Procuring Bilingual Software

Your quick-fire guide on how to specify bilingual requirements in a clear, unambiguous and measurable manner without discouraging suppliers.

For many organisations delivering services to citizens in Wales, procuring a software solution now requires that it is bilingual. This presents challenges in how to define this requirement and ensure it doesn't deter otherwise capable suppliers.

So, where do you start?

The Challenges

When procuring a software or web solution where bilingual capabilities are needed, this has often been done in a vague or informal manner.

There are usually two main motivators for this:

1 Concern that specifying detailed requirements might lead suppliers to decide not to bid if they consider they would fall short.

2 Uncertainty about what exactly is required and how to specify it.

There are issues with this approach:

- Suppliers can interpret a minimal specification and propose a 'token' solution whilst still being compliant;

- Suppliers that do have an effective and complete solution aren't able to differentiate themselves in a quantifiable manner;

- Vagueness will discourage suppliers who may have an effective solution but are cautious of unstated requirements;

- The buyer may be left with a non-compliant solution yet unable to effectively dispute this with the supplier.

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Specifying the Requirement

Improving outcomes when procuring software with a bilingual capability can invariably be achieved simply by providing a detailed specification of the requirements.

This will have been done for other areas of functionality, so that the supplier understands and commits to delivering exactly what is needed. A specific requirement produces a specific response that can be measured when making the purchasing decision and validated when the solution is delivered.

The degree of compliance you require and the exact set of requirements for each application will vary depending on its purpose and functional capabilities. Some, such as supporting the full character set should be mandatory, others may be aspirational. Here's some areas to consider when specifying these requirements:

- **Equivalence**
- **Completeness**
- **Selector**
- **Switching**
- **Initial Selection**
- **Language Quality**
- **Maintenance**
- **Changes**
- **Character Set**
- **Sort Order**
- **Preferences**
- **Accessibility**

- **Links**
- **Emails**
- **Search**
- **Addresses/Maps**
- **Reports**
- **User Assistance**
- **SEO**
- **Meta Data**
- **User Content**
- **Data Transmission**
- **Language Tools**
- **Usage Metrics**

Encouraging Suppliers to Bid

Where a solution needs to be bilingual, inclusion of detailed requirements might cause otherwise viable suppliers to decide not to bid if they assess they can't meet them cost-effectively or they can't justify the resource needed to meet them for what they may consider to be a relatively small market.

But, if the only suppliers bidding are those that already meet all the requirements this could mean an otherwise competent supplier does not bid, potentially the market leader or other preferred supplier.

So, how can we present the bilingual requirements in a manner that encourages maximum participation?

1 A clear and detailed specification of what is required will encourage suppliers.

2 Offer expertise and resources. This will reduce hassle, cost and perceived risk for suppliers less familiar with the bilingual context.

3 Suggest acceptable approaches and alternatives. For all or some requirements there may be existing approaches or resources.

4 Allowing for future development helps mitigate the investment risk for a supplier.

5 Express willingness to be a reference site. A potential gateway into the bilingual market can increase motivation.

> **Bilingual software enables users to interact in their preferred language, switch language at any time and provides equal capability in each language."**

For an in-depth guide on procuring bilingual software and web solutions with greater detail on how to specify requirements, please email us at guidance@interceptorsolutions.com.

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