



# Planning Your Translation Project

Crafting the perfect RFPs or RFIs to put translation providers on a level playing field



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## Introduction

Translating software, websites or documents is a complex process that requires the real-world expertise of translation teams – linguists, engineers and project managers. For a business stepping into the field, a base-level understanding of translation pitfalls and shortcuts is an immense help when planning projects and creating a Request for Proposals (RFP) or Request for Information (RFI).

As you start gathering information we suggest keeping a few insider tips in mind, tips that can save time and money – and help to ensure a smooth running project that makes the most of your partnership with a translation provider.

**This white paper will help you:**

- Understand the nuts and bolts of translation
- Be an informed participant in the selection process
- Know what to expect and what to avoid
- Ask questions that will help you choose the right partner for your needs

## About the Translation Industry

Translation agencies run the gamut from large, multi-million dollar corporations to small mom-and-pop shops. A multi-language vendor (MLV) will be able to handle a variety of tasks related to your project, like desktop publishing, web formatting and software testing. A single-language vendor (SLV), who specializes only in one language and perhaps a single type of translation or subject matter, may be a better fit. Although human translators are traditionally preferred by most agencies, an automated machine translation solution may also be a consideration. Knowledge of your needs, combined with a bit of research on the types of translation agencies available to you, will help you compare what services different companies will offer and who will be your ideal partner.

## How Translation Happens

Behind every polished document, landing page, software application, user interface, help system or Flash presentation is a series of source files that store the content being displayed in its most basic form. In the case of most websites and software, and in many cases for documentation, these source files are not always visible to the end user. However, these base files are exactly what your provider will require in order to scope, or determine, the translation effort involved. Typically, this



process is divided into scoping the number of files to be stripped down and analyzed, the number of words to be translated, and the number of hours needed to rebuild the translated files and ensure they behave like the English. The more detail you can provide on the source files you have, the more accurate your potential translation provider's quote will be.

That said, at the RFP/RFI stage, you may not be interested in a completely accurate quote. At the very minimum, a rough quote can usually be provided with an idea of the wordcount and the file formats involved. Your translation provider will ask some basic questions and supply a list of assumptions to help provide missing but necessary details. This quote and the assumptions will be subject to change once source files are available.

### **Unique language challenges**

Your choice of language will have an effect on the translation effort involved. Certain languages, such as German, Spanish and Russian, will result in a net increase in content compared to the English version. Conversely, Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.) will shrink in translation, leaving more space available on the page or screen. In addition, the above-mentioned Asian languages require two bytes per character rather than the standard one byte, which can result in your translated software weighing in at least twice the size of its English counterpart. Arabic and Hebrew present unique challenges as they are bi-directional, meaning the text reads right-to-left while numbers read left-to-right. Not only does this mean additional effort in desktop publishing, but the publishing software or browser you will use to display the text must support bi-directional languages and will need to be configured to properly display the translated content. These are very common occurrences which your provider will anticipate once languages and file formats are known.

If you use a content management system (CMS), you will want to ensure that it can recognize and effectively parse non-English characters, and different number, date and time formats. Again, this is a common issue, and your agency may be able to work with you to identify and prepare for these or similar issues before translation begins.

Because translated content can look and behave much differently than the English, your translation provider may recommend that they view the translated content in its final format, often offering an in-depth quality assurance pass on the version your users will see. This will help capture and address any corruptions that may have taken place after your translated files were delivered to you for further processing.



## Utilizing style guides and glossaries

Many industries have specific terminology relating to their product or service, and you may prefer a certain style or tone in your messaging. While this is commonly noted during translation and a translator will take care to reproduce a messaging style as accurately as possible, the development of a glossary or style guide before starting work will help ensure that your translation provider understands and reproduces your preferences throughout the translated material.

## Setting the pace

Accurate preparation and execution of any translation project takes time. Your translation team will be made up of full-time professionals who usually work standard business hours in their time zone, and your potential translation partner can provide an ideal schedule for your project according to the project specifications. In cases where you have a pre-defined schedule, turnaround times can be adjusted by adding more resources (such as the number of translators working on your project), refining tasks (such as the level of detail in a post-translation quality assurance pass) and performing tasks in parallel (such as translating your content while your in-country reviewers' are performing their glossary review) to meet your needs. While accelerating a project's lifecycle can mean meeting your schedule, it can also present a greater risk for challenges down the line. Discuss the risks up front with your provider to see if steps can be taken to reduce or manage them. Just as you don't want to deal with receiving badly done work, your potential agency does not want to provide you with material that you cannot use.

There is a spectrum of solutions to choose from for localization. At one end is a totally in-house localization operation while at the other is a completely outsourced, turnkey model using a Localization Service Provider (LSP). In-house provides maximum control while outsourced offers maximum flexibility. For the right conditions, both solutions can provide high value and high quality but which works best is a function of volume, workload stability and a company's appetite for scaling internal teams. With enough volume, stable demand and a long-term commitment to the business model, an in-house model might be the right approach. However, low or variable needs are addressed with an outsourced model. Almost all companies will have some elements of both. Even companies with the greatest demand such as GE, Google, Microsoft and IBM outsource most of their localization. In addition to the economics of outsourcing to specialized firms, companies often cite the benefit of keeping a cost center that is outside of their core business as a flexible on-demand service.



## Writing your RFP/RFI

After you have identified the content or material that needs translation and the languages required, the next steps in writing your RFP/RFI include:

1. **Identifying a rough timeline and a budget.** Using the costs and time involved to create your English version can be a good starting point. Although it may seem more logical to expect a budget and schedule as part of the RFI/RFP response, translation can be a complex process and many factors are taken into consideration when developing a solution. Not every translation agency will construct the same project workflow or assume the same service offerings, and as a result, your responses may vary considerably. Being able to put schedule and financial boundaries around your project will help guide most projects along similar lines.
2. **Describing your motivations for translation.** Far from being a one-size-fits-all type of resource, most translators have individual specialties and experience with certain topics, and your translation agency will select the best possible resources for your content type. Knowing your intended audience and purpose will help focus the search for the right resource, or weed out resources that are obviously not suitable.
3. **Explaining your in-house capabilities and how best to work with you.** Many translation agencies offer a range of services related to your translated project, including desktop publishing, software testing, and website maintenance, among others. Some can provide low-touch, automated or quasi-automated solutions as well. Explain the level of partnership you are looking for and ask if your potential provider can offer any related services, or outline what services you can provide that are not needed.
4. **Mentioning previous translation experiences, if applicable.** If you have previously translated content that you are pleased with, many agencies can work with you to leverage existing content into the proposed workflow to ensure consistency of voice and terminology. Likewise, if previous translation attempts did not go as well as they could have, explain what happened and why.
5. **Being specific about your needs and avoiding general, open-ended questions.** As you will see below, translation agencies have many different resources at their disposal and will be actively involved in tailoring their capabilities to meet your requirements. In order to avoid wasting time with information you do not need, ask specific questions related to your project instead of relying on freeform answers to provide more information.



## Details to include in your RFP/RFI

Many translation agencies rely on freelance, in-country translators for the translation work to ensure the most current linguistic knowledge possible. Depending on the size of the company, related tasks may be performed in-house, offshore or delegated to trusted partners. Your translation agency will likely make use of electronic communication and file-sharing tools to produce your project. If establishing relationships between your in-country staff and the linguists or between your and your partner's engineers is important to you, ask where their resources are physically located. Otherwise, ask your translation provider to explain their communication and file management processes. You may find that communication is faster and easier with someone across an ocean than across a state line, especially if the agency has a relationship in place with a particular group of people.

Most translation providers have a list of commonly-requested languages, and many languages, such as Asian or Western European languages, are more commonly produced than others. However, if a language is not listed in a particular agency's repertoire, they can usually recruit and qualify a suitable resource for your project. If you require certain dialects or regional variations, do not hesitate to communicate this within your RFP/RFI. Your agency will do its best to accommodate you.

## Finding the right resources

Your potential agency will be invested in finding the right resource for your project. If you require expertise with a certain subject matter or knowledge of a tool or application, this can usually be provided or sourced. Many agencies maintain a large pool of linguists and work with various tools and applications for this very reason. It is generally better to ask for a specific set of criteria rather than leaving this to a general, open question; e.g. "Do you have the capabilities to work with FrameMaker and provide print-ready PDFs?" is generally a better option than "Describe your desktop publishing capabilities," which may lead to a lot of information that is not relevant to your specific project.

Quality is important and your translation agency will go to great lengths to coordinate complex projects and multiple resources flawlessly. Due to the variety of quality control systems available and their relevance to particular fields, your potential agency may have a system in place already.



Ask your potential provider how they maintain control over quality, and request details that are important to you.

## Summary

Keeping these facts in mind will not only make your RFP/RFI process easier and more efficient for you, but will also show your translation agency that you are knowledgeable about their industry and invested in helping them help you succeed with your project.

## About Acclaro

Acclaro is an international translation and localization firm that helps the world's leading brands succeed across cultures. With its global headquarters in New York and offices and affiliates in Boston, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Bangkok and Paris, the agency translates websites, marketing campaigns, documents and software, giving clients an authentic voice in key language markets.

Since its founding in 2002 Acclaro has grown rapidly while maintaining a customized, personal approach. Acclaro's global team of technical and linguistic experts has served as a trusted partner to industry leaders and global businesses.

For more information, please visit [www.acclaro.com](http://www.acclaro.com).

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