

# A Buyer's Guide

Life Sciences Translation Services



A handbook for understanding how to plan  
and budget for translation projects  
- brought to you by *aiaTranslations* LLC



“Look at your translation vendor as a partner and you will see long term quality and cost rewards.”



USE THIS GUIDE TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE TRANSLATION PROCESS. ALL OF THE STRATEGIES LISTED HERE WILL REDUCE COST, IMPROVE QUALITY AND STREAMLINE THE PROCESS.

## STRATEGY: DO WE NEED TO TRANSLATE THIS?

This may seem like a strange question, but before sending anything out for translation, you should be very clear on what needs translation and what does not. Does the entire 400 page document need to be translated or are there pertinent sections? Does the patient information section need to be translated or has it been done previously? Do you need the notes in the PowerPoint presentation in German or not?

Getting a firm hold on exactly what needs translation is truly the first step to managing the entire process.

Also, if you need a summary rather than a full translation, most agencies will do this for you as well. ←

## STRATEGY: PLAN FOR TRANSLATION

If you are starting from scratch, then write for translation. Avoid plays on words and idioms that are tied to visuals. Try not to be wordy and use precise expressions and concise sentences. Ideally, send your piece to your translation partner for review BEFORE the document receives final approval. This way they can red flag any sections that are not translation-friendly before it is too late. ←

## STRATEGY: WHAT WILL IT COST?

Translation pricing can range dramatically and while the most expensive rate may not guarantee the best product, as a buyer of a service, you need to look at the rate objectively. Vendors who are pricing themselves WELL below the competition should be suspect for several reasons. First, it is possible that they do not understand the scope of the work you require. Or, it is possible that they are subcontracting their work to countries where the rate is depressed. In this case, there is an issue of accountability from a buyer’s perspective. You should be sure that your work is not being shopped around to the lowest bidder.

Many large translation clearinghouses do this—they post work on an online board and then assign it to the translator who is willing to do it the quickest and the cheapest. This is hardly ideal when the translation will go on to represent your company or your product to an international audience.

The fact of the matter is that, in translations like many things, you get what you paid for. Your agency should be pricing themselves competitively, but you should also be sure of what you are getting, how you are getting it and where it is coming from. ←

## STRATEGY: COMPARING BIDS

Great buyers know how to shop around. But the trick to this is knowing how to compare different pricing bids. First, know what is important to you—is speed more important than accuracy? Or is precision the most desirable? Once you know this, you can more

evenly compare what an agency is offering.

Also, try not to compare the final price on an estimate. Because word counts and proofreading hours can vary, looking at the rates and the assumptions will allow you to compare apples to apples. ←

## STRATEGY: COMPONENTS OF PRICING

IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPARE QUOTES IF YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE COMPONENTS OF A TRANSLATION ESTIMATE. USE THIS SECTION TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE LINE ITEMS THAT MAY APPEAR ON YOUR INVOICE.

### WORD COUNTS

Most documents are charged by the word for translation. The exceptions to this are those that fall under a pre-established “minimum” or certain types of advertising copy. Estimates will show the target estimated word count and the corresponding fee. All translations should then be checked by a second linguist. This proofreading fee is sometimes charged by the word—or also by the hour.

### PROJECT MANAGEMENT TIME

Some agencies break out their management fees or some incorporate them into the per word price.

### GRAPHICS

If graphics have to be recreated, you may also see a formatting charge.

### ENGINEERING OR DESIGN TIME

If the documents are created using a specialized design software, then you can expect to see a charge for creating foreign language pieces. This is the studio charge from the designer.

### REVIEWS

There may be an additional line item that reflects post-production proofreading or incorporation of client or regulatory feedback. ←

### Why does my document have 2000 words but my estimate is for 2800 words?

Great question. Most invoicing and billing for translation is done on the final target word count. Agencies that hope to give you estimates that will not be exceeded, will estimate the expansion of words in the translation process. Because of this, you will see a larger word count on the estimate. It is also because of this that you will see different word counts on your final invoice for different languages. The Spanish may say 2800 words, while the Italian may say 2200. ←



## STRATEGY: CONSIDER DESIGN

Making a strong visual impact is important in marketing. But when preparing documents for translation, design is a critical element in planning for translation. Considering the following steps will make the process go more smoothly:

**Length**  
When we design English documents, we keep white space in mind and try to construct a page that is not too text heavy. Remember that some languages expand dramatically and plan accordingly for this. Spanish for example could add a page or two to an average document. If you want to retain white space on pages and guard font sizes, then build in a little extra space from the beginning.

**Fonts**  
Remember that not all foreign languages will be able to use the fonts used in the English source file. For example, if you are translating into Korean, do not even spend time creating fancy designer fonts for the source document—they will not be used.

**Visual/Language Connection**  
When creative concepts are developed, often plays on language are tied to the visuals. When this cannot be avoided, be sure to involve your project manager in the development process—just to be sure that your concepts can actually still be translated.

**Software Versions**  
Be sure to clearly communicate what version of each software you are using. Know that InDesign is more foreign language-friendly than Quark.

**Logos**  
When you send files to an agency for translation, make sure to include a modifiable logo file as normally generics are translated.

**Graphics**  
All graphics must be provided with layers that are modifiable. Translation often requires tweaks to background language. ←

## STRATEGY: USING A PROFESSIONAL

Translators are often under-appreciated. The time and dedication required to become a talented translator is incredible. On top of this, it takes constant updating of ones language abilities in order to stay on top of trends and changes. Professional translators often start out as experts in a specific field—and then move into translation in that area. In order to be good, they must be working INTO their native language—but they must also possess a near native capability in the languages from which they translate. In medical translation, your translators should be physicians, nurses, chemists, biologists—not translators with dictionaries. Simply being fluent in a language does not represent any of the skills needed to truly produce high quality, relevant and useful translations. ←

## STRATEGY: WHY AN AGENCY?

Working with an agency allows you to transfer the burden of project management to an expert. When working in multiple languages, a good agency is able to guarantee consistency across languages, something that is extremely important in market research. Also, the fact of the matter is that most agencies have resource overlaps (translators work for a number of agencies) - so selecting an agency and a project manager becomes the most important piece of guaranteeing high quality, low cost translation services. ←

## STRATEGY: MACHINE TRANSLATION?

IT IS HARD TO RESIST...FREE, ONLINE IMMEDIATE TRANSLATION. The fact of the matter is that, when used appropriately, machine translation has a role to play. But that role is highly limited in technical translation and in an industry where accuracy is often a matter of life or death. Do you want to know what one isolated word means? Go ahead and use an online translator—but if you want to capture context, machine translation is still quite behind. In healthcare marketing, machine translation will always be hard pressed to capture the cultural messaging. That said, technology can be used in a different way to capture savings. ←

## STRATEGY: TRANSLATION MEMORY SYSTEMS

Translation memory (TM) is a type of software that stores translations for strings of language. Over time, these repositories of previously-translated sentences and words can grow to be quite an asset. In medical marketing, many statements are used over and over again in different pieces. Working with a provider that uses a TM will allow you to avoid paying full price for copy that has already been translated. ←

## STRATEGY: FACTORS THAT IMPACT COST

KNOWING WHY PRICES ARE DIFFERENT IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF PLANNING AND BUDGETING FOR TRANSLATION.

### Language

The fewer the qualified translators, the more a language will cost. This is the reality of the marketplace. If your agency is charging you for Spanish, what they charge for Korean, be suspect. The complexity of the language, combined with the limited resources, will make one language more expensive than another.

### Direction

In translation-speak, this means from what language into what language. Translating most foreign languages into English is usually less expensive than translating into a foreign language from English. Why? Again, this is driven by resources as well. There are more Italian to English translators than there are English to Italian translators. This, however, may not be true with languages like Thai for example. A Thai to English medical translator is rare and as such can charge a premium for their services.

### Content

What is the topic? The more complex, the more it will cost. The per word rate for a birth certificate is dramatically different than the per word rate for a prescribing information document.

### Document Format

Documents that are easy to format, contain no formatting or can be easily manipulated by a translation memory system are normally charged one rate while high design documents might be charged at a higher rate. Excel spreadsheets or documents with pages and pages of text boxes are not translator friendly and slow the translation process. Because of this, translators charge more per word or often tack on a formatting fee.

### Turnaround Time

Some deadlines require night and weekend work and these are obviously charged at a premium. ←

# STRATEGY: CHOOSING A PARTNER

## ABOUT US:

aiaTranslations LLC is the leading provider of specialized life sciences translation. With a global network of medical linguists, aiaTranslations can provide translations for projects ranging from clinical trials through commercialization and market research.

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more about the  
language of  
healthcare

Seeing your translation vendor as a partner is crucial to a long-term, successful relationship. Partners are invested and they understand strategy. They take on your goals as their own and work to make sure that they contribute to the success of each project.

Find an agency with a skilled set of project managers. Your agency partner should:

- Have low project management turnover
- Have a global network of specialized resources
- Be willing to work with your country teams to produce finalized documents
- Have errors and omissions insurance in case of a problem
- Be responsive 24 hours per day—7 days per week
- Operate legally for tax and employment purposes ←



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