

LTC ORGANISER REVIEW

Let's get organised!

An in-depth review of the LTC Organiser by Robert Clark

By now, most well-organised translation/localisation companies will be managing their projects using an exotic array of databases and spreadsheets, with varying degrees of success. Most of these companies will still be talking about that "one fine day" when they get the time to sit down and combine all these devices into a single, slick, integrated system that allows central access to everything required to manage a project efficiently and profitably: translation resources, client information, cost and pricing information, job tracking and the ability to generate reports, purchase orders and invoices. The trouble is, that "one fine day" never seems to come. And if it did, would they be prepared to shell out the price of developing such a system? If I had to bet, I know where I would put my money. A UK-based company, The Language Technology Centre (LTC), just may have come up with a solution.

The Managing Director of LTC, Dr Adriane Rinsche, is a long-serving practitioner of translation and localisation and has spent many years advising corporations on the implementation of localisation solutions. If anyone knows their way around a localisation project, she does and she will almost certainly have heard the same people talking about that "one

fine day". Appropriately, she has developed something that everybody seems to want: a single, slick, integrated system that allows central access to everything required to manage a translation/localisation project efficiently and profitably, the LTC Organiser.

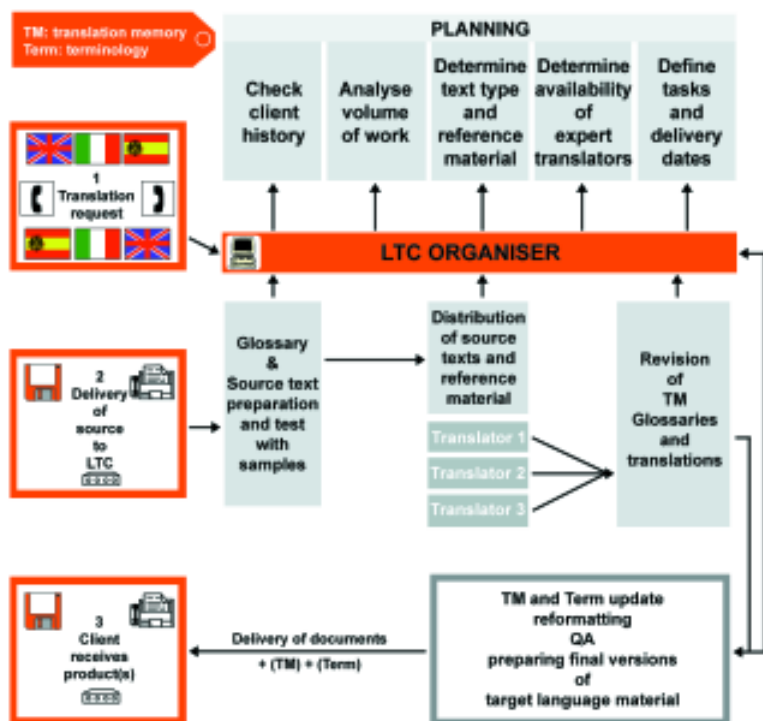
LTC's press releases claim that their Organiser is an "Advanced Project Management Tool designed to handle large and complex translation and localisation projects and is the first off-the-shelf product to provide an integrated solution for project managers". The latest release of the Organiser, version 2.92, starts with an entry-level system, the basic Translation Management Module, which includes the Translator, Contact and Client databases plus a To Do list feature, and moves up to the industrial-strength Translation & Project Management Module, which includes all the above features along with a Translation Software database and the ability to enter all project-specific information and track each stage, from receipt of material to delivery. The Scheduler function within the Project Management database provides a quick graphic overview of all projects by translator and clearly indicates any holiday or downtime periods that may impact on a project. In addition, there are two other modules available, the Finance Module, which allows the creation, export and printing of invoices, quotations and purchase orders, and the Report Module, which produces statistical and graphic management and financial reports using Crystal Reports. An export function enables data to be manipulated in other applications. This is what the LTC Organiser is *supposed* to do, now let us see if it's true.

Installation

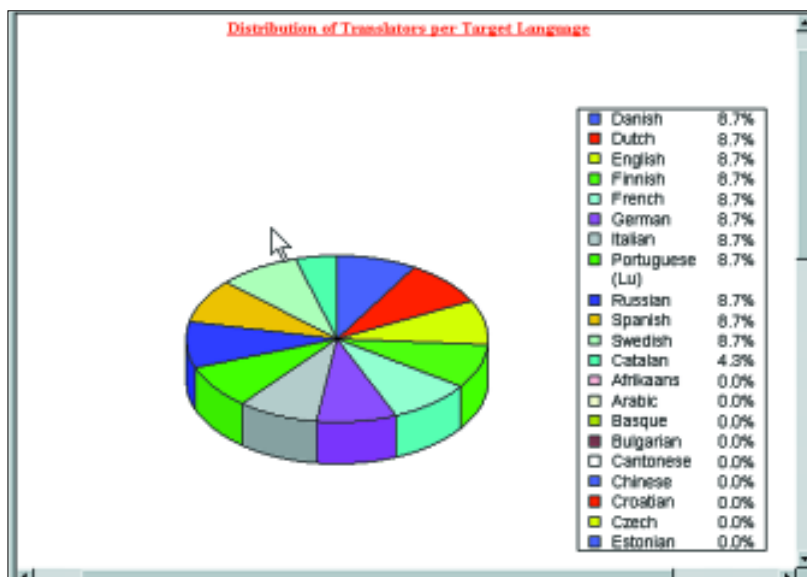
Once the inevitable dongle is in place, a stand-alone installation is just a matter of running the installation CD. A network installation is slightly more fiddly, but clearly described in the installation instructions. Access rights are also defined in the latest version.

Getting Started

The startup screen displays eleven menu items. Reading from left to right, we see "To do", "Contact", "Finance", "Translator", "Client", "Software", "Project", "Report", "Setup", "Exit" and, finally, "Help". Some of these contain drop-down menus and some do not and, when clicked, launch directly into that particular function. The natural temptation is to start browsing through the list from left to right and, by the time you reach the

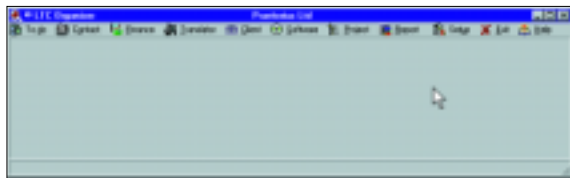


Integration of LTC Organiser in a typical workflow



"Setup" option, which is where you should have started, you could be forgiven for wondering if it will ever make sense. I would strongly advise those tempted to roll up their sleeves and have a go before reading the documentation not to do so. Please note that there is a PDF file containing the *LTC Organiser User Guide* included on the installation CD. If you follow this guide faithfully, you will soon see that there is a logical method for entering data that makes perfect sense.

Setup



The first step is to create a new database. By selecting the "Database" option under the "Setup" menu, you can open an existing database or create a new one. You can also import and export XML and Excel files in order to import and export database content. The next step is the most crucial. All the central reference information that will be used by the various modules is entered at this point. In the sub-menu under "Setup" the following items are available: "Types & Languages", "Options", "Currency Setup" and "Workload Units". "Types & Languages" is by far the most involved section, as can be seen by the screenshot, but the time spent in carefully entering the information is well worth it.

Translator Management Database

Entering information in this database is very labour intensive because of the sheer volume required for the system to work efficiently and accurately. When migrating from another database, this process can be accelerated dramatically by using the Excel import feature. If you are able to juggle your data to match the rather unforgiving template provided by the

developers and export it as an Excel file, this can be imported directly into the Translation Management Database. Obviously, any information not included in the template would then have to be entered manually. Once everything is in place, the database is a delight. Translators are searchable by source, target and mother tongue languages, subject area, and knowledge of translation tools. Once a list of translators appears, you can easily scroll through to check fees, availability, current workload, and software/hardware profiles. (I have had to break my rule here

about slavishly following the User Guide, which deals with the Contact Management Database first. All contact information entered in the Translator Database is recorded in the Contact Database, but not vice versa. This also applies to the Client Management Database, which follows.)

Client Database

Compared to the information required by the Translation Management Database, this is a piece of cake. Again, the option to batch import data using an Excel file is available and will speed things up considerably. This database allows the monitoring of all projects completed, running or projected for each client along with all invoice information.

Contact Management

This is a straightforward address book approach and the Excel option is available.

Software Management

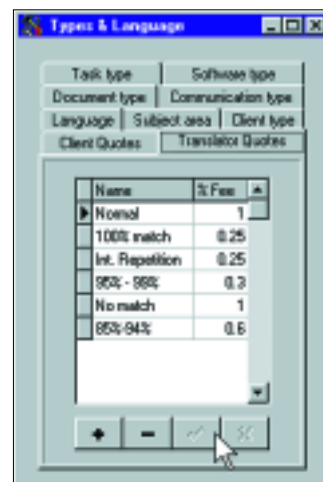
This database is used to store information on all Translation Tools used by an organisation, including licences, software types, special user and handling instructions, specialist support and document types handled. Any tools temporarily loaned out to a translator are also monitored.

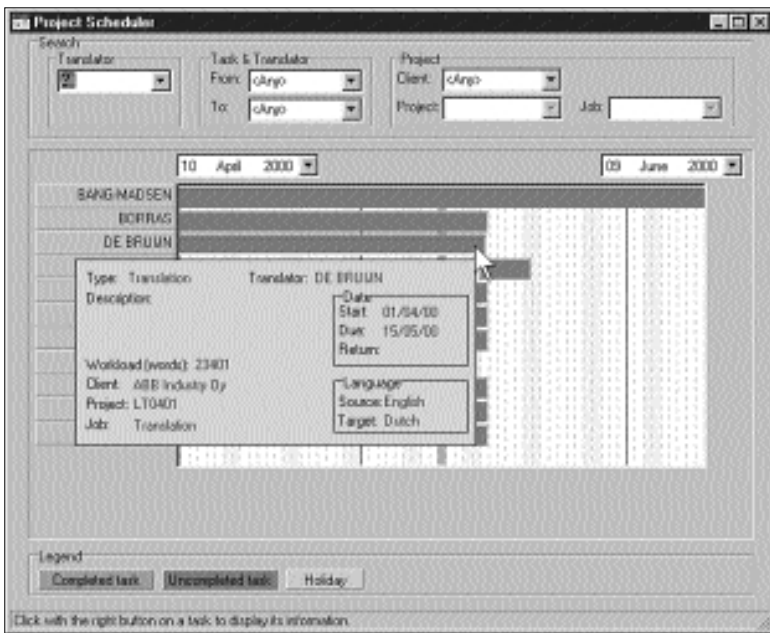
Finance Management

The Finance Module is very comprehensive and deals with all financial issues, including price lists and translator or client payments.

Reports

All reports produced by this module are



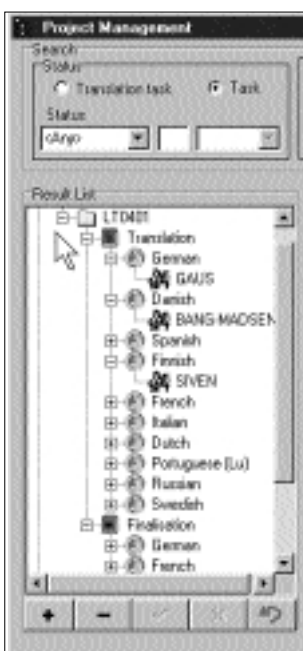


created using Crystal Report software, which means that the range of reports possible is not limited to those provided by the LTC Organiser. Users may create and customise their own. LTC also seem to keep beavering away on new ones. To date, the list includes reports on Client Management, Software Management, Project Management and Finance Management.

Reports can be exported as Doc, Excel, HTML, TXT, DIF, Lotus 1-2-3, RTF files and ODBC source for further manipulation and import into other applications.

Project Management

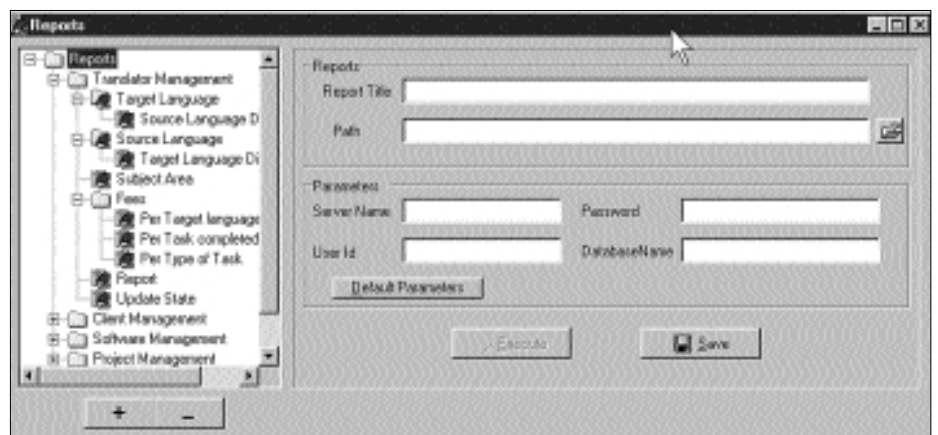
Of course, in true dramatic tradition, I have saved the best for last. Sadly, there is not enough space to thoroughly cover all the features of the Project Management module, but I will describe as many as I can. All that information that was entered in the other modules comes together in this one. Here you can search; enter and edit information, and create new jobs and translation tasks for each client already entered in the Client Management module. To create a new project you simply highlight the client name and right-click the mouse. A Wizard form appears requesting the project name, source language (drop-down



list), job name, target language (drop-down list), Translator (drop-down list) and start date and deadline. This automatically builds a three-stage tree structure, mapping the project through job, language task and translator.

The translator details dialog is then opened and any information stored in the Translator Management module is automatically transferred here. The rest is entered manually. Details, such as translator quotes, payments, and a task status graph are displayed here. A task file path structure is automatically set up to accommodate sent files, received files, and revised files.

Moving back to the language task level, we find client quote and payment details. The client quote page calculates that all important figure: the profit margin. Translator costs are automatically registered here and any additional costs may be entered to achieve an accurate final figure. The project trees can be browsed at any time to monitor status, profitability and anything else that catches your fancy. Oh, I almost forgot. There is also a "To Do" module, if you have time to fill it in!



System Requirements: Intel Pentium, 32 MB RAM, 20 MB disk space, SVGA 800x600, 16 colours, Mouse, Windows 95, 98, NT or 2000.

Prices vary, depending on module combinations. The developers say that they are working on a web-based client-server version - wow!

For further information, contact The Language Technology Centre, www.langtech.co.uk

Ease of Use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Aesthetic Appeal	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Speed	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Claims vs Reality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★