

# Best Practice - Patent Translations for Procter & Gamble

Because of the highly sensitive content and the specialized knowledge required, patent translation often causes great expenses. When translating patents for Procter & Gamble, MultiLing shows how costs can be reduced while improving quality.



photo: MultiLing

## By Michael Sneddon

With research facilities in North America, Europe, and Asia, Procter & Gamble spends billions of dollars annually inventing new procedures, chemical compounds, and products such as soaps, detergents, cleaners, and cosmetics. In order to protect the fruits of its research, P&G invests heavily in writing, filing, and prosecuting patents. These official documents protect the owner from competitors seeking to copy his intellectual property and give him a monopoly for a certain period of time. In exchange he shares his new discovery with the world.

Documenting inventions, writing patents that describe and protect these inventions, and filing these patents in foreign countries are complex tasks that require the work of specialists, both technical and legal. Translating patents for foreign filings is a part of this process and presents its own complexity.

Over ten years ago, P&G noticed that its external costs for international patent filing were increasing dramatically. The largest component of that increase was the cost of translation. P&G was filing hundreds of patents annually in over twenty different countries and costs were escalating in a dramatic fashion. So the challenge was to either slow down the increase in costs, or better yet, decrease costs.

After analyzing the situation, P&G realized that its translation process was not uniform and required a complete investigation and reassessment. The company decided to review options for translating patents rather than relying only on its in-country patent law firms, who invoiced for patent translations as part of a separate profit center. The importance and the sensitivity of the text to be translated makes it easy for law firms to justify their high fees for patent translations.

The reality is that most translators lack the skill set required to translate patents for international filings. Why is this? In addition to having a perfect

knowledge of the source and target languages, patent translators must have specialized, technical education and experience in the subject area, as well as knowledge of patent law and correct legal terminology. This skill set is rare, and therefore, labor costs are high.

Patent law firms have been slow to adopt new technology. For example, these firms often translate directly from hardcopy documents, which are transferred by courier or by fax, rather than using more efficient electronic transfer of files and translation memory technology that require the use of electronic files. Using scores of local law firms required P&G to manage and track everything, adding to the company's administrative overhead.

### Saving costs by reusing content

Investigating translation companies included research into what enabling technologies are used and how these translation companies have implemented this technology into their processes. Today, every competent translation company uses translation memory technology, which allows the reuse of previously translated text when producing publication quality translations. This should not be confused with "machine translation," which gives a rough idea of content and can be helpful for information purposes only.

It is true that the reuse of text in patent translations is not found as frequently as in technical documents. While some technical documents may reuse more than 80 percent, the reuse of text for patents may range from 10 to 20 percent, depending on volumes within specific domains. One reason for this is that the source language for patents is specialized to the invention being described. After all, each invention eligible for patentability is, by definition, unique. Another reason is that sentences in patents are often long and complex, reducing opportunities for reuse. However, given the high volumes required by P&G, neglecting the

use of translation memory technology when translating patents for international filings would be a mistake; a 10 to 20 percent reuse still represents significant savings.

In addition, translation technology is useful not only for translation, but also for terminology management. Proper management of terminology allows for the consistent use of the correct terminology by all translators. During translation, this technology presents terminology automatically to translators, reducing interruptions and improving their productivity. Also, while continuously advancing the linguistic portion, the quality of the translations improves over time. Finally, translation memory technology can preserve formatting codes and layout information, reducing the time a desktop publisher needs to ensure that the translated document looks as professional as the source document. Therefore, the use of translation technology improves productivity and quality and reduces costs throughout the entire translation and multilingual publishing process.

### Continuous process improvements

By consolidating its patent translation providers to a few vendors, and working with MultiLing to streamline its internal processes, P&G found it could not only reduce its translation costs and improve quality, but it could substantially reduce its internal administrative costs as well.

To their credit, the P&G staff responsible for the process change treated MultiLing as an integrated, long-term partner, whose expertise was valued, rather than as a fungible vendor. Through sharing responsibility for joint-processes, MultiLing and P&G worked together to streamline communication and coordination procedures between the two companies, including fully sharing all information. Eventually, MultiLing received online access to P&G's patent information, eliminating the need for P&G staff to notify MultiLing when a patent was ready for production. Now, as soon as

a translation request arises, MultiLing staff is automatically informed and can immediately start the translation process. MultiLing also brought its own project management technology to the table: GoldenEye®. By accessing GoldenEye, anywhere in the world at any time, day or night, P&G staff can quickly check the status of projects, easily track progress, and verify delivery.

The coordinated efforts of MultiLing and P&G reversed the rising cost trends of the vendor's patent translation process. Specifically, this new, completely re-engineered process has:

- Reduced administrative, maintenance, and data handling costs
- Shortened turnaround time through leverage of previous translations
- Reduced risk of errors (by eliminating the human factor from routine operations)
- Preserved the consistency, formatting, and integrity of documents
- Established automated schedule compliance
- Established reliable control over quality
- Eliminated complexity

As a result, more patents are being filed internationally at significant savings to P&G, with higher quality and less burden on its staff.

## contact



Michael V. Sneddon is President and CEO of MultiLing Corporation, a multi-national language services and technology company headquartered in the United States.  
[mvsneddon@multiling.com](mailto:mvsneddon@multiling.com)  
[www.multiling.com](http://www.multiling.com)