



You're Finally Ready To Hire A Translation Company

WHERE DO YOU START?

BY LARA L. SOWINSKI

American companies are increasingly turning to translation companies as part of their strategy for effectively competing in foreign markets, whether through globalization of their Web sites or adaptation of materials to non-English speaking consumers.

Despite the ample number of companies providing these services, in some ways it's become more difficult to find the best company and the right price for the job. There are ways to narrow down the candidates, say experts like Charlene Nagy, president of NCS Enterprises. First, the fundamentals must be answered:

- What is the agency's size; how long has it been in business; and who owns it?
- What services does the agency offer; what markets or fields does it handle; and what languages does it translate?
- What are the staff's qualifications?

- What hardware and software does the agency have?
- Who are the agency's clients?
- Does it belong to any business or professional organizations?
- What is the agency's project management system?
- What are the typical turnaround times?
- What are the rate and pricing structures?
- How are the revisions handled?

Nagy then advises prospective clients to dig deeper once an agency "short list" has been compiled. Obtain references and contact other clients to determine how well the agency has performed. It shouldn't matter what type of client they are, she says, or even if they're in the same industry. Ask specific questions, such as whether the client was happy with the agency's service and if they're still using the agency.

How long have they used the agency? At least one of the references should have been with the agency for more than two years. Unless the agency is a newly founded company, be wary if all of its references have

Translation Pricing

Translation agencies should also specify what the client is getting for the price of the word, Strozza says. For example:

- Terminology research and development is sometimes included, but not always. If it's to be added on to the translation price, expect to pay an average of 2 to 3 cents per word in addition to the translation cost.
- The per word rate typically includes translation, proof-reading, and editing. If you see any additional charges for linguistic quality assurance, be curious and ask what they are for and how exactly it's being charged, i.e. hourly, et cetera.
- Many translation tools can handle the various types of coding schemes (HTML, XML, SGML) prevalent in today's content. This sometimes involves extensive preparation or conversion of files so they can be processed using the translation memory tool. A localization engineer or other technically astute individual (whose rate is usually higher than a translator's) often does this work. While some agencies include the cost for this engineering in the per word rate, others may bill it as a separate line item. The latter is preferable and makes it easier to see exactly how much is being charged and for what.
- Most translation agencies will charge a project management fee. This fee is assessed to encompass all of the administrative tasks related to a project, such as client communications, support to translators, and status reports, and usually amounts to and add-on of between 10 and 15 percent of the project total.

been a client for a year or less, Nagy says. Also inquire about the agency's record for delivering projects on time. Does it consistently honor the turnaround times they provide?

Ask for samples of work the agency has done for other clients. This is more useful than having the agency translate a test, since prospective clients usually don't know if the person who translates the test will actually be the one assigned to a real project. Furthermore, look at final printed examples of what the agency has produced, and expect that same quality on potential projects.

Leading translation agencies are also likely to have specialists in certain fields. For instance, New York City-based Rennert Bilingual has translators who specialize in intellectual property, banking, engineering, medicine, computers, advertising copy, video scripts, and other areas.

The Bottom Dollar

Pricing is certainly another important aspect for consideration when deciding upon a translation agency. Ralph M. Strozza, president of InterPro Translation Solutions offers a few tips on what to look for here.

Most U.S.-based translation services charge their clients

on a "per word" basis, Strozza says. The translation provider counts the words in the source file and multiplies them by a per word price. However, the lack of a standardized word count utility causes some discrepancies in the translation purchasing process. Microsoft Word's utility is probably the closest thing that resembles a standard, Strozza says, and many translation agencies use this as a matter of course.

Many clients who localize their products on a regular basis will develop localization kits. These kits specify all of the project parameters, from the scope of the project down to numbers of words, to the tools that must be used and when the project must be delivered. For clients without their own localization kit, Strozza advises inquiring about how the agency arrives at the word count, and better yet, producing your own word count for comparison's sake. Finally, some translation agencies base their charge on the "target" word count. This isn't recommended because clients really don't know exactly how much they're going to have to pay until the translation is delivered. Rather, insist upon the "source" word count as the basis for the quotation.

Two more items also need to be addressed when negotiating the price, Strozza says—change requests and guarantees of workmanship. Changing the scope of projects in mid-stream makes a Change Request Authorization mechanism imperative to the successful execution of your project. The translation agency should spell it out up front and in writing how these changes are going to be handled to allow you to have a clear view of the additional project costs and potential impact to the original delivery schedule.

Typically, the translation vendor would submit a Change Request to the client, evaluating the impact of the changes on the price, schedules, or both. Only the client should have the authority to approve a Change Request and to update or modify the project work scope, and should authorize the change in writing. The agency would then proceed to execute all authorized changes according to the revisions specified by the client.

Furthermore, be sure to ask about how corrections are handled. A reputable translation agency will guarantee its work to the extent that any errors or inconsistencies are fixed at no additional charge. Stylistic or preferential modifications will always come up no matter how good the translation may be, and client-service oriented agencies will usually include one set of modifications in the initial translation price. Again, be sure to get this clarified prior to starting the project.

Fortunately, the process of buying translation services has become more straightforward as the number of U.S. companies offering multilingual products and services has grown. Standards are evolving in the industry, which will enable clients to more easily compare costs and services and arrive at a decision they feel comfortable with.

Simplifying the translation purchasing process will make for not only better-informed buyers, but also more frequent purchasers of these kinds of services. **wt**