

Get off to a good start.

Well-prepared source documents speed up delivery time and improve translation quality.



Introduction

Many people who write documents and generate content are subject matter experts, not writers or editors. Language service providers play an important role in providing the skills that business people need to improve the clarity and accuracy of communication, as well as to ensure a document is properly prepared for translation.

When a translator receives inadequate quality source text it is difficult, time-consuming, and costly to translate. If the writing is poor and the text contains many errors, the translator will request that the document undergo source text proofreading, revision and editing. These improvements can be made by a professional language service provider.

In the business world, it is expected that documents will be written to meet a high standard of quality. In the translation world, it is equally important that source text documents meet a high standard of quality.



The aim of this document is to help you understand some of the best practices you can follow to help ensure text and other content can be well translated.

Quality starts at the source

TRANSLATION-FRIENDLY AUTHORIZING



In an ideal world, authors would generate content with consideration for future multilingual delivery requirements. They would follow the basic principles of clarity, comprehensibility, and consistency, while optimising the source text for processing with computer-aided translation memory systems.

In the real world, translation is often an afterthought, so optimisation of text for translation rarely happens and the ripple effect is higher costs and poor quality.

Knowing that early optimization of text is not likely to happen, what can you do with the source text you are given? Read on and you will find the answers.

CONTENT PREPARATION

Simplify language and style

Try and limit the use of complex ideas and words, foreign phrases, slang and any expressions that may not be familiar to the translator. Ensure each sentence communicates one key point, not multiple ideas. Write in the same style throughout the document and try not to personalize/stylize it. Communicate ideas directly and succinctly.

Define a formal style guide

No two people express themselves the same way, which is a challenge for companies trying to maintain a consistent voice and brand image. This is especially true in today's multimedia landscape. By outlining a style guide, you can set the standards and expectations for the writing and design of your documents, graphics, videos and websites. Style Guides often include guidelines for:

- Branding and graphics
- Grammar, syntax and tone
- Degree of language formality and technicality
- Exact usage of slogans, mission statements or other phrases (including pre-translated versions)
- Format of currencies, addresses and telephone numbers

Preparing source documents for translation

Consider a pre-translation service: source text editing

A professional language service provider can assign an editor who understands the translation process and have that person edit the source text to ensure it is easily and accurately translatable. The editor will fix errors in basic sentence structure, mixed tenses and also catch any grammar and spelling mistakes.

The editor performs other higher value tasks such as clarifying and adjusting a poorly developed argument by adjusting it in collaboration with the author. The editor sticks to basic editing tasks and would need permission to do any rewriting. The editor's focus is to ensure that the translator can focus on translation quality and not waste valuable time restructuring content.



Avoid idioms and obscure or culture-specific references

Idioms have many levels of meaning and require a translator to make a judgement call and spend extensive time researching appropriate meanings and finding equivalents in their native language. That's just not efficient.

Culture-specific references such as movie quotes like "I'll be back!", as uttered by Arnold Schwarzenegger in "The Terminator", may not be part of the culture in the target language. Once again, research is required to find a culturally suitable substitute or the reference has to be removed by the author, which will add more steps and cost to the translation process. Culture neutral is the way to go.



Prepare a complete hand-off

EFFICIENT + LESS RISK OF ERRORS = WELL-PACKAGED INFORMATION



As a rule-of-thumb, you should endeavour to compile all your source text, the style guide (if any), and reference materials into a single well organized package. That may sound like a lot of up-front work, but your project may not be able to go into production until everything has been provided.

If your project is large and needs to be provided to the language service provider in phases, then the same “send it complete” rule would apply for each phase. In this situation you and the language service provider should create a mutually agreeable timetable.

This also allows the translator to have visibility into the volume of work ahead so they can plan accordingly, or make arrangements to help ensure consistency.

SUPPLY TEXT IN READY-TO-GO FORMATS

Professional language service providers use advanced technologies called Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) systems to support and facilitate the translation process. As you would expect, there are certain document file formats that dominate the market and CAT systems work in tandem with them.

Your language service provider will return the translated files to you in the same format as the source text. Working with the same format avoids cross-platform reformatting errors.

Whenever possible, you should provide source text in the “ready-to-go” compatible formats for the following reasons:

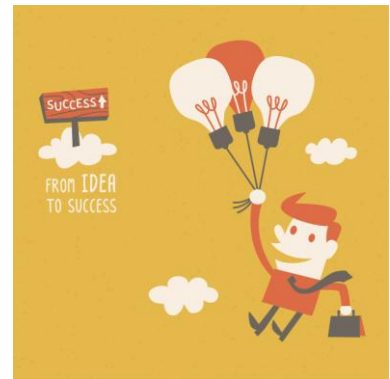
- Projects can get into production more quickly
- There’s less risk of error when re-formatting or other pre-translation work is required
- Lower overall cost for translation

Our most common filetypes:

Microsoft Word: doc, docm, docx	HTML File: htm, html	QuarkXPress file: qxd, qxt, qml
Microsoft Excel: xls, xlsx, xlsm	Rich Text Format: rtf	Pagemaker : P65
Microsoft PowerPoint: ppt, pptm, pptx	Portable Document Format: pdf	FrameMaker file: fm, mif
Adobe InDesign: inx, indd, IDML	Flash: fla, swf	Autocad file: dwg, dxf
XML: xml, tnx, tbx	Scripts: js, jsp, php, asp, pl, etc.	Custom: properties, ini, txt, etc.

Summary

1. Quality starts at the source. “Quality source text in” leads to “quality translation out”.
2. Generate translation-friendly source text whenever possible.
3. Source text editing helps ensure better communication and enables the translator to focus exclusively on the translation.
4. Provide complete and well-packaged information all at once to get your project into production quickly.
5. Ready-to-go file formats streamline the translation process and avoid the risk of errors associated with cross-platform reformatting.



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