

Communicate Virtually Anything

Communications solutions for virtually any organizational challenge

8 Tips on Preparing for Terrific Translations

The world is turning into one big market and more and more organizations are working in multiple languages; these 8 tips can help you end up with terrific translations.

1. Determine your translation audience

Who is going to end up using the translation? And are you going to need multiple languages? This will help define who you can use to accomplish the work. For a single language, you have lots of choices. If you require multiple languages, use a service that can meet all of your language needs. That will help provide a more consistent and higher quality translation across all language targets as well as being easier to manage from your side.

2. Create a complete list of everything you need translated

Define the scope of the translation project. Are there many parts, like for a software delivery with multiple documents and a complete user interface? Is this a white paper for a specific niche audience? Is this a presentation for a large corporate function? If there are many parts within the same project, list out all of the elements to see if they all need to be translated. Once you have the list you can also assign the priorities. Honestly as much as you want to believe, not everything can be the highest priority.

3. Leave enough time in the schedule to get a quality translation

Think about the schedule early on in the project. Translators require lead time and are typically “last in the food chain.” In most cases, translators cannot start their work until all other work is completed. In large projects, break the original language deliverables into as many smaller parts as possible so the translators can work in parallel with your other writing or publication efforts. As a rough estimate, translators will need from 25% to 50% of the time to get their work done as you needed to develop the original language deliverables.

4. Create a translators glossary of your company’s words and concepts

You have a niche for your company and typically a language of your own. You had better make sure the translator is clued into your company-speak. There are a couple of approaches a translator can take. A literal word for word translation, where **touch base** is translated as **the sensation of pressure on the skin and a foundation** or a contextual translation where **touch base** is translated as **establish communication**. A contextual translation requires prior knowledge. You really want to give your translator as much help as possible to understand to understand your words and concepts.

5. Know how your translator is going to work

Before the project starts, develop a process for working with your translator. You want the translator to ask questions – if they don't understand what you mean they cannot complete the work. And then as there are questions will the translator ask them one at a time, or group them in a document or spreadsheet or share site? Will there be more than one translator and if so, will they need to see the answers to all questions to make sure there is consistency? Who on your team will be answering questions? For technical projects, do you have a technical expert? Are you the SME (subject matter expert) with all the answers or a liaison to other experts on your team? You should work all of this out way before translation starts. To make sure everything works, run a test on a small piece of the project.

6. Prepare your texts in a translation-friendly way

A poorly constructed source document, user interface or presentation can make your translator's life miserable. So, be nice to your translator. Write in complete sentences. Stay away from passives. Stay away from slang. Keep the sentences compact. Keep away from noun strings (translators hate things like "underground mine worker safety protection procedures development"). If you are working on a user interface, space can be an issue. Some languages need more space than others. It works the other way, too. Some languages just don't shorten well so be careful of abbreviations.

7. Respond to translator questions in a timely manner

We talked about answering questions. Now that you have the questions, remember, that the translator is probably working against the clock in order for them to meet your deadlines. So you need to get them the answers they need. Quickly and accurately. In most cases, if you are the liaison, it will be up to you to get the correct resources in places and convince them to make the commitment to the translation.

8. Run a quality check on the completed translation

You worked in drafts – so once you have the first draft of the translation, run a quality check of the work. Have a native speaker do a review. The best work should read like it was originally written in the native speaker's language. Poor translations have a mechanical feel. Remember, the final deliverable will impact your business and your professional appearance in the organization or marketplace.