



The Translation Process — Where Do You Start?

For most U.S. manufacturers, translation is no longer an option, but a crucial component of a global marketing strategy.

By Catherine Deschamps-Potter

Catherine is vice president of sales and marketing at ICD Translation.



English may be the lingua franca of international commerce, but the demand for translation services continues to increase.

Even reluctant companies find themselves in need of translation services—increasingly stringent European and Asian regulations may require the submission of multilingual documentation before a product can be imported. If you start thinking about translation a few days before your product ships, your procrastination will cost you. Instead, take a little time now to assess your translation needs.

Choosing a Translation Agency

The number of translation agencies has increased dramatically in the past decade. Your challenge may be choosing one agency from a number of qualified candidates.

Ask each agency's sales representative for verifiable client references. Does a professional association accredit the agency's translators? What quality control processes does the agency employ? How experienced are the agency's project managers. Are its desktop publishers and software engineers proficient in your company's preferred applications?

Most clients realize that translation quality directly affects a company's reputation and, at times, the safety of its customers. Sample translations can be an effective tool to help you determine if the agency's product

is acceptable. Submit short English documents that are representative of your project as a whole. Samples may be reviewed internally, perhaps by qualified native-speaking employees or distributors in the target country.

Ideally, you want to build a solid relationship with an agency dedicated to providing quality translations and responsive customer service. The translation production cycle can be lengthy and complex, and it is important to feel comfortable with your agency's project managers and sales staff.

...translation quality directly affects a company's reputation and, at times, the safety of its customers.

Controlling Costs

There will always be companies who simply want to satisfy minimum regulatory requirements, and they are motivated by nothing more than the lowest price. Beware of cut-rate pricing in the translation industry. Corners will be cut somewhere; your documentation and corporate image abroad may suffer the consequences.

An agency's quotations are only as accurate as the information you provide to them in advance. Can you provide a written overview of your documentation process and anticipated timelines? Translation pricing is



Preparing Your English Documentation

Translators try to provide a translation that mirrors not only the content, but also the style of the English document. When you are designing and writing documents for a global audience, it is even more important to communicate your message in an effective manner. Here are several things to keep in mind when you are creating your English templates: experienced translators appreciate assistance with arcane terminology.

- Use short, clear sentences. Do not use informal vocabulary that may not translate well. Leave white space on your pages to compensate for foreign-language text expansion.
- Use easily understood icons and illustrations.
- Eliminate narrow columns that may lead to excessive hyphenation or awkward line breaks in some languages, especially German.
- Include both English/imperial and metric measurements, and double-check the metric conversions for accuracy.
- Compile glossaries of key terms, and share them with your agency's project manager. Spell out company-specific acronyms in your glossary – even experienced translators appreciate assistance with arcane terminology.

volume-driven, and long term planning can significantly lower your translation costs.

Right now, your managers may want only a marketing brochure translated. Perhaps early next year, your company will start placing multilingual content on your corporate website. It is likely that a significant amount of your documentation is repetitive in nature. Virtually all translation agencies now use translation memory software to help leverage repetitive text. Translated text is imported into a linguistic database and then recycled for future projects. This can help cut costs and turnaround time, as well as improve consistency. Your agency's sales representative should be able to explain how you are being charged for text that has been previously translated.

Make sure the quotation spells out exactly what services you will be receiving.

Not all languages are equal when it comes to price; a Korean translation typeset into a FrameMaker file will cost more than a Spanish translation of a

simple Word document. Make sure the quotation spells out exactly what services you will be receiving.

Glossaries not only help translators understand company-specific terminology, they also serve as the basis for multilingual glossaries.

Ensure effective and consistent translations

Let's go back to the concept of building English glossaries. Glossaries not only help translators understand company-specific terminology, they also serve as the basis for multilingual glossaries. Ask your international employees and distributors to review translations of key terms. After all, they will use the translations to sell your products, and will likely appreciate the opportunity to offer feedback.

You can use translation software and cloud-based translation management systems to ensure that preferred vocabulary is utilized. Within the cloud-based system, clients are able to view translations in real-time, track the progress of projects, access translation memories

and terminology at any time, contribute to an ongoing and collaborative dialog with translators, and participate in a review of your translations within the cloud. The result will be more effective and consistent translations.

In summary, planning and preparation can make a big difference in the price and quality of your multilingual documentation. The translation process usually comes at the tail end of a company's documentation cycle, when time, resources and patience are in short supply. A little foresight can go a long way in making the translation process a more pleasant endeavor. **ICD**

Original content published in *NAFEM in print*, Fall 2003.
Updated 2016.