

Translating Your Ideas...

PBSS's golden rules for getting the best translation possible

“My daughter's got GCSE French - she can translate my letter for me. I'm not paying a specialist!”

Would that same business person ask somebody with GCSE maths to do their accounts? Of course not!

What can you expect a qualified translator to be like? Like other professionals, career translators have a long training. After a first degree, many study for a post-graduate qualification, work in translation companies, export companies (overseas or in the UK), the Diplomatic or other Government service or the EU for several years and usually join either the Institute of Linguists (IOL) or the Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI).

Today, translators are no longer “talking dictionaries on legs”; their role has broadened significantly to include information gathering, market research, multi-lingual copy-writing, proof-reading and editing as well the core skills of general and technical translation. A particularly active growth area is multi-lingual web site writing, translation and editing.

Surely it can all be done by pressing a button on a keyboard? One translation myth is that ‘all you need to do is to press a button and the translation programme on the computer does it’. Sorry, not true. Professional translation tools, particularly translation memory, have made significant advances in recent years, but they remain ‘helpers’ rather than ‘doers’.

Some free and commercially available software can wring the gist of a text, but there's no way that you can enclose it as the operation instructions for your widget or as a brochure for your beautiful hotel.

One lovely translation of a ‘hydraulic ram’ came out of a (paid for!) translation program as ‘wet sheep’; another rendered ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ as ‘Blind drunk’. You have been warned!

Why not just use English? Using the customer's own language is essential today. It leads to better communication, avoids misunderstandings, establishes a rapport and creates a positive image for you, your company and arguably the UK.

At PBSS we always talk a project through with clients just to make sure what they actually need from us. Sometimes they don't realise the scale or importance of what they are proposing, other times they are blissfully unaware of the cultural problems that they can cause by insisting on communicating only in English.

The nitty-gritty - a brief guide to buying translations:

1. Work out your requirements - why do you need your materials translated? Is it for your information, for publication or for legal purposes?
2. Plan ahead! When you are drafting the original document in your own language consider what languages, what deadline you have? Be realistic!
3. Ask the translators if they have done this type of work before - do they know the market, the technical area? Do they belong to a professional institute?
4. Ensure the translator is translating into his/her native language.
5. Prepare a briefing pack of information on your business, any corporate terms, logos, job titles, departments, specialist goods or services you provide.
6. Be prepared to liaise with the translator, to review drafts, to talk through any problems that may arise. Designate a named person in your business to be the contact point - preferably the person who will be dealing with the subject matter, not just somebody who will ‘take messages’.

Before committing yourself:

1. Clarify how the translation is to be delivered - email, fax, disk, hard copy, in what format and by what time.
2. Clarify charges, including technical supplements, research and stationery costs, notarising and travel costs. Translations are usually charged a basic £x per 100 or 1000 words plus any supplements.

Be aware:

Translators do not take kindly to jobs being cancelled. Apart from the 'bad practice' aspect, they may well have started researching the subject, collecting vocabularies, etc. A fee will usually be charged in these cases.

Not an exhaustive or even prescriptive list, but following it will ensure that you have a 'beautiful relationship' with your translation provider and not a 'breakdown in communication.'

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