SH3 INC.
An Argos Multilingual Company

White Paper

Tips for Translating Websites

The World Wide Web isn't just English any more. Here are insights and information to help you localize your company's website.

SH3 INC.
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Providing quality translations for business since 1980

SH3, Inc. provides technical translation services for business and industry. Based in the Kansas City area since 1980, we offer translation into all major languages.

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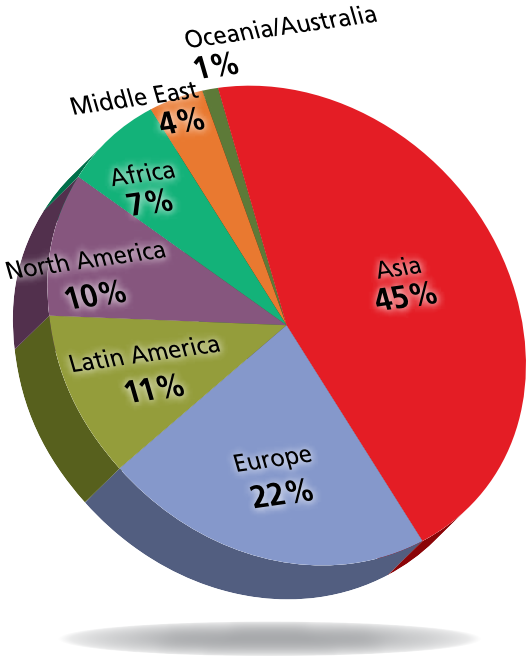
More than 2.5 billion people around the globe were connected to the Internet at the close of 2012, with new subscribers logging on every minute of every hour from every corner of the planet. Approximately 45% of web surfers are in Asia, 22% are in Europe, 11% are in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa is 7%, the Middle East is 4%, Oceania/Australia is 1%, and 10% are in North America.[1] The World Wide Web is a huge marketplace that's growing every day. And most of the customers don't speak English as their native language.



When your company makes the decision to go global with its website, it's natural to assume that translating the content is the first order of business. But before going forward, there are a number of decisions to be made. According to research by Common Sense Advisory, translation should be one of the last steps involved in creating a global presence on the web.[2]

A thorough and carefully thought-out process will save a great deal of heartburn down the road. Begin with a clear definition of your target market, followed by research into the country and culture, then move on to practical matters such as layout, language and logistics.

If you can answer the following questions in the affirmative, it's a good start:

- First and foremost, is your company **ready to support the business** you may generate from your localized website? Can you take orders in languages other than English? Can you provide language-specific customer service like phone support and payment processing? Will your forms and interactive databases display diacritical marks and non-Latin characters correctly?
- Have you decided how **navigation** will be accomplished? Do you need to reconfigure the structure of your website and page

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templates to accommodate this change? Navigation is often overlooked when languages are added, creating frustration for foreign visitors. If you use maps or flags to signify different countries and languages, remember that both of those change from time to time, and may require updating.

- Do you know how you will manage **revisions and updates** in multiple languages? Consider the time involved in obtaining translations and revising the content in several different languages whenever a change occurs. If your website resides in a content management system, make sure it's global-ready, with features like the ability to export and import XML or HTML files of the content. Some type of automatic notification to your translators will facilitate updates.
- Is your **site design** flexible enough to accept varying date and time formats, currencies, metric units, etc.? Remember that the format of phone numbers, measurements, dates and currency should be appropriate for the different regions of the world. Toll-free phone numbers (800, 888, etc.) won't work from other countries and must be adapted as well.
- Is the **content** straight-forward so that it can be readily translated? Websites often contain advertising copy, which can be a challenge for translators. Business buzzwords like "synergy" may not have a parallel meaning in other languages. Some countries have laws that require factual proof of any advertising claims. Germans, for example, frown on such claims without proper authentication.

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What's to be translated?

Once you've answered the preceding questions, you're ready to move forward. Review all of the existing content and determine exactly what is to be translated.

Consider whether the content is appropriate for foreign viewers. For instance, does your company have "Career Opportunities" in other countries? How about press releases or announcements which change frequently? Do you have a plan to keep those items current in all languages? Content that proudly proclaims your products are "Made in America," accompanied by a waving flag, might need revising.

Full site or abbreviated version?

After analyzing the content, you may decide to create an abbreviated version for specific regions or countries. In that case, build a parallel matching site in English before sending the content for translation. This will make it much less confusing for translators to view what they're translating, and to verify the translated content during the final linguistic check.

The verbiage on websites involves many different components in varying file types (HTML, BMP, PDF, ASP, etc.) Take some time to plan which of these components should appear in other languages. Once you've identified the scope, you need to provide the content in electronic format that translators can work with.

Make a list

Create a list of all the individual source files to be sent for translation. Consider each of these components:

1. Page content
2. Graphic images with embedded text – for instance, headlines created in unique fonts and placed as images, or illustrations with embedded text

3. Navigation buttons such as “About Us” or “Find A Dealer”
4. PDF documents like user manuals and brochures
5. Dynamic forms
6. Flash, streaming video, or multimedia

Web page content

The majority of the content on web pages is composed in HTML, a standard markup language used to create web pages. There are several approaches to translating this body text:

1. The **preferred method** is to provide the main body of the content in HTML, XML, or XLIFF files. Translators utilize software programs to protect tagging during their work, assuring that the translated files will display correctly. Once translated, the electronic files are ready to be compiled into the various language sites. No risky cutting and pasting is required.
2. As an option, you can provide the text in an Excel file or Word table, then copy and paste it into the website after translation. Be aware that this creates more work for you and introduces the possibility of errors when placing the text. If you decide to follow this procedure, make it mandatory for your translators to check the site on a secure server before it goes live. Otherwise you may find that words are cut off or misplaced.
3. A third alternative is to provide access to an administrative site where the translators work directly in a secure online file. This requires additional steps for translators to store their work offline, but some customers prefer this approach.

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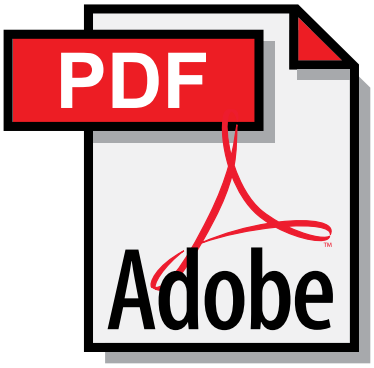
Graphic images

Any embedded text which is part of an image requires separate graphics files. Provide the source files (eps or other editable file) so the English wording can be replaced with the translation.



PDF files

Websites often contain documents in the form of PDF files. If you decide to translate these documents, the translators will need the native source files in the program which was used to create the document, such as InDesign or FrameMaker. A PDF is essentially an electronic hard copy and should be used only as a last resort for performing translation.

Dynamic forms

Provide ASP files or other files that contain the text for these forms.

Flash, streaming video

Converting these items into the local language often involves audio and/or video manipulation in addition to translation. Coordinate with your translators and the production house to accomplish this conversion.

What about free online translation?

Translating web pages requires the expertise of professional translators. It's your online presence for the world to view; you don't want it to diminish your brand in any way. Google Translate and other automatic translation programs are good for some purposes, but not for published content. One company's products, used to *burst* or replace underground pipes, were translated as *exploding* by a free online translator.

Don't be tempted to use free online translators. There's too much at stake.

Writing in "The Global Content Management Challenge," Jessica Dye says, "The biggest challenge in global content management is also the oldest – translating it into different languages. The temptation to use a free online translation might be great in this age of instant Google gratification, but *those literal word-for-word renderings don't even pass muster for a high school homework assignment, let alone a high-stakes business transaction*."[3] Don't be tempted to go that route. Remember, poor-quality translation is worse than none at all. It makes your company look bad and may discourage potential customers from buying.

Getting an estimate

Translators get many phone calls from clients asking them to, "Look at our website and give us an estimate to translate it into Spanish (or whatever language)." We respectfully submit that's like asking for a kitchen remodel estimate without letting the contractor in the front door. Because of all the details discussed above, it's nearly impossible to calculate translation cost simply from viewing a website. Estimates prepared this way can be off by 50% or more.

Website pages are interactive; there's no beginning and end so it's difficult to completely grasp the scope of what's to be translated. You need to provide the content in a translatable format to get an accurate estimate. If you've worked through the items listed here, you should be able to provide electronic files of everything to be translated.

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Now you're ready to translate

Make sure the translators you choose have the expertise and understanding to do a professional job and you'll be much happier with the end result. Gerry McGovern, a recognized web content expert, says "You don't get brownie points for trying on the Web. Web customers are ruthlessly impatient. They don't look at your badly translated content and say: 'Well, at least they tried. I think I'll buy from them.'"[4]

During this process, work with the translators to assure a quality translation by answering questions promptly. There will undoubtedly be some clarifications needed along the way; this means that your translators are trying to do a good job for you. Allow enough time for them to research your products and services, and do the job right. Emergency, "rush" turnaround times often result in shortcuts that can undermine accuracy.

Include in-country personnel in the process

A review by your in-country personnel or agent is highly recommended. The localized site can be viewed on a secure server before going live. That way, corrections and adjustments can be made privately. Don't be alarmed if the reviewers make several changes. Most of the time, those will be stylistic changes, or different ways to say the same thing. It's not unusual for reviewers to make many changes to translated websites. Due to its very nature, web content is "up close and personal" and everybody's got an opinion. Be sure to share the reviewer's changes with the initial translators. It's a good way for them to see preferences for industry terms, plus they'll need to know what's been changed when they check the final site before it goes live.

With the translation in place and review changes made, it's time to ask the translators to do a final proofing to make sure that everything is displaying correctly. This will catch any inadvertent errors that occurred while placing text or making corrections.

Launch the localized site

After checking everything, you're ready to launch your newly localized site. If you've worked through all of the details and partnered with reliable translators, you can rest assured that it reflects well on your company and its brand. A comment from Larry Gould of thebigword says it all, "What blows our minds is that large companies put huge amounts of money into branding and marketing and resist putting an effort into localizing or adapting content [to foreign markets]. That actually really, really shocks us."[5] Make sure that's not you. A localized website will bring your company a global presence and new business from international customers, and you will be glad that you took the time to do it right.

1 www.internetworldstats.com

2 Common Sense Advisory, *Beyond Global Websites*, www.commonsenseadvisory.com

3 Jessica Dye, "The Global Content Management Challenge," *Econtent* magazine, October 2007

4 Gerry McGovern, *New Thinking*, gerrymcgovern.com

5 Larry Gould, "Going Global," *Econtent* magazine, September 2008

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