

A young boy is shown in profile, shouting or singing into a professional studio microphone. The microphone is mounted on a stand and has a pop filter. The background is a solid light blue color. The overall image has a blue tint.

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JOURNAL

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22.02

CHANGE IS THE ONE CONSTANT IN LOCALIZATION

By Caroline Baines, Senior Director, Client Services, MESA



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As I reflect on the last 12 months, I think it's true to say that change became the watchword for 2022. As the world emerged from the pandemic, we have seen the media and entertainment landscape witness a significant shift in direction, one unlikely to be reversed.

The new normal is no longer new, it is just normal. Hybrid working and greater reliance on video conferencing rather than traveling are now accepted by most organizations. Productivity is not being impacted and, in many cases, has increased.

And just as we have changed as employees we have also changed as consumers. Buying online was already well established, but the explosion in e-commerce during the pandemic is also here to stay, as are our changing viewing habits.

Our appetite for content shows no sign of abating, creating huge pressures on every aspect of the content supply chain. The constant launch of new streaming services across the globe means the localization industry is busier than it has ever been. The talent crunch is a phrase that has been well-used during 2022, along with capacity shortages and stories of dubbing studios being booked 6-9 months in advance. For an industry that often needs to work on a "just in time" basis, such issues are proving to be incredibly challenging and seem set to continue into 2023.

This increased demand for content has elevated the localization industry and created many new opportunities, such as English dubs, which would have been a rare ask just a couple of years ago. Market demand is also growing in countries such as India, with more and more languages being required, which is putting increased strain on the industry to fulfill these requirements.

While this increased demand is placing challenges on the localization sector it is putting it center stage. The theme of localization was more evident at IBC than

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it has ever been, and the Cloud Localisation Blueprint was a highlight.

The localization industry remains a core focus for MESA with the Content Localisation Council resuming in-person meetings at the end of 2021. Our most recent meeting was in October, hosted by Warner Bros. Discovery. This hybrid and in-person meeting saw close to 50 localization executives coming together to discuss several key issues, including the importance of diversity and inclusion and the role that technology plays within this sector.

Localization chairs Justin Walton, head of global content operations at ITV and Jan-Hendrik Hein, VP of media operations EMEA at A+E Networks, support us from the content owner side, while Nicky McBride, global business development and client relationships for Iyuno and Carlo Decianti, head of sales for Plint support from a vendor perspective. Having their combined expertise is invaluable at our meetings and in helping shape our events.

At the recent meeting, Nicky and Carlo provided their views on IBC for those unable to attend. They highlighted the increased focus localization played at this year's event and the fact that several freelance subtitlers were in attendance. Some of the key themes included the need for

Continued on page 129

more directors and voice talent in the dubbing industry, and they cited the importance of building more of a community to help with this. Some of the concern felt amongst the freelance community was also shared, with the growing use of AI and automation seen as a potential threat. It is clear, however, that from a localization perspective, automation and integration is a major focus to enable greater efficiencies and to allow the talent to focus on the creative aspect of their role.

This need to drive efficiencies is the major reason behind the Cloud Localisation Blueprint (CLB). This project, which formed out of the IBC Accelerator program, brought together collaborators from across the industry who spent 13 weeks devising a proof of concept which is built on an AWS backbone.

The localization supply chain is often described as “spaghetti-like” and lacking visibility and, with the vast number of vendors, studios and service providers involved, it is perfect for innovation, transformation, and disruption. Since the initial discussion at IBC, MESA has spoken about the CLB at two events, Languages & The Media in Berlin and at the British Hollywood Innovation & Transformation Summit (BHITS) in London.

MESA has long been a supporter of Languages & The Media and is an association partner. We were thrilled to be back in person in Berlin after a four-year absence due to the pandemic. There was a real buzz at the event and a strong feeling of community which was great to be a part of. The freelance community were there in force along with academia, language service providers and several major content owners. There were many standout sessions around diversity, accessibility, freelancer conditions and AI and machine learning.

The MESA panel comprised experts from across the industry (Fabric, Iyuno, LinQ, SDVI and Sony Pictures). We spoke at length about the challenges the industry is seeing and the extreme pressure everyone in the supply chain is facing right now. One key piece of advice was to talk more about the issues and to continue to elevate the critical role that localization plays. Maybe this way we can help encourage more people into the industry who are currently in other roles and have never even considered localization

as a career option.

The requirement to find any time savings led us to discuss the CLB and the four key aspects that the Blueprint is designed to help solve: capacity, infrastructure, visibility and standards. Capacity to deal with the huge volumes of content in multiple languages and versions and to help plan ahead more effectively; infrastructure to create scalable, interoperable systems that work together, and which replace old and outdated legacy systems; visibility to provide accurate, real-time data on a unified system; and standards the absence of a unified identifier standard is a clear obstacle which is where the Entertainment ID Registry (EIDR) and Language Metadata Table (LMT) come into play.

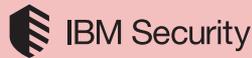
The conversation around the CLB continued at BHITS, led by Hollie Choi, managing director of EIDR. Choi told the audience: “For me, the Cloud Localisation Blueprint project was a modern approach to a localization workflow that automates the process and allows visibility into the process all the way through”. The panel session “The Cloud Localisation Blueprint (and Why Does it Matter)” talked in depth about why the blueprint was needed and how more companies can get involved. While the key purpose of the CLB is automation and efficiencies, McBride from Iyuno made the point that “80 percent of what we do is still basically human beings in a studio acting and translating and performing work” and until artificial intelligence takes on a more significant role, “we still have to schedule those human beings to be in that room at a certain time to perform that role and deliver materials back.”

The human element of localization is of paramount importance and while tools are vital in aiding the process and enabling efficiencies, we must not forget the need for creativity. We will see continued evolution in software, AI and machine learning as progress never stops, and change is the one constant in localization. ■

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