



GeekSpeak

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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).

The Update Craze

In my newsletter and this column, I often talk about new versions of software tools, especially when they concern translators. It is important for us as translators to watch the market and see what new features are being introduced in existing—or new—tools, especially when it comes to (translation environment tools (TEnTs). Fall 2008 certainly saw its share of updated versions of the tools we use, including Heartsome, MemoQ, MultiTrans, Similis, Star Transit, Trados, and Wordfast, and even completely new tools like AnyMem and Alchemy Publisher. As I have watched my e-mail inbox fill up with these and other announcements of new versions from a plethora of tools—text editors, desktop publishing programs, graphic, screenshot applications, etc.—I have realized that, especially in the present economy, we need to be really wise about what to upgrade and what not to upgrade.

Here are some guidelines that might prove helpful:

Client demands: If a client requires you to work in an updated version of, say, MS Office, which, as in the case of Office 2007, does not offer direct backward compatibility, you will need to ask yourself whether your relation-

ship with the client allows you to ask him or her to save the files to a lower version of the software (if that is possible), and/or whether the client is worth the upgrade to the new tool.

Compatibilities with other tools: So, you see a new version of a tool, rush out to buy it because it has all these cool new features, install it...and quickly find out that a number of other tools do not work with it. For translators, the interdependence of MS Word and some Word-based TEnTs comes to mind, or the lack of TEnT support for new desktop publishing software formats, or new operating systems and the lack of support for so many applications that are supposed to run on them. Before rushing out to update this or that, keep in mind that “Windows” is a well-chosen term for the operating system that most of us use because it reminds us of how fragile its environment is.

Major features that you really need: This is sort of a no-brainer, but one that I think we often overlook. Here is a good example: I got an announcement this week from the makers of my favorite every-day-in-use text editor, UltraEdit, saying that a new version

has been published. The version that I currently run is at least three or four versions behind, so every time a new version is released, I look through the new features to find out whether there is a major change. And, lo and behold, the new version did indeed have a bunch of major changes. The problem: I did not even understand what they were about. They were exclusively geared toward software developers, and they could have been written in Hindi for all that they meant to me. There is no way that I will be investing in that upgrade. The functions that I need as a translator are pretty basic text management and code page features that were as good four versions ago as they are today.

Security issues: These are usually fairly valid arguments for an upgrade—and they refer particularly to security-specific tools (such as virus scanners) and operating systems. If Microsoft is officially not supporting an operating system with security patches anymore (this would include Windows 98, Millennium Edition, and other early crimes), I would take that as a good hint to upgrade.

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