

[itl]



Because Volkswagens are driven all over the world

itl and VW make sure cars and people understand each other in 153 countries

Case study



The Volkswagen Group is one of the world's leading car manufacturers and the largest in Europe. The vehicles of the Group's brands – VW, Audi, SEAT, ŠKODA, Bentley, Bugatti, Lamborghini, Porsche, Ducati, Scania and MAN – are now sold in 153 countries. Production is also international – with 123 manufacturing plants in 31 countries spread across four continents.

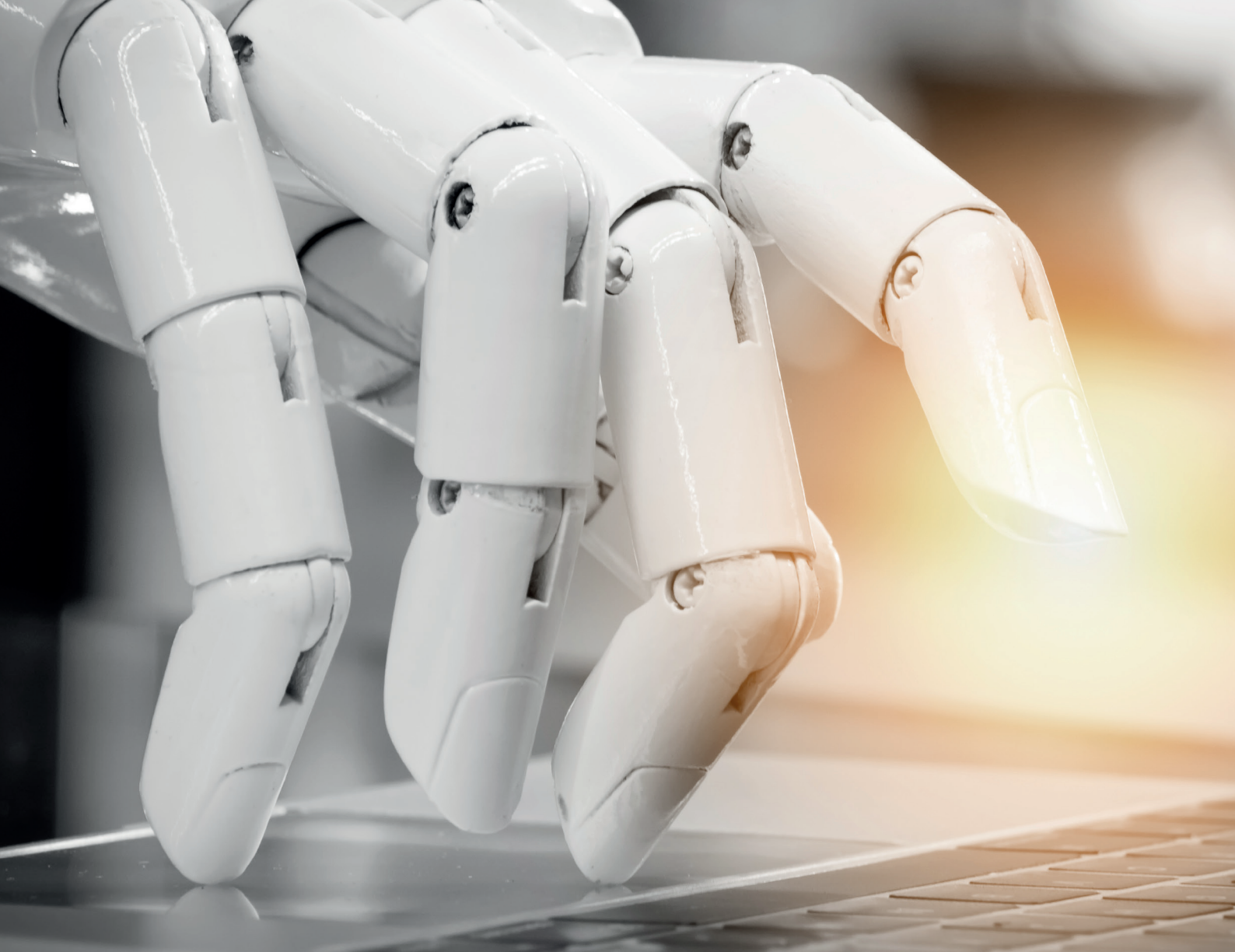
Global production and distribution like this present an enormous linguistic challenge to any company, especially when you consider that all business and management processes have to mesh seamlessly across all language and cultural barriers. Of course, you could say the same about the manufacturer of a soft drink that is made and sold all over the world. But unlike a drinks bottle, a car also contains text – more of it than meets the eye. And this text has to meet the requirements of the global market: the content is technically complex and needs to be understood intuitively and perfectly by drivers and people in workshops, garages and dealerships all over the world.

Volkswagen and itl – partners since 2014

That's why Volkswagen AG and itl, which specialises in translations and technical documentation, have been working together on translations since 2014. In addition to the obvious requirements that a language service provider has to meet, as specified in the ISO 17100 standard, there is also the whole area of information security to consider. Consequently, following an intermediate stage when an internal Volkswagen solution was used, itl AG underwent a TISAX assessment and gained certification at the first attempt.

With that in place, work began on the on-board display texts, which were translated into Bosnian, Albanian and Icelandic. Other projects involved translating safety reports and internal communications into numerous European languages. A solid working relationship developed, based on a spirit of partnership and characterised by respect on both sides.

Mutual trust, knowledge of the latest technologies and developments and a healthy dose of pragmatism were the formula that enabled Volkswagen and itl to meet the challenges that came their way at the end of 2017. Volkswagen was faced with the task of having to translate very large volumes into English – including documents from all parts of the company in Brazil, China, Germany, Russia, Spain and the Czech Republic



– within a very short space of time. The source languages were Portuguese (Brazil), Chinese, German, Russian, Spanish and Czech. To make matters more complicated, most of the documents to be translated were available only in PDF format. Some of these were editable, but others were originally handwritten documents that had been scanned. The first step was to convert these into a format it was possible to work with.

Maximising the synergy between man and machine

Initial sub-projects had shown that the documents could not be translated in the time available in the conventional way, which is to rely purely on translators working with a translation memory system. At peak times in the project, the required turnaround time from receipt of the documents to delivery to Volkswagen was 48 hours for an average of 80,000 words. To achieve this in the conventional way, an extremely large number of translators and revisers would have had to be used in parallel and coordinated, which would have raised the cost and lowered the quality. itl realised this quickly and presented Volkswagen with a plan for the use of machine translation with subsequent post-editing. This was at the beginning of 2018 – just a few weeks after Volkswagen had come to itl with the project. The plan was clear

and simple, and everyone involved knew that the only way to come to grips with the project's requirements was to make use of the latest technology. Volkswagen immediately agreed to the plan, which meant that work could begin very quickly.

Translation memory systems ensure the consistent use of language and compliance with company-wide language rules

The cornerstones of the plan were as follows:

- There was no time to train a machine translation system specifically for the project. Consequently, itl decided to use neural machine translation (MT) systems, the quality of which had recently improved hugely.



- A team of up to 100 post-editors was selected for all language combinations and prepared to undertake the project. Despite the extreme requirements in terms of delivery timescales, Volkswagen specified that the quality had to be as close as possible to that of a human translation. Random checks carried out repeatedly by Volkswagen's internal QA department during the project showed that itl was able to meet these specifications astonishingly well.
 - The translation process was subdivided into three steps: a typical process of data preparation, post-editing and quality assurance (QA):
 - To enable the PDF documents to be used as quickly as possible, a team of up to 15 people was put together. They worked in shifts to convert the PDF files into suitable Microsoft Office formats. Subsequently, both the directly editable files and those that had been prepared for editing were compared with the existing translation memory, which grew as the project progressed. All segments to be translated from scratch or with a fuzzy-match score below a threshold of 98% (in other words, all segments that were not identical or almost identical to segments in other documents), were sent to the appropriate machine translation engine. The results were then made available to the post-editor in the form of a translation memory.
 - During the post-editing process, the translators/post-editors were able to work with the results of the machine translation and make any necessary changes. They were given a terminology database to help them with this. A total of around 100 post-editors worked on the project, and at peak times up to 25 of them would be working concurrently.
 - The quality assurance process consisted of the familiar checks that can be carried out in a translation memory system to check that the terminology, formatting, numbers and so on in the translation were correct. In addition, regular expressions created by itl were used to check for typical sources of error in machine translations. These included, for example, the mixing of language variants, the translation of proper names and the failure to adhere to Volkswagen's style guide on dates. A layout check and random checks of the content completed the process.
- The documents involved were highly confidential, and itl's TISAX certification meant that Volkswagen could be sure that the information contained in them would be handled with the required care throughout the entire process chain and transmitted via the specified channels.



Success factors: mutual understanding and a strong commitment to working together

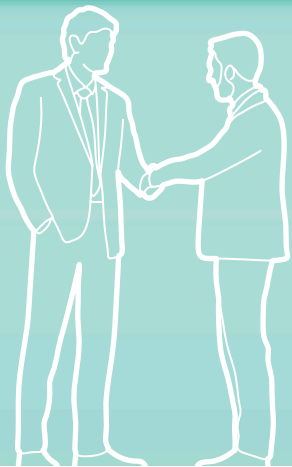
With a process as complex as this, there has to be a close, trusting working relationship between the customer and the translation team. At both Volkswagen and itl, an extremely committed core project management team of generally six people was entrusted with coordinating this mammoth project. The senders and recipients of the documents were distributed throughout the world, necessitating highly flexible time management and close coordination between the team at Volkswagen and their counterparts at itl. It worked extremely well and resulted in the project managers on both sides growing closer together as the project progressed.

Without all that, itl would not have been able to submit a clear and transparent cost estimate and ultimately adhere to it. Regardless of the quality of the source documents and the sometimes very different results of the MT systems used in terms of quality, Volkswagen was able to make considerable cost savings compared to conventional processing with a translation memory system.

In daily meetings the current situation was assessed, information was exchanged, adjustments were made to resource planning, and current problems were discussed. The project presented a challenge both to the people involved and to the machine translation system and was also a challenge in terms of the process required, but it opened up new dimensions for both Volkswagen and itl in the era of machine translation. In addition to the huge cost savings, the time factor, above all, should be mentioned: with a conventional, exclusively translation memory-driven process, the project just would not have been feasible given the timescale.

Another insight gained from the project that has relevance for the future is that translation quality can be achieved even under extreme conditions like these, provided all the above-mentioned components mesh well, and everyone involved in the process pulls together. And that really does mean everyone who played a part – at both Volkswagen and itl as well as itl's suppliers.

If we hadn't worked with each other on an equal footing, and if we had failed to understand the problems experienced by the other side, a project of this scale would simply not have been feasible. That approach kept everyone's motivation up, even when they had to put in the odd night shift. Only by operating in this way, putting in place a sophisticated process and using the latest technology were we able to successfully complete the project together.



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