



Visualforce for Multilingual Applications

Sandhya Rani Koppanathi

itsmeksr01@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Salesforce has a strong framework to build User Interface and that is Visual force. Many organizations are making global strides and are encouraged to build applications that will cater a wide range of audiences, with different languages they speak. Nevertheless, Visualforce remains a rather rich solution for building multilanguage applications. This paper discusses the strategies and best practices on how Visualforce can be used for building multilingual support in your applications. Technical concepts related to language translation, localization and also using the Salesforce Translation workbench & custom labels. The paper also discusses on how to standardize across various languages while keeping the user interaction as natural and seamless for users globally. This paper intends to provide developers and organization an improved overview on how Visualforce can be utilized for building multilingual applications efficiently over the Salesforce platform by breaking down its capabilities in this context.

Keywords: Visualforce, Multilingual Applications, Salesforce, Localization, Translation Workbench, Custom Labels, User Interface, Globalization, Software Development, Enterprise Applications.

INTRODUCTION

The globalization and localization of businesses require the development of software applications that support global operational perspectives, which requires linguistic diversity and cultural flexibility.

Salesforce is a greatest CRM tool provides different functions like visual force to help designers develop their own applications in multi-languages. Visualforce empowers developers to build user interfaces that meet the demand of more than one people provisioned in numerous regions or language.

Objective of this paper is to explain, how through Visualforce we can build applications in Salesforce which are multilingual. This article covers a series of the most crucial elements and features for localization & translation with in-depth examples on how to implement them. The paper also discusses the difficulties of building and maintaining multilingual applications; in this context it lists some recommendations to make the user interface uniform for all users.

Process of Developing Multilingual Applications using Visualforce

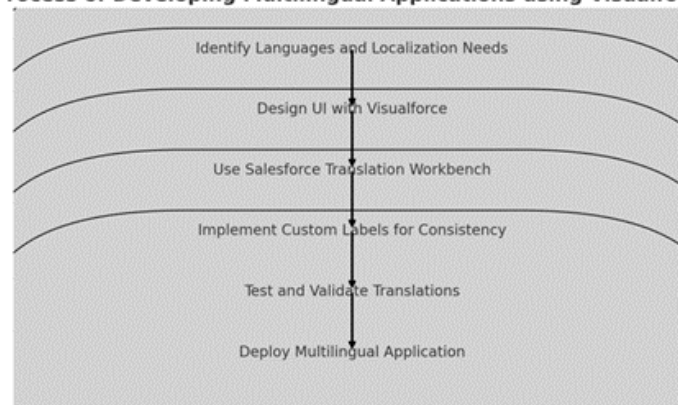


Fig.1. Diagram showing steps in building Multilingual Applications using Visualforce

UNDERSTANDING VISUALFORCE IN SALESFORCE

Visualforce is a framework for Salesforce that enables developers to build custom user interfaces on the Force.com platform. It is tag-based markup language similar like HTML and tightly integrated with Salesforce Data Model. With Visualforce, a developer can build pages which are rendered by your Force.platform and also include components for standard functionality as well custom controllers to interact with Salesforce data.

Components of Visualforce: The key components of Visualforce include:

- **Visualforce Pages:** These are the basic building blocks of the framework, where developers define the structure and layout of the user interface.
- **Controllers:** Visualforce supports both standard controllers, which provide out-of-the-box functionality, and custom controllers, which offer more flexibility for handling user interactions.
- **Extensions:** These allow developers to extend the functionality of standard controllers.
- **Apex Code:** Visualforce can be integrated with Apex, Salesforce's proprietary programming language, to add business logic to the pages.

Role of Visualforce in Multilingual Applications: Visualforce's flexibility and integration capabilities make it an ideal choice for building multilingual applications. By leveraging Visualforce's components in conjunction with Salesforce's localization tools, developers can create interfaces that dynamically adapt to the user's language and regional settings.

LOCALIZATION AND TRANSLATION IN SALESFORCE

Localization refers to the process of adapting an application to meet the language, cultural, and regional preferences of users. In Salesforce, localization is facilitated through several tools and features, including the Translation Workbench, Custom Labels, and Apex's built-in language support.

Salesforce Translation Workbench: The Salesforce Translation Workbench is a powerful tool that allows developers and administrators to manage translations for all aspects of the Salesforce user interface, including custom labels, field names, and picklist values. The Workbench supports the translation of both standard and custom objects, enabling comprehensive localization.

Managing Translations: Translations in Salesforce are managed through translation files, which can be uploaded and maintained within the Translation Workbench. These files contain key-value pairs, where the key represents the text in the base language (usually English), and the value represents the translated text. Developers can use the Workbench to assign different translations to different language codes, ensuring that the appropriate translation is displayed based on the user's language settings.

Integrating with Visualforce: Visualforce pages can be designed to utilize the translations managed within the Translation Workbench. This integration ensures that all text elements, including buttons, labels, and error messages, are displayed in the user's preferred language, providing a seamless multilingual experience.

Custom Labels in Visualforce: Custom Labels in Salesforce are user-defined text values that can be translated into multiple languages. These labels are particularly useful in Visualforce pages, as they allow developers to define reusable text elements that can be easily managed and translated.

Creating and Using Custom Labels: To create a Custom Label in Salesforce, developers define the label's name and default value, which is typically in English. Once created, these labels can be referenced within Visualforce pages using the `{!$Label.YourLabelName}` syntax. The Translation Workbench can then be used to provide translations for the label in various languages.

Benefits of Custom Labels: Custom Labels offer several benefits for multilingual applications:

- **Consistency:** Using Custom Labels ensures that the same text is used consistently across different parts of the application, reducing the likelihood of translation errors.
- **Reusability:** Labels can be reused across multiple Visualforce pages, making it easier to maintain the application.
- **Easy Management:** Custom Labels can be updated centrally, and the changes are automatically reflected across all pages that reference the label.

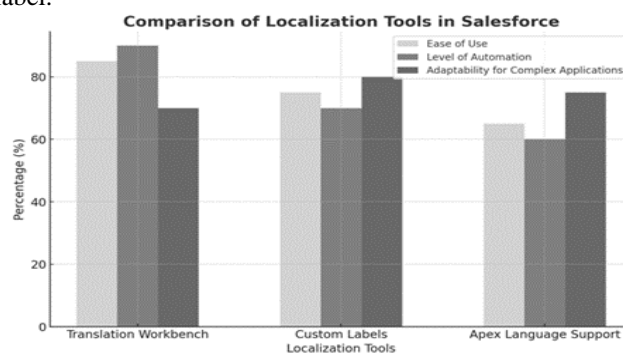


Fig.2. Comparison of Localization tools in Salesforce

BEST PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING MULTILINGUAL APPLICATIONS WITH VISUALFORCE

Developing multilingual applications with Visualforce requires careful planning and adherence to best practices to ensure that the user interface remains consistent, intuitive, and accessible across different languages.

Planning for Multilingual Support: Before starting development, it is essential to plan the multilingual aspects of the application. This includes identifying all the text elements that will require translation, understanding the cultural and regional differences that may affect the user interface, and selecting the languages that the application will support.

Identifying Translatable Elements: Developers should create a comprehensive list of all the text elements in the application that will need translation. This includes not only visible text, such as labels and messages, but also metadata, such as field names and error codes.

Cultural Considerations: Cultural differences can impact how certain elements of the user interface are perceived. For example, the format of dates, numbers, and currencies may vary across regions. It is crucial to account for these differences during the planning phase to ensure that the application is culturally appropriate for all users.

Implementing Language-Sensitive Components: Once the planning is complete, developers can begin implementing language-sensitive components in Visualforce. This involves using Custom Labels, the Translation Workbench, and other Salesforce tools to create a dynamic user interface that adapts to the user's language settings.

Dynamic Text Rendering: Visualforce allows for the dynamic rendering of text elements based on the user's language preferences. Developers can use the `{!$Label}` syntax to reference Custom Labels and ensure that the appropriate translation is displayed based on the user's locale.

Handling Date, Time, and Number Formats: Salesforce provides built-in functions for formatting dates, times, and numbers according to the user's locale. These functions should be used to ensure that all data is presented in a format that is familiar to the user, enhancing the overall usability of the application.

Testing and Validation: Testing is a critical phase in the development of multilingual applications. It is essential to test the application in all supported languages to ensure that translations are accurate, and that the user interface functions correctly.

Language Testing: Language testing involves verifying that all text elements are correctly translated and displayed in the appropriate language. This includes checking for truncation, alignment issues, and other potential problems that may arise due to differences in text length between languages.

Usability Testing: Usability testing should be conducted to ensure that the application remains intuitive and accessible across different languages. This includes testing the application with users from different cultural backgrounds to identify any issues that may impact the user experience.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN DEVELOPING MULTILINGUAL APPLICATIONS

Developing multilingual applications with Visualforce comes with its own set of challenges. However, by understanding these challenges and implementing appropriate solutions, developers can create applications that provide a seamless user experience across multiple languages.

Consistency Across Languages: One of the primary challenges in developing multilingual applications is maintaining consistency across different languages. This includes ensuring that all text elements are translated accurately, and that the user interface remains consistent regardless of the language.

Centralized Translation Management: Using centralized tools like the Translation Workbench and Custom Labels helps ensure consistency across languages. By managing translations centrally, developers can avoid discrepancies and ensure that all text elements are translated consistently.

Regular Review and Updates: Translations should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they remain accurate and relevant. This is particularly important in applications that are frequently updated or that operate in dynamic environments where language use may change over time.

Handling Text Expansion and Contraction: Languages vary in the amount of space they require to express the same idea. For example, German words are often longer than their English counterparts, while Chinese characters may take up less space. This variation can lead to issues with text alignment and truncation in the user interface.

Flexible Layout Design: To accommodate text expansion and contraction, developers should design flexible layouts that can adapt to changes in text length. This may involve using fluid grid layouts, adjustable font sizes, or dynamic resizing of interface elements.

Conditional Rendering: In cases where significant differences in text length may affect the user interface, developers can use conditional rendering to adjust the layout based on the user's language. This ensures that the interface remains usable and visually appealing in all languages.

Cultural and Regional Differences: Cultural and regional differences can impact how users interact with an application. For example, color schemes, symbols, and icons may have different meanings in different cultures. Developers need to consider these differences to ensure that the application is culturally appropriate.

Localization of Visual Elements: In addition to translating text, developers should localize visual elements of the application, such as icons, images, and color schemes. This ensures that the application is culturally relevant and resonates with users in different regions.

User Feedback and Iterative Design: Gathering feedback from users in different regions is crucial for understanding cultural differences and ensuring that the application meets the needs of all users. An iterative design process that incorporates user feedback can help identify and address cultural issues early in the development process.

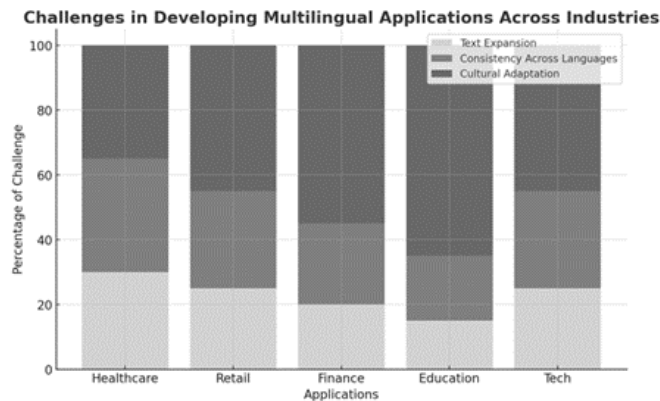


Fig 3: Challenges in Developing Multilingual Applications across Industries

CASE STUDIES: VISUALFORCE FOR MULTILINGUAL APPLICATIONS

To illustrate the practical application of Visualforce in developing multilingual applications, this section presents case studies of organizations that have successfully implemented multilingual solutions using Visualforce.

Case Study: Global Financial Services Company

Background: A global financial services company needed to develop a multilingual customer portal on Salesforce to serve clients in over 20 countries. The portal was required to support multiple languages, including English, Spanish, French, German, Chinese, and Japanese, among others. The company wanted to ensure that the portal provided a consistent and user-friendly experience for all clients, regardless of their language.

Challenges: The main challenges included:

- **Managing Translations:** The company needed to manage translations for a large volume of text, including labels, instructions, and error messages.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** The portal had to be culturally appropriate for users in different regions, considering factors such as date formats, currency symbols, and cultural references.
- **Performance:** The portal needed to perform well across all languages, with fast loading times and smooth user interactions.

Solution: The company used Visualforce in combination with Salesforce's Translation Workbench and Custom Labels to develop the multilingual portal. The Translation Workbench was used to manage translations for all text elements, while Custom Labels were used to ensure consistency across the portal. Key features of the solution included:

- **Dynamic Language Switching:** The portal allowed users to switch languages dynamically, with all text elements updating in real-time based on the selected language.
- **Localized Content:** The portal displayed localized content, such as date formats, currency symbols, and region-specific information, based on the user's location and language preferences.
- **Optimized Performance:** The development team optimized the portal's performance by minimizing the use of large images and reducing server requests, ensuring fast loading times across all languages.

Outcomes: The multilingual portal was successfully launched, providing a seamless experience for clients around the world. The use of Visualforce and Salesforce's localization tools allowed the company to manage translations efficiently and ensure that the portal was culturally appropriate for all users. The portal's performance was also well-received, with users reporting fast loading times and smooth interactions.

Case Study: International Non-Profit Organization

Background: An international non-profit organization needed to develop a multilingual donor management system on Salesforce to manage interactions with donors in multiple countries. The system was required to support languages including English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic. The organization also needed to ensure that the system was accessible to users with varying levels of technical expertise.

Challenges: The organization faced several challenges:

- **Language Variability:** The system needed to handle languages with different script directions, such as Arabic, which is written from right to left.

- **User Accessibility:** The system had to be accessible to users with varying levels of technical expertise, many of whom were not fluent in English.

- **Consistency Across Languages:** The organization needed to ensure that the system's user interface remained consistent across different languages, with no loss of functionality or usability.

Solution: The organization used Visualforce and Salesforce's Custom Labels to develop the donor management system. Visualforce's flexible layout options allowed the development team to create a user interface that could adapt to different script directions, ensuring that the system was usable in both left-to-right and right-to-left languages. Key features of the solution included:

- **Script Direction Handling:** The system automatically adjusted the layout and text alignment based on the user's language, ensuring that Arabic text was displayed correctly.

- **Simplified User Interface:** The system's user interface was designed to be intuitive and easy to navigate, with clear instructions and minimal text, making it accessible to users with varying levels of technical expertise.

- **Consistent Experience:** Custom Labels were used to ensure that all text elements were consistent across languages, reducing the likelihood of translation errors and ensuring a consistent user experience.

Outcomes: The multilingual donor management system was successfully implemented, allowing the organization to manage donor interactions more effectively across different countries. The system's ability to handle different script directions and its user-friendly interface were particularly well-received by users, who appreciated the system's accessibility and ease of use. The organization was also able to manage translations efficiently, ensuring that the system remained consistent and reliable across all supported languages.

FUTURE TRENDS IN MULTILINGUAL APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT WITH VISUALFORCE

As businesses continue to expand globally, the demand for multilingual applications will only increase. Visualforce, with its powerful features and integration capabilities, will continue to play a critical role in meeting this demand. Several trends are likely to shape the future of multilingual application development with Visualforce:

Integration with AI for Automated Translation: The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) into Visualforce development could revolutionize the way multilingual applications are built. AI-powered translation tools can automatically translate text elements in real-time, reducing the need for manual translation management and making it easier to support a larger number of languages.

AI-Powered Translation Workflows: AI-powered workflows can be integrated into Visualforce applications to dynamically translate user-generated content, such as comments and reviews, into multiple languages. This would enable real-time, multilingual communication within the application, enhancing user engagement and satisfaction.

Improved Localization Accuracy: AI and ML can also improve the accuracy of localization by learning from past translations and user feedback. Over time, these technologies can refine translations to better match the cultural and linguistic nuances of different regions, ensuring that the application remains relevant and effective.

Enhanced User Experience through Adaptive Interfaces: As multilingual applications become more sophisticated, there will be a greater focus on creating adaptive interfaces that can automatically adjust to the user's language, location, and device. Visualforce's flexibility will be key to implementing these adaptive interfaces, ensuring that the application provides an optimal user experience across different contexts.

Context-Aware Interfaces: Context-aware interfaces can dynamically adapt to the user's environment, such as changing the layout or content based on the user's location or the time of day. This level of personalization can enhance the user experience, making the application more intuitive and user-friendly.

Device-Specific Optimizations: As users access applications on a wider range of devices, including smartphones, tablets, and wearables, Visualforce will need to support device-specific optimizations. This includes ensuring that the user interface is responsive and that all features are accessible across different screen sizes and input methods.

Expanded Use of Cloud-Based Localization Services: Cloud-based localization services are likely to become more prevalent in multilingual application development. These services can be integrated with Visualforce applications to provide real-time translation and localization, reducing the burden on developers and improving the scalability of multilingual applications.

Real-Time Translation Services: Cloud-based translation services, such as Google Cloud Translation or Microsoft Translator, can be integrated into Visualforce applications to provide real-time translation of user-generated content. This would enable users to interact with the application in their preferred language, even if the content was originally created in another language.

Scalable Localization Solutions: Cloud-based localization services offer scalable solutions that can grow with the application. As the user base expands and the application supports more languages, these services can provide the necessary resources to manage translations and localization effectively.

CONCLUSION

One of the strongest qualities of Visualforce is its ability to help you create multilingual applications directly on Salesforce. Using Salesforce localization tools (Translation Workbench and Custom Labels) to build user interfaces

for your application that cater towards a global audience. But creating multilingual applications using Visualforce is not straight and requires some precautions, good practices, as well it has its share of difficulties.

This paper discusses the major concerns of building a multilingual application in Visualforce and proposed the best practices along with real case studies to help you understand more efficiently. With businesses growing globally more than ever this will serve as a notable practice. Both due to its flexibility for achieving this and its ability to integrate, Visualforce will remain a critical tool in ensuring applications are approachable by users regardless of where they live.

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