

The Impact of Labeling Architecture on Document Translation in a Regulated Medical Device Company

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Labeling Architecture:

Labeling architecture splits labeling content into modules that allow for reuse of content and saves time and money.

The Study:

This study explored the impact of labeling architecture on document translation. Labeling (e.g. clinician manuals and patient manuals) at the medical device company studied is often translated into 26+ languages, and used in 140+ countries.

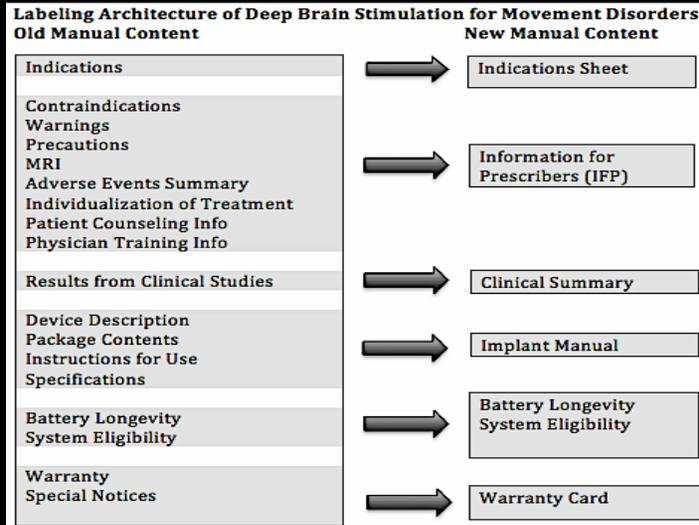
I interviewed Technical Communicators in a Labeling Department in the United States and a Translation Department in the Netherlands. I interviewed two Technical Writers, three Labeling Program Managers, one Translation Project Manager, and one Linguistic Services Manager. Their tenure ranged from 2 years to 20 years. I analyzed the transcripts of the interviews using affinity mapping to determine themes.

Data Sample:

"We kept those product manuals, but skimmed out all of the therapy-wide information and kept it to just product-specific information."
— Senior Technical Writer (L.A. 01)



Figure 1: Affinity mapping in process



Results: Four Themes Emerged from the Interviews

1. Labeling architecture promotes reuse of content, which saves time and reduces translation costs.

"Every word costs." —Linguistic Services Manager

2. Regulations are complex and a prerequisite to everything.

"The EU works together. The laws are harmonized. Japan has different laws." — Translation Department Project Manager

3. Users expect apps with localized interfaces and timely updates.

"You bring it to the market, and then the users react, and then you need to be able to adjust it very quickly. We didn't used to have that loop."
— Linguistic Services Manager

4. Working well across business units and cultures is key.

"How do you start from a place of respect for the business unit or the culture, not just empathetic, but in their shoes? This approach takes time."
— International Labeling Program Manager

Recommendations:

Labeling Architecture

- Study/revise the specific cost savings of labeling architecture that have been achieved to help lay the groundwork for a labeling architecture expansion.
- Expand labeling architecture to include all products as it becomes economically viable to do so.

Cross-Functionality

- Include the Translation Department in the planning stages of human factors studies and labeling development plans.
- Create avenues for regular communication between Labeling and Translation including a fuller understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities, and challenges.

Training and Education

- Increase the consistency of training in Global English for Technical Writers.
- Emphasize the importance of cultural intelligence through coursework in International Professional Communication and foreign language studies.

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