

Getting your message across effectively in a foreign language

What do we mean by “translation”?

- A good translation is a text that is “fit-for-purpose” — i.e. it gets your message across effectively
- Good translation = successful communication
- A good translator is a good WRITER

What distinguishes a good translator?

- Being proactive
- Advising the client
- Adapting the content
- ***Taking responsibility*** for the translated text

***“The manager has
personally passed all
the water”***

Proactive /added-value translation
vs. “humble servant” mindset

Word-for-word translations = unfit
for purpose

Tips for best practice

At the client end:

- Clarify your audience and key messages
- Is the document pertinent or does it need to be re-thought for an international audience?
- Remove superfluous text or messages aimed at an internal audience / domestic readership

**Translation is not just
substituting words,
it is a bridge between
two cultures**

Think “international” from the outset

- Avoid clichés and specifically English cultural references
- If your catch line is linked to a visual, check that it is translatable
- Consult your translators at the design stage to make sure the concept will work in the foreign language(s)

Text or graphics?

- A pictogram, pie chart or bar chart for figures – easier to assimilate than a long list
- And the translation will cost less!

Plan ahead

- Inform the translator in advance of your production schedule (especially for long documents (press kit, website, reports))
 - Ensures availability of the translator
 - Avoids urgency surcharges

Finalise your text

- Only send the document for translation when you have the definitive version
 - Avoids confusion and errors
 - Avoids additional charges for updating the translation

Brief the translator fully

- Provide background info and reference documents (previous translations, in-house glossaries, press releases, product info, web site)
- Specify the purpose of the document and the audience (internal, general public, specialist etc.)
- Monolingual or bilingual document

How long does it take to do a translation?

- Ideally, assuming the translator is available to start immediately :
 - 24 hrs for a text of less than 1000 words (i.e. 2-3 A4 pages)
 - 48 hrs for 2000 words (4-6 A4 pages)
 - A week for 5000 words (15 pages)

Format

- Preferably supply the document to be translated as a Word, Excel or Powerpoint file, not a PDF
- Website translation: liaise with the web design agency and the translator to establish the most efficient format for providing the source text and returning the translated texts

Efficient translation management

- Send the translator the full text to be translated so s/he can provide an accurate quote
- Specify the deadline and any other imperatives
- Once you have received a quote, confirm your order in writing (initially by email followed by a purchase order)
- Any changes to the brief or additional elements will be subject to a further quote
- Be available to answer translator queries

- Meet your translators and tell them as much as possible about your business
- Invest the time to give feedback, good and bad
- Provide constructive criticism to enable the translator to gain a better understanding of your requirements
- Ensure translators are paid on time!

Receipt of the translation

- Contact the translator if you have any queries – don't make changes to the translation without checking, that's how errors are introduced
- For printed documents, schedule in proof-reading. This should be included in the translator's quote and the translator should be told when to expect the proofs. This is an absolutely essential part of the process

Layout

- Watch out for punctuation differences (e.g. French inverted commas « » with a space between the commas and the word, spaces before question marks and exclamation marks, lower case letters for days/months)
- Hyphenation is different in different languages (avoid if possible, but brief the typesetter)

Choosing a good translator

A good translator:

- works into his/her mother tongue
- must be familiar with the industry sector
- asks pertinent questions
- is a member of a professional association

Request a sample of a translator's work
(confidentiality permitting)

Try a new translator out on a short text and have it
assessed by contacts in the target country

Tips for good translation management

- Plan ahead
- Finalise the documents to be translated
- Communicate with your translators
- Provide background materials (glossaries, previously well-translated documents)
- Allow sufficient time
- Be available to answer questions
- Give feedback, positive and negative
- Consider the translator as an active partner in the process rather than as a machine

Tips for translators

- Be proactive, advise clients if a document needs adapting
- Be realistic about deadlines
- Ask for a full brief (purpose of document, target audience)
- Ask pertinent questions
- Visit the client, familiarise yourself with their operation/products
- Be clear about your pricing system, terms and conditions

Communicating

- Always acknowledge emails
- Translator receipt of document
- Client receipt of quote and send confirmation
- Translator acknowledge order
- Client acknowledge receipt of translation
- Sending large files — use file transfer

Best practice is all about good
communications between client
and translator