

The Definitive Guide to
Buying Translations



able translations

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WE ENABLE PEOPLE TO COMMUNICATE™



Able Translations Ltd.

5749 Coopers Avenue
Mississauga, ON Canada
L4Z 1R9

(800)-840-5370

info@abletranslations.com www.abletranslations.com

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Introduction

The internet is full of images of poorly translated material. These things tend to go viral. Generally, the images feature a sign written in a foreign language with a poorly translated English caption. Most of the time, these poor translations have little consequence to whomever had them translated and placed in public view. Other times however, major companies have failed to see how critical professional translation is. This has cost them both financially and in terms of their reputation. Companies like Clairol, Coors, Pepsi, and Colgate have all fallen victim to oversights in the translation of their slogans. These companies, having spent large sums of money, unleashed poorly translated marketing campaigns without asking the proper questions.

Beyond maintaining brand integrity, professional translation serves several high-level functions. Most importantly, professional translation serves to disseminate knowledge and information cross-culturally. This opens up lines of communication between multiple cultures, spreads ideas, and ultimately helps us open new markets. This can only be done, however, if the translation is of the highest quality and accuracy.

In order to source the highest quality translation for your company, a number of considerations need to be made. This document will lead you through the translation process as well as the types of questions you should be asking (and your supplier should be able to answer).

For your convenience, a cheat sheet is available on the final page of this document.

Understanding the Process

The translation process can seem a little daunting when you first read about it. It isn't critical that you know every detail but it is important that your supplier does. The last thing you need is for your supplier to be skipping pivotal steps in the process without your knowledge and consent. There are times where certain steps in the process may not be necessary for your project. Removing these steps can save you time and money but that is a decision you as the consumer make. But without knowledge of the process, you can't be empowered to make these decisions.

Understanding Your Quote

When purchasing translations, the first thing you'll want to do is submit your documents for a full quotation. This gives the supplier the opportunity to find you the best suited language professional for your project. This also gives you the opportunity to see how much the project will cost you before you commit to proceeding with the translation of your document. Asking the right questions during the quotation process is critical to getting the product that you expect. Suppliers need to be flexible in order to provide you with a customizable solution that meets your needs.

Most translation companies will have an online quote submission form that allows you to fill in your contact details and provide background information on the document that needs to be translated. The form will also have a file upload option. When filling out this form, ensure that you have filled out every field.

After submitting the quote, a company representative will either email or call you to verify that the information is correct and they will obtain additional details about the project. This is done in order to help a project associate source the perfect translator for your project. This phone call is the perfect opportunity to let the translation company know exactly what you're looking for in terms of quality and price.

Between the time that you submit a quote and the quote is generated and sent to you, a project associate will be working with a number of language professionals to find you the most qualified and best priced translator to complete your project. A project associate is an employee of the translation company that functions as an intermediary between you and the translator that works on your project. They are responsible for managing your project from start to finish and they ensure that each project meets company standards and is completed as quickly as possible.

More than likely, you will receive a complete quote via email. This quote will outline the type of project, the number of words in the document, and the final price. Depending on the complexity of your project, the project associate may also suggest that you work with their desktop publishing department in order to format the translation. This generally applies to documents that have a visual component like graphics, tables, or charts. For plain text translation, desktop publishing is generally not required. Having a desktop publishing component will increase the final price of your project. It is recommended that you budget for desktop publishing but if you feel it is unnecessary ask to proceed with the translation but not the desktop publishing.

After accepting the quotation, the project associate will give the green light to the translator who is assigned to your project.

Sourcing the Right Translator

As mentioned before, one of the critical tasks of your project associate is to source the perfect translator for your job. Not all translators are created equal so arming yourself with this knowledge can help you decide which translation company is best suited for your project.

Translators vary in terms of specialties and qualifications. Top translation companies source from very talented pools of translators. These translators will have certifications and extensive subject knowledge. This accounts for a significant portion of the price variation in the market. Lower end translation companies may charge less on a per word basis because they do not source professional translators.

Let me give you an example. The legal sector has specific terminology. The documents are often dense and complex. The best translator for these types of documents is a legal translator, of course. They have the knowledge base required to translate complex legal jargon and their priority is accuracy. They understand that these documents may be used in legal proceedings where correctness is critical. Translating a legal document using a legal translator will increase the cost of the project but it will decrease risk and liability owed to improper translation. A law firm might be able to find a cheaper translation source by using a translator that doesn't have a legal background but they will be exposing themselves to significant risk. This example equally applies to numerous sectors including, but not limited to: medical, manufacturing, safety, government, and finance.

Working with the Document

Professional translation companies tend to use project management software when working with your document. When your files are received, a workflow is established by the project associate and each step is followed until the project is completed and delivered. The most basic of projects will typically follow this type of workflow:

- Your files are received and prepared by the project associate
- The prepared files are uploaded to our secure server
- The assigned translator works with the uploaded files
- Once translated, the files are re-uploaded to the secure server
- A second language professional proofreads your document for accuracy and continuity
- The proofread and revised document is uploaded to the secure server
- The final document is verified and delivered to you; the client.

Each of these steps needs to be completed before the next step can start. Your project is constantly monitored from the time the files are received to the time they are delivered back to you. Of course, projects can be far more complex than this. More complex projects might require several translators, each speaking a different language as well as a proofreader in each language combination.

Questions to Ask Yourself before Buying

Have you ever rushed out to buy something without thinking about it? You get this sudden urge to make a purchase that will satisfy a need, you go get it, bring it home, and find out it isn't exactly what you expected? Purchasing a translation can go the same way. Often, it results in a product that is of poor quality and doesn't do what you need it to do. Before you commit to a project, ask yourself the following questions. Share your thoughts with the translation company you choose to work with because they should be able to tailor a solution to your needs.

What Type of Document Is It?

Knowing what type of document you're translating is an important first step. Is it marketing material? A legal deposition? A safety manual? A medical report? Every document requires specific considerations. One of the most important considerations is legal risk. If the document is public-facing or contains information that pertains to the public, safety, the law, or health, legal risk may be a factor that needs to be considered. In cases where legal culpability is a factor, no expense should be spared in making sure the document is translated with a high degree of accuracy. One dollar spent on translation might be worth one-thousand in a court of law.

Who Is the Document For? (Internal vs External Document)

Of course, it is recommended that you always purchase the highest quality translation available. This can help you mitigate risk by avoiding costly errors. But, depending on who the document is for, you might choose to forgo some of the steps in the translation process in order to get a lower price. This is something you need to discuss with your translation provider.

If the document is for internal use only and doesn't contain any complex information, you might opt for a less comprehensive translation. For example, you might choose a machine translation (a translation performed by software) that is revised and edited for accuracy by a professional translator. If the document is fairly complex but price is still the most important factor, you might choose to forgo proofreading by a second translator. However, if the document is critical to the operation of your company, you will want the document to go through every step in the translation process. In this case, price is not nearly as important as quality.

If the document is public-facing (marketing material, websites, software, financial reports, legal documents, etc), it is recommended that you budget for a higher priced translation. Poorly translated public-facing documents can be a source of embarrassment, misinformation, and legal risk for your organization. In the case of external documents, quality is absolutely vital.

Is Price More Important Than Quality

Have you ever heard the fast, good, cheap, pricing method before? I'll explain it quickly:

- If you want something fast and good, it won't be cheap
- If you want something good and cheap, it won't be fast
- If you want something fast and cheap, it won't be good

Before you commit to a translation project, you need to decide which one of those combinations is important to you. Most translation agencies are flexible and they should be able to offer you a solution in any one of those categories.

In the end, you ask yourself this question because if getting a good price is more important than quality, you need to let the translation agency know. They should be able to get you a better price if you want to skip steps in the translation process. But, before you make that decision, re-ask yourself "what type of document is this" and "who is this document for".

What to Look For In a Supplier

If you've done a bit of searching on the internet, you'll likely have noticed that there are a number of translation companies that you can work with. Some companies are mid or large sized companies and some are "Mom and Pop shops". There are advantages at each level but there are some pieces of information you need to glean before you choose which company you'd like to submit a quote to.

Industry Position

Every company will have a different position in the industry. Some companies strive to provide the highest quality translations but they charge a premium. Some companies offer discounted products but their service is below par. Beyond this, each company will be distinct in their operating tenure, industry participation, and standards compliance.

When choosing a language service provider, choose a company that has a long service history, is a member of various translation industry associations and certifications (CAN/CGSB, LICS, ATA, and the like), and is evaluated by a third-party standards association like the ISO (International Organization for Standardization).

Availability

Problems can occur at anytime night or day, weekday or weekend. When choosing a translation supplier, choose one that is available 24/7 to serve your needs. This is the standard in the industry but ensure that the company you choose to work with has that kind of availability.

Flexibility

Flexibility is a quality that often goes unevaluated when choosing a translation company. Sometimes, things are really straightforward. Sometimes they aren't. When things get complex and you need a tailored solution, your translation provider needs to be able to roll with the punches. When speaking with a representative from the company, ask them about their flexibility. Can they change their process depending on your needs? Can they accommodate rush projects? Do they have flexible payment options (debit, credit, online payment)?

These are things you'll want to know.

Knowledgeable

Knowledge of the translation world seems like it would be first on the list because it is clearly the most important. But, it is also a given. Of course you'll want to know that the company you choose knows the ins and outs of translation. If you feel like the company lacks the knowledge to complete your project, move on. Even if the price is fantastic, find another provider. In the long-run, it will save you time and money. You see, the more often you use the same provider, the lower the price can get. Most clients build long term relationships with their translation service providers. Do you really want to get stuck in a dysfunctional relationship just because they offered you a good price?

Questions to Ask Your Supplier before Buying

Are They Insured?

You can purchase your translations from a freelance translator. Companies may opt to go this route to save money. Something they don't consider is the level of insurance a freelancer might have to cover any risk associated with errors and omissions as well as general liability. Sadly, freelancers aren't the only providers that have inadequate insurance. Some translation companies forgo coverage and pass that saving on to the consumer but they are also passing on a great deal of risk. When speaking with a representative from the translation company of your choosing, ask them to make sure they have coverage for errors and omissions as well as general liability.

Are They ISO Compliant?

The International Organization for Standardization is the world's largest, most comprehensive volunteer standards developer. Their research and development of standard practices help companies create a culture of constant improvement and customer service. Companies that comply with these standards are audited every year to ensure continued compliance.

When choosing a translation provider, ask them if they are ISO certified. Those that are certified are likely to provide you with the highest quality products and the most professional service.

Do They Belong to Industry Professional Groups and Associations?

There are many translation industry professional groups and associations that serve to monitor, improve, and advocate. They research and implement industry best practices as well as create meaningful change in the sector to increase the effectiveness of the industry. Some examples of associations include: Association of Canadian Corporations in Translation and Interpretation, Association of Language Companies, and Canada's Language Industry Association.

Participation in these industries is voluntary but it shows a commitment to standards of practice, improvement in quality, as well as the advancement of the industry as a whole.

Have They Worked with Other Clients in Your Industry?

Translation agencies usually get a good mix of clients from many different industries but it is still essential that you ask if they have done work in your industry before, especially if you work in a technical field with plenty of sector specific jargon like law, medical, mining, or manufacturing.

Generally, a company that has done work in your sector, not only has an understanding of the type of document you need translated, but also the types of ancillary services that are commonly requested in your industry.

For example, legal documents often require certification by the translator. If you have never worked with a translation company before, you may not know that this is standard practice but the provider you choose to work with should know what is expected in your industry.

Do They Have Translation Memory Available?

Translation Memory (or TM for short), is software that collects frequently used terms from your previously translated documents and applies their translation in new documents. This saves your money.

If you frequently translate documents, make sure you choose a company that uses translation memory. It can save you a lot over the long run. This is another reason why it pays to find the right provider and stick with them by developing a long-term relationship.

Let Me Save You Some Time

Able Translations Ltd. is a full-service translation provider with a broad range of industry experience. Our clients range from tier one corporations like Walmart and Honda to Government organizations at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels and everything in between. We specialize in high quality, reliable, and risk-free translations. We are insured for errors and omissions as well as general liability. Able Translations Ltd. is certified by many leading industry organizations as well as ISO 9001:2008 certified. We are active in the top language industry associations.

Able Translations Ltd. uses state-of-the-art technology, including but not limited to translation memory, and industry-leading processes to ensure that your project is completed on-time and in a way that exceeds your expectations.

We are available to take your call 24/7.

Get your project started with us today by calling a company representative at (800)-840-5370 or email us at info@abletranslations.com.

Final Thoughts

Choosing a translation company doesn't have to be a complex task. Arming yourself with this information should make it a lot easier. Just use the following cheat sheet when speaking to a company representative so that you can be sure you've got all the information you need to make a decision.

Cheat Sheet

Question	Notes
Are You Insured for Errors and Omissions as well as General Liability?	
Are You ISO Compliant?	
Do You Belong to Any Professional Associations?	
Have You Done Work in My Industry in the Past?	
Do You Have Translation Memory Software?	

Name of Company Representative:

Phone Number and Extension:

Email:

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Prepared for:

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