

The steps to successful translating:

Writing for translation and choosing your translator



Translations that mean business.™

How can you ensure a successful translation of your project — whether it's a product or policy manual, technical document or marketing materials?

A successful translation will convey your intended meaning, address your audience with the appropriate tone and generate the results you want. There are two crucial steps that determine your translation success: 1) writing for translation and 2) choosing your translator. Here are some tips for both of these steps.

WRITING FOR TRANSLATION

The more straightforward and clear your original text, the more likely a translator will be able to duplicate your meaning in a translation.

Follow some basic writing rules

First, some “Don’ts”:

- Avoid abbreviations, slang terms, buzz words, jargon, colloquial expressions
- Avoid words with more than one meaning (use “movie” instead of “film” and “painting” instead of “picture”)
- Avoid non-standard contraction marks (semi-colons and hyphens)
- Steer clear of special characters and symbols
- Skip cultural or place-specific references
- Leave out the humor

Now for some “Dos”:

- Keep sentences short and simple (less than 20 words)
- Think one sentence per idea
- Use active rather than passive verbs
- Be precise
- Keep copy style formal
- Always use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation

Know your target audience

Is your audience a group of electrical engineers or entry-level interns? Gen-Yrs, Gen-Xrs or Baby Boomers? Academics or HR generalists? Decide ahead of time what tone you want to convey—serious, informational, technically detailed or lighthearted. Your target audience determines the tone that should be conveyed.

Within individual languages and countries, meanings can also change regionally. Even in the United States, many phrases can be interpreted

differently on the East Coast than the West Coast, and colloquial phrases can be misunderstood from the South to the Midwest. Write to be understood across regions.

Learn about the country's communication style

A country's culture and manner of communicating influences how you should write and position your copy. Some cultures appreciate courtesy, sensitivity and face-saving language over facts, figures and forms. For them, the emotional quality of the message can be more important than the words or sentences themselves.

Take the word "no," for example. The Japanese have over 16 different ways to avoid saying "no" and some Southeast Asian languages don't even have a word for "no."

The number of words that a language consists of varies significantly - some languages have hundreds of thousands of words, some only thousands. As a result, the number of words available for translations varies between source and target languages. In a few languages, words don't even exist to describe things that may be considered commonplace in other languages.

Finally, the way in which people process information can vary from country to country. For example, people in the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Scandinavian countries prefer inductive reasoning—copy moves from the specific to the general. That's not the case in much of the rest of the world, including most of Western Europe, where most people prefer deductive

reasoning—moving from the general to the specific.

Write with the layout in mind

It takes more space to translate to German. Less space is needed for most Asian languages. Translations from English into another language often mean an increase of up to 33% in the number of words to convey your message. This increase in copy length can result in things like higher printing costs when page numbers go up, changes in ad layouts and a need to reorganize a product brochure.

Create standardized text wherever possible

Some translation companies refer to creating standardized text as "translation memory." This saves you valuable time and money when you use the same copy blocks or phrases in multiple places. For instance, if you're a financial services company and use the same disclaimer copy for many of your products, you could save money by creating a boilerplate for that text.

Similarly, if you are a manufacturing company that requires product manuals, some technical information may remain standard for several different products. Utilizing "translation memory" can save you a considerable amount of time and energy.

Proofread. Proofread. Proofread.

Submitting changes to your final copy will contribute to costs that could otherwise be avoided. It may even mean your copy needs to be completely retranslated.



Retranslation can also lead to inconsistencies in the tone and/or content of your document. The more copy versions, the greater the potential for project confusion.

Communicate with your translation company

While it seems like common sense, ongoing honest and open communication with your translation service company contributes to lower costs and reduced frustration. Your translation experts can help with insights into a country's culture, foreign language typographical conventions (which languages require a space before a colon or which accents go with which words) and differences in writing for various media (writing for the spoken word can be a lot different than writing for the written word or for interactive media).

CHOOSING A TRANSLATION SERVICES COMPANY

With so much at stake on any translation project—customer goodwill, company reputation, product sales and vendor relationships—selecting the right translation service company is crucial to getting translations that produce good results. Here are some initial questions you should ask:

- Are the translators native speakers?
- Do the translators have industry knowledge necessary to handle your topic?
- Do they have experience in both the source and target language?
- Does the translation company use a formal project management process?

- Is the company ISO 9000 certified?
- Is the company affiliated with any professional organizations?
- How are costs determined?

Check credentials

Translation companies that are ISO certified have been audited by a reviewing firm that certifies the translations are produced through a Quality Management System that meets ISO technical standards. ISO certification is an indicator that the company has taken steps to implement more efficient and accurate translation practices.

Evaluate industry expertise

Whether you're in medicine, manufacturing, government or education, it's a good idea to work with a translation service that understands your industry, your technology, and your customers or clients.

Some translation service companies separate translators into generalist and specialist categories. Specialized translators, in addition to having formal training as generalist translators, have acquired training in specialty areas often leading to a degree within the field. Examples of specialty areas include medical, engineering, legal or social services degree and/or work experience.

Understanding industry-specific norms and situations is the key to unlocking concise and accurate translations that speak volumes to the end-reader.

Compare prices

The best translation companies use a team approach and ensure that your priorities and concerns are understood up-front. Projects begin with a single translator responsible for the initial translation. Next, another equally qualified translator proof reads and submits any recommended changes to the project manager. Finally, the project manager conducts a thorough review of the materials before handing them off to the client. While this process is often more expensive than using a single translator, it provides the most accurate translations.

Ask about confidentiality

Since most companies say they are vigilant about protecting confidentiality and ensuring the security of electronic files, how can you tell which translation service companies truly protect client confidentiality?

Experts recommend looking for these security measures:

- Firewall protection
- Daily back-ups with off-site storage
- Document encryption at the customer's request
- Shredding of all discarded paperwork
- Signed nondisclosure agreements from all translators

Establish a relationship with your translation company

Confiance. Fiducia. Vertrauen. Confiança. Trust, in any language, is the key to a successful relationship with a translation service company. Although years in business, a solid reputation, good references and industry expertise are all important criteria, the success of a translation project often comes down to relationships.

Establishing a relationship with the translation company and your project manager will result in a smoother process and more consistent results.

About International Language Services

International Language Services, Inc. is a multi-language translation, localization and formatting company that has been serving mid-size and Fortune 500 corporations since 1982. ILS provides hands-on project management team support and translators with a wide range of industry-specific knowledge. With translation memory software, ISO certification and access to translators for any language and business application, ILS consistently produces translated documents that generate intended results.

For more information on International Language Services capabilities and clients, please visit our Web site at www.ilstranslations.com.

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