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21.02

THE FUTURE OF LOCALIZATION: A QUESTION OF STANDARDS?

Netflix's Timed Text Authoring Lineage authoring format has transformative potential ... but will competitors realize its potential?

ABSTRACT: Will we soon see the localization industry embrace standardization and leverage data to drive efficiencies across the content supply chain? Could products like Netflix's Timed Text Authoring Lineage authoring format herald a new approach to localization? And will other M&E powerhouses get on board?

By Claire Brown, VP, Global Sales, Take 1

Netflix's new authoring format, Timed Text Authoring Lineage (TTAL), promises to streamline data exchange and file management for subtitling and dubbing. It's a development that could have a transformative effect on the industry ... but is it going to happen quickly?

The speed and scale at which the media and entertainment industry continues to evolve in the age of streaming never ceases to amaze. But while we are undoubtedly witnessing a golden age of content, the increased volume of production and growing global reach of many services have heralded some profound logistical challenges, encompassing everything from network distribution capacity to content localization.

The importance of the latter topic is something we can attest to at Take 1, where we focus on utilizing data-centric workflows to provide high-quality transcription, localization and access services. Like others in the sector, we have observed the phenomenal rise in demand for these services, paralleled by a rather less-pleasing growth in the complexity of data exchange. In no small part this is caused by the use of too many different script file formats in authoring and prompting, which serves to slow down the entire localization process.

But that could soon change. In July 2021, Netflix announced that it had decided to "remove the stumbling block" presented by multiple file formats and inconsistent localization information by developing a new authoring specification, TTAL. The format enables the seamless exchange of script files between authoring and prompting tools in the localization pipeline.

WHAT MAKES TTAL TRANSFORMATIVE

The streaming giant explained that a TTAL file is able to carry “all pertinent information such as type of script, dialogues, timecode, metadata, original language text, transcribed text, language information etc. We have designed TTAL to be robust and extensible to capture all of these details.”

Netflix’s release of TTAL could be the impetus to change localization workflows across the industry, and as a company that has been active in this space for two decades and has always pioneered data-driven workflows, we believe that TTAL has transformative potential. Our clients already benefit from these workflows but, as a boutique service provider, making the case ourselves for a unified data format was always going to be challenging, with potentially limited impact.

Even in the face of increased competition from existing and emerging streaming services, Netflix boasts a subscriber base of more than 210 million, so logic dictates that there will be many post service providers who want to become early adopters of TTAL. It also stands to reason that the vendors in the Netflix Post Partner Program (NP3) will want to ensure that they are TTAL compatible. Providing a directory of vetted partners offering services in dubbing, audio description and scripting, the NP3 program promotes collaboration around audio localization to ensure that Netflix can deliver a consistently high-quality viewing experience worldwide.

From a vendor perspective, the roadmap is relatively clear in that they need to incorporate TTAL as a standard format in their platforms so that it becomes a regular option. Once that has happened across the market, dubbing houses and other post services can be supported to use it as a standard input format, making the entire data exchange process more swift and seamless.

WIDESPREAD ADOPTION?

But, as influential as Netflix remains, the broader indus-

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try will need to get behind the format if it is to achieve lasting traction. That means that other networks, streamers and content providers would need to adopt a format developed by their biggest rival. And, while the industry at large has made great inroads toward adopting a more collaborative approach in recent years, this may be too much to expect. Perhaps it’s more realistic to hope that other networks and platforms will recognize the benefits of TTAL and develop their own data-driven approaches, leaving standardization as the next challenge to conquer.

If this consistent data-driven approach to localization is going to become a reality, there will need to be a lot of coordinated intra-industry action. It is hoped that the existing leading industry associations, like MESA, DPP and SMPTE, can work together on this topic, along with other entertainment standardization forces.

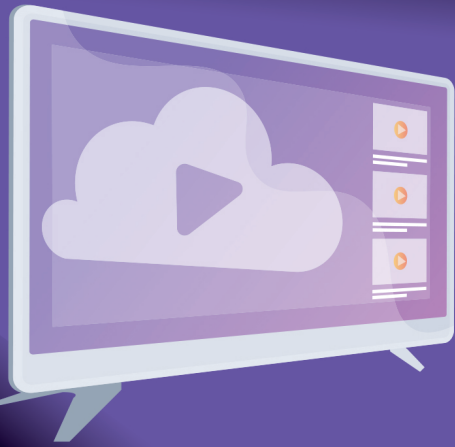
Whatever the short-term outlook for TTAL, Take 1’s increased presence in the localization sector during the last few years has only reinforced our long-term view that a data-driven approach is the only logical way forward as content production and delivery continue to expand.

We see time and again the advantage of data-driven localization in terms of streamlining workflows and cutting costs. Now that one of the world’s biggest streaming services has decided to make this a major tenet of its strategy, we can only hope that the rest of the industry will follow suit. ■



Claire Brown is the VP of global sales for Take 1. During her 20 years working across multiple disciplines in the digital media and broadcast industry, from TV production to playout, media management, localization and access services, she’s held senior positions at international organizations including BBC Digital, National Geographic and Red Bee Media. hello@take1.tv @WeAreTake1

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