



The Definitive Guide to Buying Translation Services

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Chapter 1

Introduction



We understand that making the decision to attack overseas markets can be as stressful as it is exciting!

As such, we've put together this guide to help you get the best from your translation agency and to make your transition into doing business overseas as straightforward as possible.

As with many industries, translation services has its own terminology and jargon, along with a multitude of different options to assess before achieving your translation goal.

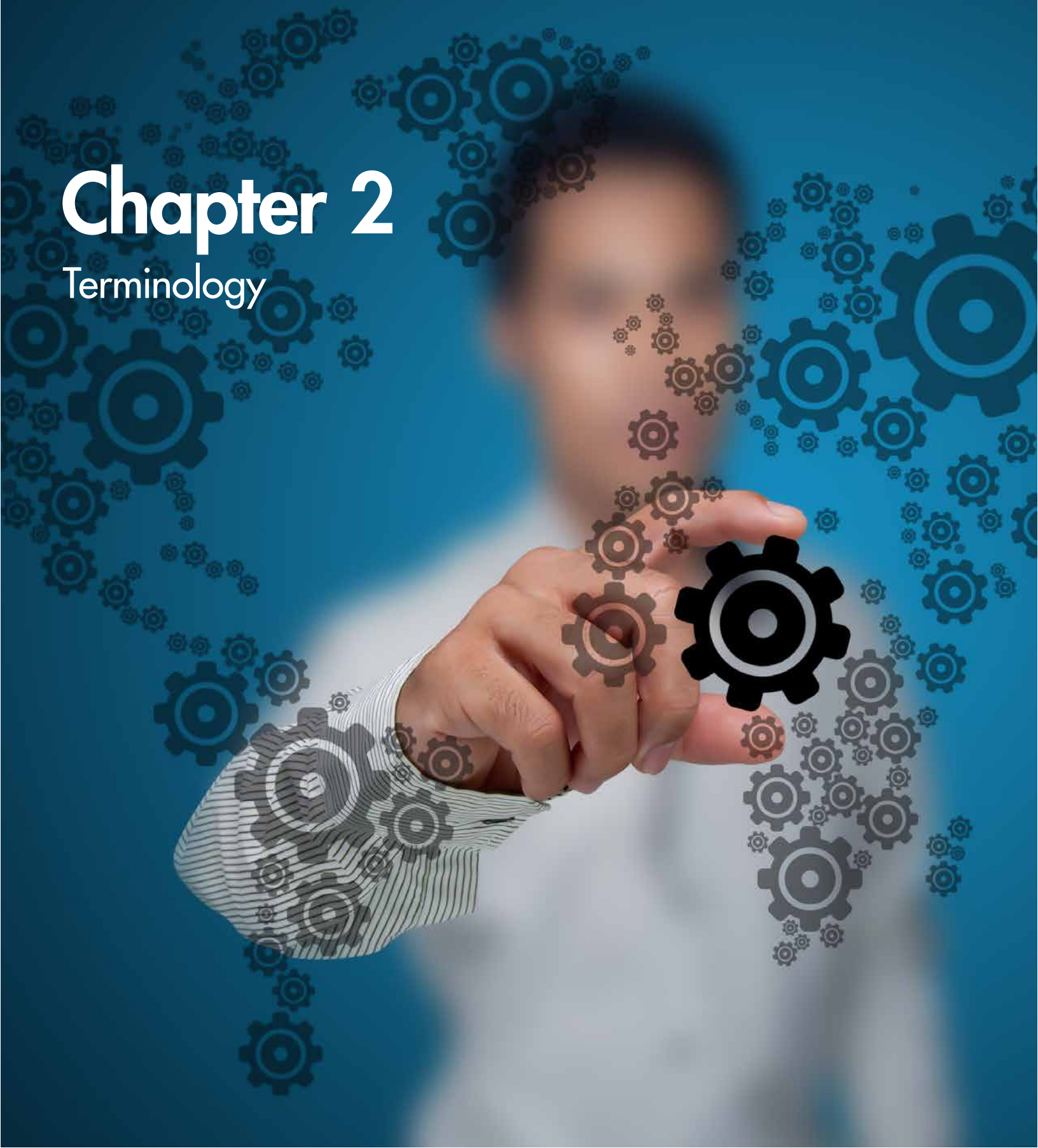
The guide is also designed to help you save money and time – ensuring you get the right result first time.

There are many stories, even from major companies, where translation has failed to communicate the marketing messages and the essence of the brand. Amongst the hilarious translation stories, there are an equal amount that are incredibly damaging to both brand and sales. They can also be culturally offensive or, in certain technical and manufacturing markets, quite dangerous.

Hopefully we can guide you through the process of understanding the service you need, choosing your language service provider and help the actual translation process run smoothly to help you focus on meeting your deadlines achieving your business goals.

Chapter 2

Terminology



Terminology

To help you understand the services offered by translation service providers, we've rounded up the key terms and jargon below.

Translation vs. Interpreting

Translation refers to the written word, whereas interpreting is oral.

Source Language + Target Language

The source language is the native language the documents were written in. The target language is the language into which the documents will be translated. This may sound obvious – but it's always best your translation partner receives the original documents in the source language rather than a translation to understand the nuances of the original source. This avoids the "Chinese whispers" effect and avoids using an interpretation of a document.

Localisation & Internationalisation

Localisation or Internationalisation is the encompassing practice of adapting a product or service to meet a specific country, group or region's needs – both linguistically and culturally.

Translation is part of the localisation process as a translation service will help you communicate your product or service's benefits to the target group. This may involve transcreation (discussed below) rather than just a word-for-word translation, even within certain broader languages. For example, Spanish in Latin America is different to that within Spain itself.

Even within countries that share a common language, different dialects may have to be taken into account. Localisation is a process generally applied to software, websites and multimedia content rather than written documentation.

To help you understand the services offered by translation service providers, we've rounded up the key terms and jargon used in the industry...

Transcreation

Transcreation is a term used to describe the “added-value” service that a professional, experienced and qualified translator brings to your translation challenge. This term is often used in reference to marketing materials rather than instructive text. In marketing copy, there are often puns and wordplay at work to help define a brand image and give your company more personality. The process of transcreation ensures that the context and meaning is carried through your marketing communications and resonates with the target audience, whatever their language and location.

We believe that all good translators understand the feeling and tone of a piece of writing, put it into context with the cultural nuances and deliver much more than just a word-for-word translation.

“All good translators understand the feeling and tone of a piece of writing and put it into context with the cultural nuances.”

In Summary...

When comparing translation agencies or freelancers, it's important that you have a clear brief for the project and understand that not all translations are created equal.

The process is not a simple word-for-cost comparison. Good translation service providers have talented professional transcreators that truly understand the challenge and how to convey your brand, not just translate the words on the page.

This can sometimes reflect in the price being slightly more expensive, but also represent huge and tangible brand value gains when communicating your company's features and benefits overseas.

Chapter 3

Types of Translation



Types of Translation

There are 3 levels of translation service, starting from the most automated to the most human:

- Machine Translation Service
- Computer-Aided Translation Service
- Human Translation Service

Machine Translation – E.g. Google Translate

On a basic level, Machine Translation performs simple substitution of words in one natural language for words in another. Machine translations are getting better with time, as more human translations are analysed using statistical techniques.

This doesn't mean it's suitable for your translation project! Machine translation struggles with recognition of whole phrases and matching them with the closest counterparts in the target language. Some of the machine translation output may be used where language is formal or formulaic, such as in legal translation but for most applications where there are natural language applications – machines just don't get it right.

The process also has an issue with disambiguation. This is where there are multiple ambiguous translation possibilities for one phrase. An example of the same type of technology you may be familiar with is the autocorrect options on spellcheck. I'm sure you've entered something in a text that was not always exactly what you intended!

Sometimes to get your marketing message across correctly, you don't always use standard speech. Bringing in casual colloquialisms can really offer your brand a human personality and feel but this is exactly where machines begin to struggle.

Do you trust a machine with your brand?

How expensive is "free?"

Computer Assisted Translation

Computer-assisted translation is where a human translator uses computer software to support and facilitate the translation process. Much like the spell-check and grammar check within Microsoft Word, these tools offer a database of what is the “right” translation – making the translation process more efficient and consistent.

Many of our own translators are advanced users of translation memory programs. They store previously translated source texts and their equivalent target texts in a database.

The benefits of such systems can be huge, especially for larger translation service clients or where there are lots of repeated segments within or between documents. This could be technical content that is used in both technical manuals and technical section of a website.

The process still relies on the skill of the human translator to input the correct translation in the first place. If this is inaccurate, the problem only gets magnified by repetition!



Human Translation Services

The most labour intensive (and therefore costly) of the translation services is a full human translation.

Like any professional service, the quality of the translation service output is largely dependent on the person behind the screen.

The computer aided tools are only useful and cost-effective when the person using them to choose the right phrase has the experience, vocabulary and intelligence to understand the context of the translation – not just the words (the machine can do that!)

“The process still relies on the skill of the human translator to input the correct translation in the first place!”

In Summary...

Many translation agencies claim they have “market-leading software and platforms” whereas in reality they’re only as good as the people behind them.

Beware of the reliance on these tools across translation agencies as they can multiply mistakes. We pride ourselves on having meticulous proof-readers employed too.

Avoid submitting a Word document then simply comparing costs. It’s important to know the company’s translation service process and how the translations are checked. It’s more costly to lose sales due to poor translation than to pay 10% more for a specialist translator in your field.

Chapter 4

Quotes + Costing



We understand that every translation project has a budget, which is often “as cheap as possible” in the interest of maximising marketing return on investment!

Here we try to explain the most frequently used pricing methods and explain the factors that can impact the cost of your translation service.

Word, Page & Line Counts

You may see different translation freelancers and agencies using different pricing methods for their work which can make it difficult to compare apples to apples – even without knowing the quality behind the keyboard!

We always work with and advise our clients to compare word counts. Lines and pages are simply driven by the font size, line spacing and margins!

The source language word count is normally used as a basis for the translation as the target languages can differ massively from the source.

A handy tip for marketing managers – consider the output document format alongside the word count of the quote. Bear in mind that the target language may be longer or more compact than your source language.

This can mean text in Spanish and French taking up 20% more space than the English text. It's difficult to have a general rule for all, especially when Chinese characters come into play. This can have implications for your website and documentation design and therefore worth budgeting for slight amendments here too.

Always compare word counts...

Lines and pages are simply driven by the font size, line spacing and margins!

The background of the slide is a close-up, artistic photograph of several overlapping 20 British Pound banknotes. The notes are in shades of purple and blue, with the word 'Bank of England' and the number '20' clearly visible. The lighting creates a soft, glowing effect across the currency, giving it a textured and dynamic appearance.

Chapter 5

Factors that Impact Cost

Factors that Impact Cost

As discussed above and as you'd expect, the length of the document is the most relevant when comparing cost of translations.

There are a number of other considerations that also play a part:

Subject Matter

It sounds obvious, but the more technical a document translation is, the more it will cost. This is due to two pivotal factors – the expertise required to understand the text and the time taken to be meticulous over the content of the translation. A handy tip would be to check the translator or agency's experience in certain fields and look at their case studies to ensure that you'll get the right result.

The same rules also apply in marketing text. Although often not as technically rigorous, there is a certain flair that is required to convey your brand correctly and as such, transcreation may be required.

This exhibits a key strength of translation agencies as we can choose the right translator from our staff for the right job such as marketing post-graduates for the marketing translations. Freelance translators can't always promise this specialisation.

Language Combination

The source to target language combination affects the cost. In general, rare languages and character-based languages are the most expensive as they are considered more difficult to translate or translators are equally rare hence increasing their price.

The length of the document is the most relevant when comparing cost, but there are a number of other considerations that also play a part...

Formatting

It's always easier to work from editable documents such as word files which is reflected in the cost. If the document is scanned or in PDF form, there may be a few more ambiguities and inaccuracies in the word count which can affect the cost as prices are adjusted to with a built-in margin of error. We'll always run the PDF through advanced optical character recognition tools to get the most accurate quote first time – but as a client it's worth digging out the original editable document to ensure budgeting accuracy.

Output

Sometimes the output required isn't simply another word document. If you wish for the text to be flowed straight into a website content management system or into a brochure using Indesign – this may attract more cost as there is an added level of technicality and/or software.

Urgency

As a very general rule of thumb, the faster the turnaround required, the more expensive the job will be. It's always better to plan your translation service requirements as far in advance as possible to minimise cost. This isn't always the case however and we certainly try to be as fast and accommodating as possible without affecting the budget and you will always have clear and concise quotes before any work is started.

Where urgency can increase the cost exponentially however is when it is mixed with one of the factors above. If it is a rare language combination, technical text and a short turnaround requirement – this can increase cost much more than just one of the factors.

Don't Forget... Proofreading

Proofreading is a necessity as it allows time for a fresh pair of eyes to look over the translation work to ensure that the source material is perfectly represented in the new localised form.

Although not as time consuming as the translation itself (proofreading is roughly 150% faster) it still requires specialist expertise to spot the details and cultural nuances that can be so important to your sales overseas.

Proofreading can be done by the original translator or another translator.



Chapter 6

Quality + Speed

Fast, quality and cost effective translation services are possible as they are not mutually exclusive factors, but there are a few elements to the process that can affect both quality and speed.

Formatting

If the document arrives in editable form, both the quote and translation process is made quicker and easier – saving you money.

Further Information

Whilst we employ specialist native-speaking translators, it's always a massive benefit to have some context behind the translation.

This could be:

- Audience – Who is reading it?
- Purpose – what is the desired outcome of the translation (e.g. to generate sales)
- Destination (e.g. website, press release, brochure, technical manual)

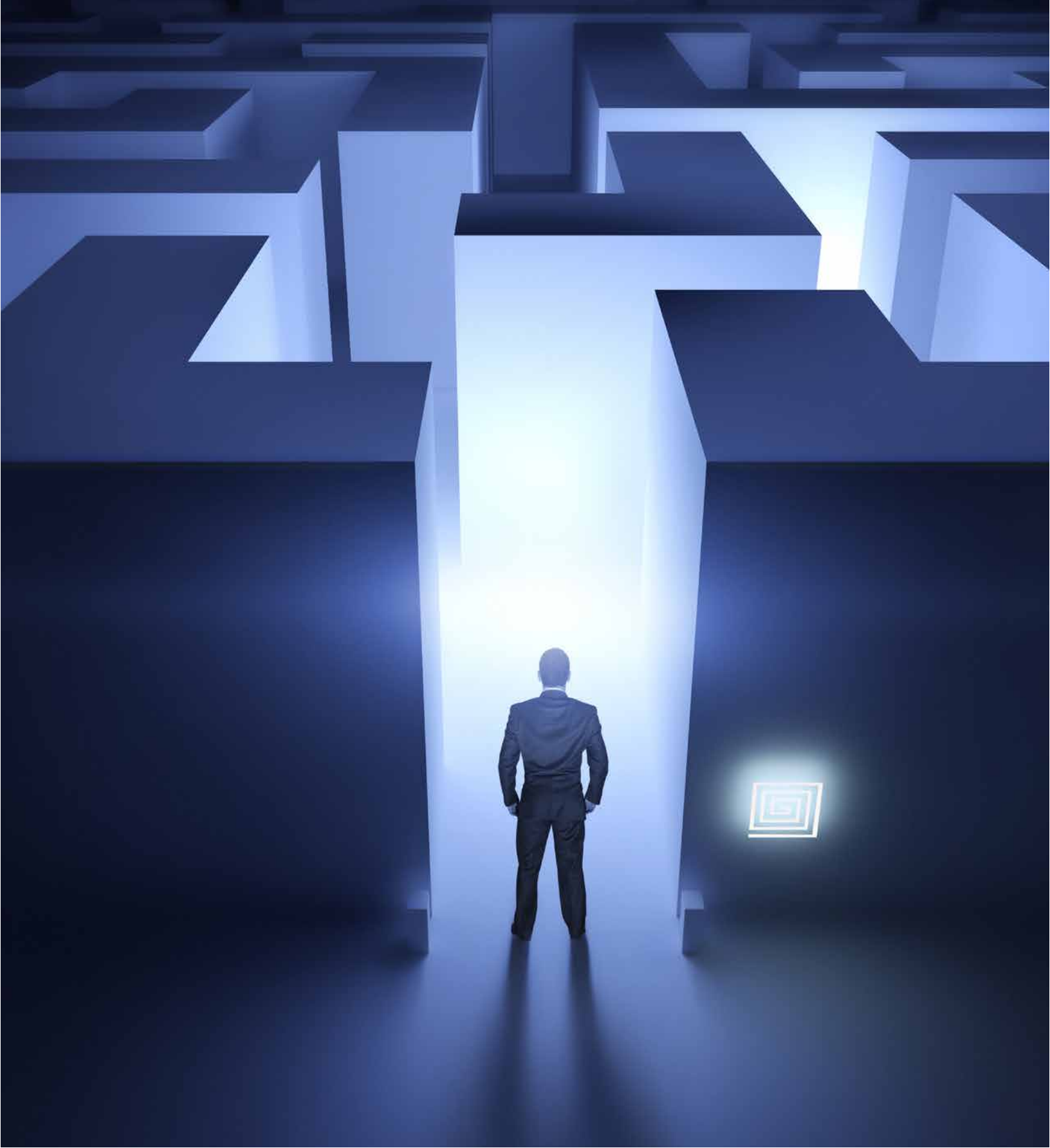
It's also great to have a range of reference materials if appropriate to the translation challenge, this could be:

- Previous translations
- Company style guide
- Glossaries

Whilst we employ specialist native-speaking translators, it's always a massive benefit to have some context behind the translation too...

Chapter 7

Choosing the Right Solution



Choosing the Right Solution

Machine Translation

We've already looked at the machine translation earlier in the guide and these systems do have a great selling point – they're free! Unfortunately, the accuracy of the automated translation tools simply can't be guaranteed.

The tools can be a useful aid in understanding an informal email or getting the essence of a message, but your brand, reputation and sales rely on more than this vague idea of your communication.

If this is still an option for you, we advise to translate some copy you have already to a new target language using one of these tools... and then back again. Trusting a "free" machine with your precious brand and marketing materials can end up costing your company, in lost sales or worse.

DIY

Another free option, you could always choose to do-it-yourself on the translation front. This doesn't always mean a bilingual marketing manager, but possibly using some of the skills of your colleagues in another geographic office.

This could be a viable option, however, being bilingual or fluent is not the same as being a professional translator. Professional translators have knowledge of translation techniques, a very wide vocabulary, research skills and experience you or your colleague may lack.

Who to Consider?

There are lots of options to choose from when translating documentation for your international marketplace...

Professional Translators – Freelance or Agency?

The translation market has changed significantly as internet usage matured and companies became used to outsourcing services via the web.

The choice of freelancers and agencies is staggering but there are still many considerations for employing a professional translator which largely depend on your project. It's hard not to sound biased as a translation agency – but many of our clients come to us after poor experiences with freelance or DIY projects and here's why:

Agencies have a breadth of translators.

This allows agencies to choose the right translator for the job based on constant and first-hand experience of their previous work. They work more often and more closely with translators so can always drive the best result for you. Agencies have the ability to also meet urgent deadlines as they can use one of their many translation staff rather than simply work with one trusted translator who is incredibly busy or on holiday! As an idea, we have almost 4,000 translators worldwide – which allows us to tailor the translation service perfectly to your needs.

Agencies have dedicated project managers.

A complimentary point to the above, with breadth you also get the ability to take on larger projects across many languages and agencies have dedicated managers to help deal with all of this and simplify the process for you. You get one simple email back with all of the copy and one invoice – not reams of communication on email and multiple and confusing points of contact.

Agencies have strong proofreading processes.

As agencies have more translators on hand, they can also employ different translators to proofread other's work. These fresh eyes can help avoid any mistakes or clarify any tricky technical text.

Using Your Local Sales Agent

Many companies enter local markets by employing a sales agent in that geography rather than incurring the cost of employing staff and a satellite office.

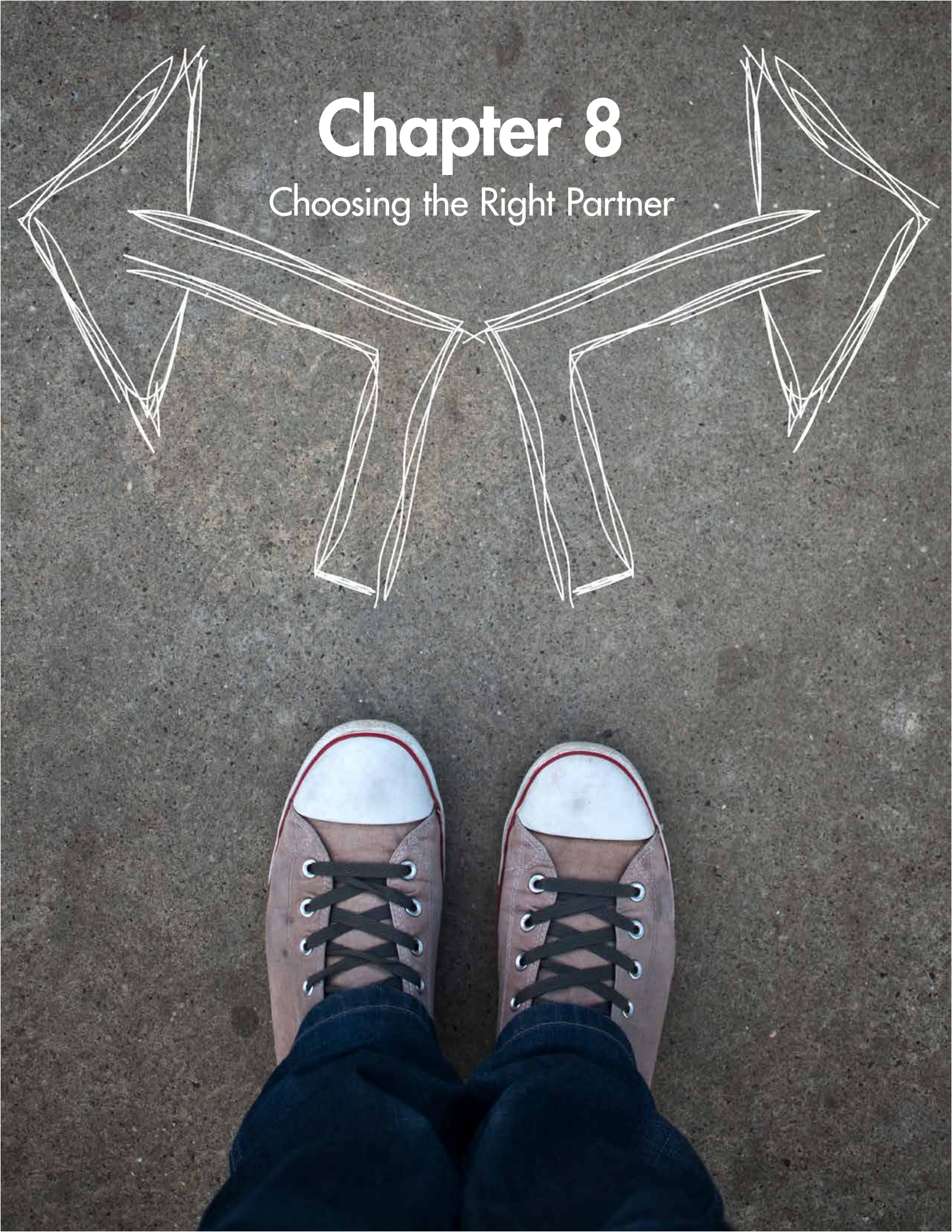
These partnerships may be fantastic for growing sales, but for many reasons – they should not be considered for translation.

Alongside the fact that they don't have the experience in the translation field, sales agents won't always be able to communicate the essence of your brand effectively.

They may also be the representatives for other brands in your market and using them to translate may homogenise your materials and dilute your messages.

Chapter 8

Choosing the Right Partner



How do you choose the right translation partner?

No matter your business or industry, we understand that you may feel that your products or services are too technical or specialist to be translated by an agency rather than a local sales agent.

A huge amount of our clients have this reservation – but with over 11 years' experience and 52 million+ words translated, we can assure you that this isn't the case!

In fact, many of our clients have turned to us after poor experiences with freelancers, local sales agents and even their own in-country staff not being able to meet quality levels or deadlines.

Businesses looking to make the most of a global market need highly competent translators who are not only well versed in the terms that you use, but are additionally knowledgeable about industry terms in the language you're translating to.

It's also important that the translation service understand the medium for which you are translating.

So what are the comparison criteria you should have on your translation partner shortlist?

Experience, Experience... Experience

Not just a headline, experience is important and should be considered from 3 perspectives.

Time Served - The translation agency's length of time in the industry is an important indicator for how reliable and reputable they are. Ask about how many clients they've translated for, how many clients return and the length of service provided to those clients. This can reassure you that companies who are experienced in employing translation services come back to the agency as their quality, pricing and management is excellent.

Industry Experience - In the former case, a business who has been established for a long time are obviously doing something right; but what they've been translating is also massively important. This will help not only streamline the process but reassure you that they have the right translators at hand to get great results. It's also good to ensure that the translation agency has specific language experience. As every language is slightly different, this leads to a lot of ambiguity in terms as many phrases simply don't have exact counterparts. With our vast experience and software tools, we've become experts in disambiguation!

Service Experience - In many complex industries, documents that need to be translated fall under many categories, from marketing and sales development with website translation or brochure translation to instructional booklets and safety guidelines for your staff.

All tasks require slightly different types of translation as they switch from emotive, colloquial and natural language to formulaic and formalised. We've found that, although every client is different, translation experience can be qualified in these 3 ways – so if an agency has translated a technical manual in Simplified Chinese for a manufacturing company, you can be confident that they can transpose that experience into different sub-sectors.

3 key questions to ask:

- How long have you translated for?
- Who have you translated for?
- What have you translated for them?

Price Vs. Value

Price is a massive supply factor for your own business, and it'll surely influence your choice of translation agency.

However, choosing your translation company on pricing alone can lead to serious issues and may invariably lead to you spending further money on quality translation services.

We've helped clients out of a scenario when another agency or freelance translator couldn't understand the literature or simply couldn't meet a deadline.

It's easy to submit a few Word documents to a few translation agencies and wait for the lowest per-word or document cost but if this was the only way to choose any product – your own business would struggle to add value!

Real value comes from professional and accurate translations that help you communicate your brand values. The damage to your reputation can be irrevocable if you choose based solely on price. A sure fire way to arrive at this situation is to use a translation company with pricing that really is too good to be true! You can also be caught out by automated pricing tables and the "inhuman" speed of response – first isn't always best.

Sometimes this speed means that pricing has been done via an automated formula – rather than taking into account the actual requirement and whole translation service. We pride ourselves on having a 30 minute response, but guarantee all of our quotes are done manually – minimising any fluctuations or hidden surprises.

Frequency of Your Needs

If your project is particularly large, with ongoing work in the future, ensuring that the company you've chosen can consistently meet your needs requires you thinking about their size and staffing capabilities.

Larger translation companies will be able to accommodate larger projects and shorter deadlines, so that you can be safe in the knowledge that future projects benefit from assured delivery times.

Look for Great Processes, Accreditations, Testimonials and Insurance

As a business leader – you know all about the importance of processes!

Great translation agencies can give you testimonials, in your sector or task as previously mentioned. They can also explain their processes, and can offer software-assisted translation memory to give even better value for money (through not replicating the translation twice for recurring terminologies and phrases.)

Accreditations like the ATC and EUATC also reassure you when looking for a translation agency. For the record, we're members of both. Professional translation agencies also have professional indemnity insurance in the unlikely event of the translation service causing legal issues.

There's no magic formula to choosing the right translation partner, but having the checklist from this chapter will help!

In Summary...

There's no magic formula to choosing the right translation partner, but having the checklist above will help.

Make a note of the "must-have" attributes that really matter to you, be it experience in sector, language or service.

Be confident that, although your product or service may be incredibly complex, a strong agency with a large staff of translators and experience in your sector will be able to deliver perfectly accurate translations.



About Us...

Bubbles Translation Services

We Speak Your Language...

Bubbles is a full-service translation agency and have been helping the world's leading brands grow their sales internationally since 2003.

With more than 3,800 translators across the globe, you can be confident that we've got every language covered.

With over 10 years' experience, 1100 happy clients and 52 million + words translated across 9,400 projects, we've got commercial and technical native-speaking translation experts for every challenge.

From websites and marketing Arabic, to technical documents in Turkish – we can get the job done quickly, accurately and for the best value.

Every translation is supported by our guaranteed quality assurance and design production services if required.

We offer:

- A fast turnaround for short deadlines
- Accurate, guaranteed and accredited translations
- Deep experience in all sectors – from manufacturing to medical
- A real understanding of your translation challenge – technical, marketing or contractual
- Great value for money!

Get in touch and start communicating internationally today...



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