

**30 THINGS YOU
NEED TO KNOW
BEFORE CHOOSING
A TRANSLATION
PARTNER**



**WHEN
CHOOSING
A TRANSLATION
PARTNER . . .**

01

Choose a translation provider with subject matter expertise.

Does your translation provider specialize in the type of content (technical, medical, general) or project types (manuals, catalogs, websites, eLearning courses) that you need to translate? Knowing the qualifications of your vendor can help ensure your satisfaction and mitigate the risks of translation errors.



Go with a translation provider with language-specific expertise.

It's critical that the linguists assigned to carry out your translations have native fluency in the target language, and not vice versa. Also, if your target language is intended for a specific country, be sure to request that the editor is actually from that country as well. Differences in words, phrases, and terminology can vary even from country-to-country with the same official language.

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Consider a provider that's the right size for your business.

Large companies usually pick large translation agencies, while medium-sized and small businesses often work with smaller translation agencies and freelancers. If your needs are very small or you only translate into a couple of languages, you may not be deemed an "important" client with sizeable revenue for larger agencies. To ensure that you receive the best possible customer service, pick a provider for which the amount of business you'll send them is meaningful.



Be open to discussing your long-term needs beyond the first project.

Talk with the translation provider not just about an initial project, but about your recurring and ongoing needs. How many projects do you think you'll need to translate per month, per quarter, per year? Moving the discussion further into the future makes you more attractive as a client because you're offering multiple projects and in anticipation, your translation partner will be able to secure the availability of the best resources for you.

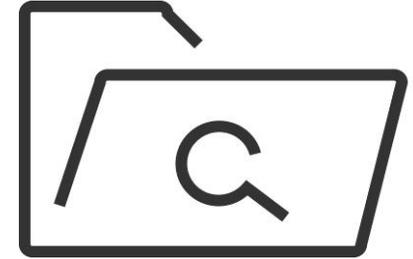
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Ask for references.

If you really want to know what a translation provider is made of, ask for customer references, testimonials, or case studies.

If they are quality providers, they can point you to various satisfied customers who will be glad to speak with you or who have already gone on record to tell the world how great this provider is.



Ask to sign a Non-Disclosure / Confidentiality Agreement.

Sending your documents out for translation means that your company's proprietary information, such as patents, trade secrets, HR policies, instructions for use, website architecture, and other sensitive information will be reviewed by someone outside of company walls and even perhaps by a translator who works for a competitor. Not only is it wise to have a Non-Disclosure or Confidentiality Agreement in place, it's also a good idea to ensure that the agency has one in place with their translators as well.



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Ask for a sample translation.

Before going with a new translation vendor, take a test drive first by evaluating the quality of a sample translation. Choose one, maybe two languages and provide a 300-500 word sample copy. Then ask your in-country subject matter expert or a third-party resource to provide any feedback as to its quality and accuracy.



Make sure you know who will be actually performing the translations.

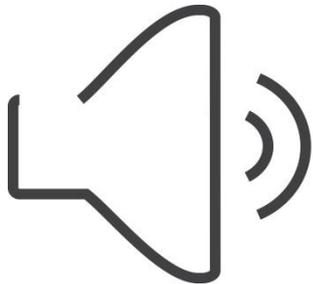
Ask which translators will be assigned to your projects. If you work with an agency, you're doing so because of volume and scale -- but you still have the right to know who is working on your projects as well as their qualifications. Working with a transparent translation partner will help form trust and confidence – the building blocks essential for a long-term working relationship.

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Set up criteria in advance of how you'll evaluate and measure the services you're receiving.

Explain to your translation providers how you'll measure their overall performance beyond just linguistic quality. Consider using a carrot-and-stick approach. Do they have to provide a discount if quality is poor? Can they charge more if the quality passes with flying colors? Set up the criteria in advance of launching your project. Think of the test-driven development method. Write the test before you code.



Clearly define and communicate your quality expectations.

For most companies, quality is crucial. Most translators will assume you want the best possible quality, but perhaps you actually need a translation completed by the deadline in order to avoid missing your global product launch or release date, even if quality is compromised in the process.

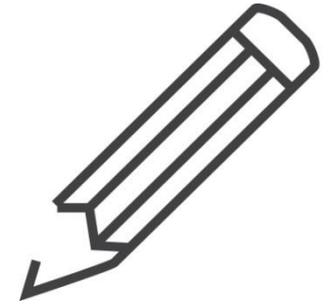
Whatever your situation is, clearly communicate it, or else your translation agency may provide a service at a higher cost than was actually needed.

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Ensure high quality of the source language.

While writing in a simplified English form is always advised to produce a quality localization product, translators are all too familiar with the expression “garbage in, garbage out,” but too often they are expected to turn garbage into works of art. If the source text is poorly written, your expectations for translation should equate. The translator may need more time to work on the text than normal, because vague and ambiguous writing takes more time to improve. Ask your translators to review the source text before translation begins in order to give you a sense of whether the text will be difficult to translate.



Develop and then share a style guide and multilingual glossary.

What is your company writing style? What does your brand voice sound like? If you have any guidelines for writing or marketing, make sure to share these with your translators. Do you prefer a formal or informal tone? Who is the target reader and what is their reading level? All of these details shared within a style guide as well as a pre-approved glossary of product-specific terms will help the translator improve quality from the start, making the project more efficient and effective.

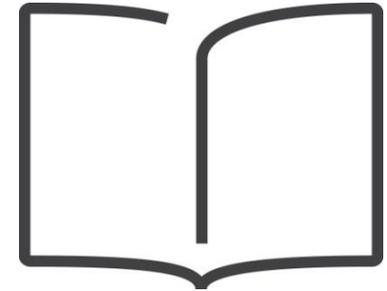


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Provide translators with context and reference materials.

Give the translation team as much background information about the content that they are translating as you can. This includes any pictures, diagrams, manuals, web pages, or any other reference material, such as previously translated content, that will help provide context.

Also consider providing them with a visual translation interface, so they can see exactly what they are translating in real time, and how their changes affect the layout, format, and spacing of the end product.



Try to provide native or original files whenever possible.

While this may or may not seem obvious, many companies fail to provide source files to their translation provider and instead provide a PDF version or a published webpage, expecting the translator to manually recreate everything.

This is not only extremely time-consuming or the most inefficient use of a translator's time, but it will result in errors and higher costs. Even if having to locate the native files is inconvenient, still try to provide them as often as possible.

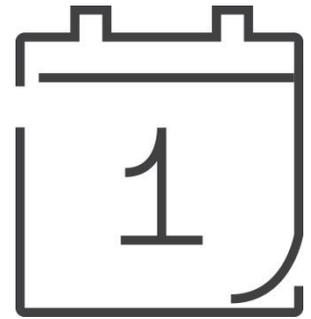
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Be aware of standard turnaround and capacity rates for human translators.

Try your very best to hand off the files when you say you will, and don't try to compress the translation into a shorter timeline than what was originally agreed upon. Sometimes, business realities take precedence, but make sure that you clearly tell others at your company about translation dependencies, so that they understand the importance of a timely hand-off and the link to a timely delivery by your provider. Human translators and editors are limited to a daily capacity based on a specific number of words per day. It's therefore sometimes a fair expectation to pay more for rush projects – people will literally be working nights and weekends to meet your deadlines.



Choose an agency with project managers close to your time zone.

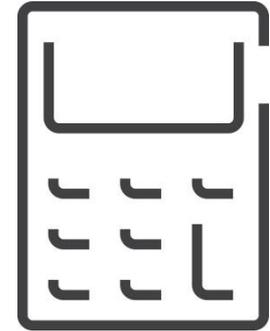
If you're dealing with an agency, make sure they have a project manager who is available within your time zone. In case your needs change or an urgent project arises, it's essential that you can reach someone during your business hours.

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Look for a translation partner with transparent pricing.

Many translators and translation providers use a “price per word” model, but this model is not by any means universal or required. Remember that the price per word will not include all possible additional fees that you may want associated with the project, such as professional editing, project management, graphic design, desktop publishing, and other localization services. If you anticipate an ongoing stream of work, you might want to consider drawing up a Master Service Agreement with itemized, locked-in rates.



Select a provider based on several criteria, not just price alone.

As with most purchases, when it comes to translation services, you usually get what you pay for. Just as general doctors and specialists charge different rates, knowing that technical and more complex projects will require someone with matching skills.

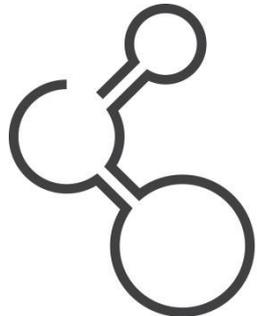
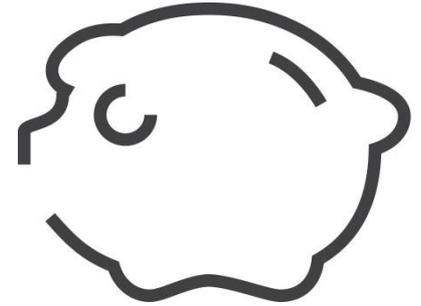
Quality, turnaround time, project scope and customer service are also relevant factors to consider.

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Treat translation as an investment, not only as a cost.

Cost is just one tiny piece of the translation equation. Don't think of it as an added cost, but rather, an investment your business is making in order to reach new markets and to grow revenue. If translation providers are viewed as a cost, your company's inclination will be to try to cut costs over time. Meanwhile, your competitors may be sourcing the best possible, high-quality translation teams around the globe, producing better content for global customers and thereby winning business that you could win instead. View your translation team as a competitive advantage in business – not as merely the cost of doing business.



Make sure management understands how much revenue is tied to translations.

If there's one way to help people understand the value of translation, it's by showing them how much revenue comes from your international markets and purchases made because your company's products and were available in the market's native language. Set-up these metrics early, ideally before you start translation, and then use these numbers to generate reports that will show the return on investment.

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Develop an easy process for giving feedback.

If you don't already have a translation software platform, choose one that offers you the ability to easily send comments back and forth to translators from others within your company and make sure that the comments are saved or archived so that they can access the information for future projects.



Conduct a project post-mortem.

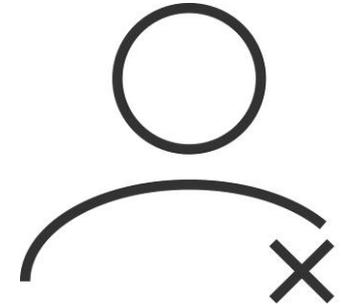
Once your first or major project is complete, have a quick meeting with your provider to discuss what went well as well as any areas for improvement. It may take only 15 minutes of your time and it's important to not only document any lessons learned for future projects but to also give any positive feedback where it's earned.

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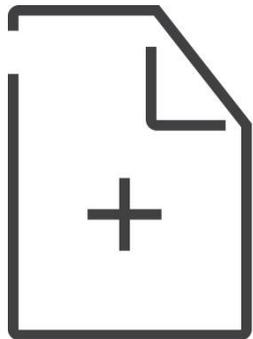
Be cautious of asking bilingual staff to translate technical content.

It might seem like a good idea at the time, but just like every person who speaks English isn't necessarily a great writer, not every person who speaks a foreign language will be a good translator. Bilingual employees are generally not good candidates for translation projects unless they also happen to be professional translators who have the necessary credentials or subject matter expertise.



Provide clear instructions to your in-country reviewers.

If you ask bilingual staff to participate in your translation quality review, make sure that they know what kinds of things to look for, i.e., terminology, spelling, or grammar errors. Also, tell them not to make too many stylistic change, otherwise, they might do so just to make sure it looks like they are doing their job. After all, imagine if they sent back a note that said, "no changes." It might look like they didn't actually do the review at all. This process can motivate bad behaviors, so be mindful when asking employees to review translations – it can turn into a major waste of time.

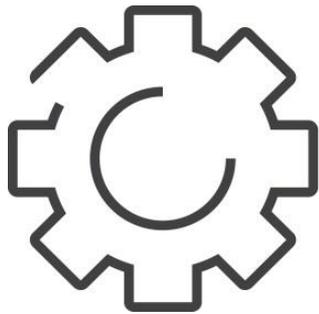


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Maintain translation files in a central location.

If you do obtain feedback on translations, make sure that changes are inserted into your translation assets across the board – translation memories, glossary, and style guide so that the translations will be better from the very start.



Collect copies of your translation memory assets.

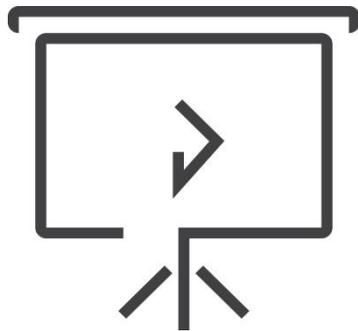
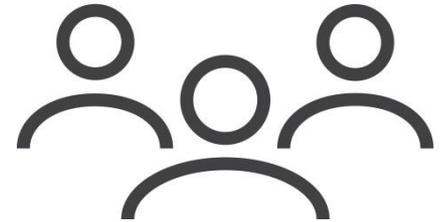
Whenever a translation provider works on your projects, they generate a database of saved translations known as a “translation memory.” Ask your provider to give you full access to your translation memory files so that you always have the most current translations within reach and so that you can ensure that they’re used on future projects for consistency and accuracy. Having these on-hand will also prove helpful in case you ever need to part ways with your translation vendor.

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Treat your translation provider as an extended part of your team and get them involved as early as possible.

It's easy to think of translators as the nameless, faceless individuals on the other end of the computer screen. Your translators are truly an extension of your content creation team, so make sure that you treat them this way. Involve them in discussions about upcoming projects so they know what is coming and can plan accordingly. Keep them in the loop on what to expect next as you develop a relationship with them over time.



Provide ongoing training to your translation partner.

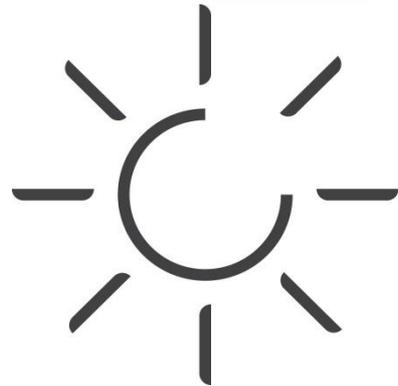
Invite your translators to your company and tell them more about the details of your products and services. If you go to this length, quality will improve significantly and so will efficiency. Instead of having to ask clarification questions, translators will understand more about your business, improving communication all around.

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Translations don't have to be difficult and you don't have to go at it alone.

Working with a trusted translation partner is a more empowered way of working. Choose a translation provider that meets most of the ideas and best practices mentioned here, including shared knowledge and a common purpose. After all, a team approach in today's modern worldwide organization begins the roadmap to today's global success.



It may take time to reach your long-term goals, but remain optimistic and focus on the end results at all times.

Just as in all aspects of life, creating and executing a long-term localization strategy will have its natural ups and downs. Being aware of this and remaining conscientiously optimistic will positively impact other team members' attitudes and performance, lead to quicker recovery times during unforeseen set-backs, and make the journey seem that much brighter.

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