

A Buyer's Guide to Translation Services

Compliments of:

Landon IP, Inc.

1725 Jamieson Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314 USA

Phone: 703.486.1150

Fax: 703.892.4510

www.landon-ip.com

Orders and Inquiries: mail@landon-ip.com



A Buyer's Guide to Translation Services

It's important to remember that translation is not a commodity. You can't swap out one translation for another; each text has a unique subject, target audience and purpose. Just as you wouldn't hire a freelance business journalist to draft a patent application, you can't expect anyone who happens to be bilingual to translate your patent application!

Translation is a professional service provided by skilled specialists. Every vendor has different capabilities, offers different services, and operates using different processes and approaches. Therefore, it is critical for a purchaser of translation services to be an informed consumer and have an understanding of the different factors that determine the success (or failure) of a translation project.

Three intersecting factors determine the workflow used to complete a translation project: **cost, quality and turnaround time**. Since high-quality translation is almost always required, most decisions are based on either cost considerations or delivery time. Remember that setting priorities doesn't mean abandoning the other factors: while budget considerations may mean a longer turnaround time, your translation vendor shouldn't extend the timeframe unnecessarily! Similarly, emphasizing cost or time doesn't necessarily mean accepting a "low-quality" translation.

The following pages provide helpful information to consider when choosing a translation vendor, as well as more detailed advice on how to manage your individual translation projects and how to save time and money and improve the quality of your translations.



How do I find a reliable translation vendor?

1. Ask questions!

A good translation vendor welcomes your input and will be happy to take the time to address your questions and concerns. Some important points to consider are:

What should I ask?

Who will be my contact(s) at your translation agency?
Who do I call for a quote or to give authorization to start a project?
Who do I call while a translation is in progress?

Which languages can you translate from?
And which languages can you translate into?
Which language pairs do you work with most frequently?
Are there any language pairs and/or subject matters you do not work with? And if so, will you help me locate a qualified vendor for such projects?

How do you screen your translators?

- How do you require potential translators to demonstrate their educational and practical background?
- What steps do you take to verify your translators to confirm that they are familiar with the unique requirements of patent, technical and/or legal translation?
- How do you determine their skill level before they start working on your customers' projects?

Why do I need to know this?

Some agencies have a dedicated project manager/client support representative for you, while others may have multiple contacts for different stages of translation projects. What's important is that you get to communicate directly with the project manager who is actively handling "your project", so you can check the specifics.

Some agencies are extremely specialized, only working in certain language pairs or only accepting source materials on specific subjects. Others offer a broader range of services.

A reputable company will not accept work if they feel they can't provide a first-class translation. In these cases, they should help you locate someone who can meet your needs.

Translators (like all skilled professionals) have different levels of ability and experience. Before sending translators work, an agency should screen potential translators carefully by reviewing their resumes, evaluating samples of their previous work, and conducting face-to-face or phone interviews. You don't want your vendor scrambling to find a qualified translator while the clock is ticking on your urgent deadline!

A Buyer's Guide to Translation Services

What should I ask?

How do you select the translators who will work on this project?

Will the translators on my project be translating into their native language?

What is your Quality Assurance (QA) process?

- How is the translation reviewed before delivery?
- Who handles the subject matter-related technical questions from your translators?

What types of best practices and quality standards does your QA process conform to?

How do you determine the pricing and turnaround time needed for a particular project?

- Do you charge any additional fees (for project management, scanning/printing charges, etc.) on top of the per-word rate?
- Will any such fees be included in the initial quote, or assessed at the end of the project?
- When applicable, how do you charge for desktop publishing to properly format target-language files, or to localize the graphics in the file?

Why do I need to know this?

The vendor should select the best available translator for your project, based on their skill set and experience with your subject matter.

Translators should always translate into their native language.

Translation is a skilled service provided by a person; since no person is perfect, it's important that the translation be edited and proofread by a second (or third) person to catch errors, omissions or misunderstandings of the source text. At each step in the process, SMEs (subject matter experts) are a valuable resource when a text is technically challenging.

Both CEN (the European Committee for Standardization) and ASTM (the American Society for Testing and Materials) publish specific standards for translation project QA processes. The best translation agencies conform to the best practices defined in these standards, whether or not they have a formal certification. Some agencies also tout their compliance with ISO standards relating to QA processes. While the ISO standard provides a useful assessment of overall quality processes, it does not contain any guidelines specific to translation services.

In addition to the per-word rate applied to the text itself, many (but not all) agencies will charge a fee for related tasks, such as preparing the files for translation, saving the final target files in PDF format, or managing the project. These can be flat fees or calculated as a percentage of the cost. Desktop publishing (DTP) refers to formatting a file in a format such as Adobe® FrameMaker®, Adobe® InDesign® or QuarkXPress®, and is generally billed in addition to the cost of translation, usually on an hourly rate, or at a set cost per page.

A Buyer's Guide to Translation Services

What should I ask?

Do your translators use Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) tools to manage terminology and develop a database of my translated sentences?

Do you use Machine Translation (MT) tools, such as Google Translate, even for complicated, technical text?

If you do use such tools, how are the machine-generated translations reviewed by a competent professional translator before delivery?

After you deliver the translation, can I have an independent third-party review performed by an internal team member or one of our business partners?
(If yes) How will you use the feedback that they provide?

Why do I need to know this?

CAT tools, such as Translation Memory and customized bilingual glossaries, can be a valuable resource to save time and money on projects while improving quality! If a translator or an agency uses CAT tools on your project, they should be able to provide you with tiered prices reflecting the efficiencies that these resources bring to the process.

MT systems, especially the “free” services found online, do not provide the level of precision and accuracy needed for patent, technical and legal translations. Machine translation should not be used for critical projects, where a high level of accuracy is required.

An agency that does use MT systems should have ALL such translations thoroughly edited, word for word, by a competent, professional translator before submitting them to a customer.

A reputable agency will offer you the opportunity to have an independent review. Any feedback you offer should be used to update the TM and glossary, so that future projects “start off on the right foot”!

But remember that a translation agency has to maintain accuracy to the source text. If your reviewer makes a suggestion that seems to create a discrepancy between source and target, a good agency will discuss the situation with you and your reviewer to find an acceptable solution.

A Buyer's Guide to Translation Services

- 2.** Ask for references. A reputable agency will be happy to give you the names of satisfied clients. When reviewing an agency's references, look for those who are submitting requests similar to your own. An impressive list of pharmaceutical clients will not help you if your files document hydraulic equipment.

- 3.** Request a test translation, using a document that reflects your typical translation needs. Vendors will often provide a small translation free of charge to a new client, but the source text should not be longer than 1 page (up to approximately 250 words). If you select an excerpt from a larger file as your sample, please provide the entire source text for the translators' reference. Context is very important in translation; information on page 50 may influence vocabulary choices throughout the document!

- 4.** Provide complete, thorough information on your translation needs. Some vendors are extremely specialized, only working in certain language pairs, or only handling specific subjects. Other vendors may offer the entire spectrum of language services, but might not have the resources to handle a large volume of extremely specialized work.

- 5.** Ask the vendor if they will provide a free quote based on your detailed requirements prior to beginning a project. Any reputable translation agency will do this for you. In addition, ask what specific information is included in their quote; any translation project quote should include the time needed for completion and a full explanation and enumeration of all applicable fees. You can find more guidance about actually requesting quotes for specific projects in the next section.



A reputable agency will be happy to give you the names of satisfied clients.

How do I manage individual projects with my vendor?

When requesting a quote:

1. When submitting a quote request, **clearly define your project parameters**, paying particular attention to the following:
 - (a) What is the purpose of the translation? Will it be used to file a patent application with a foreign authority, or is it simply for informational purposes? Does the translation of your legal document require a signed certification of accuracy from the vendor? Will your manual be publicly distributed to foreign customers, or is it intended for internal use by your company's employees?
 - (b) For translations from English into a foreign language, specify the target country(ies). The Spanish spoken in Spain can be very different from the Spanish spoken in Mexico or Argentina. Likewise, Canadian French has many differences from European French.
 - (c) State your deadline clearly. If you have an external deadline (i.e., a filing deadline or product launch date), tell the vendor upfront so adequate time for review and revision (if needed) can be allowed without jeopardizing your business requirements.
2. Determine your project priorities:
 - (a) You need the translation completed on or before a certain date.
 - (b) You have a budget that you cannot exceed.
 - (b) You must have the highest-possible quality, even if it costs more or takes longer to complete.

Remember that as any one of these priorities becomes more critical, flexibility on the other points becomes more important. Extending the deadline an extra day or two may eliminate rush charges and keep your budget intact; whereas rush fees could save your deadline.
3. If you don't receive prompt confirmation that your request has been received, a quick phone call is a good idea! Once receipt of the files is acknowledged, allow the vendor sufficient time to develop the quote. Remember that for larger projects, more time may be needed. Your Project Manager will be reviewing your request with her team, preparing the files and mapping out a plan to meet your requirements. Careful planning upfront will save you time, money and quality headaches! Providing the vendor with text-accessible file formats such as Microsoft® Word or Corel® WordPerfect® will save some time during preparation of the quote, and may save you money as well.
4. Your Project Manager may contact you with questions. Respond to them promptly and thoroughly. The more information she has from you, the more precise the quote will be!
5. If the quote does not meet your requirements, give your Project Manager clear instructions on where the problem lies. If she can't meet all of your requirements, she will offer you alternative solutions. Give honest feedback:
 - (a) Can you extend the deadline but not the budget? Allowing even a few extra days may reduce or eliminate rush charges.
 - (b) Alternatively, is adherence to the deadline the most important consideration? Perhaps a larger team can be assembled for the project.

A Buyer's Guide to Translation Services

- (c) When both budget and timeline are non-negotiable, look at reducing the translation's length and/or quality: do you need the patent's entire specification translated, or can you accept translation of just the claims? Will a summary or first-draft translation give you the information you need? Reducing the amount of text for translation may make your budget and time constraints manageable.

The Project Manager will work with you to find the best feasible solution.

During translation:

1. When you authorize the Project Manager to begin a translation, confirm the project parameters with her. If your requirements have changed, you must specify the new guidelines. Keep in mind that if the requirements have changed significantly, the quote may have to be revised.
2. Respond promptly to inquiries from the translation team. It is likely that the translators will want your input on terminology decisions, or they may ask for clarification of a technical concept.
3. Once the project has begun, alert the translation team as soon as possible to any changes in your requirements. If the schedule changes, or if the source document has been revised, let the Project Manager know so that she can change course as quickly as possible. That will lessen the amount of rework needed, which will in turn minimize the extra costs and time needed for completion.
4. Confirm receipt of the target files! Conversely, if your deadline is near and you haven't heard from your Project Manager, please give her a call. It is possible she sent the files but they didn't reach you. If you work with a good project manager, you should always know the delivery date(s), and the project manager will keep you informed of any changes throughout the project.
5. If you must cancel a project in progress, notify your Project Manager as soon as possible. Please understand that she may need to invoice you for the work completed before cancellation.

After translation is completed:

1. If someone within your organization has the linguistic and technical knowledge to review the translation, send your expert's feedback to the vendor. Translators appreciate the opportunity to learn from an expert evaluation of their text.
2. Should you happen to find an error in the translation, contact the vendor so that the translation can be corrected as quickly as possible.

When submitting the results of your expert's review, or working to correct a mistake in the target text, remember that a translation agency is obligated to maintain accuracy to the source text. If your reviewer makes a suggestion that seems to create a discrepancy between source and target, your Project Manager will discuss the situation with you and your reviewer to find an acceptable solution.

Between translations:

1. If you expect to be sending translation requests in the near future, let your Project Manager know as soon as possible, so that she can keep an eye out for your files and plan the most efficient use of resources.
2. If you have any requests or ideas on how to improve the translation process, discuss it with your Project Manager. A good vendor will work with you to make sure you have what you need!

How can I save TIME on my translation?

1. If you need translation of several documents, are you willing to have separate translators working independently on each file? Doing so will get the translation to you faster, but it is more likely that there will be inconsistencies between documents. Also remember that this approach may cost you more: you may lose some of the discounts for repeated text, since the translators will not have access to the text the other team members are working on.
2. Look at your source file. Is the text clean and sharp? Are the graphics clearly reproduced? Ask yourself: if a file in similar condition landed on your desk, would it be easy to work with? Of course, sometimes you have to take what you can get. But if you have access to a cleaner version, send the best possible file!
3. If possible, locate text-accessible versions of the documents for translation (i.e., Microsoft Word, Corel WordPerfect, OpenOffice formats).
4. Do you have any existing materials that will aid in the translation process? These materials can include translations of similar documents, additional drawings or technical information about the invention, glossaries of industry-specific technical jargon, and more. If you have any questions about whether something will aid the translation process, please call your translation Project Manager to discuss it.
5. Respond promptly to inquiries from the translation team. It is likely that the translators will want your input on terminology decisions, or they may ask for clarification of a technical or legal concept.
6. Consider whether you could work from a summary or draft translation, which could be completed more quickly. If the translation is meant for internal, behind-the-scenes use and is not intended to be released publicly, this may be an appropriate solution for you.
7. Translation projects involve multiple steps and require ensuring the availability of human resources who are qualified to support your needs. Given this, vendors can support you with better planning if you give them a heads up before your project is ready to begin. This will eliminate delays once you are ready to proceed.



Save time...

How can I save MONEY on my translation?

1. Allow your translation vendor ample time to review your project and develop a quote. This will enable your Project Manager to identify strategies to save you money. Careful planning upfront pays off in the end!
2. Allow extra time for the translation to be completed. Sometimes, even a few extra days may reduce or eliminate rush fees. Rush fees vary by vendor, but can more than double the cost of a translation project.
3. If you can accept rolling delivery, where each file is submitted separately as it is completed, this will enable the vendor to maximize use of Translation Memory tools. If certain documents are more urgent than others, please indicate which should be completed first.
4. Translation Memory tools can generate significant cost savings. Discuss the availability of these tools with your vendor, and ask what you need to do to ensure that the tools can be used on your project. An important point to remember is that use of Translation Memory software requires a text-accessible source file (i.e., Microsoft Word, Corel WordPerfect, OpenOffice formats). Make sure to ask about cost savings realized by using Translation Memory.
5. Determine if you need the entire document translated. If you only need a specific section, translating the entire document may be an unnecessary expense. But even when requesting translation of an excerpt, please provide the entire source text for the translators' reference. Context is very important in translation; information on page 50 may influence vocabulary choices in your single paragraph from page 3!
6. If you do need the entire text translated, consider whether you could work from a summary or draft translation, which could be a less expensive option. If the translation is meant for internal, behind-the-scenes use, and not intended to be released publicly, this may be an appropriate solution for you.



Save money...

How can I ensure the QUALITY of my translation?

1. Careful development and maintenance of a Translation Memory and terminology glossary is an important factor in ensuring a high-quality translation. Choosing a vendor who uses these tools can be a great advantage. Work together with your translation Project Manager to keep your TM and glossary up to date.
 - (a) Early in the project, the translation team may send you a bilingual glossary with a selection of important terms in both the source and target languages. If you have the resources to evaluate these terminology choices, send your feedback to your vendor as soon as possible. This way, the team can use the approved terms during translation, instead of during the editing process.
 - (b) Respond promptly to inquiries from the translation team. It is likely that the translators will want your input on terminology decisions, or they may ask for clarification of a technical concept.
 - (c) A good translation vendor will encourage you to have someone within your organization with linguistic and subject-matter expertise review the translation. Feedback (both good and bad) will provide a better understanding of the technology and will help improve future translations. It may also improve your Translation Memory to save you money on your next translation!
2. Do you have any existing materials that will aid in the translation process? These materials can include translations of similar documents, additional drawings or technical information about the invention, glossaries of industry-specific technical jargon, and more. If you have any questions about whether something will aid the translation process, please call your translation Project Manager to discuss it.
3. Develop an ongoing professional partnership with a trusted translation vendor. As your relationship grows over time, the vendor will learn your specific needs. As the translators become familiar with your documents, they will apply the lessons learned from previous projects to improve their deliverables. And the vendor's familiarity with your processes will simplify the administrative work on your end.



Ensure quality...

In Conclusion

Translation can be an intimidating process to those who don't know how the industry works. Because all translation is custom work, it's important to find the translation vendor best suited to your unique needs.

We hope that this guide has given you the information you need to evaluate and select translation vendors and to effectively manage translation projects.

Glossary

Computer-Aided Translation (CAT): computer software to aid human translators in their work. Major components are a Translation Memory (TM) and Glossary.

Desktop Publishing (DTP): formatting text and graphics within a document. Common DTP software applications include Adobe® Creative Suite®, Adobe FrameMaker, Adobe InDesign and QuarkXPress.

Editing: once the translation is complete, it will be reviewed by a second, equally qualified translator, who examines the translation thoroughly to identify and eliminate errors and omissions.

Editor: the person who edits the translation. The editor must be fluent in both source and target languages, and a native speaker of the target language.

Glossary: a listing of important terminology, with each term listed in source and target languages.

Interpretation: the act of conveying spoken information from one language into another.

Language pair: a source language and corresponding target language.

Language Service Provider (LSP): a company that provides translation, interpretation, multilingual DTP, and/or other language-based services

Machine Translation (MT): computer software that seeks to translate text with no human input.

Proofreading/Proofing: checking the edited translation for formatting, typographical errors and the like.

Proofreader/Proofer: the person who proofreads the translation. Unlike the translator and editor, the proofer may or may not be fluent in the source language.

Segment: a phrase or sentence from the Translation Memory, in source and target languages.

Source (document, file, language): the version that will be translated to create the “target”.

Target (document, file, language): the version that has been translated from the “source”.

Term: a word or phrase from the Glossary, in source and target languages.

Translation: the act of conveying written information from one language into another.

Translation, Edit, and Proofread (TEP): The industry-standard 3-step QA process

Translation Memory (TM): a database of source sentences and the corresponding target translations.

Translator: the person who translates the source text into the target language. The translator must be fluent in both source and target languages, and a native speaker of the target language.

About Landon IP

Landon IP has been a trusted supplier of patent, legal and technical translations for over 25 years. Legal and corporate customers, working in a wide range of technologies, rely on us to deliver their critical translations on time and on budget, no matter the file format or language pair.

In addition to translations, Landon IP also provides our customers with other support services throughout the patent lifecycle, including patent searching, patent analytics, and global information retrieval.

Landon IP, Inc.

1725 Jamieson Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314 USA

Phone: 703.486.1150

Fax: 703.892.4510

www.landon-ip.com

Orders and Inquiries: mail@landon-ip.com

