

Globally speaking: translation tips for international business

Ellen Boyar
Thomson Scientific
August 2005

Transport links and globalization of business have made the world a smaller place, but language barriers still exist. Translation of key information is essential for effective global operations — here we provide tips for ensuring both speed and accuracy in your translation process, and illustrate how our own translations team works with contract research organizations worldwide.

Connecting with the world

Translation of interoffice materials and intranets can bring employees of international organizations closer together — empowering those who are not native-speakers of the language used in the head office. Effective translation of information on external web sites and printed materials can also enhance the global presence of a company, bringing it closer to customers worldwide.

Not just across borders

The need for translation arises even within countries. For example, within the United States, the non-native-English speaking part of the population is rapidly growing. The US Census 2000 indicates that Hispanic Americans are the fastest growing demographic, and that Spanish is the second most common language. The Chinese and other Asian-language-speaking population of the United States is also rapidly increasing. In order to effectively communicate, you might think that all you need is someone who can translate your words into the same words in another language. Translation, however, is far more than that. The goal of translation is to not merely convey a series of words, but to convey a message. You want this message to be phrased in such a way as to be responsive to the cultural needs of the foreign-language-speaking audience.

Choosing a translation provider

The goal of translation is to accurately and appropriately communicate your “message” into the local language. This helps keep your business expectations the same as those you have when dealing with the native-language speaking population. But how do you find the foreign-language expert? What should you expect? What questions should you ask? And what should you be prepared to answer?

It is important to remember that speaking a language does not “translate” into writing a language, so it is advisable not to translate materials yourself. You run the risk of creating a

poor translation, with inaccurate or possibly even insulting text! In addition, external translators offer a second eye on the text, frequently highlighting points that need clarification.

People frequently request “certified” translators. In the United States, there is currently no certification process for translators, but the American Translators Association accredits translators through a voluntary testing process. A nonaccredited translator, however, can be as excellent as an accredited one.

If you decide to use a freelance translator, someone in your business will need to coordinate the workflow. In addition, you might incur extra charges for editing and proofreading, because most translators work with a team of freelancers to whom the translator’s work will pass for this phase of the process. An alternative is to work with a translation agency, who can take on the burden of selecting and supervising translators, project management, quality control, and ensuring consistency between documents that are being translated into many languages.

Budgeting

Globalization of your work will certainly impact on your budget. You may find it very useful to discuss your needs with a translation provider in the planning stages, because certain considerations can have a great impact on the final cost. For example:

- word counts will change when moving into another language
- the presence of graphics and requirement for use of desktop publishing techniques can add to the cost
- specialized subject matter can add to turnaround time and cost
- if you delay too long before consulting a translation provider, you may end up paying extra for rush processing of your translation order

Timescales

It is not unusual for companies to allocate inadequate time for translation, leading to rushed work, and text that might require intensive work to complete the adaptation to a foreign language. Early consultation with a translation provider can help you establish timelines and also control costs (as above).

Experienced professional translators can translate approximately 3000 words per day, but this does not include editing. It is critical to be aware that translators usually all have previous commitments, and your expectations should be reasonable—remember they are not sitting around waiting for your work! They are busy people who will work in 24-hour stretches if that is what is required to honor their commitments.

Preparing text for translation

Thinking globally when you create your original text can help streamline time and costs of the translation process. A translation expert can help you to localize text before it is translated: ensuring it is appropriate for the target country and educational level of the intended audience. Rethinking and rewriting text later in the translation process to address this problem can prove costly!

Some basic considerations for creating text for effective translation include:

- use uncomplicated sentence structure
- use few (if any) idiomatic or colloquial expressions
- review your text for possible ambiguous terms or phrases.

A translation provider may also work with you to develop a specialized vocabulary, so that translators can be aware of any terminology specific to your company.

Version control

Finalizing your text *before* the translation process starts is essential. Multiple text revisions can introduce major delays, and the more versions there are, the greater the potential for confusion! And of course, the more a document is revised, the more the translation will cost. Revising text in a foreign language requires much more than exchanging one word for a new one, or changing one sentence. The translator must be sure that everything that follows from that word or sentence follows the correct grammatical rules, such as gender and the use of the singular or plural.

Custom Information Services: partners in pharmaceutical communication

Thomson *Custom Information Services* (CIS), originally known as Medical Documentation Service, has been helping the pharmaceutical industry accurately communicate its message globally through translations for over 45 years. Our work with contract research organizations (CROs) focuses on the translation of:

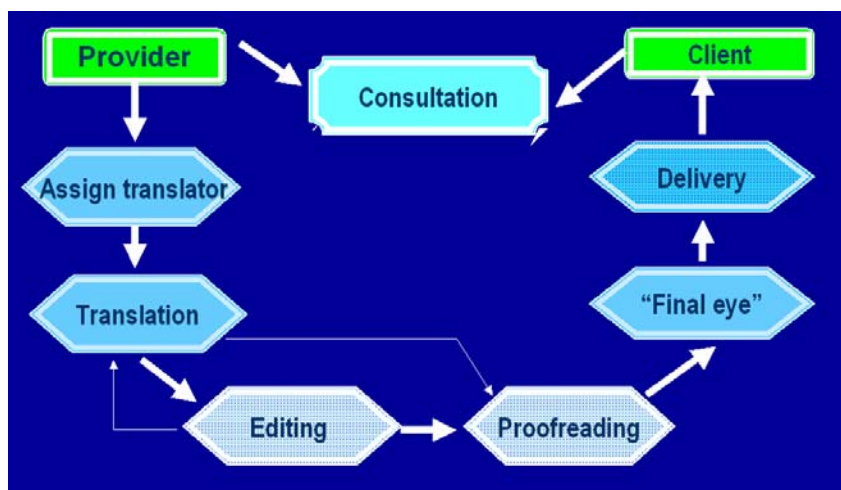
- Informed consents
- Patient diaries
- Case Report Forms

In many cases these translations will be for clinical trials held in multiple countries, with patient material required in multiple languages.

Our translation process

Our *Custom Information*

Services translation managers consult with our clients about their translation needs, ensuring that the project is managed smoothly from beginning to end. Each translation project is assigned to the appropriate translators. The translations are all edited by native-speaking, subject-matter specialists and, if



necessary, are sent back to the translator/s for revision. After proofing the entire document to ensure such things as the correct transcription of numbers, it is sent to the client in whatever format is chosen. The document is a mirror image of the original.

Quality translations by professionals

Custom Information Services only uses native speakers of the language into which the information is being translated. All have linguistic backgrounds, good knowledge of the culture, experience in translating medical/pharmaceutical material AND experience in accurately conveying the sense of technical terminology. Most have advanced degrees.

Back translations are provided, if requested, and are done by native English speakers who are fluent in the language being used. The translators carefully read the client's documents and identify areas needing clarification. They also check the content for expressions that don't translate well.

Making your choice

By using *Custom Information Services*, clients are working with a group that can focus attention on considerations that are critical for producing an accurate and timely document. The client receives multiple layers of quality control and consistency between documents translated into many languages. You can contact the team via Ellen Boyar (email ellen.boyar@thomson.com, telephone +1 215 386 0100 ext. 1331) or visit <http://scientific.thomson.com/products/cis/>

Translation companies can be powerful partners in conveying your organization's message accurately to your target population. When selecting such a company, be sure to select one that understands your subject matter, and can help you define your needs — before a single word is translated!