

Chapter 12

Irish Identification as Exigence: A Self–Service Case Study for Producing User Documentation in Online Contexts

Andrew Mara

North Dakota State University, USA

Miriam Mara

North Dakota State University, USA

ABSTRACT

To address some of the technical writing pressures concomitant with globalization, this chapter investigates documentation solutions implemented by an Irish Do-It-Yourself tour operator. The same identity-dependent approaches that these DIY tourism companies use to fulfill tourist expectations can provide technical writers with additional tools for analyzing user motivation. This chapter first analyzes how an Irish DIY Adventure travel company harnesses user motivations, then applies Appadurai's (1996) globalism theories (especially his use of ethnoscapas, technoscapas, and mediascapas) to a particular use of this travel company's documents, and finally demonstrates how user motivation intrinsic to identity formation can help the technical writer create documentation that effectively assists users in overcoming breakdowns through identity affordances.

INTRODUCTION

The sharing of expertise, which is an easily understood and frequently practiced form of human discourse, has become an archetypal task

of online engagement and interaction. - Stuart Selber (2010, p. 99)

In order to address some of the technical communication pressures concomitant with globalization—just two of which are de-professionalization and intensification of documentation practices—many scholars have sought alternatives to the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-833-0.ch012

purely instrumental technical writing paradigms that typically prevail in technical communication practice. Technical communicators are professionals who create documents that allow people to accomplish tasks. Within this context, user documentation usually refers to instructions for end users of a (often technical) product rather than persons within an organization, although that definition does not always suffice. David Dobrin, in his landmark article “What’s Technical about Technical Writing” (1983), defines technical communication (then more commonly known as “technical writing”) as “writing that accommodates technology to the user,” (p. 118) admitting that at each point in a document’s life “the reader is a user” (p. 121). Documentation, in this sense, then consists of the artifacts where this writing inheres.

In his 2003 article “Rearticulating Civic Engagement Through Cultural Studies and Service-Learning,” J. Blake Scott asserts cultural studies and civic engagement can solve what he calls the “hyperpragmatist” orientation of technical writing (p. 289). Other technical communication scholars believe that paying attention to identity within communities can simultaneously preserve the status of the writer and improve the practice of technical writing (Faber, 2002).

As with previous research such as Faber (2002) and Spinuzzi (2003), we have found that some of the best solutions to globalist pressures in technical documentation are already being practiced in other industries in ad hoc and unofficial ways. The solutions we found when studying an Irish Do-It-Yourself (DIY) tour operator reflect the same kind of wiliness and ad hoc improvisation that not only helps solve the wide range of problems that Spinuzzi and Faber identify in organizational, community, and regional settings, but also addresses problems that cross national boundaries. The same identity-dependent approaches that these DIY tourism companies use to fulfill postmodern tourist expectations (Reichel et. al, 2008) can help technical communicators begin to address some

of the crushing pressures endemic to increasingly global trade and travel. This chapter will analyze an Irish DIY adventure travel company in its economic context. In so doing, we will demonstrate how technical communicators can apply Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) globalism theories to create identity affordances that effectively assist users in overcoming breakdowns.

AN OVERVIEW OF TOURISM IN IRELAND

From 1994 to the 2008, Ireland globalised and grew rapidly to become the economic power many called the Celtic Tiger. Within that growth and change, lingering tensions between the traditional and the new re-emerged. New technology industries like software programming transplanted a host of new business and corporate practices, including documentation processes, into what had been an economically depressed island. One traditional Irish industry, tourism, integrated the new wealth and growth. However, unlike the newly imported fields of pharmaceuticals and software production, tourism had a stake in pre-Tiger Ireland. While Ireland has learned much from recent global corporate in-migration, there is much that documentation experts could learn from adaptations that the service industry made during this period to accommodate new global flows without destroying already-existing methods of cultivating and satisfying audience desire. The tourism trade, one of Ireland’s oldest global industries, demonstrates how user identification with an assumed ethnic and/or national group can enlist the user to both the co-create and maintain user documentation and other language-based affordances.

The Irish tourist industry depends on constructing national landscape and experiences in the midst of a global, transnational economic reality. Current tourism companies faintly resemble early ascendancy landlords (British and Scottish

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/irish-identification-exigence/55568

Related Content

Empowerment of SMEs Through Open Innovation Strategies: Life Cycle of Technology Management

Hakikur Rahman and Isabel Ramos (2011). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development* (pp. 42-57).

www.irma-international.org/article/empowerment-smes-through-open-innovation/55958

European Elections and Facebook: Political Advertising and Deliberation?

Lucia Vesnic-Alujevic (2016). *(R)evolutionizing Political Communication through Social Media* (pp. 191-209).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/european-elections-and-facebook/145986

Theory and Application: Using Social Networking to Build Online Credibility

Misty L. Knight, Richard A. Knight, Abigail Gobeen and Aaron W. Dobbs (2013). *Online Credibility and Digital Ethos: Evaluating Computer-Mediated Communication* (pp. 285-301).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/theory-application-using-social-networking/72634

Constructing a Flexible Distance Learning Environment Through a Socio-Technical Perspective

Tülay Görü Doğan and Gülsün Eby (2014). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development* (pp. 47-66).

www.irma-international.org/article/constructing-a-flexible-distance-learning-environment-through-a-socio-technical-perspective/119067

A Reconsideration of Modernization Theory: Contribution to ICT4D's Research

Sylvain K. Cibangu (2013). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development* (pp. 86-101).

www.irma-international.org/article/reconsideration-modernization-theory/77869