

# How do you know what you're getting if you can't read what you got?

In our globalized world, almost everyone is confronted with the need to overcome some type of language barrier. Businesses often hit this barrier when looking to expand the reach of their current customer base. With more than 1.9 billion Internet users and more than five billion mobile subscribers, there are millions of new customers just waiting to be reached by the right business, individual or product. The problem is that they speak hundreds of different languages.

In order to communicate to your customers successfully, your message must mean the same thing to them in their language as it means to you in your language. It must be funny, motivating or concise to them in the same way that it is funny, motivating or concise to you. It's a task that is not easily accomplished and requires more than the mere transcription of words into their foreign counterparts. On a general level, a debate currently rages in the translation world between machine-generated and human-generated translation. Though the debate continues, it is always important to remember that a good translation will make you competitive in a tough new market, but a bad translation could take you out of the running altogether. Machine translation can be more economical upfront, but the question of quality looms. Human translation provides higher quality, though naturally at a higher cost. As a customer, you want value. In this article, I will explain what to look for to ensure that you get what you pay for.

I will give a brief explanation of the terms: language service provider (LSP), translation, interpretation and localization. I will also provide some important tips that you may want to pay attention to when it is time to take your message to a broader market.

A language service provider specializes in taking a text, data or voice message from a source language and accurately conveying that message in a target language. A good LSP will have access to translation and project management tools, as well as a personal database of tested and tried translators and interpreters who have a strong track record of providing quality translations/interpretations by clearly defined deadlines. These linguists will have access to translation tools to ensure consistent translation. The right translation tools are critical because they allow a translator to change the words in a document without changing formatting or coding, thus maintaining the document's integrity. This means that what you get back will have the same professional look that it had when you sent it out.

A good LSP will also assign a project manager who is easily accessible and can answer your questions and meet your needs. This manager will lead linguistic teams of up to three professionals per language who will ensure that your information is translated accurately and promptly.

A good LSP will always use translators and interpreters who are strong communicators in their native language, which will also be the target language for translation or interpretation. In addition to having more experience, they know the culture and understand better the many meanings and connotations one word can have.

Translation refers to the transfer of writ-

ten text from a source language into a target language. Translation in its most basic form requires little more than an understanding of two languages (sometimes referred to as a language pair), but how many thriving businesses are looking to be understood or viewed as basic? Quality translation requires much more. It requires most of all the ability to communicate at a professional level in a target language. Even after an able translator has finished translating, the work is not complete. A good LSP will often offer two proofreading steps to gain approval from additional sources. If your LSP doesn't offer this from the get go, you should get going.

Interpretation is different from translation. It is the transfer of speech from a source language into a target language. There are two forms: consecutive and simultaneous. Consecutive interpretation is when the speaker stops every couple of minutes to allow the interpreter to express the message. Simultaneous interpretation means that the interpreter expresses one message while simultaneously hearing the next. This language service is often an intense, on the spot, one-shot opportunity that is either realized or regretted. A good interpreter will have an extensive vocabulary in both languages to express ideas concisely and clearly.

Localization is an often complex process that involves translation and sometimes interpretation, and requires changing messages from one language to another as well as imagery and delivery method to fit in with the common practices of a specific region. Localization is complicated and is most often applied to websites, apps, software and marketing materials. In order to be successful, localization must take many details into account such as language, dialect, history, humor, culture, etc.

One of the best steps that any company can take to ensure a smooth localization process is to plan ahead. Any time you create a complex manual, website, software or mobile app, it is important to consider not only your immediate customers but also your future customers in areas that you would sometime like to expand to. By formatting materials with expansion in mind, companies can save time and money when they want to localize those materials. One basic but very important thing to take into account is the number and length of words used in different languages to describe the same thing. For example, Spanish often requires more words than English to say the same thing and many German words have more characters than their English counterparts. Thus, text boxes and pages may need to accommodate more characters. Sufficient free space would need to be added to eliminate clutter. The main point is that companies benefit by looking long-term when considering what they would like to do with their materials.

As you look to broaden your market, be sure to ask your language provider just exactly what you are paying for. There is valuable growth potential when LSP's are priced right!

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