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Go Local to Go Global:
Localizing Your Speech Application for International Markets.
- Matt Strach, Brand Manager, GM Voices



If you, the reader of this white paper, represent a US-based company deploying an automated voice application in a non-English market, congratulations. Expanding your market presence is cause for much celebration. But there is work to be done.

Launching an IVR system in domestic markets is challenging enough. Now you want to take it around the globe? Fortunately, many of the same design principles apply. To ensure an ROI on your technology, do your homework and engage vendors with proven experience in script, voice, grammar and programming localization.

Here are a few guidelines on how to provide a world-class automated voice experience; one that delivers local market authenticity and is accepted by its calling audience.

Don't Just Translate; Localize. Use an Established, In-Country Service.

It's not enough to deliver a word-for-word translation of your English-language voice prompts to international customers. Context is everything, and different words are used differently to represent different things. As we like to say at GM Voices, *how* you say something is just as important as *what* you say.

To this end, it's very important to use a translation/localization service attuned to the dialectal preferences of the end-user audience. And as a rule of thumb, it's best, almost essential, to use a translator currently residing in the country of the application deployment. These are the people with their ears to the streets; language is constantly evolving, and an in-country speaker can account for the words, phrases and delivery most appropriate to present to callers.



Simply, if your voice prompts sound inauthentic, your application will be rejected. Vet your translation provider to ensure it meets the needs of your target audience.

Choose a Native Voice Talent to Deliver Your Message.

Once your scripting is localized to the international market, it's time to select the voice to bring your message to life. Similar to your translator, your chosen voice talent must meet the needs of your customers. And, again, a native professional is key to the application's acceptance. Before a voice talent is added to GM Voices' roster, for example, it first must be authenticated by our language experts as being consistent with the expectations of the calling audience—accent (or lack thereof), emphasis and pacing. Because the script dictates the choice of words, a voice talent's current residence may not be as important as a translator. But the voice must retain its "edge," a local flavor that persists from the voice's origin.



Find a Long-Term Voice Solution Provider for Consistency and Savings.

Contact center technologies often have an extended lifespan, reflecting company changes over many years of use. The voice user interface (VUI) design and voice prompts will undoubtedly need updates from time to time. This process can be a huge operational burden if handled internally or with the wrong voice provider.

When selecting a native voice talent to front your international speech, IVR or voice automation deployment, choose a managed voice service over working with an independent professional. The benefits are many. Most importantly, you get a dedicated account team that ensures quality from initial scripting to final audio delivery. Several voice services base their business model around large IVR systems—they know about technologies and file format requirements, record in bundled sessions, and offer insurance and contingency plans in the event a voice talent becomes unavailable. Also, in the event of recording updates, previous orders can be referenced to match the sound, style and technical considerations of the previously-recorded voice prompts.

Working directly with a voice talent may seem advantageous, especially from a cost perspective, but that's not the reality, especially for international languages. You'll incur the full brunt of studio setups and recording fees, and likely, your translation function will be handled separately. Before you're even invoiced, the time expenditure will make internal management impractical. Find an all-in-one provider that can make this process painless for you and your implementation team.

Internationalize Your Programming to Minimize Engineering Changes.

It's always a good idea to design a speech application knowing that it will be adapted into multiple languages. This minimizes back-end engineering changes. However, this isn't always possible, especially when dealing with legacy systems. IVRs also rely on concatenation (data strings of numbers, dates, times, currencies) to reduce recording and production costs. This is where localized programming notes can make a big difference to the performance of your technology.

Here is an example:

When localizing an English IVR to French, numbers will need to change depending on the gender of the nouns they are modifying. The number "one" will need to be offered in both feminine and masculine versions when dealing with phrases like the following:

"[You have] [one] [fax]" will be translated using *UN* "[Vous avez] [un] [télécopieur]" because it is used as a digit that modifies a masculine noun.

"[You have] [one] [minute]" will be translated using *UNE* "[Vous avez] [une] [minute]" because it is used as a digit that modifies a feminine noun.

In this example, the English script and system were not ready for a feminine version of "one." This consultative, IVR-centric approach cannot be captured with a simple translation order. To ensure optimum performance, engage an IVR consulting provider that can put all the pieces together to meet the needs of your international language callers.

Make your mark in any language. Deliver a world-class voice experience by choosing established, in-country localization and recording services. Your customers will respond to the genuine article, increasing your bottom line and accelerating your IVR's ROI.

Special thanks to Dan Samper.

GM Voices is the global leader in professionally-recorded voice prompts for automated voice technologies. Over 100 languages and dialects are offered, from full-service translation to crisp, clear voice files from locally-authentic voice actors. VUI design, scripting and programming consultation services are also offered. For more information, visit www.gmvoices.com.

