



# CLIENTSIDE NEWS

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**January 2008 FEATURE**

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## Avoid Getting Lost in Translation

by Michael Hamilton  
Vice President of Product Management,  
MadCap Software

Where did my table of contents go? What happened to my glossary? These questions, and many others about document structure and formatting, still arise all too often as these components get lost in translation.

We have seen important technology advances to facilitate the translation of content. Most notable are the growing use of Unicode to support both single- and double-byte languages and adoption of the Extensible Markup Language (XML), which facilitates the sharing of structured data across different systems. As a result, translating a set of words from one language into one or more others is a fairly predictable experience.

Bringing that predictability to the overall document remains a challenge. At the heart of the matter is the fact that document files need to be transferred into a translation memory system (TMS). A TMS can be programmed to recognize the document formatting. However, when localization experts transfer files into these pre-programmed systems, portions of those files—for example variables and indices—often get corrupted.

Even when the actual file transfer is smooth, the fact that there is a transfer leaves room for error and inefficiency. The challenge can be particularly daunting with topic-based authoring. Consider that some projects may have 12,000 files. The project manager needs to ensure that all 12,000 files get sent over for translation and localization. It is not uncommon to get the translation back, and realize that, for example, an index has not been translated. Now the localization project is delayed as the additional file is translated.

Then, too, if there are changes to an existing document, perhaps to reflect a policy change or product upgrade, it may be that only 112 of the 12,000 files need to be updated and translated. It can take hours for the project manager to identify that small subset of files, and hopefully he or she will catch them all.

### Translation Without File Transfers

So many of these challenges would disappear if there

was no need to actually transfer the data. This is the approach taken with MadCap Lingo, a fully integrated translation memory system and authoring tool that eliminates the need for file transfers in order to complete translation. As a result, documentation and localization professionals no longer have to risk losing valuable content and formatting. Instead, document components—such as tables of contents, topics, index keywords, concepts, glossaries, and variables—all remain intact throughout the translation and localization process, so there is never a need to recreate them. The XML-based MadCap Lingo is also fully Unicode enabled to support any European or Asian language.

MadCap Lingo is tightly integrated with MadCap Flare, a native-XML authoring product, and MadCap Blaze, a native-XML alternative to Adobe FrameMaker for publishing long print documents, which will be generally available in early 2008. A user simply creates a MadCap Lingo project to access the source content in a Flare or Blaze project via a shared file structure. Working through Lingo's interface, the user accesses and translates the content. Because the content never actually leaves the structure of the original Flare or Blaze project, all the content and formatting are preserved in the translated version. Once a project is translated, it is opened in either Flare or Blaze, which generates the output and facilitates publishing.

Taking the file transfer out of translation simplifies and speeds the localization process in many ways. Because there is no transfer, all files are automatically translated; none are left behind. There also is a clear view of all the files that need to be translated. When a MadCap Lingo project is initiated, it automatically lists all of the files in the documentation project. Because the software automatically tracks what files have and haven't been translated, it will recognize if the project is an update to an earlier one, highlighting the files that have been changed and therefore require translation.

With this in mind, let's revisit the example of a project containing 12,000 content files. By allowing the translation to occur within the original project, all 12,000 files are automatically flagged for localization—as well as any

support files, such as a table of contents or a list of variables—providing a complete picture of the project. Moreover, when there is an update that affects only 112 files, it is easy for a documentation or localization expert to immediately identify and then translate just those files rather than having to sift through the entire list. Project managers can ensure that their projects are complete while eliminating hours of unnecessary work.

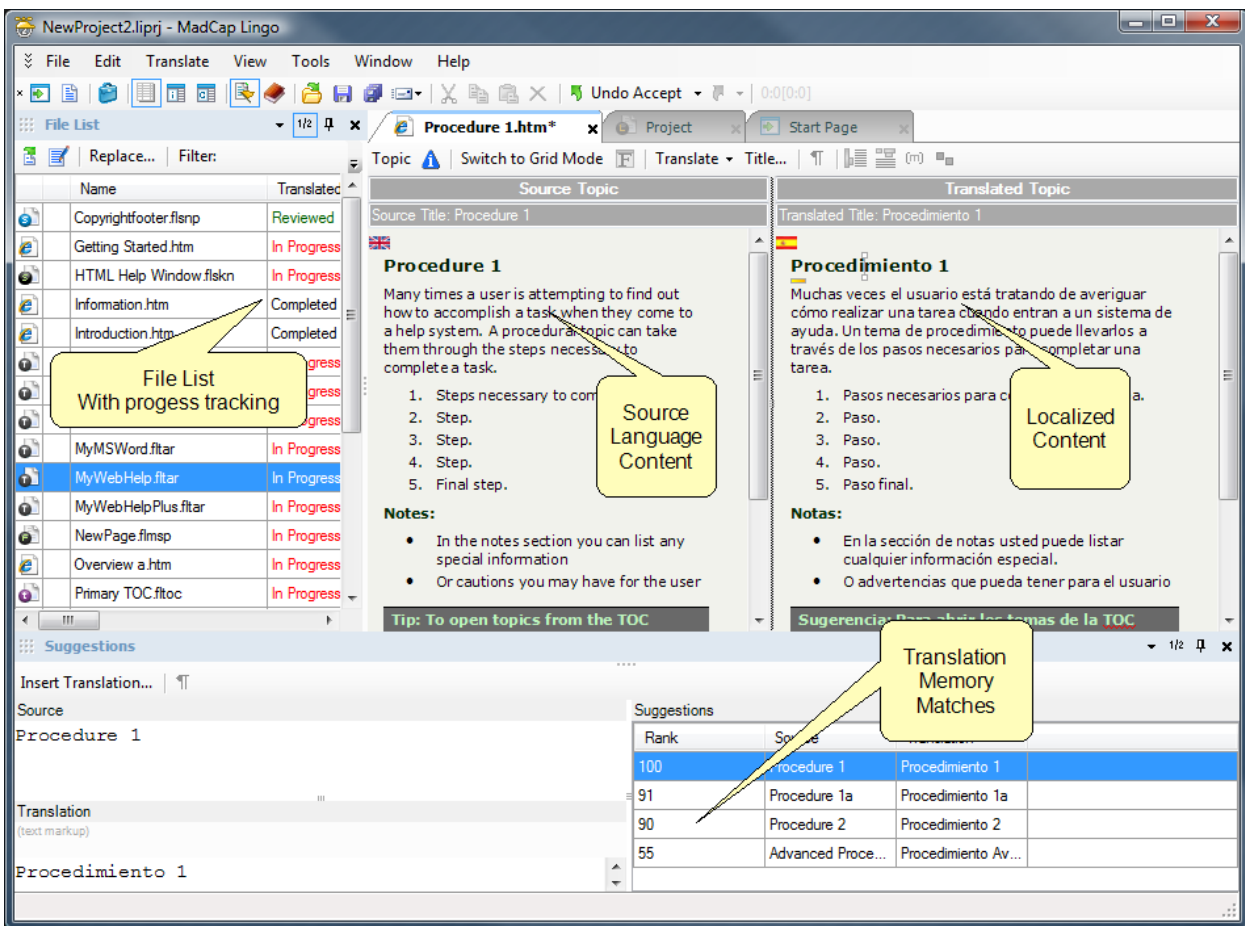
Similarly, project managers often receive an eleventh-hour change that requires only one or two sentence adjustments. With the integrated translation memory system, a documentation or translation expert can quickly make the updates. If the updates affect variables in the project, those variables will be updated automatically as well, making it possible to meet publishing deadlines even with last-minute edits.

For example, German text strings tend to be longer than English ones, so translating a “helpful hint” box from English to German may result in the text length doubling, and therefore no longer able to fit into the box. A translator or author can see this immediately and revise the style sheet to accommodate the text length.

#### Support for Existing TMS and Authoring Tools

The functionality enabled by integrating authoring with the TMS is powerful. At the same time, documentation professionals and localization experts require the ability to take advantage of the authoring tools and TMSs used to produce their existing localized content. MadCap addresses this at both the authoring and translation levels.

On the authoring side, the Flare and Blaze authoring tools that work with MadCap Lingo can import a range of document types to create the source content. Both can bring in documents from products such as Micro-



The ability to complete translation within the content project means that document and localization professionals can view content as it will be published—with the table of contents, images, screen captures, and more. They also can review the original language version and the translated version side by side for comparison. This facilitates the ability to address formatting issues that arise from the translation.

soft Word and Adobe FrameMaker. Following translation, these products provide single-source delivery to multiple formats online and off, including the Internet, intranets, CDs, and print. Print formats supported include the Microsoft XML Paper Specification (XPS) format, Adobe PDF, Adobe FrameMaker, and Microsoft Word. Additionally, Flare supports a number of online content input and output formats.

On the localization front, MadCap Lingo is designed to work with other TMSs. Consequently, localization consultants or in-house translation departments can use their existing TMS with MadCap Lingo to translate new or updated projects without having to complete a file transfer. At the same time, documentation teams that outsource their localization can simply send over a ZIP folder containing the entire project, which remains a cohesive whole maintaining all file relationships.

Document managers also can use MadCap Lingo for quick in-house translation of the last-minute changes that plague almost every project, without having to send files back to the outside firm. If the translation contractor provides a copy of the translation memory database used when delivering the localized content, the very same database can be used with MadCap Lingo to make those last-minute adjustments.

By integrating authoring with the TMS, the sagas of content lost in translation are becoming tales of the past. Replacing them is the promise of documentation that addresses today's global Internet economy by providing a consistent experience online, in print, and in any language.

## MadCap Lingo Snapshot

- Authoring tool with Lingo Server built-in translation memory system, plus ability to connect with third-party TMSs and translate text using the integrated Google service.
- Ability to create "difference" projects, highlighting changed areas that need translation.
- Shortcut keys for quickly performing translation functions and moving around the interface.
- Side-by-side translation editors to simplify the process of localizing topics, tables of contents, index keywords, concepts, glossaries, variables, and more.
- Fully Unicode enabled with full functionality for translating Eastern European, Western European, and Asian languages.
- File list window to display which files require translation.
- Ability to view and edit multiple documents simultaneously.
- Customizable interface to support users' preferred ways of working.
- Works natively in XML with full support for XML-based content.
- Available for \$2,199 per license or on a subscription basis of \$649 per year. Support options start at \$449 per year.

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Michael Hamilton, vice president of product management at MadCap Software, has more than ten years of experience in training, technical communication, multimedia development, and software development. Prior to joining MadCap, he served as a product manager for the award-winning RoboHelp product line, first at eHelp and then Macromedia, working closely with the customer community and guiding ongoing development. He also has held positions at Cymer, National Steel & Shipbuilding, and the US Navy. Hamilton is a featured speaker at industry events, Society for Technical Communication annual conference and WinWriters Online Help conferences, as well as shows throughout Europe and Australia.