How To Choose the Right Website Translation Provider

Discover the hallmarks of outstanding website translation companies—from fast turnaround times to smooth technology integration, and more.
Translation can make or break your business in global markets

Translating website content to serve your global customers sounds straightforward. You simply offer content in the preferred language of your new customers. How hard could it be?

It’s harder than you think. To craft website translations worthy of your brand, they must undergo a complex, multi-step process: select web content for localization, translate it, edit and revise it—and after the quality and word choice is pitch-perfect, publish it.
Integrating those translations into a global website is a big challenge, too. It's uncommon to find a website translation vendor that can do that. And it's downright rare to find one that's mastered that process—and can also deliver amazing translations.

In this e-book, we'll examine the five characteristics of great translators and translation vendors, and why translation quality, accuracy, authenticity and speed are keys to success in global online markets. Great translations often mean the difference between creating an appealing, relevant website that advances your global business goals, and an outdated or tone-deaf site that turns visitors off.

Now, let's explore five key considerations for selecting the best translation vendor.
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High stakes, multiple pitfalls

Before we dive into the attributes of leading translation providers, consider this point above all others: **Value.** Great, brand-worthy translations shouldn’t be cheap. Some translation vendors make it easy to cut corners in order to save you money, but the results can wreck the credibility of your localized site.

For instance:

**TRANSLATION SOFTWARE**

Relying exclusively on machine translation tools (aka translation software) can affect the authenticity and nuance of your translations. Machine translation often **produces peculiar results** that can be difficult to understand. Worse still, they can produce inaccurate or culturally insensitive content.
BILINGUAL EMPLOYEES

Asking local, bilingual employees to translate content can lead to delays and quality concerns. These workers must try to balance their primary responsibilities with translation duties. And since they’re probably not certified linguists, they may create unimaginative or inconsistent translations.

PARTIALLY TRANSLATED SITES

Settling for partially translated sites, or localized microsites with limited content, is another cost-saving measure that can backfire. These compromised user experiences usually give visitors the impression that your company considers them second-class citizens. These approaches can also undermine the effectiveness of local sales and marketing teams, who rely on them as resources.

BARGAIN-BASEMENT PRICES

Choosing a third-party translation provider based primarily on price is shortsighted. You often sacrifice quality and experience, and spend more in the long run to fix issues.

INTEGRATE TRANSLATIONS

Choosing a solution that can’t efficiently integrate translations into your multilingual site is a non-starter. You’ll need a vendor that can elegantly update your global sites with proper translations, in a timely manner.
With such high stakes—namely, the success of your company's expansion into new markets—it's essential to look for overall value when selecting your translation provider. Investing upfront in a high-quality, value-added website translation vendor will pay dividends across the board, from accurate content to a streamlined, effortless process.
Hallmarks of a Great Website Translation Vendor

High Translation Quality
Translation quality is mission-critical for success in global markets. But does what “quality” mean, exactly?

The best website translations feature technical accuracy and cultural sensitivity in word choice and composition, and an absolute adherence to your organization's branding and style guidelines.

To achieve high quality and consistency in these areas, a vendor's translators (and its editors) need skills, experience and certification, an understanding of the target audience, and attention to detail.
The translation vendor you choose should support its staff with robust, customized tools that promote quality and consistency. These tools include:

- **A brand glossary listing your company’s preferred terminology**
- **A style guide specifying your company’s brand voice, tone and other style elements**
- **Local language dictionary and thesaurus**
- **Translation memory (a database of translations) to promote uniformity across content**
- **“Contextual integrity” interfaces to ensure translated content does not affect templates or the look and feel of the website design**

Their qualifications should include:

- **NATIVE SPEAKERS**
  The translator should be fluent in the target language and, ideally, be a native of the country for which the website is being created.

- **PROFESSIONAL LINGUISTS**
  The translation service should carefully vet its staff and require them to pass rigorous certification programs.

- **SUBJECT-MATTER EXPERTS**
  Especially when it comes to B2B websites, which often have their own terminology, the translator should have experience in your industry.

- **BRAND MAVENS**
  The translator needs to be familiar with your company’s brand, including key messaging, positioning and target audience.
Quality Assurance

But translation alone still isn’t enough to assure high quality. Leading website translation providers also build in rigorous review processes to ensure the content reflects your company’s brand, follows approved style and writing guidelines, and is consistent from one document to another.

Editors—who also should be native speakers and professional linguists—should review these elements:

- Grammar
- Punctuation
- Number/date format
- Spelling
- Syntax
The content should also be reviewed in the webpage’s template to identify changes that might be needed due to word growth or reduction.

“Word growth” (or reduction) occurs when the translation from one language to another requires more (or fewer) words than the original text. This disparity can “break” web design, layout and templates.

Technical issues can also emerge when integrating translated content into a multilingual site. For instance, site code can break, or *translatable content can be missed*, leading to a “mixed language” on-site experience. Pages must be QA'ed to identify these problems.

❌ Ontem a noite eu fui a um *concerto*

✅ Ontem a noite eu fui a um *conserto*
Rapid Turnaround Times

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Hallmarks of a Great Website Translation Vendor
Translations shouldn’t just be accurate; they should be delivered in a timeframe that can keep up with your business.

Here’s why:

1. Your organization probably wants to launch new multilingual sites as quickly as possible to support new markets and business goals—such as gaining a competitive advantage, or capitalizing on a new opportunity.

2. You want to keep your localized sites’ content in sync with the information on your flagship primary-market site. That means translating new and updated content, rapidly.
Equally important, they have technologies that continuously monitor your primary-market site for new or updated content. When those changes are detected, linguists can translate those additions in near real-time. The best vendors do this in one business day or less.

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The best translation vendors can deploy a multilingual site in as few as 30 days.

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Dangers of Delayed Translations

When localized website content lags behind your primary site’s information, big problems can emerge:

- Outdated pricing information
- Missing products or services
- Lost opportunities to promote special offers
- Customer confusion

This often leads to higher bounce rates, abandoned shopping carts, and compromised brand credibility and trust.
3 Hallmarks of a Great Website Translation Vendor

Translation Flexibility
No two website translation projects are identical.

They vary in scope, priority and level of oversight. A cookie-cutter approach by your translation vendor won’t take these variables into account, which leads to mismatched expectations, botched translations and extra costs.

That’s why you need vendors that provide flexibility in their approaches to translation. Sometimes, website translation projects require the nuanced localizations that only professional linguists—supported by a multi-touch editorial review—can provide. Other times, machine translation with a simple review by a human translator can be a perfect solution. Perhaps a combination of the two is most appropriate.

The best translation providers offer a range of options and customizations to suit your budget and requirements for cultural appropriateness, inclusion of branding/messaging and technical precision. Often, this means a mix of approaches.
Human Translation

Human linguists bring priceless skills to the translation process, including critical thinking, creativity, industry experience and cultural sensitivity. Human translation is an especially good choice for brand- and image-conscious companies, or those requiring technical, scientific, medical or other specialized translations.
Machine Translation

Machine translation solutions from companies like Google and Bing have come a long way in recent years, and artificial intelligence promises to refine this method even more. The main advantages of *machine translation are lower cost and faster speed* than human translation—which is especially important for very large sites. However, there are significant drawbacks, including:

- Simplistic word choice
- Lack of personality
- Off-brand messaging
- Additional costs for human editing and proofreading

Those shortcomings quickly pile up. Worse still, global customers notice when translated website copy doesn't come close to how human beings actually speak. They'll often leave such sites, and never come back.
Hybrid Translation

A hybrid approach uses human translation for pages or sections of pages requiring nuance, messaging and context, and machine translation for pages that are less brand-sensitive or less technical. This combination can reduce costs and time, while ensuring that prominent content is technically precise, culturally authentic and correctly branded.
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Hallmarks of a Great Website Translation Vendor

Technology Integration
The best vendors offer far more than translation services.

Their solutions also feature powerful technology to efficiently manage the translation process. Depending upon your organization’s needs, you may want a turn-key solution for hands-off management of translation workflow, or a more hands-on approach that leverages your backend web management platform.

In either case, the vendor's technology should operate independently of your other platforms so you are free to make updates or changes to those systems without affecting the translation process.
Deploying and operating multilingual websites requires an unexpected variety of tasks and actors, leading to continuous effort and hidden expense well beyond mere translation. Most website translation vendors lack the right technologies and the specific expertise to efficiently cope with the challenge.

In contrast, fully turn-key website translation solutions eliminate operational cost and complexity, including complicated translation processes like:

1. Exporting content from backend systems
2. Sending source files to translators
3. Managing the translation workflow
4. Receiving and copying the translated content back into your system
5. Testing for quality
6. Synchronizing daily changes
7. Repeating the entire procedure for all languages
Turn-key solutions combine advanced proxy-based technologies with the complementary services needed, allowing for the smallest effort on your part. The vendor provides all personnel, processes and technology.

This option is ideal for organizations that want to minimize the amount of effort and oversight required to keep their localized sites up-to-date.
Integration with Your CMS

Some companies want to leverage their multilingual content management system (CMS), product information management (PIM) system or other web management platform for greater control of their translated content. The trick is finding the best way to integrate these backend platforms with the translation vendor’s technology.

THE CONNECTOR

A common answer is the connector (or cartridge). These are pre-configured integrations that allow a translation provider to store translated content in your CMS, PIM or other platform. However, connectors rarely work out of the box because backend systems are often customized. And if you make changes to the CMS or PIM, the connector may no longer work and will require time-consuming modifications.

Another drawback of connectors is that they pull content for translation from only one place. Your organization may have content located in third-party databases, web apps and many other locations, but the connector cannot access it. This means extra work for your team.
THE API

An application programming interface (API) is a better alternative than a connector. Using the API, integrations between a translation company’s platform and your content databases can be built and used to transmit content to the vendor—either manually or programmatically—and send it back to the CMS or other platform.

One important benefit of choosing API technology is the ability to repurpose translated content from localized websites in other channels.

Your team can retrieve this content and insert it into online or offline marketing campaigns, trade show materials, social media materials or product collateral.
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Hallmarks of a Great Website Translation Vendor

Multimedia & Multichannel Translation
Your website will always be a critical digital marketing channel for your company, but it’s by no means the only one.

The need to **distribute relevant messaging** in many media, across many digital channels, is more important than ever.

To provide relevant content to your global customers where they live and play online, you’ll need a vendor that can translate far more than Word, Excel, PDF and PowerPoint documents. Many other elements, both seen and unseen, also require translation. These include images with embedded text, videos, mobile applications, dynamically loaded third-party functionality such as customer review systems, dynamic PDFs such as customer account statements, and code in JavaScript applications.

If your translation vendor can’t handle these elements, guess what?

A. Your team will end up taking care of them, **adding unwanted complexity** to the project.

B. Your website will be **incompletely translated**, which can lead to an unsatisfying experience for visitors.
In addition to translating a wide range of content types and formats associated with today’s websites, leading vendors can easily accommodate digital content for multichannel use (social media, ads) and offline use (brochures, documents, signage).

Your company may even need a provider that can work with customer-facing content found in in-store kiosks and other self-service systems.

Multichannel content translation can be a huge asset for your organization. It allows you to distribute product and marketing materials to global sales teams for use in the field, and educate customers across many channels, from YouTube videos to infographics to product sheets.

Can Your Vendor Translate These?

**Documents/offline sources:**
Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint files, PDF documents, desktop publishing files (InDesign), XML

**Multimedia files:**
Videos (on-screen text, audio subtitles), interactive applications, images

**Dynamic PDFs:**
Dynamic PDFs are generated on-the-fly by populating user-relevant content into the document

**HTML email templates:**
Used for business and marketing correspondence

**Mobile applications:**
Smartphone and tablet apps
A Final Note on Cost, Time and Effort

No one wants to pay too much for a professional service but pinching pennies can backfire. When it comes to translation services, it’s important to look at the whole package.

For example, if you choose a low-cost provider, you may be getting inexperienced translators who don’t understand your industry or brand, and whose work requires extensive editing by your in-house team.

Or, if you choose a vendor that uses the traditional price-per-word or per-page model, you’ll probably pay extra for important services such as professional editing and project management, and for expedited service to complete urgent projects.
Your translation vendor should be considered an investment in your plans to tap new market opportunities, win new customers and grow revenues. Selecting a vendor based on price alone will very likely cost you more in the final analysis. More critically, choosing the cheapest route can negatively affect the quality and timeliness of your web content, and burden your team with additional work.

Instead, engage with a vendor that not only provides speedy, spot-on translations but also simplifies operations. The vendor should relieve your staff of extra duties and easily accommodate your specific requirements for scope of work, timeframe, number of sites and languages, and degree of hands-on involvement.

This kind of best-in-class provider can be a huge asset to your organization—both tactically and strategically.
MotionPoint Corporation
info@motionpoint.com
www.motionpoint.com

United States
Lyons Technology Center
4661 Johnson Road
Coconut Creek, FL 33073
+1.954.421.0890

Europe
Regus Cibeles
Calle de Alcalá 61, Room 323
28014 Madrid
+34.917.944.707