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INDUSTRY REPORTS

CAT TOOLS

(PART ONE)

an industry report from
ProZ.com

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Intro

Every now and then, the subject of the use of Translation Memories (TMs) and Computer-aided Translation (CAT) tools comes up in the ProZ.com forums and elsewhere. Should you use a CAT tool? Why? Which one? Why (again)? Are there kinds of work where a CAT tool will not be useful?

In a previous State of the industry report for freelance translators, the word on TMs and CAT tools was to take them as "a given." A high percentage of translators use at least one CAT tool, and reports on the increased productivity and efficiency that can accompany their use are solid enough to indicate that, unless the kind of translation work you do by its very nature excludes the use of a CAT tool, you should be using one.



CAT Tool
You're doing it wrong

Surveys have been run periodically to gather more information and details on the matter. How many translators are really using a CAT tool? Why? Which CAT tools are preferred most, and why? How many translators do not use a CAT tool, and why?

If you have been in the translation business a few years and you use a CAT tool, most of what follows will not surprise.

If you are an established translator who has decided CAT tool use is not for you, what follows is not designed to try to change your mind.

Rather, this information is meant to give a wider panorama on TM and CAT tool use that you can use to compare to your own experience. If you are just getting started in translation and are wondering whether a CAT tool might be worth the investment, the following may be a good starting point for researching the matter.

Who provided information on CAT tool use?

The surveys on CAT tool use were aimed primarily at full-time professional translators. A majority of survey respondents have been in the translation business for at least five years, and just over thirty percent of them have been in the business for more than ten years. The largest age group of survey respondents was between 25 and 35 years old (35%). Over three thousand full-time professional translators from around the world responded to the surveys, which were broken into a survey for CAT tool users and one for those who do not use any CAT tool at all.

Who is using CAT tools?

- 88% of respondents use at least one CAT tool for at least some of their translation tasks.
- Of those using CAT tools, 76% use more than one CAT tool.
- Of those using CAT tools, 83% use a CAT tool for most or all of their translation work.
- Of those using CAT tools, 64% have been using one for upwards of three years now, and 23% have been using one for more than seven years.
- Among those using CAT tools, the main areas of expertise were ranked as follows:
 1. Tech/Engineering 34%
 2. Business/Financial 15%
 3. Marketing 12%
 4. Medical 12%
 5. Law/Patents 11%
 6. Art/Literary 5%
 7. Social Sciences 4%
 8. Science 4%
 9. Other 3%

Of the 12% who *do not* use a CAT tool, 68% had used or tried to use a CAT tool before, and 32% had never used one at all.

Among those *not* using CAT tools, the breakdown of main areas of expertise were:

1. Law/Patents 22%
2. Tech/Engineering 17%
3. Art/Literary 14%
4. Business/Financial 12%
5. Medical 11%
6. Marketing 9%
7. Social Sciences 7%
8. Science 4%
9. Other 4%

Only 3.4% of respondents who do not use a CAT tool did not know what a CAT tool is.

Files types, subject areas, computer usage skills

The file types translators work with do not seem to have much impact on whether or not they will use a CAT tool, as common file types indicated by both groups did not differ. The PDF file was the most mentioned by CAT tool users as tending to be problematic, along with scanned or image files.

When it comes to subject matter, many CAT tool users noted they may get less out of their CAT tool when working on texts of a literary, commercial or journalistic nature, for transcreation, and in texts heavy with tables, formulas, numbers, etc. It should be noted that others comment that at least for these first three they find a CAT tool helpful, and some mention that even for texts where there are few or no repetitions, for example, CAT tool segmentation still helps when it comes to focusing on translation and in quality control.

Some difference was noted in computer usage skills between the two groups. The majority of CAT tool users would rate their computer usage skills as good to excellent. This was also a majority among non-users of CAT tools, though a greater percentage of them rated their skills from fair to poor.

Reasons given for *not* using a CAT tool

Of translators who do not use a CAT tool, 58% pointed to cost as being a factor in their not using a tool. In second place, close to 47% stated that a CAT tool would not be useful for the kind of work they do.

Other reasons which ranked highly were the difficulty involved in learning to use a CAT tool, lack of time to get properly trained in CAT tool use, and lack of time to research whether a CAT tool would work for the translator, and which CAT tool to use.

Reasons given for using a CAT tool

Almost all CAT tool users agree that, in general, the use of a CAT tool helps them translate more efficiently. A small percentage, almost 8%, are unsure of how much more efficiently. The majority estimate that it is an efficiency boost of at least 30%, and fifty percent put the increased efficiency at 50% and above.

Not surprisingly, it is not the CAT tool on its own that is necessarily responsible for this. The size, quality and organization of the translation memory (TM) is a factor most point to as being important. Just as there may be a monetary investment in a new tool or resource, there is also a time investment. Most translators who use a CAT tool will tell you that becoming proficient in that tool's use is also key; in some cases this consists of reading manuals, articles, support forums and the like, but 55% of CAT tool users have taken training to learn or to improve their use of the tool. How much training time are we talking about here? 47% estimate they have spent fewer than ten hours in training (self-training as well as receiving training), and 31% would put their training in the 10 to 30 hour range.

Are your clients asking for it?

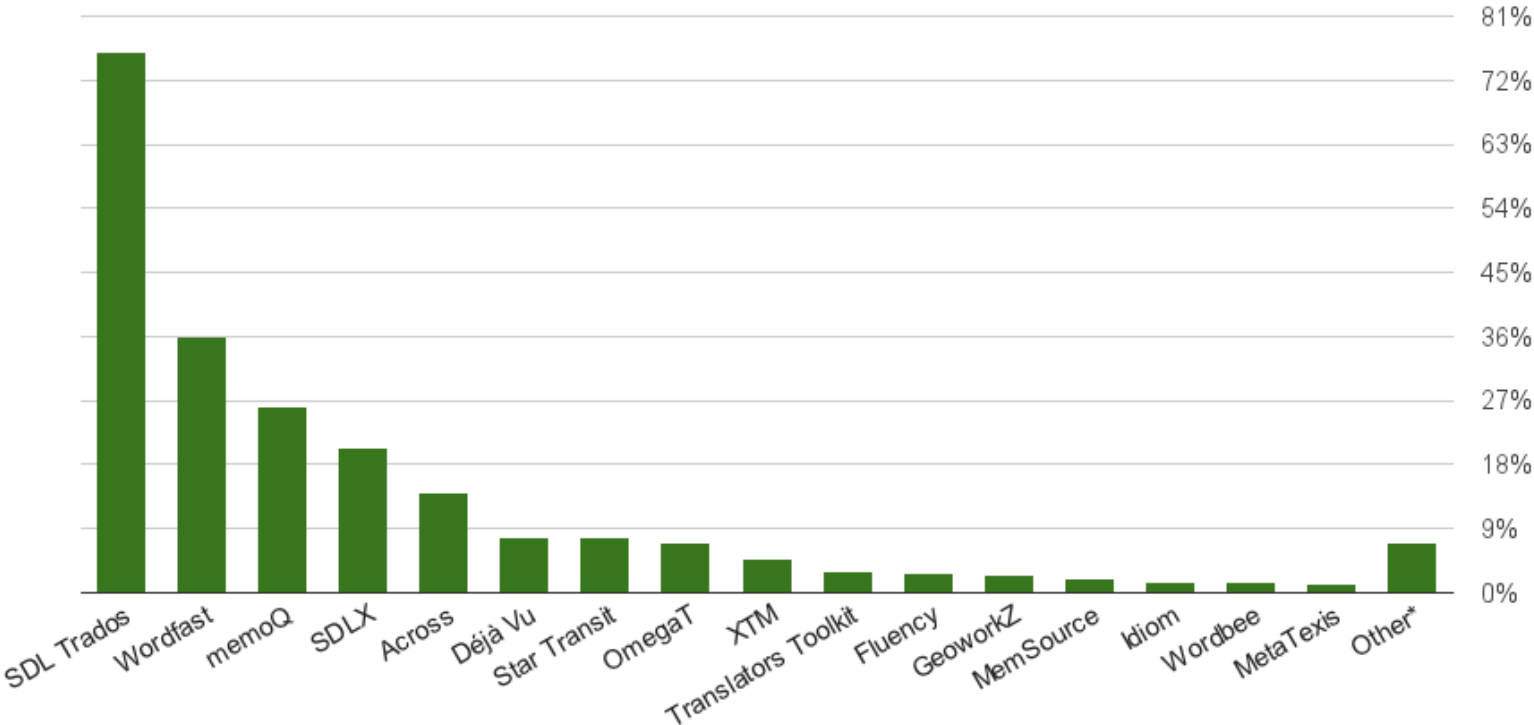
When CAT tool users were asked to estimate how many of their clients were requiring the use of a CAT tool, responses were fairly evenly spread. Six percent stated that none of their clients require CAT tool use, forty percent say under 50% of their clients require one, around half would estimate that over 50% of their clients require a CAT tool, and four percent were unsure. A large number of CAT tool users use their CAT tools regardless of whether the client has asked for it, because of the added efficiency and quality control mentioned above.



Which CAT tools are being used the most?

Trados comes in first, followed by Wordfast and memoQ.

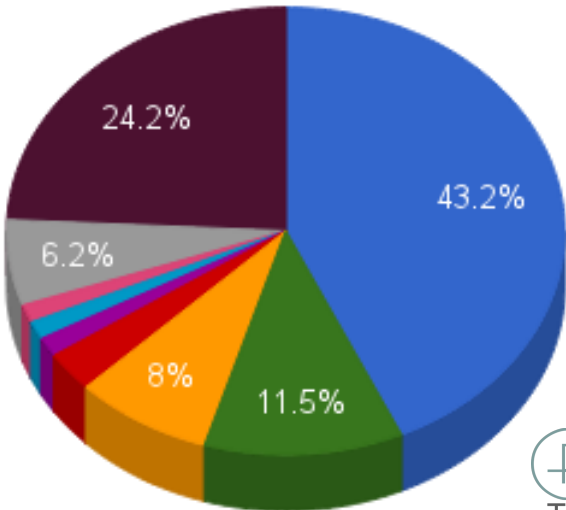
Which CAT tool(s) do you use?



* "Other" groups tools where the individual percentage was less than 1% among survey respondents

Which CAT tool do you use most?

- SDL Trados
- Wordfast
- memoQ
- Déjà Vu
- Across
- SDLX
- OmegaT
- Other*
- I only use one CAT tool

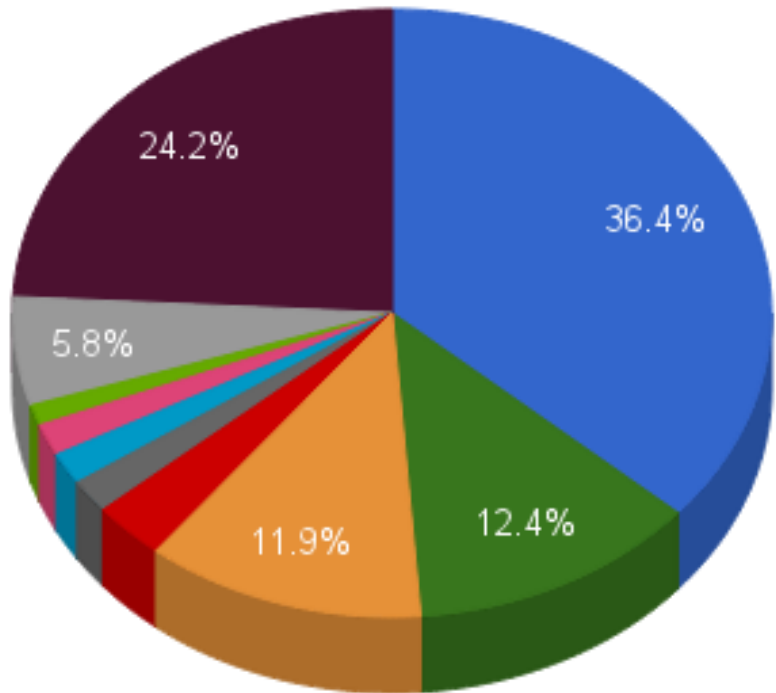


Most used tools

The top three ranking held together when translators were asked to state their favorite CAT tool (in cases where more than one CAT tool was in play-- just over 24% of CAT tool users only use one), and which CAT tool they would recommend to someone considering using a CAT tool for the first time.

Which is your favorite CAT tool to use?

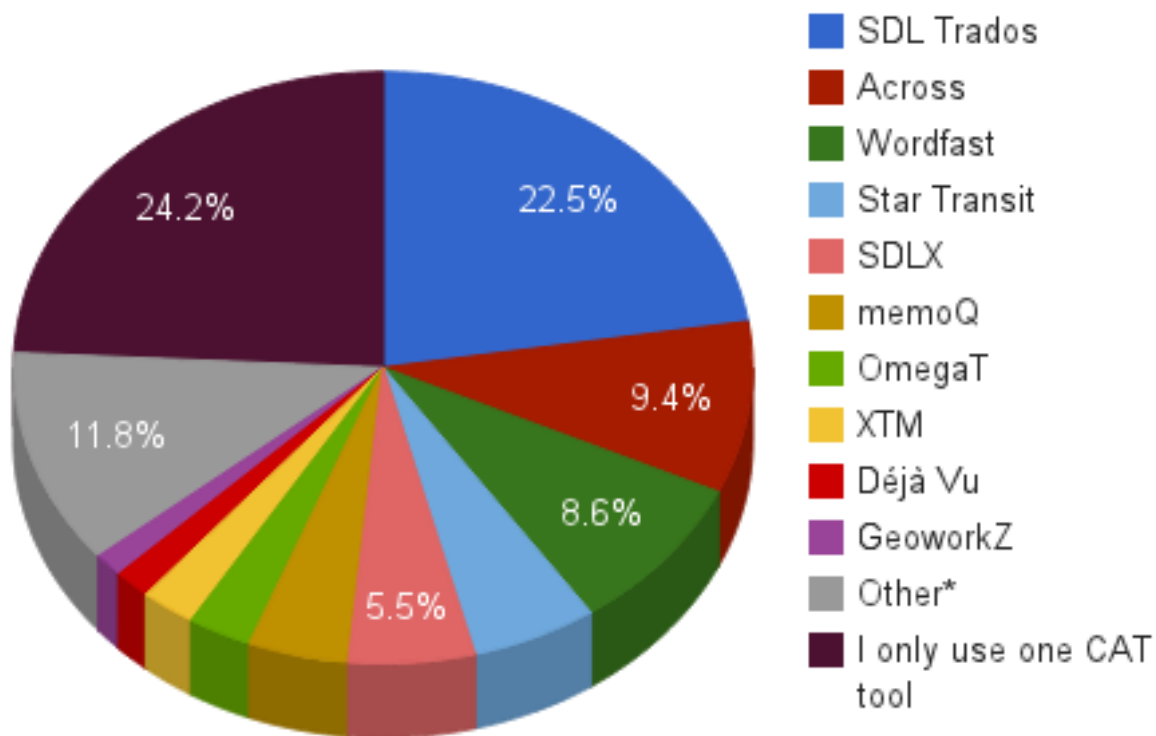
- SDL Trados
- Wordfast
- memoQ
- Déjà Vu
- OmegaT
- Across
- SDLX
- Star Transit
- Other*
- I only use one CAT tool



Most used tools

Translators were also asked which CAT tool was their *least* favorite to use:

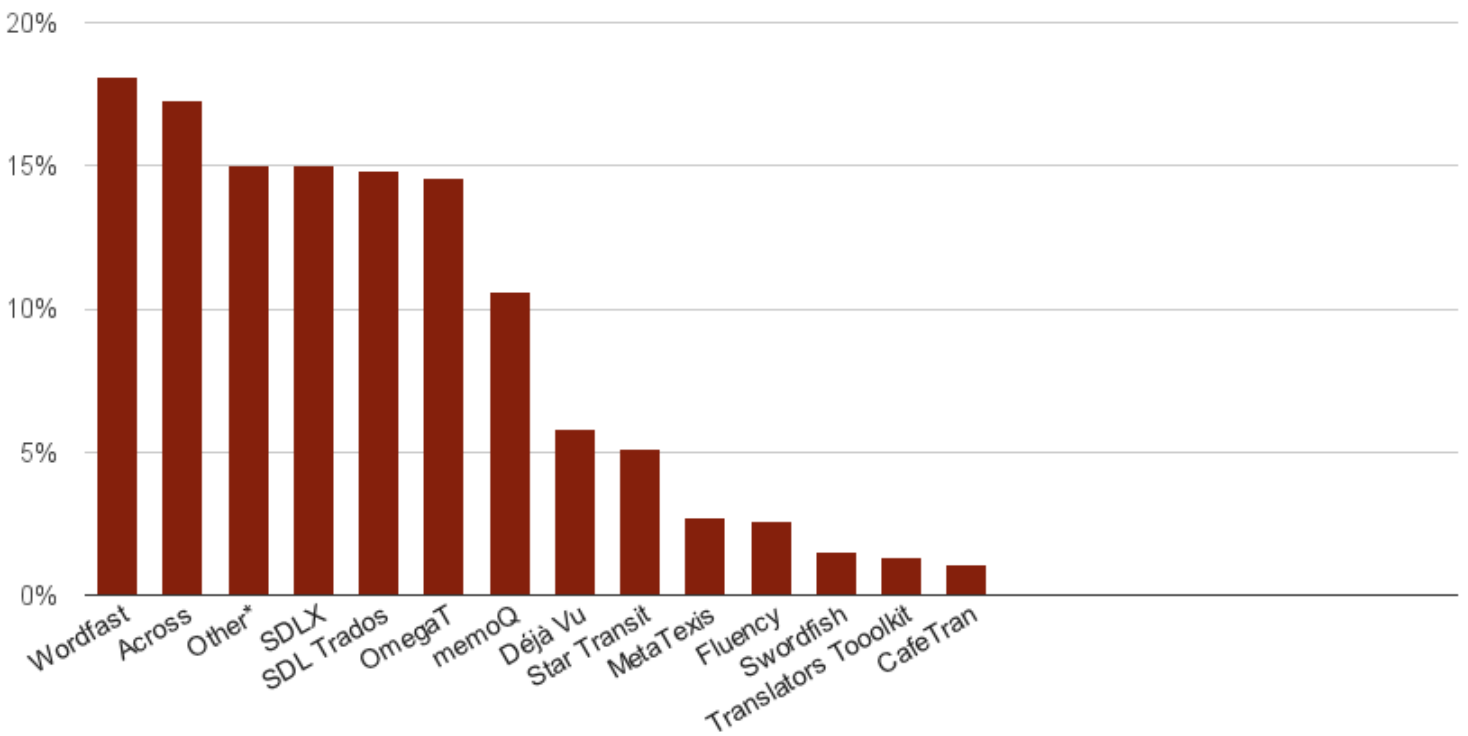
Which is your least favorite CAT tool to use?



Most used tools

And thirty-three percent of respondents who use a CAT tool own at least one CAT tool they do not use at all:

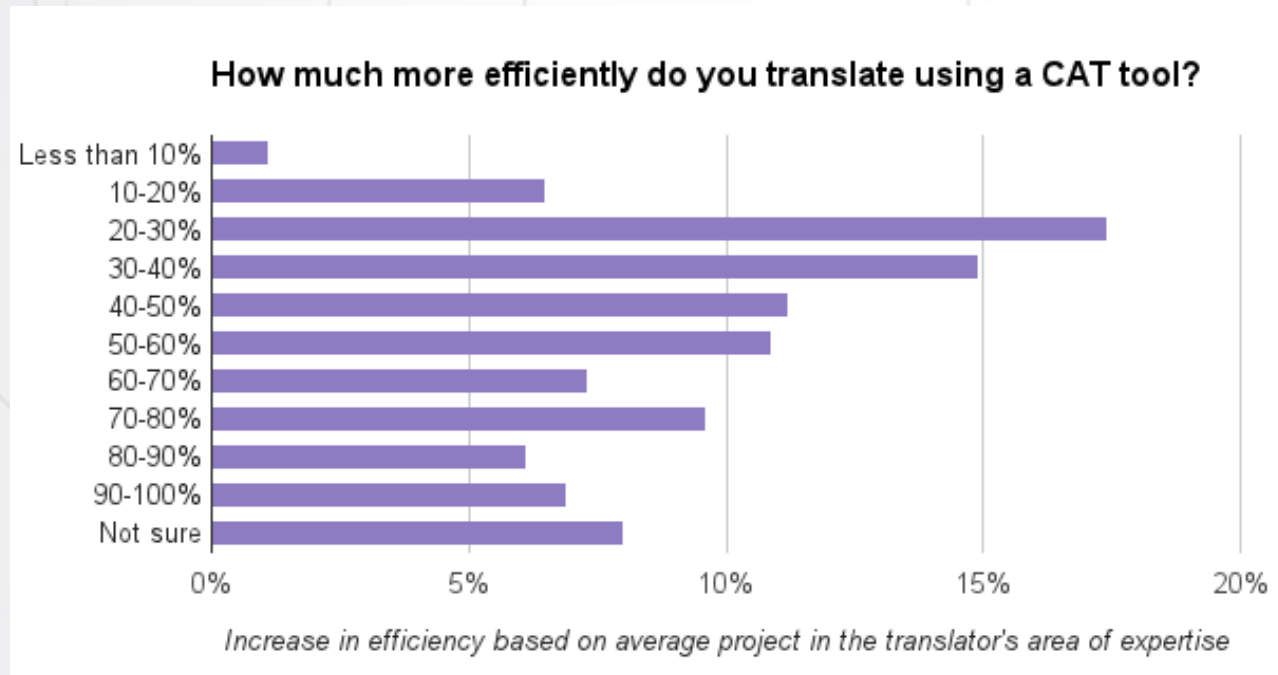
Do you own a CAT tool that you do not use?



* "Other" groups tools where the individual percentage was less than 1% among survey respondents

My CAT tool helps me translate faster...

Ninety-three percent of CAT tool users agree that using a CAT tool helps them to translate more efficiently (3% said no, and 4% were not sure). Those who stated a CAT tool had helped in this respect were asked to rate the increase in their efficiency based on the average project for them in their area of expertise.



It can be difficult to accurately estimate an increase in efficiency due to one factor alone, but the numbers illustrate some increase overall, with the largest number putting the increase in the 20 to 30 percent range (this is consistent with the findings in a previous [State of the translation industry report](#)).

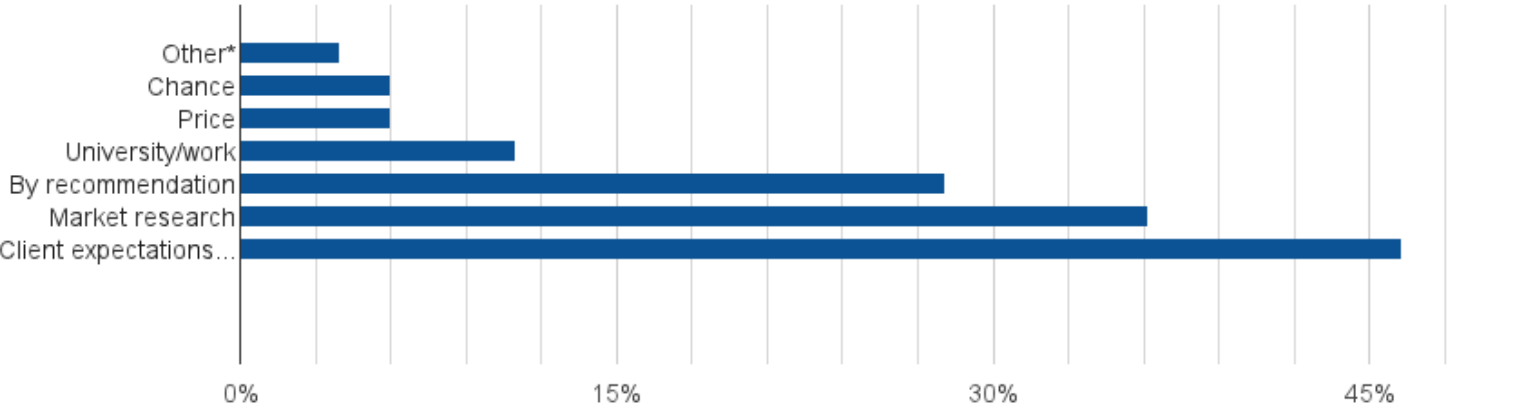
... and helps me with quality control

Overall, most CAT tool users agreed that the use of a CAT tool was a benefit in terms of maintaining consistency, quality control, in terminology management, and in project management. Most also agree that the size and organization of the translation memory (TM) being used is a key factor.

Reasons for selecting a specific CAT tool

Client expectations or requirements ranked highest among the reasons translators chose a particular CAT tool, though some point out that they have clients who do not necessarily specify *which* CAT tool, but rather expect that one be used. An interesting number were introduced to their primary CAT tool through translation studies or at previous in-house jobs by their employer. Recommendations made by colleagues or friends weighed heavily, and a large number also researched the options available on the market before deciding on which CAT tool to go for. Some respondents who have been working in translation for many years now noted that when they began using a CAT tool, there were few if any options to choose from on the market. Price was a factor but not much of one, tying with "Chance" as a reason for deciding on a particular tool.

How did you decide on your (primary) CAT tool?

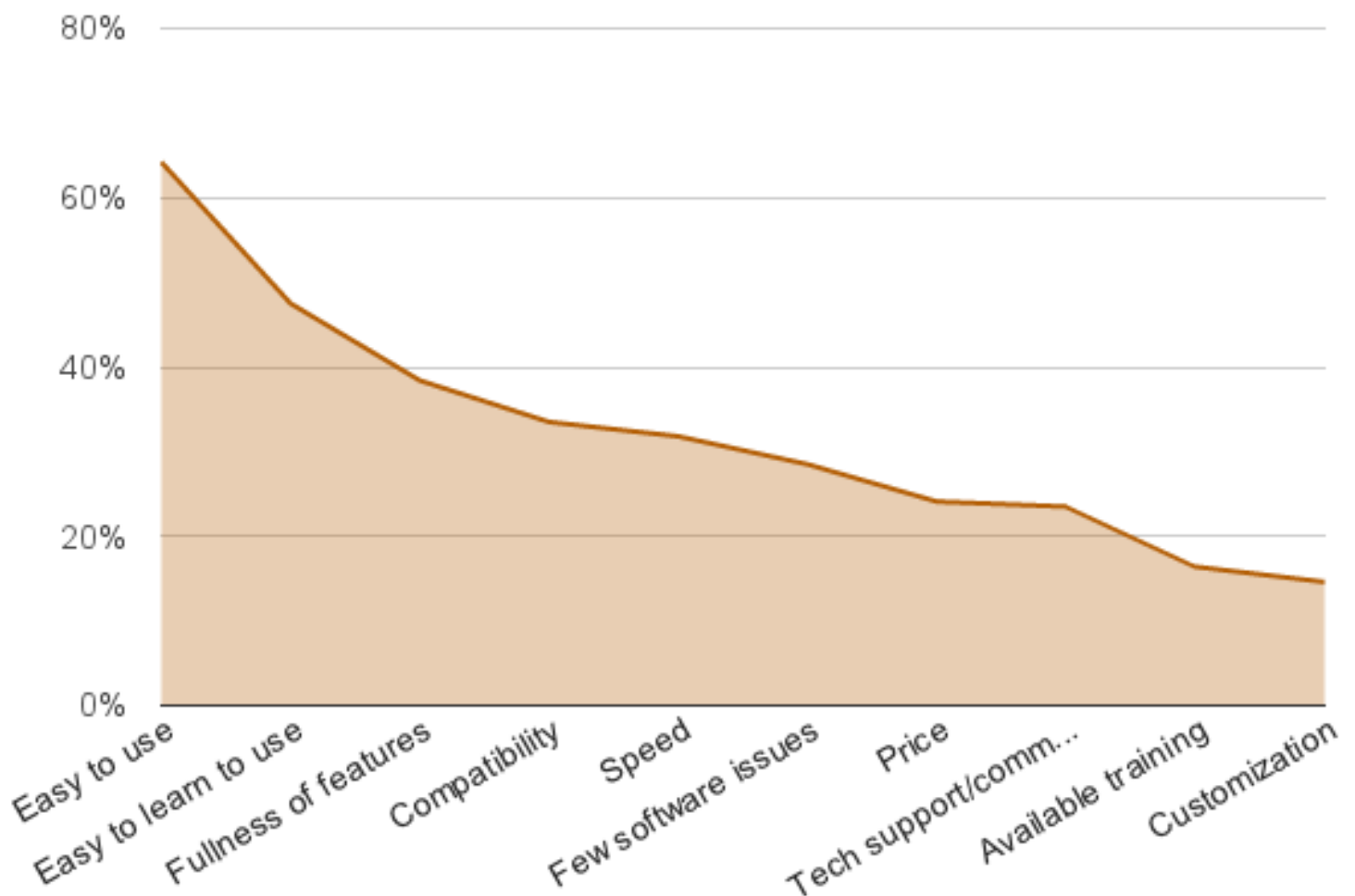


* "Other" groups tools where the individual percentage was less than 1% among survey respondents

Reasons for selecting a specific CAT tool

When it came to highlighting the features that translators looked for when selecting a CAT tool or deciding on a favorite, ease of use of course came in first. Price was again a factor but did not rank highly, though it did beat out tech support/community, available training for the tool, and customization.

Importance of CAT tool features



What would make you change your mind?

Non-CAT tool users were asked what, if anything, might convince them to start using a CAT tool. Those not using CAT tools may be broken into two groups: translators who have previously used a CAT tool (68%) and those who have never used one (32%). Price did rank highly among reasons here, with many respondents stating that a cheap or free tool or free training in the tool would be a convincing argument. This was followed by the wish for readily available in-depth and usually in-person training in the CAT tool and simpler, easier-to-use interfaces and features. Some would take the plunge with stronger assurances of increased work volume as a result of investing in a tool.

Interestingly, among translators not using a CAT tool, many responses seemed to indicate an impression that the use of a CAT tool might be intended as a replacement for a translator's skill, knowledge and existing quality assurance rather than as an enhancement to these. A concern also often voiced was that of CAT tools as being tied to inherently lower payment for projects. Compatibility with operating systems other than Windows was another roadblock for some respondents.

General opinions

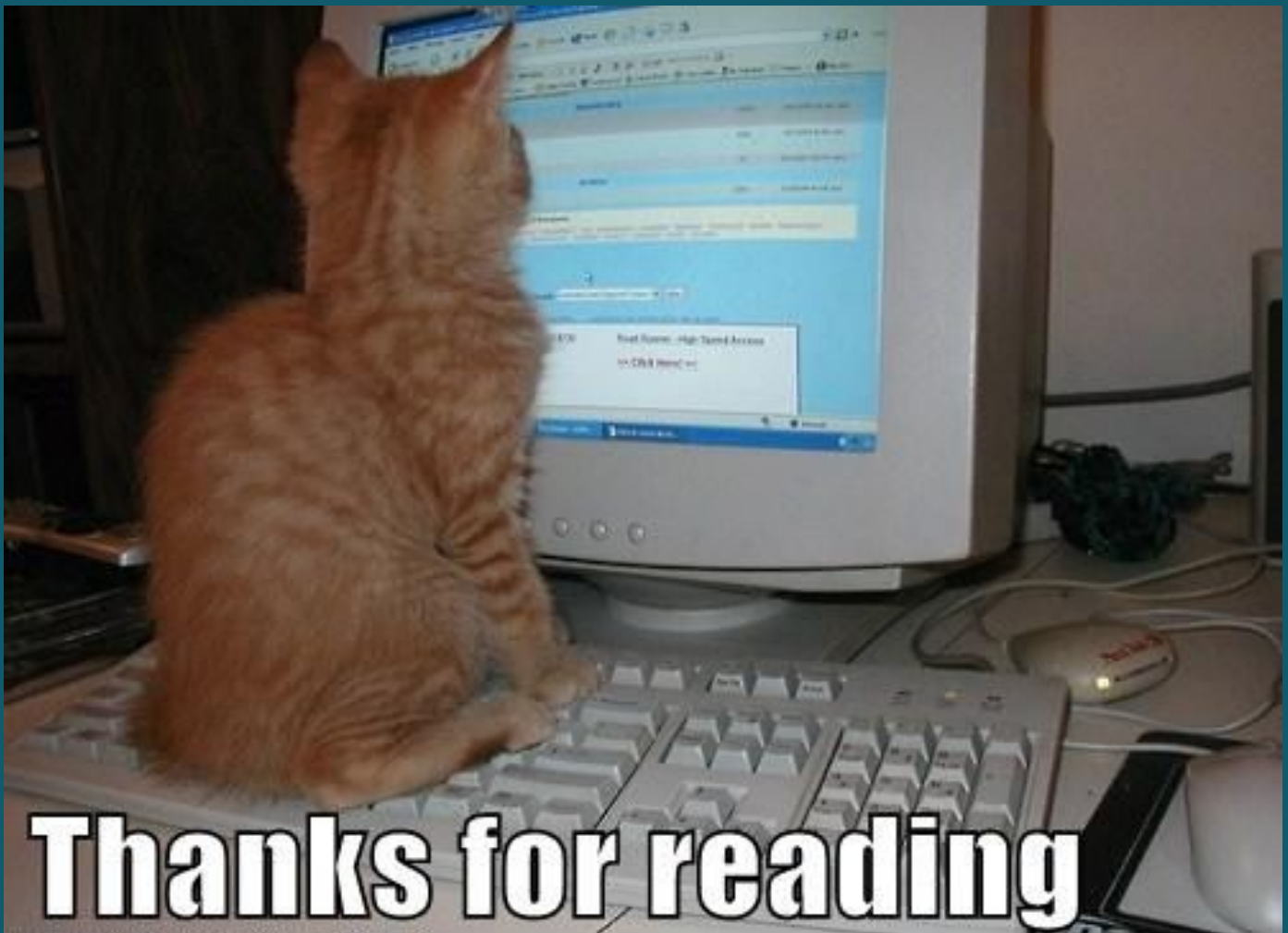
Finally, both groups were given some broad opinions on CAT tools and asked to state which best described their own opinion. Here are the results.

CAT tool users:

1. A great resource (32.1%)
2. A good resource (32%)
3. I couldn't live without mine (21.5%)
4. A necessary evil (6.4%)
5. Neutral (4.9%)
6. An added complication I can do without (3.1%)

non-CAT tool users:

1. An added complication I can do without (41.6%)
2. A good resource (21.6%)
3. Neutral (21.3%)
4. A necessary evil (8.1%)
5. A great resource (7.4%)




SOFTWARE
Comparison Tool

*You can view ratings, translator reviews, compare features and download free trials for most CAT tools and other translator software using ProZ.com's **translation software comparison tool**.*

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State of the translation industry reports

ProZ.com "state of the industry" reports take a look at some of the changes that are affecting translators, as told by translators. The reports include discussion of the trends, obstacles and opportunities to freelance work in the translation industry today, and how freelance translators are dealing with these trends.

These reports are free for all [full ProZ.com members](#). Non-members have access to the report abstracts shown on this page.

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Abstracts

State of the industry: freelance translators in 2012

Introduction

Commenting on the impact of the Internet and other factors leading to accelerated globalization, Thomas Friedman, in *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, wrote, "The world has been flattened ... global collaboration and competition - between individuals and individuals, companies and individuals, companies and companies, and companies and customers -- have been made cheaper, easier, more friction-free, and more productive for more people from more corners of the earth than at any time in the history of the world."

These changes, of course, have also affected translation. As companies have gained increased access to new potential customers around the world, the need for translation has increased. The translation industry is a healthy, growing one.

Other features of this flattened translation world are, for instance, the increased turnaround times translation projects demand. It is easier now too for clients to find the right professional for the job, in less time. With advances in content management, the use of translation memories, improvements in machine translation, more effective online and offline resources and many other factors, human translators are now more efficient. They are more specialized. They are, through this heightened productivity and specialization, able to provide increasingly higher quality.

Outline

1. General data
2. Specialization as a given
3. Project turnaround and translator efficiency
4. "New" technologies
5. Quality
6. Demand and growth
7. Translator income, investments and expectations
8. Diversification
9. Differentiation and marketing
10. Strategies for success

