

Going Global

Translation and DTP go Hand-In-Hand

Language is one of the last stumbling blocks for businesses seeking to go global – and unless everyone agrees to speak the same language sometime soon, the need for translation is likely to always exist.

Although the translation industry generates over \$10b USD in revenue each year, it's an industry that often goes unnoticed – but it's an essential line of expertise for any international company, without which many businesses and consumers of the world would struggle to have any sort of meaningful interaction.

The translation process involves a lot more than translators and proofreaders, though – for many projects, having in-depth IT and DTP expertise is as important as having linguistic knowledge.

It's in any translation company's best interests to make life as easy as possible for its clients. So if a client has a PDF brochure in, say, English and they want it returned in exactly the same format except with German text, then naturally a translation company will do all it can to meet this request.

Of course, it's easier if we receive the editable versions of the document, whether it's .indd, .inx or .ai. But sometimes this just isn't possible for one reason or another and it's necessary to work directly from the PDF.

Both Adobe Acrobat and Acrobat Professional enable our in-house DTP specialists to make minor modifications to the text with the TouchUp text tool. And where images or other objects are involved, Acrobat – in conjunction with the likes of Photoshop and Illustrator – is normally more than up for the task, with the Touchup Object Tool and a context-click all that's needed to alter an image.

But there are a number of issues that are thrown up when working between languages. The main one is text-length.

A short, pithy text in English, when translated into German, may become much longer. This can pose problems when importing translated text back into the final deliverable, especially with space-sensitive tables and documents such as flyers and posters that come with a pre-determined size and layout. Even French, on average, is about a third longer than English.

Conversely, Chinese, Korean and Japanese intrinsically require less space than English to convey a message. By way of example, the word 'information' requires a mere two characters in Japanese.

Indeed, it's often necessary to alter the deliverable's format and layout to cater for such issues, which is why many translation companies have dedicated technical divisions, to redesign translated documents and to manipulate the space to fit the text/images – or, to manipulate the text/images to fit the space.

But businesses with frequent translation requirements can actually make the process a lot simpler. By carefully considering how the source document is constructed in the first instance, it can become much easier, and consequently cheaper, to adapt a document for other languages.

For example, don't embed text within an image. Even the most gifted of DTP specialists will struggle to work with a graphic with words contained in it, and it'll save you a whole lot of hassle having to recreate an image from scratch if you simply omit any text from it in the first place.

Also, when designing Dreamweaver pages, you should be thinking ahead to when it's time to translate. Don't hard-code widths to elements that hold text – words should be permitted to flow and expand as required by the language. Separate your content from the design: cascading style sheets (CSS) enable table-less design and ultimately keep content and design apart, which means each translated page won't have to be re-designed from scratch.

Translation and localization are vital services for any business globalizing its wares, and DTP and document management are key facets of the process, but designers and developers can do themselves a big favor by considering in advance how their documents will transport across languages.

Any business that's going global should adopt this philosophy of planning for translation where possible: by thinking ahead, you will save yourself from a whole host of issues (and save money) later on.

Microbiography

Christian Arno is founder of [localization and language services](#) company Lingo24. Launched in 2001, Lingo24 now has 130 employees working on three continents and clients in over sixty countries, drawing in revenue of over \$6m USD.