



GeekSpeak

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Seek and Ye Shall Find

I often receive queries

from readers concerning all kinds of computer-related things. I do not want to discourage you from sending these types of queries, since they are often very educational for me. However, the answers to many of these questions can be found quite easily by looking them up, and I would really encourage you to use the following resources before asking someone else.

Help System

The first place to look for answers should always be the help system. Now, I know that some help systems can be a curse. It feels like the developer just wants to rub it in that you do not know much, but, let's be honest, this is the exception rather than the rule. While many help systems are not well written, they still contain information that is helpful if we can only find it. If your application is equipped with a traditional WinHelp or HtmlHelp system, there are three different tabs: Contents, Index, and Search. As their names imply, the first two are the table of contents and the index. Unless you know that the developer of the help system has taken extraordinary care in making the table of contents and the index user-friendly, I would skip those and go straight to the Search tab. The first time you open this tab, the system creates its own index of searchable terms, and you will usually have a lot more luck in getting the information you are looking for by typing in some keywords related to your problem. As you would in Google, keep on trying different words or phrases until you find what you need. Other applications have a context-sensitive help system that can be launched by pressing F1. Still others—in particular the latest Microsoft products—have highly integrated help systems where a field inside the application allows you to pose your questions in natural language,

and the answers are assembled from a variety of online and offline resources.

FAQs and Knowledgebases

Let's imagine you do not find what you need in the help system. The next step would be to go to the tool's website and look for the frequently asked questions (FAQs) and/or the knowledgebase and/or the support section—and I would do it in that order if the website has all three. The FAQ section is usually short, and you can quickly browse through it to see whether your question is answered. (In the process, you may stumble on other questions and answers that are also helpful.) The knowledgebase is a searchable database that you can query to find answers quickly. The URL to the knowledgebase is often called support.developer.com (such as support.microsoft.com, support.atril.com, support.sdl.com, etc.). If there is also a support section that requires you to send in a question, I recommend that you hold off and try one of the next options first (unless you are good friends with the developer or know that he is going to answer right away).

Google It

If a specific error message accompanied your problem, make a brute-force Google query with the exact wording of the message in quotation marks. Since you will probably still find a host of hits, go to the hits from the developer's website first—especially if it concerns Microsoft products (unless you want to read through pages and pages of Microsoft-bashing).

User Groups

If it is a question for which you do not have much specific information, go to the user group of the product. Some user groups, including those for all of Adobe's products, are hosted on the developer's website. This is often a

good thing because it usually means that there is a company representative participating. Other user groups can be found in newsgroups like those for Microsoft's products (www.microsoft.com/communities/newsgroups/default.mspx), and yet others, including almost all the translation environment tools, can be found on Yahoo! Groups (groups.yahoo.com). These are typically very supportive places to look for answers, ask questions, answer questions, or simply hang around to have a look at the different tools. And PLEASE look for an answer before you ask questions within the group. These groups all have a search box, so you can search tens of thousands of postings in a heartbeat, and nine times out of ten you will find what you are looking for. I would also encourage you to go to the "Files" section where you can find all kinds of manuals, utilities, and other interesting things that are specific to the group at which you are looking.

To find a group for your particular tool, just go to groups.yahoo.com, type the name of your tool, and it should show up. (It is also very cool to subscribe to these groups as RSS feeds—more on RSS in one of the next columns.)

The Answer is Out There

Interestingly, in the time it took me to write this, I received four e-mails with questions, three of which could have been answered by going to one of the user groups.

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The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost also publishes a free technical newsletter for translators (www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit).