

A Buyer's Guide For Translation Services

Insights into Translation



Introduction

There are many reasons why you may require translations for your business. In Canada you may have a project that legally requires you to distribute information in the two official languages, English and French. You may be communicating with multilingual communities, working with business partners overseas, or require a multilingual website.

When a translation need arises, what should you do? What information do you require to get a quote? What should you expect in terms of quality and price? How can you gain the confidence of others internally to get your budget approved?

This guide was prepared to help you make good decisions and enable you to purchase a quality translation at a reasonable price. The approach is based on four stages: gathering requirements, quotation, production and evaluation.

If you are relatively inexperienced at buying translations, this guide is perfect for you. If you are a highly experienced buyer, please contact us for a customized version.

Gathering requirements

The more accurately you can determine and communicate your needs, the easier it will be to identify the services that will best meet your requirements.

Below is a checklist of items that will help you determine the scope of your needs. We recommend you address these issues when communicating with a Translation Account Coordinator and ensure all critical points have been satisfactorily covered.

REQUIREMENTS CHECKLIST

1. High-level description of project (plus annual translation needs with new vendors)
2. Specific type of work to be done (translation, revision, copy edit, terminology research, layout, proofreading)
3. Editable source files (ideally—if actual files are not available, send a comparable sample file)
4. Source and target languages (English to French, French to Spanish, etc.)
5. The target location where translations will be read
6. Use of the finished product (printed document for internal use, advertising collateral, user guide, notarized translation, etc.)
7. Information about the target audience (to whom the text is addressed, i.e., consumers, clients, company employees)
8. Deadline (date by which a given document must be delivered)
9. Special requests
10. Name of person (if any) who will provide feedback on final translations

Quotation

This section will help you get the most out of the quotation process. Getting prices from vendors is easy; understanding what you are buying and knowing that you're getting the biggest bang for your buck is much harder.

You will need to understand when costs will be lower or higher. For example, you will *likely* pay more if the subject matter is specialized or if the job has to be completed on a rush basis. You will *definitely* pay more if starting fresh with an LSP (Language Service Provider), and not providing translation assets to reduce costs and maintain consistency.

GENERATING COST SAVINGS

The most common way to reduce costs is to develop a long-term relationship with your language service provider. By signing a formal "Letter of Agreement" you can immediately benefit from volume-discounted prices and specify service delivery parameters.

It is natural to feel uncomfortable about committing to an annual volume. If you have concerns, you can ask for a formal account review at the end of each year to analyze production data and choose between a "fixed price per word" model or a variable rate "level of similarity" model, which charges rates on each project based on full matches, partial matches and new words involved with each project.

If you work in a large company or are using multiple translators, you should consider centralizing your purchasing with a single vendor. A good LSP will educate you on how to reduce costs and will add value by streamlining administrative processes.

COMPARING CURRENT AND NEW VENDOR QUOTES

Your current vendor has access to your translation assets and, as a result, has a pricing advantage over a new vendor. To ensure a like-for-like pricing comparison, it is a good idea to ask all parties to provide per-word pricing sorted based on a variable rate per word match value (new words, full word matches and partial word matches). Comparing one-off project costs will not generate the intended ideal cost reductions you are hoping for, since whoever has done work for you in the past will likely always cost less than a new vendor.

TYPES OF RATES

There are four basic rates for translation services: per-word rates, variable per word rates, hourly rates, and flat (all-inclusive) rates. Please see our [Translation Pricing Model](#) white paper for more information.

Hourly rates are provided for such services as desktop publishing, transcription, proofreading and revision of other people's work, and other professional services such as IT development.

ASSESSING MULTIPLE NEW VENDOR QUOTES

Buying based simply on price is never a good idea. What you want to identify is value.

High value = quality processes + excellent customer service + experienced translators + competitive pricing + on-time delivery.

Be aware that quotes may vary depending on the number of steps and linguists priced into the translation process. Your quotes should be fairly close in price as the translation market is mature. If one quote is exceptionally high or low, it is a good idea to understand why. Something may or may not be getting done as you wish!

PROVIDING REFERENCE MATERIALS

To speed up production, achieve high-quality results and maintain consistency, you should provide to any new LSP you are considering working with all of the critical information they need to work effectively and reduce costs. Your current LSP may not require these items. Depending on your situation, you should supply all or just some of the items below:

Item	Description
Translation memory	This is a database of previous translations that enables the LSP to translate only the changed part of a text. It includes set phrases and pre-approved bodies of text, and will help to ensure your new and incumbent vendor(s) have the same scope of work to consider.
Glossaries and lexicons	These are required for terminology management. A glossary can be a simple list of unique or industry-related terms, product names and other specialized words.
Background materials	Brochures, documents, and reports may provide useful details.
Corporate standards guides	Standards guides provide information about your company's general style of expression and conventions for grammar, punctuation, and word usage. Often there are boilerplates for legal clauses or mission statements, etc.
Translation style guide	Style guides explain how text should be translated in each language and may cover dates, weights, conversion of measures, capitalization, forms of address, and other matters.

CALCULATING COSTS

Pricing is not as simple as you might think. There are a number of variables that affect pricing, such as language combination, repetitions, turnaround time, complexity, and volume. Your Translation Account Coordinator can explain the details to you.

Item	Description
Languages and translators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates depend on source and target language combinations. • Translators are typically retained in or near the target audience location; their rates vary accordingly.
Similarity between projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitions and partial matches reduce the translation rate per word. • A translation management system allows the translator to use content from previous translations. • Consistency, timelines and production costs are all improved.
Subject matter or text domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-technical, technical/legal/human resources and marketing material have different cost structures.
Quality Assurance – Stage 1 (after initial translation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of content and usage require one or all of the following steps, which each have different cost structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Revision ➢ Copy Editing ➢ Proofreading
Quality Assurance – Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the target text by a Client Side Reviewer • Errors are corrected at no cost while subjective changes are subject to change-request fees.
Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher volumes result in lower rates. • This is true on a cost-per-order and estimated-annual-budget basis.

PRICING FOR QUALITY

The highest quality translations follow the European Standard, which calls for two independent native-speaking professionals: one to produce the translation and a second to provide revision. Since there are multiple steps and people involved, costs are higher than the often lower-quality process where the same person translates and revises their own work.

VALUE OF CHOOSING A CERTIFIED VENDOR

There is no governing body over the translation industry, so how do you know which companies are most likely to provide you with quality translations? Leading translation companies will follow the world's highest standards and be transparent about their processes.

When quality translations are required, look for a company that offers the following certifications:

ISO 17100:2015

This international standard provides requirements for the core processes, resources, and other aspects necessary for the delivery of a quality translation service. It also provides the means by which a translation service provider (TSP) can demonstrate conformity of specified translation services and its capability to deliver that translation service. Compliance is ensured by recognized certification bodies through on-site audits.

CAN/CGSB-131.10-2017

Developed by the Canadian General Standards Board and approved by the Standards Council of Canada, this certification defines quality translation processes. It was strongly advocated for by l'Association de l'industrie de la langue/Language Industry Association (AILIA).

Production

Once you have given your LSP approval to proceed, you should explain to your Translation Account Coordinator how you like to work. Do you want to be contacted before the completed project is sent or shortly thereafter? Is email the best method to reach you, or can you be reached easily by phone? Set clear expectations for your LSP and they will be happy to oblige.

If your project will take several weeks to complete, how frequently would you like project updates? Do you require a written work-back schedule or project plan? Do you require any special reports delivered by a certain time each month?

Most importantly, you should plan to spot-check translations by asking for staggered deliveries; you don't have to wait for the project to be completed before you start your own quality assurance.

Evaluation

The people who know your corporate culture the best are you and your team members. Ideally, all translations should be reviewed by one company employee with the industry-specific knowledge.

Your LSP will value your feedback. Knowing your preferences and expectations will increase your level of satisfaction with each successive job. It is common that early in a new relationship the first few projects will require some changes to address stylistic preferences.

As a rule of thumb, if the source text was developed by a specialist (accountant, lawyer, technician), the translated document should be reviewed by a specialist.

Summary

1. Be an educated translation buyer
2. Understand and document your needs.
3. Obtain quotes for the same type of services.
4. Understand the LSP's quality processes.
5. Choose your LSP based on overall value and fit.
6. Allocate appropriate budget and resources.
7. Communicate your work style and reporting requirements.
8. Create style guides and glossaries.
9. Internally review translations.
10. Provide feedback to your LSP.

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