



Terminology Management Systems: Three Steps to Finding the Right One for You

WHITE PAPER





Introduction

Although the benefits of systematic terminology management are well-documented, many organizations still can't bring themselves to take the first leap towards saving significant amounts of time and money on translation.

The purpose of this guide is to aid you in your search for the right terminology management system. By "right," we mean right for you, which is to say, a terminology management system that specifically addresses the needs of your organization.

There are four steps in this three-step guide. We apologize for the deception, but there is some method to the madness. You see, the first step is that you need to really know your organization and what it needs. If you've already spent the time and energy to thoroughly assess the terminology-related needs of your company—that's great. You're a step ahead of the rest. Feel free to skip to the second step.

If you're still trying to see the forest through the trees, however, and haven't quite placed a finger on where and how your organization can benefit from a terminology management system, then no worries. We're here to help. Go ahead and flip to the next page, and we'll tackle this beast one step at a time.

I. First and foremost, figure out what you need.

In any procurement process—especially when you're investing in enterprise-level software—you need to make sure that what you're buying fulfills your company's individual requirements. This may sound elementary, but you'd be surprised by how many organizations cough up buco bucks on a solution that, ultimately, isn't a solution at all. These mistakes, nine times out of ten, are born of people (and companies) not knowing what they want.

So, on the road to technological self-discovery, you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- **Why am I managing my terminology?**

Answering this one might be duck soup, but it's good to know whether you're only managing source terms to keep your tech writers' heads on straight; whether you're looking to create something more complex, like a multilingual termbase; or if you're looking for a more comprehensive solution that serves as a knowledge base for a range of operative groups within your company. Depending on your needs, the approach—and the degree of functionality—will be different.



- **Who needs to have access to the system and/or termbase?**

Depending on the type of glossary, there can be as many as 10 functional groups using your terminology management system at the same time. Is it just for your engineers and tech writers, or does your marketing department need to use it too? If you're in the Life Sciences, what about regulatory affairs? Knowing who's going to use the system will help you understand what type of functionality you'll need and, more importantly, how much it will cost to train everyone involved.

- **What other system(s) do I need it to integrate with?**

After you know who's going to use the terminology management system, you should figure out how they're going to use it, including information about the other tools with which it needs to integrate. Some examples include other content management systems, corporate knowledge bases, translation memory and management systems, as well as other terminology-related tools. Make sure you're clear about what standards and file formats you need the system to support (e.g., XML, XLIFF, CSV, etc.).

- **What kind of security features will I need?**

Again, depending on who's using the terminology management system, you're going to need different security features. Are you only implementing the system internally, or is it something that your localization vendor, external linguists, or even customers might use? Naturally, the more granular the security features, the better.

- **What kind of budget am I working with ?**

This one's a biggie. Though your budget shouldn't be the deciding factor in which solution you ultimately choose (proactively managing terminology, after all, is proven to save you money in the long run), it is something that should be taken into account. Some traditional models of terminology management require upfront investments of sometimes \$50,000 - \$100,000 USD, which is completely unnecessary. No matter which system you decide to implement, make sure you're aware of any "hidden costs" beforehand, which include:

- o **Training costs** – Is the system easy to use?
- o **Implementation costs** – Is the software a monster to install, or is it web-based?
- o **Support costs** – How much support does the developer offer, and at what price?
- o **Hosting costs** – If you're not hosting internally, is the vendor charging you market price?
- o **Commitment costs** – How difficult is it to migrate your data if you ever switch systems ?

Once you have clear answers to all of these questions, you're on your way to finding the right terminology management system for your organization.

Alternatively, if you're having trouble answering these questions, you can always consider the consulting services of an expert (ideally a terminologist). Many language service providers

(LSPs) offer these types of services, including CSOFT. If you decide to seek out consulting services, however, make sure to avail yourself of a localization vendor with terminology management expertise and, ideally, with their own corporate terminologist on board.

II. Rein in your geeks.

Although we both love and depend on our engineers, they aren't always human enough to choose technological solutions for less technically savvy users. If it were up to them, we'd still be operating in DOS, using command lines to perform everyday functions on our computers. That said, it's important that you pay attention to the user-friendliness of any terminology management system that you intend to implement.

As previously noted, a thorough terminology management strategy involves input from a number of different functional groups within your organization, all with varying degrees of technological know-how. Because of this, it's essential to choose a system that not only supports the functionality deemed necessary by each group, but that can also be used effectively by each stakeholder in the lifecycle of a term.

What should I look for in a user-friendly terminology management system?

A number of terminology management systems developed for corporate or enterprise-level use, though rife with bells and whistles, were not designed with the user's experience in mind. No matter how powerful a tool is, if your everyday user can't handle simple tasks without consulting the Help menu or frantically appealing to the corporate terminologist for assistance, then you've got yourself one expensive waste of money and hard drive space.

In general, there are three tell-tale signs of a user-friendly system:

1) A user-friendly terminology management system is web-based.

Elaborate software installations are a thing of the past. They waste time, money, and aren't always executed with success. Any terminology management system worth its salt ought to be web-based. Web-based systems free you from installation-related headaches and enabled authorized users to access your termbase from anywhere in the world. Furthermore, a significant benefit of web-based terminology management is that your glossary will be managed in a centralized database, ensuring that everyone always has access to the same, most up-to-date and approved terms.

2) A user-friendly terminology management system has an intuitive user interface.

If you can't figure out how to add a term, edit a term, then translate it, approve it, and notify other stakeholders of changes made to the glossary within the first ten minutes of using the system, then it's likely that the amount of money you end up spending on training and maintenance alone will surpass the amount of money that the system was designed to save you. Not only that, but mazelike user interfaces have a way of instigating human error in the terminology management process, effectively compromising the quality of all related downstream work.

3) A user-friendly terminology management system enables you to find the right term.

In less user-oriented terminology management systems, you'll find that there isn't much tolerance for spelling errors, nor are there many options for filtering your searches. Managing terms is about improving the quality of your content and increasing productivity, so what's the point of investing money in a controlled vocabulary if you can't find the right word? A system that supports fuzzy-matches, that tolerates spelling mistakes, and that has structured search filters based on language, domain, product, and even product version will ensure that each user is only working with the terms that apply to his or her individual workflow.

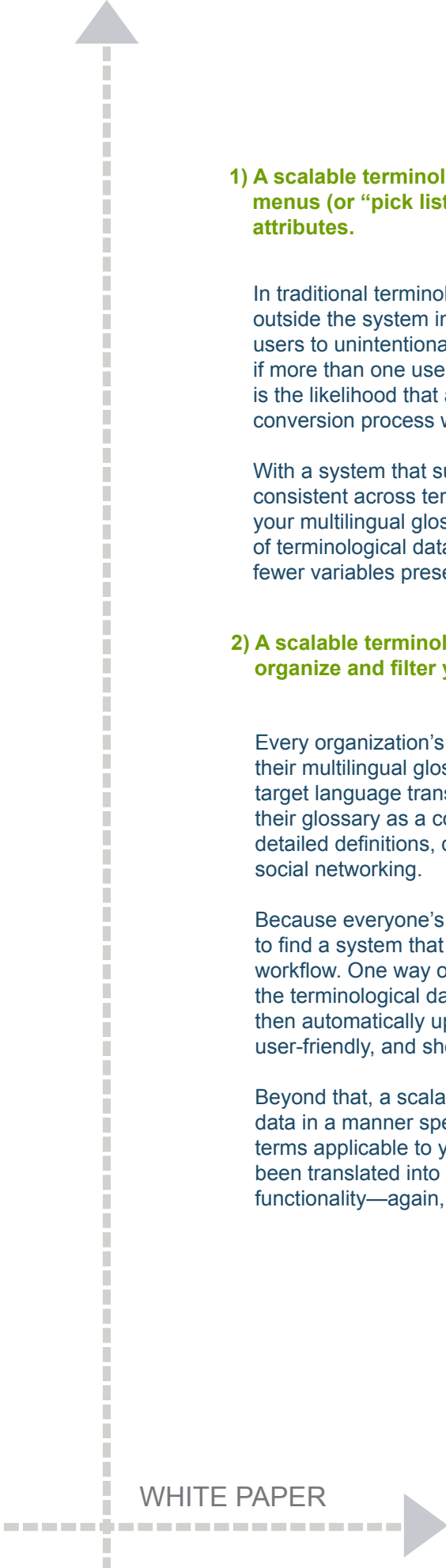
But don't take our word for it. Before you decide to invest in an enterprise-level terminology management system, get your hands dirty—have the developers set you up with a trial version and experiment with the interface yourself. More than a product demo (and more than recommendations from your engineering team), actually using the system is the best way to gauge its usability.

III. Choose a system that can grow with you.

You want to avoid investing in a terminology management system that your company is going to outgrow within the first couple years of use. At first, you may only have a hundred or so key terms in your glossary. But as your terminology management strategy matures and your product offering grows, the system you use to manage relevant terms should support that growth in as structured a manner as possible.

What makes one system more scalable than another?

When assessing scalability, it's important to appraise the organizational structure of the system, noting the degree to which the structure can be defined and customized to meet the specific needs of your organization. There are two main features that ensure the ongoing scalability of a terminology management system:



1) A scalable terminology management system includes ISO-compliant drop-down menus (or “pick lists”) to ensure finite, consistent data for certain terminological attributes.

In traditional terminology management models, you generally have to create term entries outside the system in a spreadsheet application. In this scenario, it's not uncommon for users to unintentionally enter inconsistent values in certain data categories, especially if more than one user is updating the glossary at the same time. More detrimental still is the likelihood that a given user misspells an attribute, in which case the entire import/conversion process will be compromised.

With a system that supports definable “pick lists,” you can ensure that your data is consistent across terms and languages, both solidifying the organizational structure of your multilingual glossary and optimizing future data migration. Beyond that, consistency of terminological data engenders more powerful searching capabilities because there are fewer variables present to pollute the system's search filters.

2) A scalable terminology management system allows you to define how you want to organize and filter your terms.

Every organization's terminology management strategy is different. Some companies limit their multilingual glossaries to the bare essentials: just term, part of speech, status, and target language translation. On the opposite end of the spectrum, other companies use their glossary as a comprehensive knowledge base for training purposes, incorporating detailed definitions, complex terminological data, multimedia, and even forms of internal social networking.

Because everyone's approach to terminology management is different, it's important to find a system that not only scales, but becomes increasingly tailored to your unique workflow. One way of ensuring this is by looking for a system that allows you to customize the terminological data that you collect, enabling you to add and delete attributes, and then automatically update them for all terms across the board. This function should be user-friendly, and should require no more than a few clicks.

Beyond that, a scalable terminology management system should allow you to organize data in a manner specified by you. For example, if only want to view the source terms applicable to your hardware department for version 2.0 of product XYZ that haven't been translated into Hebrew yet, then the system should be able to provide that functionality—again, with only a few clicks.

Take a company like Microsoft, whose glossary has over 25,000 terms and definitions in English alone. Including the translations of all their terms in the 100 different languages into which they localize, that's no less than 2.5 million terms that they have to maintain and deploy to their various functional groups around the globe. Without a scalable terminology management system in place that supports the specific needs of their organization, they'd be better off managing their multilingual glossary with an industrial food processor.

IV. Embrace your inner control freak.

Given the highly collaborative nature of terminology development, management, and translation, it's worthwhile to find a system that supports a granular set of control features. These should include comprehensive user management modules that enable you to determine in detail which operative groups can see what terms, including the degree to which they can interact with them. Ideally, permissions should be completely customizable, manageable in-house, and definable on a term-by-term basis. Be wary of systems that require a heavy (and expensive) amount of outsourced programming to make sure that, for example, French translators can't edit Arabic terms.

Aside from user administration, you should also be able to control how your terminology management system integrates with other systems. The key to this is finding a system that has an open API, and can import/export data in multiple industry-standard formats. Blanket, standards-based compatibility enables the system to integrate with the wide range of tools used by all operative groups involved in the lifecycle of your terms.

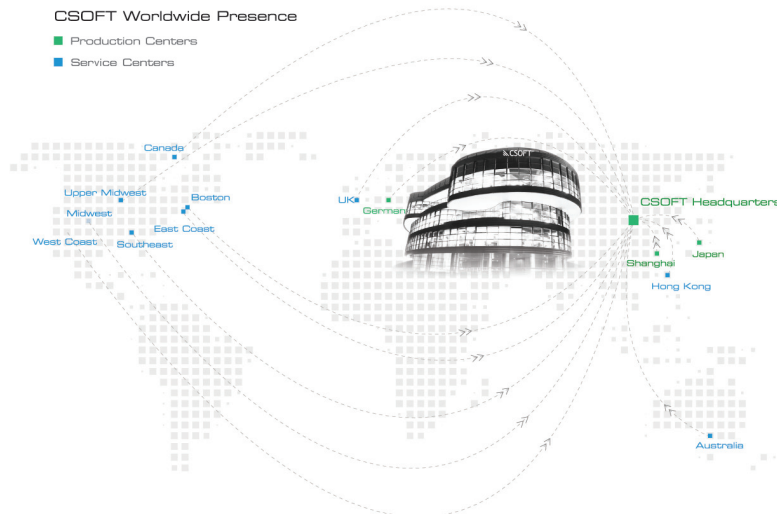
Conclusion

There are a lot of terminology management solutions out there for professional use. You'll find that the better you understand your own needs, the better you can sift through the products available and find the right system. If your company is having trouble developing a proactive strategy, or if you're not clear about the advantages of implementing a terminology management system, you should consider enlisting the help of a language service provider with ample terminology management experience, like CSOFT.

About CSOFT

CSOFT International is the developer of TermWiki, the localization industry's first online, wiki-based terminology management system. For more information, check out <http://www.csoftintl.com/termwiki.php>

In addition to helping organizations of all sizes improve their terminology management practices, CSOFT delivers quality-driven localization and software development services in 90 different languages with fanatical customer service, cutting-edge language technologies, ISO 9001 and 13485-certified processes, and an award-winning leadership team. Common Sense Advisory recently recognized CSOFT as one of the Top 35 Language Service Providers worldwide, a milestone that reinforces CSOFT's commitment to best practices, fiscal stability, and superior service.



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