

Translation and Localisation for Apps

A Testronic Labs White Paper

*Filipe Samora, Translation Manager
Testronic Labs.*



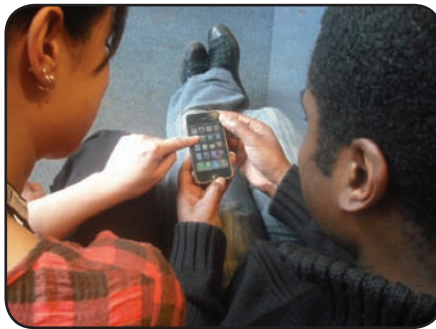
Successfully Localising Mobile Games

The App Store is truly global and truly meritocratic – the best games and tools achieve high volume sales in many regions, but localisation quality has to be perfect to impress a savvy audience with a quarter of a million competing products to choose from.

The boom in popularity of smartphone apps has provided a fillip to the translation and localisation industries which is intensifying as 2011 unfolds – there is revenue potential now that apps have gone global, but these projects are specialised.

The fast-growing App Economy has been well documented, and an August 2010 report from games trade association TIGA underpins the assertion that games are central to this growth. Low barriers to entry (versus funding, publishing and distributing a console game at retail) and the chance for bedroom developers to rival big-name publishers have spawned what analysts are calling a “gold rush” – where the big-selling pick of the apps, such as Rovio’s “Angry Birds” game, sold for £0.59, have reached 6m downloads. Reviews and word-of-mouth drive sales in the games space, and the appeal to the wider market of the “casual” non-traditional consumer, ensuring that the revenues from a well-received product can be vast. With China, Japan and Europe all seeing similar trends to the US and UK when it comes to uptake of the iPhone device among consumers, the need for localisation is clear. Apple’s App Store is now accessible from over 90 countries – a logical extension of a trend that started slowly – in 2004, the iTunes storefront itself was localised into only a very limited set of languages. Consumers of games are used to well-translated, sensitively localised and genre-specific renderings of the products that they buy. The tolerance of a Japanese, Korean, Chinese, or European gamer for an English-language game is more limited than, say, that of consumers of business

applications. Companies like Tapulous, a social-game big hitter recently acquired by Disney Interactive, told the Wall Street Journal in April 2010 that 40% of its business came from global, i.e. non-US, sales, up from 20% a year previous. That is a clear indication that games companies are taking notice of the global opportunities of the App Store – because localising quality new SKUs of their product is a cost-effective way to farm the original development investment and potentially increase their revenue by an order of magnitude.



With the App Store now containing nearly a quarter of a million apps and downloads having topped a staggering four billion in a single year, the growth curve remains steep as handset penetration increases – with analysts expecting sales of iPhones alone to pass the 100 million mark by 2012, and the new iPad shipping three million units in its first 80 days on sale. The app market may be maturing to the extent that localisation companies are beginning to capitalise, but the boom is far from over. Not to be ignored, too, are emerging opportunities for localisation in the Android and Blackberry applications markets – the same motivations for developers to exploit new markets apply, but the staggering consumer popularity of the iPhone and its

niche as a personal, leisure tool (versus Blackberry as incumbent corporate tool of choice) means that the mobile game sector is synonymous with Cupertino’s finest.

QUALITY LOCALISATION BOOSTING SALES

So, with non UK and US downloads rising to 15% of all transactions on the App Store last year, how are games localisation providers refining their workflow processes and gathering best practice knowledge in order to offer the ideal service for their mobile developer clients? When Testronic Labs took on their highest-profile mobile game localisation project to date, X2 Football 2010, they were not able to predict that the game would shoot to such popular acclaim and rocket past behemoth FIFA 2010’s iPhone port in popular reviews worldwide. The developers are quick to acknowledge the impact of the language treatment in boosting their product’s popularity and revenue, saying *“As the app phenomenon goes global, it makes sense to reach out to as many markets as possible and using a fast, friendly and fair localisation company meant we achieved this in a way that was seamless with the development and distribution of the game”*.

UNDERSTANDING MOBILE GAME CHARACTERISTICS

Seasoned games localisation companies understand that the workflow of every game, every developer varies – absorbing platform-specific requirements, the whims



of individual development managers and the norms and niceties of the game genre. In fact, genre “culturisation” is a lucrative and highly-specified subdivision of the game localisation process. What useful insights, then, can be drawn from TL’s experience across mobile game localisation projects? The chief shared characteristic of a mobile game is its diminutive size relative to a fully-fledged game localisation. Gone are the peripherals like packaging, truncated are the instructions and manuals to reflect the “pick up and play” user-friendliness objective. Development cycles are often quicker, and the localisation process needs to be flexible enough to accommodate quick turnarounds for projects with modest word counts – or indeed for minuscule instalments that form a bigger project. This business model is a stretch for some large translation companies used to dealing with project word counts beginning at the tens of thousands and reaching vast proportions. The localisation provider needs to make their professional structure fit this model – perhaps it requires an innovative billing system whereby minimum charges are scrapped and tiny snippets of information are happily localised in a “drip, drip” manner, with invoices only sent on a monthly basis or when a word count threshold is reached. Some mobile game development houses are small outfits who have never engaged with localisation professionals before, particularly if they came from a development role inside a large games publisher where localisation and translation was the preserve of another department. Generating multiple, small invoices is

“**Consistency in terminology across different channels is key**”

unwieldy for the localisation professional and unwelcome for the small company – so a clear billing system that fits the nature of the project is essential.

CONSISTENT AND UNIQUE TERMINOLOGY

Commonly, in a small mobile dev firm, the project manager will be undertaking the end-to-end process of getting a game to market for the first time, so the ability to explain the value-add of the process and emphasise that the earlier localisation or localisation QA can be embedded into the development cycle, the more smoothly the process will run in parallel. Games industry professionals prize the unique codes and conventions that enthusiasts recognise and use, so a localisation treatment that hits the mark needs to be done with a proven passion for and understanding of the game’s genre. This process is aided by the sorts of glossary management and translation memory tools that lend efficiencies to the project and ensure consistency – put simply, these tools are repositories for vocabulary and terminology that allows the provider to leverage previously translated content for the same client. Consistency in terminology across different channels is key – whether it’s in-game text, press release verbiage, website descriptions or something else, the buzz around your game and the professional character of the release is soon punctured by sloppy text. Within the game, consistency is essential for other reasons – a football game like X2, where the terminology conventions are deeply embedded and any erratic vocabulary would jar, is a great example of the value

of these tools. A term like “free kick”, correctly rather than literally translated, then needs to appear consistently in every context within the game, and within future games – similarly sensitive are team and player names, the names of the various injuries that players occasionally suffer. Translating of any of these key elements badly, or inconsistently, fatally undermines the crucial authenticity of the game. In a market environment where peer reviews drive sales in a very direct correlation, poor localisation can undermine revenue potential very quickly – the gamer community is known for its diligence in providing peer reviews on forums, and websites like PocketGamer, Touch Arcade and others are respected repositories of feedback which can “make or break” an app’s reputation and thus its marketability.



GRAMMATICAL SPECIALITIES

Language engineering solutions, with regard to noun gender, are a fascinating aspect of the process for games – in each rendering of the word, responding to the actions of the user, the article in the sentence needs to auto-implement. This involves making a grammatically sound table that lists the nouns affected and their the indefinite and definite articles in singular and plural – in all target languages. Accurately creating this table and ensuring that it covers all relevant pieces of terminology and all in-game instances



is no mean feat, but is an excellent, creative solution that marries the understanding of game programming with localisation expertise to ensure perfect implementation, every time. Yet further creative solutions may be required where budget or project size renounces this option – and of course a diligent localisation QA process is required to ensure that accurate renderings, however they are implemented, still work correctly from a gameplay and functionality perspective. Text, or readable graphics, need to be placed correctly on the screen, not run off the page or obscure another element, etc – all key parts of the localisation QA process. Another area where genre-specific knowledge is crucial is in flagging up potential licensing and rights issues regarding terminology – without expensive rights to phrases like “Champions League”, developers of football games need to devise authentic-sounding alternatives for tournament, club or even player names. Native speaker ability, and specific genre knowledge, is utterly crucial to this – and it obtains whether the genre is military, fighting or another sport. Part of this is critically evaluating the source text – if the genre-specific terms miss the mark in the source text, then they should be challenged at this early

stage, otherwise no amount of sensitive localisation handling will retrieve a project from text inauthenticity. Establishing a relationship with the client where “there’s no such thing as a stupid question” is key – where source text terms are dubious, the client and service provider need to be able to discuss the terms in a non-confrontational, clear way to ensure that the right words are taken forward to be localised. A clear, shared focus on the end-user experience and an understanding that inauthentic terminology can undermine the best functional game is key, and part of the successful service provider’s remit should be to store all of these questions, answers and details of the source language rationale to aid the native translators as they go about their task. All of these nuances of sense can be used by the language professionals, and form a palette of high-quality services that transcend traditional localisation. This early “language consultancy” is essential when dealing with a savvy consumer who has a huge amount of purchase choice – the mobile gamer being the epitome of this.

LOCALISING GAMES FOR THE IPAD

With the rapid growth of the

iPhone and other smartphone app markets, as well as the brave new world of the iPad, a new vernacular has arrived. We tap and drag rather than clicking, and “pressing enter” sounds about as archaic as a “carriage return” to the modern technology user – these platform commands are part of the recognisable language conventions, alongside the genre expertise and specific workflow required for the successful localisation of apps. After the success of X2 Football 2010, the team have recently worked on their first iPad localisation project, for a high-profile fighting game. The popularity of the latest Apple baby was unprecedented at launch, and some developers have been quick to exploit the possibility for more involved games (delivered in glorious high definition), with bigger word counts and more involved plot lines. The outlook for the iPad looks bright at the time of writing, and no doubt the second and third generation releases will elicit new waves of consumer demand. This can only be good for the translation and localisation providers that prove agile enough to position themselves correctly for this new wave of potential clients, supporting the app economy to really go global.

Author Bio:

Filipe Samora is the Translation Manager for Testronic Labs. Based at Pinewood Studios, Filipe is a Project Manager with extensive experience in the translation and localisation industry. During his career with Testronic Labs, and previously at Today Translations and Eidos, Filipe has managed over 3,000 localisation projects for FTSE 100 and Fortune 500 companies.

CONTACT US:

London

Lyon House
160 - 166 Borough High St
SE1 1LB
United Kingdom
Ph: +44 (0) 207 253 7258

Pinewood

Pinewood Studios
Iver, Buckinghamshire
SLO 0NH
United Kingdom
Ph: +44 (0) 1753 653722

Belgium

Belgium NV
Wetenschapspark 7
B-3590 Diepenbeek
Belgium
Ph: +32 11 303 600

Poland

Testronic Sp. z o.o.
ul. Julianowska 65 A
Piaseczno 05-500
Poland
Ph: +32 11 303 600

US

111 North First Street
Suite #304
Burbank, CA 91502
US
Ph: +1 (818) 845 3223

Japan

c/o Interarrows Inc.
503 Mirum Shiroganedai
1-1-4 Kamiosaki Shinagawa-ku
Tokyo, Japan 141-0021
Ph: +81 (0)3 5420 3035

