Knowledge Services at Work

Xplanation International designs a translation solution
for Fortis Bank.

By Bert Maes and Francis Roossens

In 2001, Fortis Bank entered into a partnership agreement with the Xplanation International Group to form Xplanation-F&A, a full-service outsourcing solution to handle all of Fortis Bank's banking and administrative translation requirements. This article tells the story of how the Fortis Bank managed to solve an issue that many large institutions and corporations face: how to keep translation costs down while still providing high quality services required by customers and partners.

Questions for all Corporations

Today's continuously changing economic climate has impacted almost every company around the globe. The bottom line is heavily scrutinized and difficult decisions on how to reduce costs are made on a daily basis.

For many years, large companies have built their own service organizations in the belief that it was more cost effective to have the expertise in-house to support core business. This was probably true in the past when technology was less prevalent and salaries were not as big a percentage of corporate budgets as they are today. Rapidly changing technologies and the need to stay current, as well as escalating salaries for skilled employees, have changed the cost-effectiveness of maintaining internal service organizations.

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Corporations need to ask themselves whether they should continue to keep all support functions in-house. Questions they need to ask are: What is our core business? How can we best optimize our resources? How does this particular service organization effectively support our core business? Does it make sense to retain a staff of full-time support employees for a less than full-time need? What other functions can these employees perform? Is there a specialized outsourcing organization that can provide the same support for less than it costs us to do it ourselves? Can we trust an outside source to maintain the confidentiality of our sensitive or proprietary content? Can we maintain control of our content if we outsource it?

There is no single answer to any of these questions, but the reality is that all companies must contain costs. One way to accomplish this is to outsource support and service functions to organizations that specialize in these areas

The Answer for Fortis Bank

Fortis Bank, like many large corporate institutions, maintained its own translation department. The Fortis Bank Language Center (FBLC) was responsible for Fortis Bank translations with a very broad scope. The division contained 26 employees with desks for Dutch, French, English, German, administrative, and IT. Translations were done in-house for these four languages, and there was an extensive network of off-site translators that handled other European languages and less frequent requirements, such as the Arabic languages.
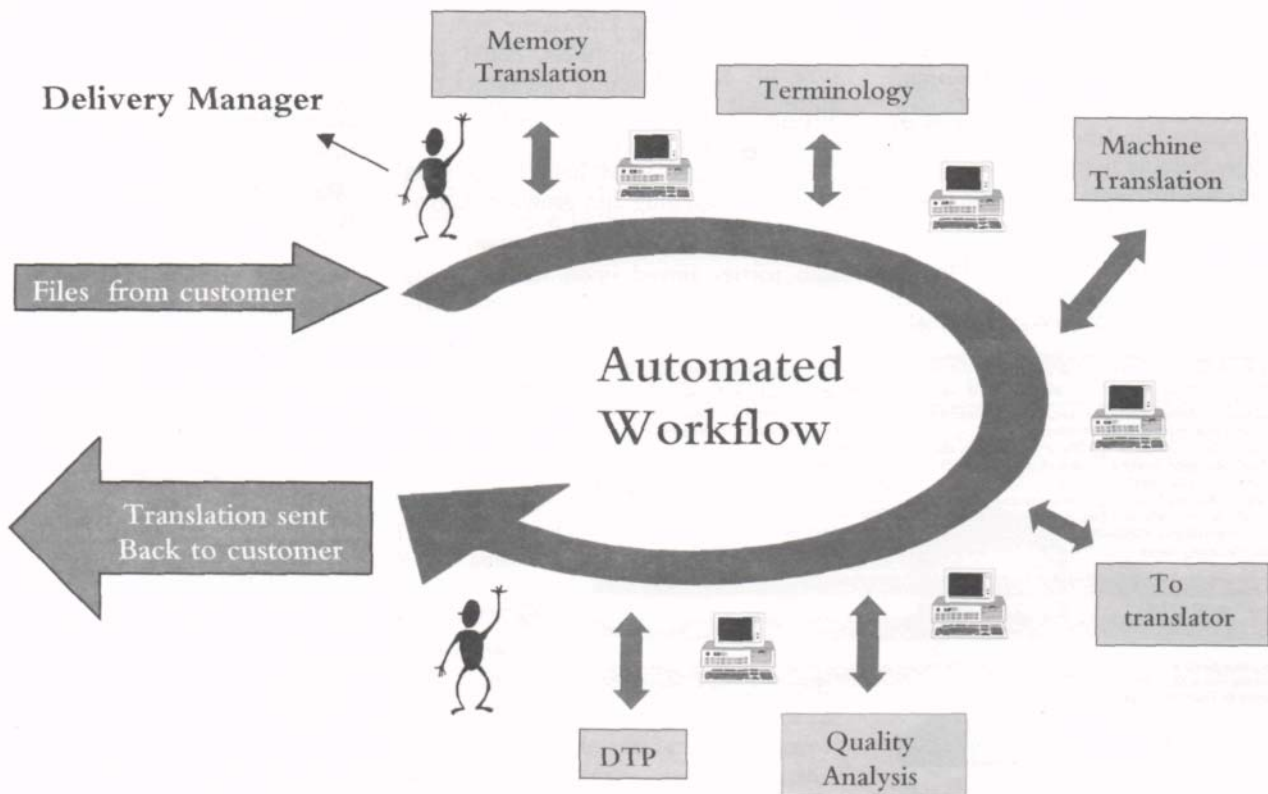
How does Lantworks work?

Figure 1: Lantworks…the workflow tool

In addition to translating, the employees of the FBLC were also responsible for editing, interpreting, terminology management, and general language support. The FBLC not only handled all bank-oriented translations, it also translated content for insurance documents, stock exchange

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trades, and other administrative businesses for the bank. Moreover, the FBLC was also translating non-business-related text, such as the company newspaper.

In the mid-1990s, Fortis Bank was investigating the use of a combined Machine Translation, Translation Memory, Terminology Database (MT-TM-TDB) technology platform for its translators. The system should ensure translation quality and reduce the processing time for translations. After extensive market research, Fortis Bank chose a partner, LANT, with their Optimizer translation memory tool. LANT later became the R&D division of the Xplanation International Group, headquartered in Leuven, Belgium.

Since the 1990s, Fortis Bank, then known as Generale Bank—Générale de Banque, has grown steadily and its translation de-

mands grew as well. Last year alone, Fortis Bank translated 1.5 million lines, over a quarter of a million of which contained edited text. With this growth in demand for translation services, Fortis Bank had to choose whether to invest in additional translation resources and/or tools, or to outsource the translation activities.

Like many other large corporations, Fortis was facing the problem of soaring costs, which did not fit in with the rapidly changing banking environment. Within FBLC, the internal translators could not always manage the highly differentiated and quickly evolving bank materials, particularly with the general shift to electronic and private banking. The expanding range of different file formats was also difficult for the FBLC to manage.

It appeared that the only way Fortis could resolve this was by investing heavily in new hardware, software, and intensive training for its translation staff. At what point would the demands for this drain on resources end?

The Joint Venture with Xplanation

At the time Fortis Bank was investigating solutions to the translation problem, Xplanation was moving into the knowledge services business. Outsourcing the translation activities was the preferred solution, and the partnership with Xplanation, a company combining knowledge management and translation tools, could give Fortis the exact direction and future orientation it needed. Xplanation's R&D department and experience working with General Motors could help Fortis react quickly to changing and growing translation needs.

Both parties agreed upon the following ground rules: content must maintain

quality, confidentiality has to be strictly observed, and services must be provided with the same dedication to deadlines, corporate standards, and customer requirements as the bank had always delivered. Also required were a simple workflow, translator training, transparent billing, and unobtrusive software updates that did not impact the on-going content management process.

The automated workflow reduces human error to a minimum, be it in the processing of the assignment, the billing, the pre-translation, or the desktop publishing phase.

In July 2001, Xplanation-F&A was founded, incorporating all banking and administrative translation-related matters at Xplanation. Over a half million lines have already been successfully translated. The use of translation tools in the process is described below.

In a traditional translation cycle, even when using translation memory and a terminology database, the primary responsibility for all aspects of the translation process belongs to the translator. This applies to software purchases, quality assurance, billing, DTP, and terminology updates.

Within the Lantworks system, the translator no longer has primary responsibility for the translation process. Everything is handled centrally and the translator no longer needs to worry about market positioning or investing in new equipment or software. The translator only needs to be concerned with the actual translation (see Figure 1).

Lantworks comes with an editor called LES (Lantworks Editor Studio). LES presents the translator with pre-translated text from the memory database, as shown in Figure 2. Repetitive work is thus avoided. The use of translation memory, terminology database, and even machine translation is rather well known, but the pre-translation sequence is unique. Translations are generated as follows:

1. The customer-specific translation memory database is consulted with additional fuzzy matching features.
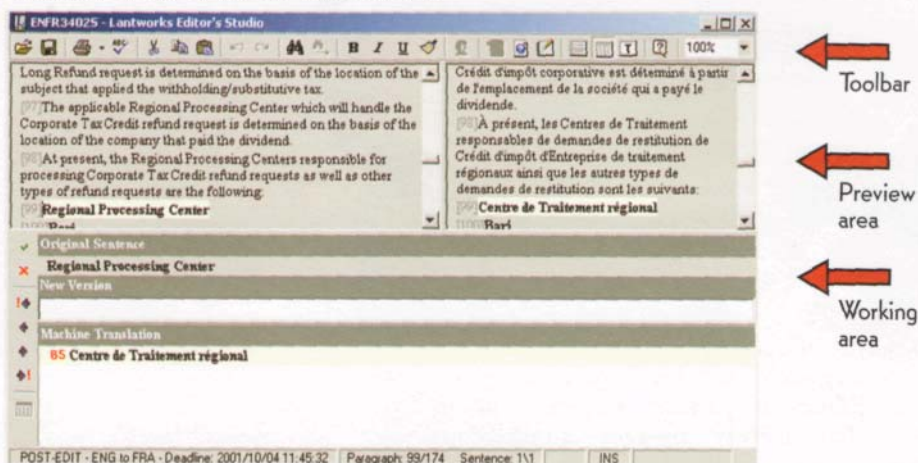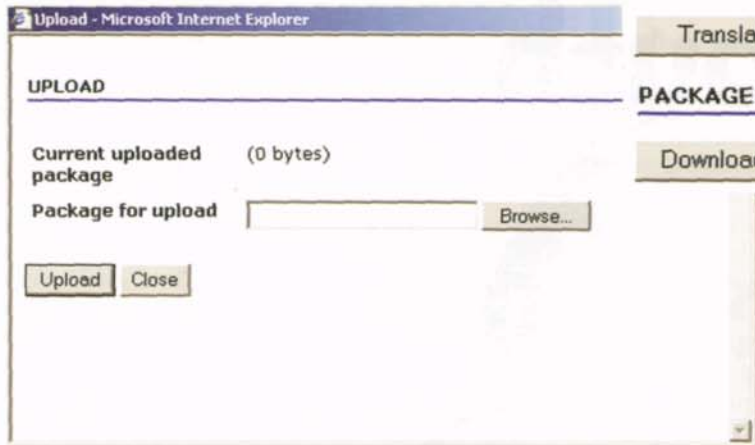

Figure 2: Lantworks Editor Studio…the editor

Finished translation:

1. Save file to disk

2. Open Lantworks

Translation Workflow System
Web Client

TRANSLATION JOB

Translation Job Name   ENG -> FRA ENFR3402S.doc

[Translation Jobs]

PACKAGE FOR ACTIVITY POSTEDITION

[Download] [Upload]

Upload - Microsoft Internet Explorer

UPLOAD

Current uploaded package	(0 bytes)
Package for upload	[_____] Browse...

[Upload] [Close]

3. Press Upload button

Figure 3: Back to Lantworks…

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2. The terminology database provides the translator with customer-approved terms.

3. Machine Translation is used in the background, helping translators boost productivity by as much as 20%, depending on the type of text.

The MT tool is enhanced with a smart paste feature, automatically finishing words represented in the pre-translated phrase, further improving productivity and making the application easier to use.

This process runs fully in the background. Customers submit translation requests online and Lantworks assigns a translator automatically via an intelligent time-out procedure, rerouting translation assignments when a translator is not available within a certain timeframe. Text is then extracted and pre-translated within minutes, depending on deadline urgency. Automatically, the translation interface is created and when the assignment is processed, the process step is flagged, sending a notification to the delivery manager. (see Figure 3)

Once the post-editing and internal quality assurance are completed, the translation is reformatted in the target language and returned to the customer, significantly reducing project management, translation, and desktop publishing costs. Moreover, within the near future, a billing tool will be implemented, to enhance transparency and reduce administrative costs.

The Advantages for Fortis

Focusing on the workflow itself, the advantages include:

- Faster assignment processing
- More consistent translation quality
- Reduced costs

The automated workflow reduces human error to a minimum, be it in the processing of the assignment, the billing, the pre-translation, or the desktop publishing phase. A single delivery manager can easily process several assignments at one time, thus reducing process time, while keeping a solid overview of the several assignments. The process learning curve is short, enabling several delivery managers to easily step into ongoing work without shortcutting translation processing. Also, because every step of the workflow is automatically registered and it is easy to overview the entire project, communication problems are eliminated.

Customers can request to be set up in Application Service Provider (ASP) mode, which allows them to have full access to a web site to view ongoing tasks, or even have some tasks, such as post-editing, centralized at their location.

The quality of translations is enhanced by the software tools used, which guarantee the consistency in phrasing and terminology. The delivery manager further controls quality by performing quality and

DTP checks, and providing feedback to everyone in the chain.

Efficiency leads to cost reduction and so does the use of translation software. Thanks to Xplanation's high volume orientation, we can go even further in reducing translation costs. Billing is directly linked to source text count and the counts generated by the pre-translation process.

The new Fortis-Xplanation translation approach is not only modern, it is also very efficient and transparent. Today's translation demands are certainly not always easy to meet, but a combination of advanced technology and professional services produces the best results for both sides.

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