Multilingual Product Content:

Transforming Traditional Practices into Global Content Value Chains

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The Gilbane Group

Extract: BMW Motorrad Best Practices Profile

THE GILBANE GROUP

BMW Motorrad

BMW Motorrad is the largest manufacturer of motorcycles in Europe, and a leader in the motorcycle market worldwide. It is a division of the BMW Group, headquartered in Munich, Germany, with $82 billion in sales and 107,000 employees. BMW Motorrad produces 104,000 motorcycles annually— with over 80% sold outside of Germany—and provides a premium, high-quality product.

Focus on Technical Writing

The technical writing department at BMW Motorrad has a long history of producing technical documentation for motorcycles sold on a worldwide basis. The team's main output is a printed "rider's manual," which is customized to the particular model and features, a vital part of the "premium" offering. The team also delivers a broad array of product documentation (print and web) for customer support, repair, and warranty management. Over time, there has been a steady evolution toward structured content authoring.

In recent years, the technical writing team had seen the volume of documentation rapidly expand due to advances in machine complexity and the growing volume of motorcycle configurations (there are now over 150 variants). They were also under pressure to reduce documentation costs, advance the team's productivity, and improve the level of quality and accuracy.

Meanwhile, product development cycles were getting shorter and shorter. The team needed to capture technical product content earlier, and extend the usable lifecycle of product documentation longer and longer. The goal was to create content that was accurate and understandable, and could be retained for greater time periods, used for different documents, and published in multiple media.

Underlying these changes was a recognition that technical documentation should reflect the premium, high quality nature of BMW motorcycles. Customers buying an R, F, or K Series bike expect that the documentation will support and enrich the premium experience with information specific to their vehicle, factually correct, and easily understandable. The goal was for technical documentation to help BMW Motorrad deliver a premium customer experience.

Content Globalization Challenges

A key ingredient in delivering a premium customer experience was for BMW Motorrad to publish product documentation, especially rider's manuals, in the local country languages. To meet consumer requirements, multilingual technical documents had to be ready early enough to launch a product in multiple language markets simultaneously. To ensure a high level of quality in these markets, the content needed to be at the same level of granularity as that delivered in the German source content. Moreover, when it came to ongoing product changes, Motorrad faced challenges with

tracking multilingual product updates against changes in both the source language data and target language materials. Inevitably, the multilingual multiplier had come into play, expanding and intensifying the problems associated with producing accurate, high-quality content, and ensuring that customer experience was not compromised.

As multilingual communications played a progressively more important role in BMW Motorrad's business, localization and translation costs escalated dramatically. The technical writing team was compelled to decrease these expenses at the same time it was adding languages and increasing the volume of technical content.

The Solution

BMW Motorrad chose to address these challenges by introducing a complete multilingual publishing solution that relied on single sourcing and media independence. Motorrad ensured the success of the implementation with clear business processes and careful resource planning.

To begin with, the new system was a major change in the way Motorrad produced technical documentation. The team worked hard to educate and train writers in the practice of structured authoring, who were then able to regularly follow the paradigm of single sourcing in writing technical content. To maximize reuse, Motorrad produced content in a way that was media independent, that is, the information was never written for a specific document, like a rider's manual, but instead for accuracy within a specific context and usage. As a consequence, content components could be readily accessed and shared across the enterprise, leveraging component content management to reuse approved source content for many different documents in multiple languages.

The individual countries owned the budget for localization/translation, and determined what content was translated in what timeframe. The highest priority for translation decisions was motorcycle sales volume, although the resellers and importers sometimes presented other rationale. Once the decision was made, the writers outsourced the localization/translation to three LSPs that actively used the Motorrad publishing system for translation management. The LSPs returned the localized/translated product information to the technical writing team, which then leveraged the same system to publish it.

To ensure consistency, Motorrad installed policies and procedures for formal governance, which were typically driven by software-generated workflow. Additional governance was provided by the corporate style guide and the terminology management process.

BMW Motorrad implemented this approach using a multilingual publishing system from the STAR Group, which contained four main software programs. GRIPS is an information management system that leverages SGML/XML technology. STAR's Transit is a translation memory system for storing and reusing translated content, as well as managing the localization/translation process. TermStar and WebTerm are terminology management systems for managing specific terms, tracking source language words and phrases and their equivalents in target languages. The translation

memory and terminology management systems tied closely to GRIPS from the creation of source content through publishing. The GRIPS information management system remains the sole, contextually accurate information repository for the value chain–including text, terms, and translations for all languages and across all functions. This common repository eliminates unnecessary conversions of information from one format to another as the data moves through the chain. According to Mr. Andreas Hahn, a technical writer at BMW Motorrad, "Conversion is always fault-prone and often linked with dramatic losses of content."

Results

By implementing this new infrastructure (people, process, and technology) BMW Motorrad scored a significant increase in productivity. They now delivered product documentation in 18 languages. In terms of ROI, the team reduced documentation costs by 30%, and localization/translation costs by 30%.

They are successful at producing customer- or vehicle-specific rider's manuals, and have automated processes for delivering personalized documentation. Motorrad has taken a lesson from engineering in that a document may be composed of individual, self-contained logic components in the same way a technical product is comprised of separate subassemblies (as an engine is a subassembly of the motorcycle).

The team is now publishing more documents in a shorter time, with greater information depth and higher overall quality. In addition, the structured authoring and single sourcing enabled them to easily produce derivative documentation, so that, for example, content from a rider's manual could be repurposed for use in a customer service or repair manual.

Motorrad believes that their solution's greater modularity and flexibility coupled with higher quality helps them to "future proof" their documentation, significantly extending the lifecycle for approved product content.

Gilbane Group Perspective

Customer-specific rider manuals, along with derivative maintenance plans and customer support manuals, are a solid advance in delivering a rewarding customer experience. As Mr. Hahn noted, "If a customer receives product documentation in their mother tongue, it makes it much easier for them to understand how to operate the vehicle." In addition, this enhancement increases customer satisfaction, accelerates and expands product use, and lays the groundwork for repeat business.

The technologies and processes across BMW Motorrad's GCVC are comprehensive and well integrated. They provide a great example of the benefits that can be wrought from the end-to-end single sourcing and terminology management. Because the technology ensures that the same content and the same terms flow across the value chain, and because of the links between content management and localization/translation and multi-channel publishing, the publishing process has become highly automated. And

this automation speeds time to market, along with increasing flexibility and responsiveness.