

# 10 Things To Remember When Translating Documents

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There are many ways you can help your translation projects go more smoothly. It's important to trust the translation provider you've chosen, and to communicate your needs clearly. With an attitude of cooperation and partnership, you can iron out details and come up with a system that works for both of you. Here's a list of ten fundamentals that will contribute to the process.

## **Give your translators enough time.**

Sometimes translation customers expect a 50,000-word translation by next Monday. Keep in mind that translators are professionals with many clients and human needs such as a good night's sleep. Although your translator wants to give you the best service, it's not always possible to jump on a project the minute it comes in the door. Translators use a great deal of creativity and research in their craft, and it takes time to do an accurate, well-written translation.

## **Use the right program for each type of document.**

Use publishing software efficiently. For lengthier technical manuals, choose a program such as FrameMaker that is designed to handle technical documents. Don't expect Word for Windows to be the cure-all program for any type of document, especially where multiple graphic images and complex formatting are required. Use a program like QuarkXPress for brochures, instead of FreeHand or Corel Draw, which weren't designed for typographic creativity.

By using appropriate publishing programs to create your English documents, you will make your translators' job easier. Translated text is much simpler to work with in a suitable program, especially in non-Roman languages.

## **Send well-organized and current electronic files.**

Here's another important point about electronic files. Be sure they are organized in proper file structures, in the current version, using functions such as styles, master pages and tables. If you're the person creating the document, resist the temptation to take shortcuts—such as manually tabbing and breaking text—instead of using automatic features and table functions. A properly formatted file is more efficient to work with, and will help keep your costs down.

One more tip—before you submit your file, check to make sure it matches the hard copy (very important).

## **Be willing to pay a reasonable amount for good service.**

Reach a cost agreement up front, and don't berate your translator for every small revision charge. Nothing is more disheartening to a translation provider than to make a super-human effort to meet a client's deadline, only to get a complaint about minor charges for last-minute alterations.

Recognize that translation is priced like any other professional service. It's based on the amount of time required to do the job by highly skilled professionals. Smart clients watch the bottom line, but don't continually pester their translator about cost if they're happy with the service.

### **Include metric units in your international documents.**

The metric system is not going away, yet many companies are still trying to ignore it. Include metric units in each and every document you write for international audiences.

### **Remember that your translator is not a mind reader.**

Send detailed instructions when a project is initiated. Explain what languages are required, exactly what is to be translated, the type of deliverable you need, when you hope to receive it back and in what form, how it is to be shipped and any other helpful details. Provide reference and background information where appropriate. It's better to err on the side of too much information, than too little.

### **Be accessible.**

Questions invariably arise during a translation project and the sooner they are answered, the faster the translation can progress. Respond quickly to e-mail, voice mail or fax messages. Provide a backup person if you're going on vacation.

### **Treat your translator as a business partner.**

Find a translator you can work with and build a relationship based on mutual respect. This is much more successful than going with the low bidder on every project, or playing one translation vendor against another. In the long run, a single-source relationship will reap many benefits, both tangible and intangible.

With your translator as a business partner, you will become a more effective international communicator. Your translation costs will go down if you welcome the translator's suggestions. Translation quality will improve as the translation team gains experience with your specific terminology. You will gain a different perspective on your documents. And you won't have to explain all of those little details to a new vendor each month.

### **Leave the revisions to the translators.**

Recognize your naiveté with other languages and respect your translator's expertise. When documents need to be revised, rely on your translator to make the changes. Never try to make the revisions yourself, even if you do have a really good French dictionary.

### **Say thank you.**

When your translator does a good job, don't forget to say thanks. Translators don't always expect a pat on the back for providing the services that you hired them to do. But when things go particularly well, it's nice to be thanked.

These are just a few of the things you can do to contribute to a good working relationship with your translator. Clear and frequent communication, organization, and long-term partnering give rise to a smoother process. The result is higher quality translation at more affordable prices, and less hassle for all.