**Globally Speaking**

**Podcast 046**

**How to Combine Content Strategy with Localization**

R I am Renato Beninatto.

M And I am Michael Stevens.

R Today in our show we’re going to talk to somebody that was recently awarded the MindTouch Top 25 content strategy influencers in the world. It’s a person that mixes a passion for languages with a passion for one language, which is the original content.

M That’s right, that’s right, and there’s a lot of talk about the means in which content is delivered to customers, to users of that content.

R It’s the form factors; it’s the strategy to create the content. Michael, I knew very little about this whole content creation world, so today we’re going to be a little enlightened about the topic.

M Yes, let’s find out about that.

K Hi, I’m Kirsty Taylor, I work as a content and localization manager with the ABB Enterprise Software Group, and I live in Brisbane, Australia.

R I think this is the first Aussie we have in our show.

M Well, if you go back to rocketing growth, we did have an Australian on an early episode.

R Oh, that’s true. From Denver.

M For those listeners, they should check that out as well, if you haven’t listened to that one yet. Good plug. You gave me a chance to plug one of our old episodes, so that’s good. Unfortunately you’re not the first, but the second Australian.

K Second works.

R So you work with content. Localization is also part of your responsibility. How do you marry these two things in your current job?

K I have always been involved in content from a career perspective. I started out as a technical writer many years ago, though my background has always been a mixture of IT, communications and language. When I go back to my university days, which is getting really a few years ago now, I started off studying IT. It took me a couple of years to realize I did not want to be a computer programmer. I liked technology but I didn’t want to write code. Eventually I got that realization through. Didn’t spend too much money on university fees, luckily. In Australia at that time it wasn’t too bad. And then I switched to an arts degree and I actually studied business, German and linguistics. Finished my degree; did my honors, and then I mixed that all together and convinced someone to give me a job as a technical writer. So after quite a number of years I ended up having the role of localization coordinator kind of thrust upon me as well.

R Just because you spoke German.

K Just because I spoke German, yes, exactly.

R It’s the story of half of our listeners.

M Yes, they become these directors and managers because of their... oftentimes it’s their native language or they’ve studied one.

K Exactly. Exactly. And I had had a previous manager who that management group had laid off, and she had run a great localization department, and I think they kind of hoped I’d managed to suck down all of her knowledge, which I got a tiny amount, and that was a huge starting point for me. So I love the world of content and localization. It’s a great mixture for me from a language perspective. I can get very nerdy about language when translators are asking questions, you know, ‘Which case is this? Is this pluperfect? Is it subjunctive? Is this a noun or a verb?’ Those little basic things. I’ve got such a strong language background it doesn’t throw me that I get asked those questions and I know some people, even great technical communicators, might struggle with some of... they know what to write, they know how to write well, but maybe not into some of that nitty-gritty grammar you get into when you study a language like German, or when you study linguistics at university.

R So you design or are you responsible for designing the content, for writing that content and then for translating that? So you are the one who’s going to complain to yourself about the quality of the translation.

M Yes, the source wasn’t very good. Garbage in, garbage out.

K Well, luckily on the content side I have a great team of technical writers, so if there are issues with the content, even though we may have worked together, both them and myself, to set the design for what we’re going to create, ultimately they’re doing the hard yards with the writing, the English content. I do have to go back to them at times.

R This might sound like a silly question, but I really don’t know. When you talk about content design, what do you mean by that?

K What I mean is designing the information we have to give to our end users to help them use our products. So that could be something like online help and do we want to have... in an online help structure, what do we want to have? Do we need to have conceptual topics that tell them about the accounts payable module or tells them about the drill and blast module, which is in our mining software? That’s really fun, because you think about blasting up the ground, so it’s kind of cool. Or do we need to focus on tasks? Entering data into a screen, step one, step two, step three. Do we need to have business flow and process diagrams? Is that what’s the most important kind of content to deliver to users? Or as we’re emerging these days, we’re a little late on this train compared to some other vendors in our space, but now looking at videos. Are videos a good way?

And also considering as we design that content, design what needs to be delivered, considering the globalization needs and considering the different types of users we have. We know that some users love videos. If my daughter were in the workforce yet... she’s not, that would be child labor… if she were, she would only trust it if it was on YouTube, if it was a video. For me, and for some other people like me, I want the written-down steps, because I know I want to go to step five. I’ve figured out one to four, but I’m stuck at step five, so I don’t want to sit through a video, and so it’s thinking about all of these.

R You might even want to print it if you’re as old as I am. Print it to read it.

M Print it and then write notes around it and all of that.

R So the designing part is essentially defining what is the best vehicle for the information, but also the structure of the content, is that what you’re saying?

K Yes. Yes, it’s both. That’s part of the whole content strategy. You’re thinking about the outputs you have to deliver, who the users are, what’s their moment of need, when are they accessing content and what’s the best way to give them the content they need right there? Because we’re not in a mindset too often these days in the software world where we might have been 20 or 30 years ago of expecting someone will read a user guide. And, you know, when software used to come in a box with a big manual, these days there’s maybe online help, but maybe there’s a whole bunch of videos, there’s a website, there’s training, all kinds of different things these days.

M Some of the systems that were designed back then, I think, did a... for example, of how you’re organizing and structuring information and using bits of it here and there, some of the principles still apply, don’t they, as far as being... like search and getting to what you need. Can you talk a little bit about that?

K Absolutely. In the technical communication world, as content developers, we get very geeked out by the tools we use and how we use them and how we can reuse content at a microscopic level and then sometimes realize you’ve done something really bad for translation, because you say this half of a sentence really often, so you make that a variable or something reused and weren’t thinking about translation at the time and knew that the sentence was going to be completely reswizzled in German or Portuguese or something. So oops, that was a bad idea. I’ve made those kinds of mistakes in trying to drive that word count down and get great reuse.

Using structured tools, like DITA, is really huge here in the US. There are also people using DITA in Australia. From what I’ve heard it’s not used as widely in Europe, but there’s still some adoption of DITA over there. So I think technical communicators like to organize. Content, if it’s organized well, has a certain structure that does help for the searching of the content and help the end user find what they need and get more context around the content that will help them.

M That’s key for content creators because they want to find out what they said previously and not have it lost in this. It’s key for marketers, so they can... and then when you get into costs and reuse and those areas, there are some great benefits.

K Absolutely.

R And now, with mobile, there is a lot of this reduction to... what’s the term? Minimum viable content, right?

K Yes.

R How does this effort to transform things in buttons and icons and images and emojis, how does that affect the conversion of content to another language?

K That’s probably an area I haven’t delved into much, because I’m still in this big ERP and business software world, and I haven’t been working on... I haven’t been working on too many apps, but we have started developing some SAAS apps or apps, standalone apps that are in the iTunes store and so on. What we’re seeing is needing to make the developers... all the usual stuff with the bigger software products. The developers needing to be aware of screen size and what I’ve struggled with is, for the mobile form factor we’ve got some software that is for doing an inspection on equipment. You need to lock down equipment before you maintain it.

That they need to remember about the space on a mobile and we’re translating maybe into Spanish for South America, and it’s going to expand from the English and they haven’t considered that and they can’t give me the restrictions. That’s been a bit different to some of our other software products.

And then on the content side, because it’s a mobile device, we’re not delivering a user guide or a PDF, we’re maybe working with the UX team to embed content into the experience, so you download a new app, you get a new app update, if we think about just standard mobile phone apps, and there’ll be those couple of screens often on a new app update, ‘Here’s the new features. Here’s what we’ve put into this update.’ That’s where the content and the information for end users is going to.

R So your kind of software is not the one that you can swipe right and swipe left, right?

K No. No swiping right or swiping left on our mining software, no. Don’t drill this, don’t blast that.

M That looks like a great place to drill. Wait a second.

R Well, maybe you can swipe it, this is a good miner, this is not a good miner.

M Yes. That’s great. Do you think that more... people who are in localization management and only responsible for the international, what could they benefit in understanding content first?

R Yes, because you’re a top content strategy influencer in the world. How do you influence content strategy in the world, Kirsty? Tell us.

K Well, I was very flattered to receive that honor.

R It wasn’t like somebody... ‘Oh, I know Kirsty, I’m going to...’ it was actually something that involved hundreds of content strategists and you were selected as one of the top in the world.

K Yes, true. True. There were about 200 nominated and then a judging panel selected the shortlist for the top 25, and it was a surprise. It took me a while to find out about it, because I was on holiday in Japan and not downloading PDFs onto my mobile devices while I was overseas. So what I think as far as influencing content strategy globally is, from purely just the content side, trying to ensure that our content teams, our technical communicators, or anyone who’s creating content... you know, I come from a software world, so I think about technical communicators, but they’re not the only content creators in the world.

Product management, product owners, marketing people are creating content and this can all be valuable to the end users. What my big focus would be with content strategy is ensuring it’s the right kind of content delivered to the user at the right time in the best possible way for them to get through what they need to do with the application or software, whether they’re booking a flight on a website, whether they’re swiping right, swiping left on some kind of app, whether they’re in Facebook and trying to figure out why they keep getting ads in Japanese three weeks after they left their holiday in Japan. What they’re trying to do, to make it easy for them, because when users get annoyed their customer experience drops.

They don’t want to use your software and they complain, they ring customer support or they stop paying maintenance. That’s simplistically, but that’s the long-term repercussions, and then once you’ve disappointed a user or a customer, it’s so much harder to restore that relationship, rebuild the trust. So I think the content element is vital in helping a good customer relationship.

R There’s a classic story that people are seven times more likely to share bad experiences than they are to share good experiences, so you need to avoid those.

K Exactly.

M Now, a little bit of shift of a question. You’re working out of Australia. You work with companies that provide partners, who provide localization and other services. For companies that may not have an office in Australia, what are some of the things that they could do to help serve you better? Do you have anything that could illustrate that?

K Sure. I’ve worked with a range of vendors probably in the last five or six years. I’ve worked with vendors who were Australian-based, where I had an account manager who was local in Australia, whether they were part of a bigger MLV that had its main presence in some other place, somewhere else in the world, but my main point of contact was in my time zone. That was where I started and that was really great.

I also started off actually... initially there was a small handful of vendors I’d worked with. Some of them were in South America. We had absolutely no crossover of business hours, but I got into the rhythm of that, of like, ‘Okay, I’ve sent an email during my work day. I’m going to have the response by the next morning,’ and mostly that was workable. I was accustomed to that after many years of working with offices in the US, in Denver and those different time zones.

I have wished, both working with some vendors in South America, some vendors recently in Europe, where there is almost no or no crossover of business time, where I wish there could be a local person... somewhat local. It may not be local, it may be China, it may be Indonesia, it may be India, it may be New Zealand, as somewhere closer to my time zone where there are some hours of crossover, because I think that can be really valuable. When your relationship with your account manager or your project managers at a translation vendor is all by email, it's not as trustful as... it’s harder to establish as when there is someone who you can talk to as well as email throughout the day.

R It’s also prone to misunderstandings.

M Yes, email’s good for documenting things. It’s not good for setting up strategy or goals or things can be misread pretty easily.

K Yes, and I think one of the things I’ve been reflecting on recently is if your vendor is so far away and you’re mostly dealing with email contact, you maybe don’t get to have a bit of a brainstorming phone call of, ‘Have you considered this about MT, or neural MT, or have you considered this? Are you looking at chatbots?’ Whatever. These sorts of conversations don’t get to happen if you’re only, ‘Here’s a project. Here are some questions about the project. Here are the files,’ and that’s where your relationship is primarily.

So that’s what it’s at, for any vendors, whether you do have someone like me, who’s completely out of your time zone and your business hours. Are there ways you can have some regular contact with that person to help establish that relationship, because you might know things, you might be able to suggest things to that customer that they haven’t thought of, or maybe they’ve thought of, but didn’t think you were capable of.

M And if you’re listening and you’re new to the industry, be prepared to have some late nights or some early mornings if you’re going to have good customer service. That’s just the reality of who we are, we do that sometimes

**END OF CONVERSATION**