



## WHAT IS AUDIO LOCALIZATION, AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

You hear human voice recordings in many places, from online training modules and advertisements, to websites and message machines. If you want people to use your products internationally, you need to translate product-related voice recordings into the languages of your target markets. This involves re-recording the audio in the language of the target customers.

Sounds easy enough, right? If only it were that simple. Audio recording has a large cast of characters and a large number of variables to consider.

### 13 Important Steps in Audio Localization

1. **Transcribe** the audio script. If it isn't written down anywhere, someone will have to listen to the original recording, and write it down word for word.
2. **Translate** the audio script. If it is, for example, in English, and you need to record it in French and Spanish, then you must translate it into those two languages.
3. Conduct an **in-country review** of the translated scripts, via client partners capable of reviewing the language version. Collect and implement feedback.
4. **Time-stamp it**. If it matters when the speaker utters particular sentences, you will need to indicate this in the script. This is key for time-sensitive recordings.
5. Provide **pronunciation guidelines**. If there are certain terms that need to be pronounced in a certain way, you will need to document this for the actors.
6. **Find professional actors**. Non-professional voice talents can do this work, but typically it takes them longer and may require more re-recording. It is often worth the additional cost to pay a professional.
7. **Select the voice talent** from several samples. Does the client want one voice? Two voices? Young or old? Male or female? "Hip" or "traditional" voices? You need to determine the character the client wants the voice to imbue.
8. **Rehearse** the script.
9. **Record** the script, using professional equipment.
10. Do any **editing**. An engineer can correct the variation in speakers' volume, tone, and distance from the microphone. Also, people breathe! They hiccup and smack their lips from time to time! Their stomachs growl! The engineer can edit the audio and take out any ambient noise, including the human kind, machines, traffic noise, etc.
11. Do **Quality Assurance and linguistic validation** of the recorded product.
12. Produce the **final file format**. This depends on how the audio product is going to be used.
13. **Integrate** the recorded product into its final resting place (an eLearning module, a video, etc).

### People Involved in Audio Localization

Typically, there are a half dozen people involved in an audio project:

1. **Transcriber**. For example, a resource who can listen to the English and capture it, in English, exactly as spoken. That person uses tools to easily stop and play the audio in order to transcribe the content in a timely manner.
2. **Translator**, usually a bilingual native speaker with linguistic specialization and training.
3. **Actor** (voice talent). You ALWAYS want to be working with native-speakers when doing recordings. If possible, you want to be doing recordings in the country of the target market. This will help you avoid issues with pronunciation and tone.
4. **Dialog director**, usually a native speaker who can coach the actor; also called a Voice coach.
5. **Audio Engineer**, to assist with audio formats and equipment.
6. **Project Manager**, with experience in audio projects

All tasks related to audio localization take time. But recording is, of course, the bulk of the work. You can grossly ballpark this effort with the metric that

15 minutes of final audio requires 1 full hour in the studio, for non-time sensitive recording. If it is a timed recording (using those "time-stamps" from point 4), that throughput slows to 10 minutes of final audio per one full hour in the studio.

### Real-World Example

- ➔ You know that having your training material in-language will help you reach your in-country employees more effectively. Even if they speak English, they will retain more of the content and understand it more deeply if you deliver it in their native language. Yet, your training material is only in English.
- ➔ You plan to launch your eLearning module in Europe, specifically in Spain, France, Italy, and Portugal. The English course is one hour long and there are two voices, one female and one male, both young. (Your target audience is Generation Y, people in their mid-twenties.)
- ➔ You do not have a transcript. The first thing you should do is have the script transcribed and translated.
- ➔ Your in-country partners will want to review the translated script to make sure it is acceptable before you can record it.
- ➔ The finished output of the audio localization project will be a .WAV file.
- ➔ A language service provider can help you price out the audio localization project and build a schedule.

### What you Should Know

1. Translation of a multimedia piece is not really complete until you address the spoken component.
2. Audio projects are not simply a matter of finding a native speaker and asking that person to read a script.
3. Outsourcing to a language service provider who knows how to handle audio recordings is often the best bet. (Save yourself for something you know you do well!)
4. Subtitling and making the translated transcript available to users may be a cheaper option. Your language service provider can help you figure this out.

5. Oftentimes, only professionally localized audio is optimal and appropriate.

For more information on Audio Localization, visit <http://bit.ly/ctLAUV> for an introductory webinar on *Going Global with Multimedia: Best Practices for Localizing Multimedia*.

### Subtitling

Adjacent to any discussion on audio is subtitling.

Here is a Q&A on subtitling from our recent webinar on multimedia localization.

**Question:** It seems like subtitles would be less expensive than a voice-over that involves multiple talents. Is that correct? If so, what is the percentage difference?

**Answer:** Correct. The more voices you use during recordings, the more the audio costs will increase. When dealing with audio with multiple voices, you should ask, "Do I need to have all these voices in the localized versions?" You may be able to get away with using only one male and one female voice-talent rather than multiple voices. This can be an alternative to subtitles and still keep your costs down.

If you really need multiple speakers, then subtitles probably won't do. You should consider the impact subtitles will have on the end product. If you have a video that is very long, for example 45 minutes, your user will not be as attentive to the content if it is subtitled because it may be difficult to follow. You want to consider subtitles when dealing with shorter videos - say fewer than 10 minutes.

In terms of cost, it is difficult to say a percentage, because the video localization costs are based on multiple factors: duration of audio, target language, total number of voice-talents, etc. Keep in mind that the more you have recorded, the lower the cost per final minute of audio recorded. For subtitling, the cost is based on the duration of the video only. So really, you want to consider the user experience to establish your budget.

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