



**FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DES TRADUCTEURS
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FIT Position Statement on Crowdsourcing of Translation, Terminology and Interpreting (TTI) Services

Background

Crowdsourcing, this seemingly low-cost, technology-driven, internet-mediated “black-box” phenomenon, promises to revolutionise trans-lingual communications and transforms international interactions from disasters relief to corporate campaign. But crowdsourcing is many things to many people. Common Sense Advisory attempted to group this diverse phenomenon into three broad categories known as CT³– (a) community / social; (b) collaborative and (c) crowdsourced / team translation. (dePalma 2008)

As the voice of associations of translators, interpreters and terminologists around the world, FIT will below provide some clarity to users of TTI services and other interested parties the pertinent issues on this evolving field based on the latest research.

One of the original definitions of crowdsourcing is "the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call" (Howe, 2006a). This innovative means of doing business has often been heralded as another Industrial Revolution providing “the new pool of cheap labor” (Howe, 2006b)

Furthermore, in increasingly complex business and public sectors, most companies or institutions do not have all the necessary resources, competencies and knowledge to provide complete solutions for customers’ needs. Rather than in-house translators, terminologists and interpreters, the ideal of crowdsourcing is to recruit a pool of TTI specialists as niche players on a per-need basis to provide specialist solutions and thus enhance the overall value of the project without the burden of ongoing investment.

Apart from the cost savings that are often focused on – the advertised savings have been variably quoted as up to as much as 80% – judicious use of crowdsourcing has been known to have other benefits, including speed, scalability, faster user feedback, niche creation, selective increase in productivity and market diversification and robustness (Iansiti et al., 2002).

On the other hand, there are many often hidden and/or unquantifiable risks arising from crowdsourcing where professional translators, terminologist and interpreters are sought to remedy when such risks materialise. Based on Kannangara et al., FIT highlights below the five categories of risk, with some common solutions to mitigate them.

1. Relationship complexity

Crowdsourcing can introduce considerable complexity and with it uncertainty. In order to mitigate such risks, it is therefore critical that there is a robust and flexible crowd governance structure and management policy as well as an in-house manager completely familiar with the needs of the company or institution as well as that of the translation / terminology / interpreting process.

2. Control/effectiveness

User-knowledge management is time-consuming and requires considerable effort in extracting what is useful as well as what is detrimental. Companies should therefore pay particular attention to choosing the right users for collaboration (Rajala et al. 2013). In the absence of in-house experts, the evaluation of user-generated content can be very challenging, and the risk unquantifiable. Crowd control and monitoring therefore add new dimensions and expenses to project management.

3. Co-ordination of workflow and duplication

Crowdsourcing does not mean parallel processing. It also creates new challenges to branding and consistency. There will be new operational bottlenecks limiting the benefit.

Crowdsourcing can create duplications and thus wastage of precious resources. Furthermore, the law of errors is cumulative. Crowdsourcing introduces more sources of errors by virtue of more people being involved as well as decontextualised fragments. Furthermore, the process of identifying errors and ensuring consistency post-hoc can be time-consuming and resource-intensive and display variable completeness.

4. Loss of know-how and intellectual property risks

The background and motivation of the crowd are unknown risk factors that are difficult to assess and therefore mitigate. Crowdsourcing by definition means more players will be exposed to parts of, if not the whole, project, creating a challenging environment of intellectual property protection and confidentiality. It has often been suggested crowdsourcing most suits the processing of unimportant documents.

5. Loss of certainty in results

Crowdsourcing is often conceptualised as a blackbox where a product is generated by an opaque process and faceless individuals. Furthermore, crowdsourcing is associated with an increase in detachment of individual players from the overall project as well as the company or institution, thus significantly reducing accountability and therefore potentially quality. One well-known strategy against this is duplication (see §3).

Recommendations

Crowdsourcing has penetrated into the fabric of the translation, terminology and interpreting profession. TTIs across the world, users of TTI services and policymakers alike are working towards understanding this developing phenomenon as well as establishing best practice guidelines to optimally benefit from it. Based on the above risk categories, companies and institutions ought to ask the following questions before embarking on crowdsourcing of TTI services:

- Do we know where are the possible sources of reliable TTIs who can provide a best solution to support our project?
- Is confidentiality, information security and/or intellectual property rights critical? How much would our project be compromised if the information needing TTI services is leaked by one or more members of the crowd?
- Do we have the in-house expertise to evaluate the crowd? and thus to evaluate their solutions?
- Do we have a contingency plan if one of the above risks or combination of risks eventuates?

For more information, contact FIT (www.fit-ift.org) or individual FIT member association in your country or region.

References

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