

# **Commercial PC-Based Machine Translation Software Packages**

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## **GENERAL**

A number of changes have occurred in the commercial PC-based machine translation market this past year. The two largest companies reported a 125% increase in sales in the first quarter of 1994 over the same period in 1993. Several new players have entered the market while a few old ones have changed their company name and/or product name. At least three companies have licensed their products for sale by other companies. Different name, package, user manual, and pricing - same product. The recent merger of the two leading marketers of PC-based MT software products promises new and improved products through shared resources. Well-known mainframe and workstation systems are close to entering the personal computer market with software versions. The increasing processor speed and rapidly expanding storage capacity of the personal computer itself necessitates the inclusion of several systems that run under the UNIX operating system.

## **PLATFORMS**

Most DOS products now have Windows counterparts on the market or under development. There are products for OS/2 users and finally, for the Macintosh. Developing the software for use on different platforms does appear to have taken time away from linguistic research and development. In general, fewer new features have been implemented than in previous years.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES**

There have been some interesting technological advances to note. The Kanji board and/or DOS/V are no longer needed for some Japanese products. Voice technology has been added to a hand-held product, bringing the impending merger of voice technology and MT closer to reality. Better software designs and programming tools have decreased the size of several programs.

## **LANGUAGE PAIRS**

Spanish/English, French/English, German/English, and Italian/English continue to be the most popular choices for U. S. developers. Japanese/English is still produced primarily by Japanese developers. The diversity of language pairs is increasing. All the Western European languages are represented. Arabic, Russian, and even Creole are now available. Several companies are currently adding Portuguese and Asian languages to their product line.

## **FEATURES**

Developers have responded to requests for Word Processing and Desktop Publishing file compatibility. Dictionaries are becoming easier to modify. Subject-specific dictionaries continue to be developed for general topics such as Medical, Legal, Financial, and Computers. Less general topics such as Aluminum Processing and Petroleum Mining are

continually being added. End-user support has improved with at least two developers offering on-line e-mail access. One developer maintains a forum on CompuServe.

### **PRICING**

Retail prices range from \$29.95 for a Spanish/English bi-directional Windows program up to \$25,000+. The majority fall in under \$300. Several new entries created competition among the lower-priced products and drove prices down on more expensive software packages. The price war generated bargains for consumers of up to 50% off the retail price.

### **WHERE CAN I BUY IT?**

Purchasing products is still difficult. There are over 20 companies selling PC-based MT products in the U. S. , yet only five companies are readily available in national software stores. It is rare to find the complete product line for the five nationally distributed companies in stock. Many have to be special-ordered. The other developers either require that you buy directly from them or from a distributor.

### **WHAT IS MT GOOD FOR? WHAT WILL IT DO FOR ME?**

While there are translators that effectively use PC-Based MT products to increase profits, they are still a small percentage of end-users. Many companies find that the time required to customize the dictionaries is too cost prohibitive. Only one product continues to allow an easy ASCII dump of previously created glossaries. Several companies will convert your glossaries for a fee. They will require that you format the glossary to their specifications first. Two projects involve linking products from MT developers and MAT developers. This will result in systems more suitable for professional translators. The majority of end-users for PC-based MT products use them for non-publication quality output or a general understanding of the source language text. Programs with grammar modules are favored by students of a foreign language.

### **WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR ME? HOW DO I PICK ONE?**

Guidelines vary but generally follow this order.

1. What will I be using this for? Is it a suitable project for MT?

MT is still best suited for highly repetitive technical text. There are additional instances where MT is viable - although I would look hard at any other use that requires publication-quality output.

2. What language pair(s) do I need?

3. What products are available for my language pair(s)?

4. If platform, hardware requirements, or price are an issue, eliminate the products that do not fit.

5. Look at the features of the remaining products.

How easy is it to update the dictionary? How deep is the dictionary coding? Does the program read my source file directly or will I need to convert it? Will the program retain my formatting codes? What pre-editing features do I need? (spell-checker/grammar-checker/word scan) Are there add-on dictionaries that apply to my needs?