

## **Technical Documentation in Spain and on the European Market**

On 29 April 2004, the first information day on technical documentation in Catalonia took place in the Col·legi d'Enginyers Industrials de Catalunya in the centre of Barcelona. Speakers from Barcelona and Germany, presented their view of the role of technical documentation and technical translation.

Over 80 people - translators, documentation service providers, representatives of technical and sales departments of small and large manufacturing companies as well as students of the College - had registered for the information day. The surprisingly high number of attendees in this first event of this kind in Barcelona shows that there is a large and very interested target group. There is a significant demand for information and knowledge exchange in the field of technical documentation.

Operating manuals and instructions for technical consumer and industrial goods can be an important success factor and contribute essentially to customers' satisfaction and consequently to customers' loyalty. David García (Verlag Automobilwirtschaft, Barcelona) and Augusto Guijarro (SEAT, Barcelona) explained in their presentations, both from their specific point of view of a service provider and a manufacturer, why product information can be the decisive factor to influence the consumer's choice. Nowadays, in branches like the automobile industry, it is difficult to outsmart the competition "only" by the mere features of the product. Cars made by different manufacturers within the same category differ hardly one from each other in terms of speed, performance, comfort, technology, security aspects, duration of life and other product features. That's why good documentation can tip the scales.

Investigations have shown that 70 % of all reclamations regarding a product don't refer directly to the product but to services related to the product such as packaging, the operating manual and all sorts of after-sales services. For the customer, however, product and manual is the same thing. He will not regard the product separated from the manual, the manual is just part of the product. In many cases, the customer is not able to use a product properly and perform all the functions because the manual is bad. The customer will be convinced that the product doesn't work although the product might be perfect. Manufacturers have made the experience that consumers keep help-desks, hot-lines and service teams busy telling them that the product is defective, but in reality, they just don't understand the instructions for the installation and the basic functions. Better product information helps to reduce significantly expenses for after-sales services. And a satisfied customer will choose the same product again or another product of the same manufacturer.

Augusto Guijarro emphasised the added value of good workshop literature for cars. Clear illustrations can be much more helpful than long and complicated descriptions in words. Standardised symbols, colours and terminology prevent misunderstandings and confusion. Well designed and structured workshop literature leads to a significant reduction of time and costs for repair and to satisfied customers. This shows that technical documentation is not a cost factor but an investment with a high benefit. On an increasingly globalised market, translation becomes an inherent part of technical documentation. Surveys carried out by the societies for technical communicators showed that one of the main problems that consumers have with all sorts of appliances and technical goods is the fact that manuals are not well translated and therefore illegible. Besides the linguistic qualification, a technical translator needs practical solutions and support to comply with his tasks in an efficient way. There are a wide range of helpful tools and technologies such as translation memory tools, localisation tools. In regions like Catalunya where there is more than one official language, documentation has to be available in Catalán as well as in Spanish. To make sure that the terminology of modern technical vocabulary is

clear and correctly used, the regional government founded Termcat. This body creates dictionaries, develops and implements rules for the use of modern terminology in catalán and has a consultation service to assist people writing all sorts of texts and documentation in catalán. Gloria Fontova presented the work of termcat.

To achieve a high level of quality, various requirements need to be fulfilled. Technical writers or whoever produces technical documentation needs to have access to all relevant information. The sooner the documentation process is involved in the development processes, the better. Regular flow of information and feedback help to prevent errors and time losses. Michael Fritz showed how tekomp, the German association for technical documentation define quality and what tekomp do to help their members to cope better with their daily tasks at work.

Together with associations for technical communicators in Finland, The UK and France, and with consumer organisations in Germany, Austria and Sweden, tekomp has created a practical guide for all those who are responsible for operating manuals for consumer goods. In sections that are structured like check-lists, the reader finds in detail all important aspects of a good and usable operating manual and of an efficient documentation process. These check-lists and a great variety of useful information can be found on the tekomp web portal [www.tekomp.de](http://www.tekomp.de) For people dealing with technical documentation, the tekomp web portal is an important source of information. It provides a platform for information and knowledge exchange. Members have access to a comprehensive pool of specialised articles where they can search for specific information. Self-employed technical writers and translators and very small companies can enter their details on a data base, publish job ads. Certainly the most important services on the web portal are the expert consultation services. Members can make specific questions directly to experts in different fields such as legal requirements, standards and directives, XML, Adobe Acrobat, Adobe FrameMaker and other tools. The web portal is currently being localised into English and will be localised in several European languages. The Spanish version will be available by the end of this year.

tekomp and their partners in Barcelona, VAW and SEAT, are planning to continue the activities in the field of technical documentation. To provide a solid basis and a platform for information exchange, the partners are envisaging to found a regional organisation in Catalunya before the end of this year.

For more information regarding the foundation of a regional group, contact [u.wirtz@tekomp.de](mailto:u.wirtz@tekomp.de)