

## **For non-linguists, buying in translation is often a source of stress. The suggestions in this guide are aimed at reducing that stress.**

It will help you decide what you need and will improve your chances of getting a translation that works.

### **There are many ways a translation project can go off track:**

- o misapplied CAT (Computer Aided Translation),
- o ambiguities in source text,
- o no proofreading of final text,
- o poor coordination of large projects,
- o unrealistic deadlines,
- o no client input.

### **Choosing a translator**

#### **Translation, Interpreting - what's the difference?**

Translation is written, whereas interpreting is spoken.

#### **Professional translators work into their native language**

As a translation buyer, you may not be aware of this, but a translator who flouts this basic rule is likely to be ignorant of other important quality issues as well.

**Professional translators are writers too!** They are capable of producing texts that read well in the target language. In effect they are the bridge between the languages in which they work.

#### **Surely a bilingual person can do it?**

Bilingualism is something else. Bilinguals speak two languages fluently, but are not necessarily good at moving information between the two, especially in writing. And experience shows that many people described as bilingual overestimate their communication skills altogether.

#### **Resist the temptation to do it yourself**

In-house bilingual people are not necessarily translators - they can proofread the final draft but more often than not they are not qualified to comment on a technical/specialist text.

#### **An inquisitive translator is good news!**

##### **Tell the translator who and what it's for**

No one reads your texts more carefully than your translator. Along the way, he or she is likely to identify fuzzy bits – sections where clarification is needed. This is good news for you, since it will allow you to improve your original.

*Style and register are important: a speech is not a web site. An article in The News of the World is not a prospectus for an IPO.*

#### **A widely-held myth.**

##### **“Technical terms pose few translation problems”**

The more technical your subject, the more important it is that your translators know it inside out.

Talk to your translators. They should be at home with the subjects they translate; if not, it's time to change suppliers.

#### **What about CAT? (Computer Aided Translation)**

These days most translators use CAT. But it is just that - an aid - not a replacement. There are advantages to CAT if used properly.

#### **Have you thought about monitoring foreign media?**



Are you still at the research stage? Translators know the international market perhaps they can provide you with competitive research before you take the plunge into a new market.

**Would a summary of the text suffice?** Do you need a "for information" only translation? Would you like a summary of a large text to help you decide on what you need translating? Rather than blindly translate documents in full – hundreds of pages – decide which information is actually required.

### **Get the translator involved**

With translation, the fastest way to get caught out is to wash your hands of the whole process. It may take 10 minutes longer than telling your secretary to "get this translated", but if the right person spends those 10 minutes chatting to the translator you will probably save money and stress further down the line.

### **Finalise your text before starting the translation**

Tempting as it may be to get your translation project rolling as quickly as possible, having translators work from a draft-in-progress will almost always be more time-consuming – hence more expensive (and probably more frustrating) – than waiting for the final text to be ready. Worse yet: the more versions you have, the greater the margin for error. Sometimes it's unavoidable. If so, say so, and involve the translator at all stages.

### **A picture is worth a thousand words**

Take the burden off the words.

Judicious use of maps, pictograms and diagrams can be far more effective with international readers than literary ramblings and hyper-technical descriptions.

Your translator's job will be easier; there will be less risk of stumbling over the precise technical term. And your translation bill will probably be lower.

### **Think international from the start**

Avoid culture-bound clichés. References to your national sport may well fall flat. The same goes for literary/cultural metaphors. Tread carefully with references to parts of the human body, viewed differently by different cultures.

For written documents, don't box yourself in by linking your pitch to visuals that may not carry the same meaning outside your native country – forcing translators to resort to cumbersome wordplay and workarounds.

### **How much will it cost?**

How much time was spent producing the original? How good is the original? A translator is paid to reproduce this for you in another language. S/he will need at least as much time to do this to the same standard, if not better. A good translator will quickly be able to assess the quality of the original and this will affect how long it will take to produce a good translation.

What source text will the translator be expected to work with? Is it for external publication?

### **Have the final proof read by your translator**

Always. Even if you have a sound procedure in place, with reliable translation providers who know your company inside out, last-minute additions (headings, captions, word changes) by well-meaning non-linguists can sabotage an otherwise effective document.

### **Printing translator credits in your document costs nothing and**

encourages suppliers to deliver top-quality work. Note: translators may insist on signing off proofs to protect their reputations from last-minute revisions at your end. This is in everyone's best interest. Accept immediately.

*A financial institution in France trimmed a 500-page user manual down to 230 pages with the help of an expert translator, who identified redundancies and sections that did not apply to foreign clients – before starting the translation proper.*

*Think Ikea. 80% of instructions are pictures only; the remaining 20% require text to communicate safety aspects.*

*Remember, if you pay peanuts, you generally get monkeys*

*For the same reason, do not finalise changes to foreign texts by telephone. They are almost always misheard.*