

Outsell's Gilbane Group Beacon

Guidance on Content Strategies,
Practices and Technologies

Translating Social Media and Dynamic Content in Real Time for Customers

New Options for Enterprises

By Vince Emery, Senior Analyst

November 2010

Sponsored by:



Social Media for Multinational Businesses

As more non-English-speaking people and enterprises have flocked to the internet, the balance of languages online has changed. The report *Internet Users in the World by Geographic Regions: 2010* by Internet World Stats estimates that in 2010 there were 536.6 million English-language internet users, 444.9 million Chinese language users, and 985 million internet users who read other languages. The dominance of English has ended. In fact, Google CEO Eric Schmidt has predicted that by 2014 the internet will be dominated by Chinese-language content.

The fastest-growing areas of the internet are social media sites, places where people find and contribute content, such as customer support knowledgebases, discussion forums, blogs, online communities, and online chat. To illustrate the rapid growth of social media sites, "What Americans Do Online" in the August 2010 issue of *NielsenWire* reports that Americans spend nearly a quarter of their online time on social sites, up from 15.8 % just a year ago—a 43% increase.

The growing appetite for social and real-time content is a worldwide trend, with people consuming and contributing social content in their own languages. In several countries, both the percentage of people who use social media and the average number of hours spent using social media are much higher than in North American countries. For example, *Social Media in Asia* (July 2010) by NM Incite reports more than 220 million bloggers in China, more than twice as many as in the US. (For a graphical representation of the dramatic differences between social media use in different countries, see "Vision Statement: Mapping the Social Internet," July-August 2010, *Harvard Business Review*.)

The people who are causing the rise of social media are the customers of enterprises in both the business-to-consumer and business-to-customer spaces. It is no surprise, then, to see enterprises leveraging social media to engage with their customers. Enterprises are reaching social customers in many ways; the three most prevalent activities are customer care; marketing; and discovering customer preferences.

Managers who support international business goals are increasingly pressured by this global popularity to provide and respond to social content in multiple languages. Even as it provides new opportunities, the need for multilingual social content creates new problems.

When translators localize content into multiple languages, they use technologies created for traditional static content, not for social content. Social media produce relatively large volumes of user-generated content that are then consumed by other users in real time or near real time. Even when assisted by technologies such as translation memory, traditional human-generated translations are too costly for social media and certainly are too slow for translating content that customers can generate faster than human translators can localize.

Because human translators cannot scale their output to meet enterprise needs for fast, inexpensive, and accurate translations of social content, enterprises are beginning to turn to the only viable alternative: real-time machine translation (also called *automated translation*) for social media.



This paper targets marketing and customer care executives and content managers who need to understand new enterprise solutions for rapid translation of social interactions and dynamic content. Its goal is to answer these questions:

- What types of benefits do enterprises expect from using multilingual social content to engage customers? What difficulties should managers be aware of when planning a multilingual social project?
- What features should managers expect their solutions to provide to deliver those benefits and minimize the difficulties?
- What are some of the key questions managers should answer to ensure successful results for their multilingual social media projects?

Customer Engagement in the Age of Social Media

Social media are online media using technology to allow interactive dialogues and the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Enterprises that apply social media for customer engagement sometimes refer to *customer-generated media*. Social media give companies ways of engaging in conversations with their customers beyond their traditional websites.

Here are some of the channels used by multinational businesses for customer engagement.

Knowledgebases Many companies provide knowledgebases for customer care or customer support, enabling customers to ask questions and post comments related to problems and their solutions. Because customers often answer each others' support questions, knowledgebases reduce customer care costs and increase customer satisfaction, and can be useful for marketing activities as well. Translating knowledgebase entries enables customers to leverage the expertise of other customers worldwide, increasing customer satisfaction levels across regions, even for regions that lack the critical mass of customers needed to populate a knowledgebase.

Reviews Customer-written reviews of products and services have increased traffic and sales on all kinds of websites. For example, TripAdvisor operates 23 localized websites serving business customers and consumers. Every week, visitors to TripAdvisor websites publish between 50,000 and 100,000 user-written travel reviews, making TripAdvisor the world's largest travel review site. Reviews are translated into several languages, creating content that attracts millions of visitors from search engines every week. Another example is Amazon.com, which enables customers to post reviews for all of its product categories, and enables other customers to comment on reviews and vote on each review's quality.

Forums and communities Many enterprises provide customer forums or online communities for their end customers, or for their partners or distributors. These forums can be open to the public, or visibility can be restricted only to certain groups. Forums provide customer care, and can also be used to gather customer preferences for new product development and for marketing insights. More widely-known are third-party forums such as LinkedIn, which enterprises often use for recruitment, and Facebook, commonly used for marketing.



Blogs and comments It's hard to find a large enterprise that doesn't provide some sort of blog, but most do not feature the interactivity that fosters productive marketing or good customer care. Blogs must draw enough readership to generate comments. Companies that localize blogs often translate the blog's body text without translating reader comments, a mistake that decreases reader involvement in translated blogs. Customer comments can also be used without blogs.

Product listings Allowing an enterprise's customers or partners to list their own products and services for sale requires more technical and process infrastructure than other social media, but can generate revenue and build customer loyalty. The most well-known provider of a social environment that enables customers to post product listings is eBay, but thousands of other businesses use variations of this model. Some use customer-posted product listings as their main business, such as HomeAway, where homeowners list their homes as vacation rentals, or Abebooks, where people sell used books. Others enable sellers to post product listings as a sideline, such as the AppExchange, created by Salesforce.com, which enables its partners to post services and software apps for Salesforce customers to buy. AppExchange has created a rich milieu of third-party add-on features and services to enrich the Salesforce products.

Chat Businesses use online chat to provide real-time customer support, training, and pre-sales service at a fraction of the cost of telephone calls. Support via live web chat and mobile chat are now provided by businesses in almost all industries. Because chat conversations can be saved, edited, and published on websites, chat enables companies to build archives of high-quality, low-cost content to attract more web visitors.

Twitter Twitter enables enterprises to send brief messages to subscribers and then receive near-instant feedback. Companies use Twitter to ask questions about new products, promote company news, and offer promotions or e-coupons. Enterprises also use Twitter search to look for news mentioning the company's name, a competitor's name, product names, or relevant words. Some companies search for Twittered complaints, so they can address complaints quickly and prevent small annoyances from growing into firestorms.

These are only a few examples. Businesses use many other social channels as well, but as this brief list indicates, there are some channels where enterprises can own and manage the entire user experience, such as knowledgebases, reviews, forums, and chat. With other social channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, and third-party review sites, businesses cannot own the entire user experience, but can monitor activity and decide when and how to take part in a conversation. For many business purposes, the enterprise-owned channels present the biggest opportunity.

Benefits from Multilingual Social Customer Projects

Regardless of which social media channel or channels an enterprise decides to use, the business benefits often fall into three categories:

Customer care benefits: The need for customer care in specific languages can become apparent when one region shows lower customer satisfaction scores than other regions. Businesses also use social media because they need to reduce costs for customer care in a particular country. Another issue where social media can help is when customers in some countries fail to use all the features of a product, or seem to be confused by new features.

Marketing benefits: Without enough local-language content, regional websites cannot attract the visitor traffic they need to reach marketing goals. When search engines index a greater volume of target-language content from a site, they assign higher rankings to it. The higher the search engine rankings, the more business you will generate. Publishing more content through more channels drives findability, which generates more clickthroughs, more conversions, more advertising revenue,



and more transactional revenue. Translating customer-generated content can be a fast and relatively low-cost way to increase the volume of content you provide in target languages.

Discovery of customer sentiments and preferences: Social channels are research tools. You can listen to your customers' conversations. What are they saying about your company? About your competitors? Your partners? Your products? Companies track industry trends, background-check job candidates, and find decision-makers in prospective new accounts. Products like Sysomos enable discovery by providing analytics and business intelligence from social media.

Ten Difficulties of Using Multilingual Social Media to Engage Customers

The previous section of this paper highlighted some of the benefits companies have realized from multilingual social media. This section describes ten challenges that enterprises have encountered.

1. **Social media do not just provide content, they require enterprises to listen and rapidly respond.** Traditional media provide monologs. Social media provide conversations. Lack of understanding of the resulting differences in requirements and infrastructure has doomed many multilingual social projects to failure. Technologies, workflows, and review processes suitable for traditional content may not be sufficient for conducting multilingual conversations, and content creation plans must include resource allocations for creating responses.
2. **Need for translation in real time or near real time.** Some enterprises update content on their localized websites once a week. Social media customers are not that patient. When they raise a question or make a response-worthy comment, they expect a quick response in their own language. Most social channels require enterprises to make real-time or near real-time responses to customer-posted content. Human translators can rarely support the quick turnaround times needed. This need for speed makes social media ideal for automated translation, especially with recent advances in the quality of automated translations, enabling most social content to be translated without human intervention. Technology that evaluates translations for confidence in translation quality (and routes only nonconforming texts to human translators) ensures translations meet quality standards.

A technique called *crowdsourcing*—asking hundreds of customers to volunteer online to each translate short texts—has been used by some companies as a low-cost way to translate articles and software interfaces. However, the willingness of volunteers to participate is not predictable, the quality of their translations is erratic, and they cannot keep up with rapid social interactions. Crowdsourcing is not suitable for most enterprise-scale customer interactions.



3. **Variable volume and timing of customer-generated content.** Traditional content is produced according to the enterprise's schedule, but much social content is produced whenever customers create it. Events outside an enterprise's control can cause spikes in social content volume at unpredictable times. This variability argues against hiring enough people to translate peak volumes because they would sit idle during non-peak times. This is another reason enterprises are turning to automated translation to provide the scalability they need to handle unpredictable peaks and valleys without incurring ongoing overhead costs.
4. **Need for cost effectiveness.** Successful social media projects can generate a large volume of content—think of the 50,000 to 100,000 customer-created reviews generated every week on TripAdvisor.com; TripAdvisor translates almost all of them in near real time for most of its 23 localized websites. These reviews are the lifeblood of the TripAdvisor site, but translating them would not be cost-effective if performed by human translators. To manage expenses, large-scale multilingual social projects use human translators only for exceptional content.
5. **Branding and messaging consistency.** With the need for speed of translation for multilingual social content, the accuracy of translated branding and messaging (including such basics and product names and company trademarks) can take a hit unless branding control is built into the translation infrastructure. This can be automated by integrating term management dictionaries and translation memories with the technology that generates social content translations.
6. **Search engine optimization (SEO).** Suppose you threw a party and nobody came. Many of the benefits of multilingual social media are driven by the findability of social content for people searching with their native language search terms. Without local language SEO, your archives of multilingual social content will be much less visible (and therefore, will attract far fewer visitors) than content that has been optimized for search engines, especially for Google.
7. **Metadata tagging.** Some enterprises apply metadata in one language to all content assets globally. This hides assets—especially non-text assets, such as graphics, videos, and podcasts—from customers searching in other languages. Metadata is a tiny quantity of localizable text, but generates a large influence in making social media content usable by global customers. Metadata localization can be done with term management technology and relatively little effort.
8. **Need to integrate several systems.** Managers who implement social media localization can be blindsided by the number of systems to integrate. They should certainly include translation memory, term management, machine translation, and workflow systems, and may possibly include systems for social content management, web content management, analytics, digital asset management, email marketing, marketing automation, CRM, and security. Before you launch your first multilingual social media project, research which systems you will need to integrate, how each integration will be done, the time required (which will often take longer than projected), set-up costs, and ongoing costs.



9. **Need to minimize IT involvement.** It is important to involve Information Technology (IT) departments in the technology selection, implementation, and integration of multilingual social media projects, but in most enterprises, IT will want to commit as few resources as possible to continuing maintenance. In addition, the business users who own multilingual channels will not want to pay for IT resources on an ongoing basis, and business people will want to their own make changes without waiting for IT to squeeze changes into its busy schedule.
10. **Allocation of costs across regions and departments.** When an enterprise launches a multilingual social media project, who pays for it? Who pays for ongoing costs? In most enterprises, costs will be allocated across the involved regions and several departments. Creating an allocation plan beforehand for cost tracking and chargebacks will save grief and time later.

Features to Look for in Multilingual Social Solutions

The previous sections of this paper provided an overview of some of the types of social media, the business problems solved, the benefits of multilingual social customer engagement, and the difficulties involved. This section uses those criteria as starting points to determine some features to consider when selecting a solution for multilingual social media.

Machine translation capabilities. For enterprise-scale multilingual social media, the requirements for real-time translation, quality, and cost effectiveness all point towards machine translation. These capabilities are available as low-level software for desktop computers, but use of social media for customer engagement on a corporate scale will require either a larger-scale enterprise system or a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) hosted offering. Whatever solution you choose should be able to determine confidence levels of the quality of each piece of automatically translated content, and should be able to route potential problems to human reviewers for inspection.

Response time. We discussed the need for enterprises to publish quick responses to customer-generated content and questions. One of the most important criteria for selecting your solution should be its ability to provide real-time or near real-time translation and publishing of customer-generated content.

Real-time scalability. Social customers generate inconsistent volumes of content. Waiting days or hours to ramp up resources to handle volume increases is not practical for social content. Your resources must be able to scale up almost instantly to handle volume increases as they happen.

Available language pairs. Machine translation works in *language pairs*. For example, if you want to translate content from English to German, Japanese, and Chinese, you will need three language pairs: English-German, English-Japanese, and English-Chinese. If, in addition to these you want to translate to and from Chinese and Japanese, you will also need a Chinese-Japanese language pair. Your machine translation solution must support the specific language pairs your business needs.



Ease of integration with other systems. Integration costs of the systems to support multilingual social media can add up to more than the cost of the systems themselves. Integration with your term management and translation memory software will be essential, and other integrations will be needed as well.

Minimization of IT effort. In both the implementation and the ongoing management of your solution, IT involvement will be important, but can be costly and lead to project delays. Business considerations (especially from customer care and marketing) will inevitably lead to changes in processes and workflows; managers who expect this are better prepared to evaluate technology to determine if it enables businesspeople to make changes with little or no IT effort.

Ease of management by nontechnical businesspeople. The new social channels will be owned by businesspeople, not IT specialists, and the businesspeople will be accountable for its results. An ideal solution will include a dashboard or user interface that enables nontechnical people to manage parameters; for instance, to determine which languages are used, which content types are translated, which dictionaries are used, what must go through an approval process, and how costs are charged back to regions and departments.

Automated improvement based on feedback. Machine translation software can use machine learning to apply human feedback about translation quality to continually improve the accuracy of the translations it produces. More accurate translations lead to better SEO, greater traffic, and more customer conversions.

Workflow. Chances are that your social media translations will follow a different workflow than your traditional content. Your social media solution should have its own workflow—or even better, forge its own path with the other workflows you use for translation.

Security and privacy. Because your social media will be seen by customers worldwide, look for role-based security to protect your content from unauthorized tampering. And because customer-generated content will include customer information, remember to evaluate solutions for their ability to protect customer privacy and comply with privacy regulations in your target countries.

Key Questions to Answer

Whether you are starting your first multilingual social media project or your seventeenth, here are questions to help you implement and manage your project.

How can we start?

Start small, then grow. It is best to begin with one social channel first and add more later. The best channel depends on what business goals you need to achieve and which country you are trying to reach, because the popularity of social media types varies wildly from country to country. Start by launching a *monolingual* social project first. After your first project is up and running, expand to two languages. These first two languages should each be a half of your most important language pair.



Focus on building a sufficient volume of approved translations in your first language pair to give you a critical mass that you can use to train your machine language system.

One of the most difficult parts of social projects is attracting enough visitors at the start, so begin with a project that includes or branches off from a website page with enough visitors to populate your project.

What language pairs are important to our business?

Before selecting any solution, it is crucial for you to determine exactly which language pairs your business will need. Classify them into three tiers: crucial to have, important to have, and good to have. Then use your list of tiered language pairs to evaluate whether or not an automated translation solution can support the ones you need the most, and at what cost.

How can we tell if translated content will be accurate and will reflect our brand experience?

Gilbane recommends that *you* use a termbase that contains all your company brands, product names, and trademarks in your source language and all your target languages. And Gilbane recommends that you also use a translation memory that contains approved translated content so your automated translation system can reuse approved phrases and sentences.

Beyond those two systems, machine translation software can apply algorithms that generate confidence rankings for every piece of translated content. For example, SDL BeGlobal automated translation software calculates a proprietary TrustScore for each piece of translated content. Translations below a target confidence level can be sent to a human translator for review.

What systems will we need this solution to integrate with?

Your multilingual social solution should include plug-and-play or minimal-effort integration with the applications your enterprise uses to manage, localize, and publish content. These applications can include content management software, CRM applications, social and community platforms, and translation management software. In addition to integration considerations, evaluate candidate solutions for whether they allow you to continue using your current software and service vendors, and whether they will disrupt your existing business processes.

How long will my project take to launch?

That depends on how many systems you will need to integrate, whether integration is plug-and-play or API enabled, whether you have existing content that needs to be pre-processed, and how much training time will be required—not human training, but training the automated translation software itself. It will need to scan a large amount of already-translated content in both languages of your first language pair before it can generate test translations. Look for a solution that will help you get up and running quickly while allowing you to deliver consistent branding and reach your business goals for multilingual social media.





Advancing the business of Information

Outsell's Gilbane Group provides analyst and consulting services dedicated to content strategies, practices, and technologies and their application to high-value business solutions. We have delivered quality market education and insight to global enterprises, governments, non-profits, publishers, and information providers since 1987. Outsell's Gilbane Group is part of Outsell, Inc., the only research and advisory firm focused on the publishing and information industries. Our international team provides independent, fact-based analysis and actionable advice about competitors, markets, operational benchmarks, and best practices, so our clients thrive and grow in today's fast-changing digital and global environment.

Call +1 617.497.9443
Fax +1 617.497.5256
763 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Call +1 650.342.6060
Fax +1 650.342.7135
330 Primrose Road, Suite 510
Burlingame, California 94010

Call +44 (0)20 8090 6590
Fax +44 (0)20 7031 8101
25 Floral Street
London WC2E 9DS

info@outsellinc.com
www.outsellinc.com
<http://gilbane.com>

