

The Importance of Localisation, Customisation and Translation in Training

In today's global economy, regionalization, customization and translation of training materials and the ability to deliver in multiple languages is more important than ever. If you do not localise, culturalise or translate training materials, students do not learn effectively and are often frustrated by the experience.

Delivering off-the shelf, generic training programs decreases a student's ability to understand key concepts and makes it much more difficult for them to apply what they do learn on the job. Generic training programs lead employees to think "I don't understand how this applies to me, so I'm not going to pay attention to it", instead of completing a training program thinking, "Yes, I could apply this to my job." This results in a demotivated class and a decreased training return on investment.

When evaluating generic training programs for delivery in a particular region, there are three specific areas to examine carefully:

- Training Appropriateness to Culture, Religion, and Gender.
- Training Applicability to the Specific Audience Group.
- Training Translation for Individuals whose Native Language is not the Delivery Language.

Training Appropriateness

The most effective way to derail a training program is to have inappropriate content in the training program. This content can quickly offend students, undermining any goals the training may have. Some of the major areas of training inappropriateness, especially with the diverse Middle Eastern Work Force, are religion, gender and ethnicity.

Religious Considerations

When deploying a training program created in a country such as the United States or the United Kingdom, it is critical to ensure that the program does not contain any content, design or graphics that would offend many of the various religions found in the Middle East.

For example, including a gambling activity in an online training program deployed to Muslim employees would immediately offend their religious beliefs which prohibit gambling. The program would immediately be tainted and inappropriate to the students, causing many to discontinue the program and to be upset with their organization for deploying such a program.

Gender Considerations

Along the same lines of religious considerations, gender considerations must also be reviewed. Inclusion of any female-specific content or graphics to male students may offend conservative cultures that require the separation of such content: male-only content for men and female-only content for women.

For example, many US and UK training programs include diverse graphics and scenarios showing men and women in graphics and using male and female names in the content. This would not be appropriate for Islamic cultures which require the separation of gender-specific content, graphics, etc..

Ethnic Considerations

Because the Middle East is a melting pot of many different cultures and ethnicities, it is important to ensure that training programs focus on the culture of intended audiences. While many foreign training companies may think that all Arabic people are the same, the various cultures throughout the Middle East take pride in their uniqueness. Acknowledging and customizing for this uniqueness will increase training program effectiveness.

Training Applicability

Training must be immediately applicable to its intended audience to reduce confusion and increase retention. A sales training program that uses examples on selling to consumers will not help employees who are focused on selling to businesses because the examples and content will not be applicable.

When evaluating training applicability, there are several areas to consider:

- Examples, Scenarios and Case Studies – are the examples in the training program immediately applicable to the intended audience? In order for the students to understand the content, it must be presented in a familiar context. For example, using examples about serving branch customers when training bank tellers increases program retention and applicability.
- Currency – is the currency used in the program local currency? To eliminate the distraction of trying to convert currency in a program to local currency, it must be. For example, providing accounting training using USD instead of KWD will result in the students first trying to convert all the amounts in sample balance sheets and income statements to local currency so that they can understand the concepts and ratios being taught. This creates a barrier to learning.
- Language – is the language used understandable? Using idioms, humor, abbreviations and jargon not common to the audience receiving the training only confuses the learner and limits content retention. For example, a US training program uses an example for customer service that states the customer was “up in arms”. For non-native English speakers, “up in arms” will not easily translate into the customer being very upset, destroying understanding of the key learning concept using the idiom.

Translation

Most generic training programs are available in English and although most professionals in the Middle East speak English, English is not their native language. Therefore, although able to converse and conduct business in English, it is still not the language they are most comfortable in and thus it reduces their ability to understand and retain certain key concepts. In order to ensure that the training is understandable, providing translated training materials is critical. Often, you must even pay attention to the local dialect. Our recommendation for training in the Middle East is to offer bi-lingual materials – allowing delivery in English with content presented in both English and Arabic.

The quality of translation is also critical. Obviously fluency in both languages is critical, but especially when training on complex, jargon-filled content, expertise in the subject matter is a requirement. You never want for example, “Money Laundering” to be translated as “Washing Money.” Further, by considering the requirements above, especially when it comes to language applicability, translation will be easier and more accurate, ensuring that nothing is lost in translation, or mistranslated in a way that the meaning of the content is changed or lost.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to maximize the return on investment of any training initiative, especially when purchasing training from abroad, organizations must ensure that the training is customized, including localisation, culturalisation and translation.