The need for speed: How to ensure the completion of your most urgent translation projects within three days

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Almost all translation projects are urgent

Today, almost all product-related translation projects are time sensitive. In the case of life sciences companies, some documents absolutely must be translated in the shortest amount of time and at the highest possible level of quality to prevent patients from coming to harm. This article illustrates how CSOFT International works with some of their large corporate clients to develop processes that, among other things, eliminate in-country translation review, and result, typically, in turn-around times of three days from receipt of source files to delivery of publishable documents.

Making translation part of the overall communication plan results in streamlined translation

Planning for translation from the outset of a project can be the single most important factor for speeding-up translation. Many of the steps discussed below (e.g. developing project-specific glossaries, style guides, document templates, etc.) are typically too complex, time-consuming and expensive to be performed on an ad-hoc basis for a single high-priority translation project. However, if maintaining multilingual glossaries and style guides is part of a global communication strategy, updating these resources, where necessary for a specific project, is generally much more feasible.

Treating translation as an integral part of an organization’s communication strategy

Today, many corporate translation buyers treat translation as a commodity, and, consequently, use a transactional business model where individual translation projects are awarded via reverse auction to the lowest bidder. In an e-auction environment, depending on the size and duration of a project, it may be difficult to align processes, schedules, and resources between the translation buyer and language service provider.

If, on the other hand, the buyer and the provider of translation services form a strategic partnership, it is much easier for the service provider to establish and maintain client-specific resources and workflows. In this type of environment, a language service provider typically uses a team of professionals who, based on continuous exposure and – ideally – product training, knows the client’s products and/or services inside out.

High-speed translation is not a commodity

For many projects, it’s not uncommon for language service providers to learn about a new translation project the day it shows up in their inbox. If that project has a tight deadline, the only option available to most translation service providers is to distribute the work to many linguists simultaneously, which might negatively impact the quality of the deliverables.

Get service providers on-board early

However, if a translation buyer coordinates his or her efforts with the language service provider early in the project stage, additional options for early delivery become available. For instance, linguists may successfully translate text as authors create it or revise translations in sync with changes in the source. In this scenario, even a single translation
professional may be able to not only complete a large project but deliver the final translation mere hours after the source text has been finalized.

**Controlled terminology helps translators getting it right the first time**

Few factors have a more detrimental effect on the timely completion of a translation project than discussions about the correct use of terminology that often occur without the availability of a comprehensive glossary. The translator uses ‘USB stick’, the editor prefers ‘USB drive’ and the reviewer insists on ‘flash drive’. With a comprehensive, project-specific glossary, these unnecessary, expensive and, above all, time-consuming controversies are a thing of the past. While every translation project (in fact, every communication project) benefits from the availability of a glossary, the advantages are most apparent in rush jobs: translators can focus on translating, thereby maximizing the translators’ productivity instead of spending valuable time on terminology research.

Having a project-specific, multilingual glossary available in electronic form early in the project is good; having such a glossary with the client’s stamp of approval is even better. For terminology matters in particular, the old adage applies: the customer is always right! No matter how well-researched a glossary the service provider creates, if the client prefers other terms, changes will have to be made in the translation. To avoid these types of change requests, the best course of action is to create and update the glossary early in the project, have the client sign-off on it, and make that glossary available to translators as soon as possible. Following this strategy ensures that translators not only use terminology consistently, but that they use the ‘right’ term every time, which reduces time spent editing and reviewing. For clients who have a recurring need for fast turnaround and high-quality translations, playing an active role in creating and continuously updating multilingual glossaries is a must.

**Detailed style guides help avoid unnecessary corrections**

One of the overarching goals in every rush project is to eliminate repetitive work and the risk of corrections – in other words, enable team members to do it right the first time. So how do you make sure a translation meets the client’s expectations? By using the client’s approved translations (via a translation memory system), by using the client’s approved terminology (via a terminology management system), and by following the client’s translation style guide. But wait: most clients don’t have a style guide for each language for which they buy translation services! That is typically not a problem, as, in the absence of a formalized set of rules, reviewers on the client side are usually happy to come up with one of their own. If speed is of the essence, however, a language-specific style guide is an effective tool for avoiding post-translation changes concerning capitalization, representation of numbers and the like. Who should write these style guides? Ideally, the person or people who typically perform translation review on the client side. If that is not an option, creating client-specific translation style guides is a service many language service providers offer. And while the creation of a style guide does cost money, it is typically a minor investment that has a high pay-off, especially in terms of time savings.

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