice-over-IP)
- Only useful for participants who have a certain knowledge about how to work with computers and the internet
- Training contents has to be prepared in a special, modular way
- Trainer needs to know the technology and do multitasking which can be very demanding

12 Conclusion

While live online sessions are definitely a good way to cut down on training expenses, it cannot be an only substitute for a face-to-face classroom training, also it is not the ideal solution for every user. It needs a lot of preparation and timing and is very demanding on the trainer regarding

communication with the participants and attention to a detailed training session plan.

It is however a very flexible alternative to phone-only conferences and a very effective way to get collaboration on an internationally distributed team or training group. As connections to the internet get more speedy and less expensive there is a great opportunity to deliver more live online training sessions over the web. Also it is to be expected that voice-over-IP will improve a lot within the next few years so that parallel phone conferences will not be needed that much any more.

References

List of virtual meeting platforms

The following list shows some of the providers of virtual meeting platforms. Most offer the same feature set of presentation window, chat area, application sharing, polling, recording and meeting setup. This is not a complete list of all providers and the services they offer except phone conferences and or web conferences vary quite a lot.

They all offer a free sample meetings to get to know the technology. Most of these platform providers also offer an introduction into the work of an e-trainer.

Provider	Website
WebEx One of the first platforms on the market, says it holds 64% market share, costs at 45 cents/minute/participant. Phone conferences at additional cost between 10 (dial-in) and 25 (dial-out) cent/minute/person	www.webex.com
DataExchange 27 cent per minute per participant, uses WebEx technology	www.freeconferencerecall.com
Vcademy by Daten und Dokumentation Uses technology from Centra (www.centra.com), no phone conferencing offered, only voice-over-IP	www.daten-dokumentation.de

Netucate Needs clients software installation, no pricing information found on the website	www.netucate.com
NetMeeting Component of Windows 2000 by Microsoft	www.microsoft.com
Sametime By IBM, Lotus, needs client installed	
SaveOnConferences Phone conferencing with free meeting platform as an addition (from 8.5 cents down to 5.5 cents per minute per participant, depending on volume)	www.saveonconferences.com
Genesys Phone conferencing and meeting platform, prices per minute per participant but no actual prices on website available	www.genesys.com

Further reading for example:

Stephen J. Bigelow. 1/3/02. *CNET review: We compare 5 Web conferencing apps.*
http://reviews.cnet.com/4520-3535_7-5020761-1.html?legacy=cnet

Clive Shepherd. 2003. *Training the e-Trainer: Website of Fastrak Consulting Ltd.*
<http://www.fastrak-consulting.co.uk/tactix/Features/etrainer.htm>