



LINGO
SYSTEMS

Business processes and IT systems at LSPs:

A whole world of solutions

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The language service provider (LSP) market has been undergoing major changes for years. Thanks to the internet, companies are increasingly able to address their target group(s) around the world, without breaking the bank. Content production, especially digital content, is increasing exponentially as a result of diverse audiences and marketing channels like social media. The demand for translation and localization services continues to grow, as does the need for high quality and quick turnaround times.

In recent years, LSPs have invested heavily in technologies to optimise and automate their workflows in order to stay competitive in the market. One sign of the transformations in the industry are the many mergers and acquisitions involving LSPs.

However, many LSPs still face such investment decisions. They are wondering which investments – at which points in their value creation chain – really make sense and will contribute to success in the long run. The technological possibilities seem endless, but the means and also the time available are limited.

In this article, we take a bird's-eye view of value creation at an LSP and show how the system landscape available today can help optimise value creation. For LSPs, this perspective provides new food for thought and should help them to prioritise sustainable, long-term solutions that benefit customers, employees and partners alike when making optimisation and investment decisions.

The LSP's typical project workflow

Traditionally, LSPs work closely with their customers (clients) and their partners (suppliers). Figure 1 shows the sequence of a typical job.

INQUIRY. The client submits an inquiry to the LSP, specifying the key parameters of the job. This usually includes the content (in the form of documents), the desired translation services and target languages, and the requested delivery date.

INQUIRY REGISTRATION. The LSP creates the job in its translation management system (TMS), adding all relevant metadata and other information about the customer and the job.

DOCUMENT PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS. This step involves counting the source documents and analysing them according to the desired services. Since the LSP essentially has no control over the source documents, document preparation is often a time-consuming step. For example, file formats have to be converted for analysis or the texts to be translated have to be typed from graphics.

SERVICE PACKAGE AND OFFER. Based on the document analysis and the available resources, the LSP checks the feasibility for the desired delivery date and prepares a binding offer. This also takes into account individual customer agreements on prices, surcharges, etc.

LSP VALUE CREATION

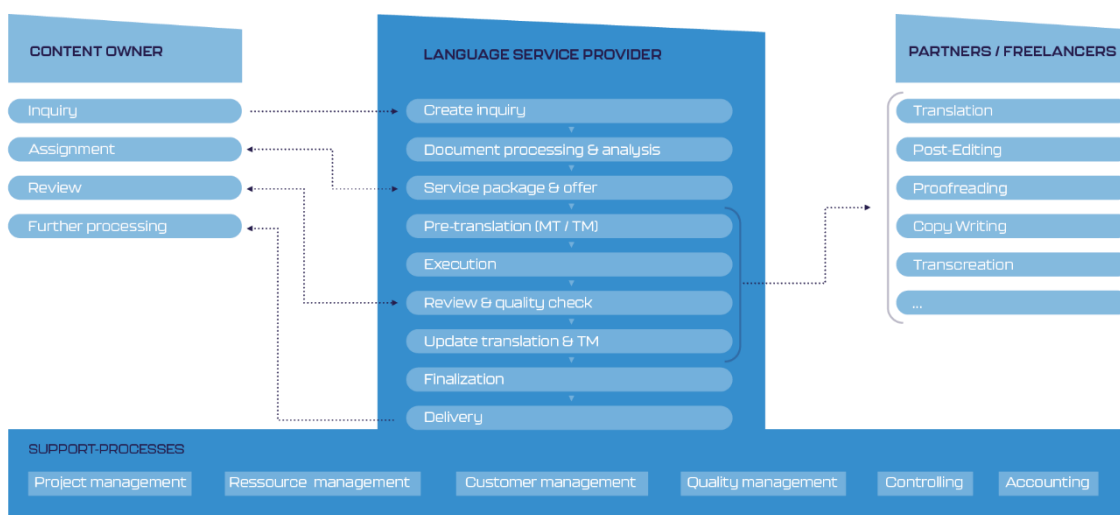


Figure 1: Value creation at the LSP

PLACING THE ORDER. Normally, the client will accept the offer and place the order. There may, however, be further adjustments to the inquiry, triggering a new offer cycle. It also happens that framework agreements exist and the LSP is not required to submit offers, but is commissioned directly by the client.

PRE-TRANSLATION (MT/TM). Once the order has been placed, the project manager decides whether pre-translation using machine translation (MT) is necessary and checks whether the correct translation memories (TMs) and terminology databases have been included in the project. TMs are typically used as early as the document analysis stage in order to check how many segments of the text have already been translated previously.

EXECUTION. The project manager decides which tasks will be carried out by in-house staff and which by external partners. In doing so, they have to take a wide range of variables into account, including the availability and workload of the staff (both internal and external), expertise in the relevant field, the staff's experience with the customer, but also the costs of

using external partners. External partners need to be approached, the relevant documents and information provided, and all of the tasks and contributors to a project coordinated. The internal or external contributors then carry out the specific tasks such as translation, editing, proofreading or copywriting.

REVIEW & QUALITY CHECK. Before the results can be delivered to the client, experienced staff at the LSP are often responsible for internal reviews and quality assurance. Increasingly, these tasks are also being taken on by external partners.

REVIEW. If necessary, the client may also carry out a review of the results. This step is particularly helpful with content involving a lot of graphics and design requirements such as presentations, brochures or advertisements, so as to avoid costly complaints later on.

UPDATE TRANSLATIONS AND THE TM. The target documents are updated with the adjustments from the review. Furthermore, translation memories and also terminology databases are updated with the

knowledge gained in the project so that it can be used immediately in the next project.

FINALISATION. The target documents are prepared for the client. This may include, for example, converting the file format.

DELIVERY. The project results are made available to the client, and the client is informed that the project is complete. Ideally, the results are transferred directly to the client's content systems, allowing it to start processing them right away.

FURTHER PROCESSING. The client receives the target documents and can process them further internally.

The actual workflow behind these steps in the value creation chain is individual for each LSP. If LSPs cater very strongly to customer demands, the workflow will have many branches and be complex. LSPs with a focus on cost and efficiency, on the other hand, will focus on workflows that are as simple and standardised as possible.

Clients typically want to exert strong control over this workflow to satisfy themselves that their content is in good hands. Secrecy is a top priority for new products or patent applications, for example. Here, a trusting relationship between the client and the LSP is indispensable.

The workflow is typically accompanied by support processes such as project management, customer management, resource management, etc. These ensure that customer orders are processed as seamlessly as possible.

System landscape of an LSP

One – if not *the* – core building block used by LSPs to provide maximum value to their customers and maintain customer relationships in the long term is software systems. There are countless systems that support the workflow and value creation at a wide variety of stages and in many ways. Figure 2 shows the typical system classes used by an LSP and its clients and partners.

A translation management system (TMS) is generally understood to be a system in which customer projects are managed and processed and which integrates all project participants. A TMS can be a single software product or a set of integrated software systems that provide the desired translation management functionality.

In the following, we present the system classes typically in use at an LSP.

BUSINESS AND WORKFLOW SYSTEMS. The core of any TMS is managing both customer projects and workflows for the various language services provided by the LSP. This is where all the information on customers, suppliers, price agreements and much more comes together in order to manage customer projects effectively and efficiently.

CAT-SYSTEMS. Computer-aided translation systems are tools that provide operational support to the linguist when translating, proofreading, etc. Typically, they are integrated with other systems and provide the linguist with direct access to the translation memory or terminology database, for example.

TRANSLATION MEMORY (TM) SYSTEMS. A translation memory is a means of storing previous translations with a wide variety of contextual information. In subsequent translation projects, this information is used to translate text segments automatically or to display translation suggestions to the translator. TMs are usually specific to one customer.

TERMINOLOGY DATABASE (TERMBASE) SYSTEMS. A terminology database stores terms together with a variety of contextual information about how to use them. This kind of glossary is necessary to ensure consistency in language and the use of terms and phrases. A terminology database is usually specific to one customer.

MACHINE TRANSLATION (MT) SYSTEMS. MT includes all systems that translate texts automatically. There are many different approaches to MT, from statistics-based to self-learning systems, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Especially where high

volumes have to be translated in a very short time, MT has found its place. Most LSPs already offer their customers MT translation with post-editing by linguists.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS SYSTEMS. The analysis of source documents is particularly helpful in a project’s planning phase to determine the scope of the text segments to be translated. An important part of this is correctly counting characters, words, segments and lines. Another major challenge is the many file formats available and being able to extract the content that actually needs to be translated. For example, a PowerPoint presentation may contain relevant text not only on the slides, but also in notes or comments.

CUSTOMER OR PARTNER PORTAL. Self-service portals for customers and partners (suppliers, freelancers) deliver great added value for both sides. They are a central location for customers to place orders and keep track of all current and completed projects. Partners and suppliers can accept jobs offered to them directly, automatically receive all relevant information, and return the results to the LSP directly via the portal. For the LSP, portals provide a

controllable channel for communicating with their customers and partners. Email communication is greatly reduced, workflows can be standardised and optimised, and via the portals, the LSP has the opportunity to offer additional services for customers and partners, such as granting customers access to their terminology, providing an MT interface, invoice management or helpful reports and other analyses.

The linguists (in-house at the LSP or external at the partner) mainly use CAT systems for operational work in conjunction with translation memories and terminology databases. The use of machine translation systems is also continuing to grow in many areas.

The client essentially uses systems to manage its relevant content. The spectrum ranges from the ubiquitous content management system (CMS) and product information management (PIM) systems to digital asset management systems (DAM) and centralised content repositories. The client’s goal is to have this content available as seamlessly as possible in the relevant target languages for the respective target groups.

LSP TECH LANDSCAPE

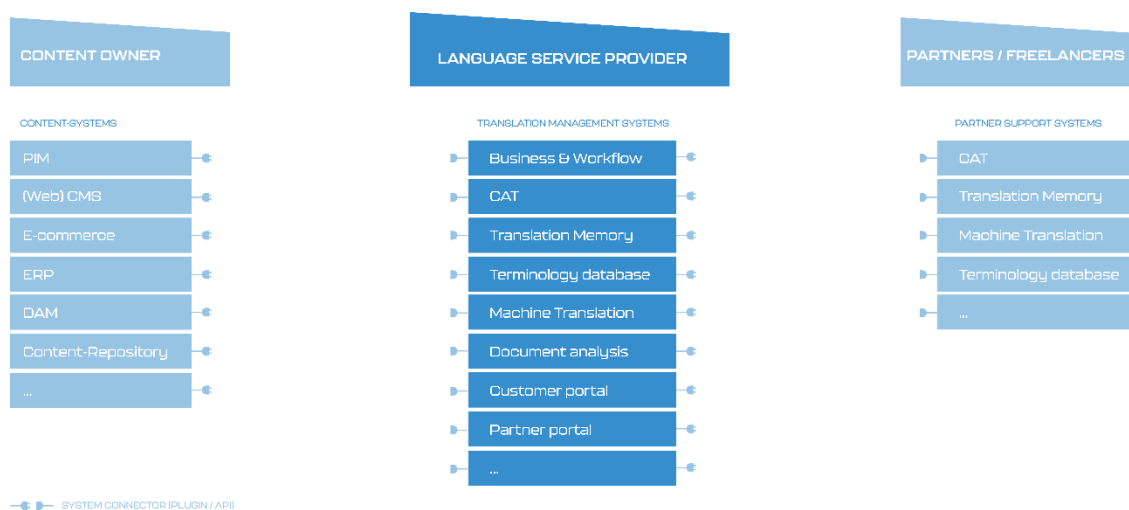


Figure 2: LSP tech landscape

All of these systems play a part in the LSP's value creation and support the workflow described at the outset. Integrating these systems is a key lever for optimising LSP value creation. Integration can lead to processing customer projects as seamlessly, effectively and efficiently as possible, delivering high quality at an acceptable cost.

By means of system interfaces, virtually any system can be integrated with any other. On a technical level, such interfaces might be plug-ins for the systems involved or APIs that are offered by one system and used by others.

The sheer number of possibilities of connecting different systems, and also of the technical implementation, makes it necessary to analyse exactly at which point a system integration can deliver the greatest added value for customers, partners and the LSP itself.

Real solutions depend heavily on the customer structure, the type of customer projects, the workflows and systems used, and the strategic orientation of the LSP. The market will continue to be subject to major changes in the future, and flexibility and responsiveness to these changes are important factors in order to succeed in the market.

A shrewd and appropriate integration strategy can create and leverage vast potential for LSP value creation. Such endeavours are already in full swing among the big LSPs, and smaller start-ups and niche LSPs are also showing that, with the right technical basis, they can hold their own in the market.

Are you looking to improve and automate your processes? Would you like to stand out in the translation and language services market? Improving your IT landscape could help?

As an innovative language service provider, you need the best possible technological basis: reliable CAT tools, high-performance translation management systems, intuitive customer portals and the right interfaces to your customers. We offer you IT support tailored to your individual requirements: at lingo systems, we work with you to design and, if required, implement your information technology landscape. We are familiar with the standard products used by the LSP industry (Plunet, RWS, memoQ, Across, etc.). We will think ahead with you as you plan your next steps. What will the translation industry look like and how will it work in the coming years? Be a technical pioneer and let us help you to take your language services to the next level!

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**Technology and consulting for
language service providers.**