



The Multilingual Desktop Publishing Process

Translating a user manual or a marketing collateral piece is only half the challenge. Once the initial linguistic work is finished, there are additional steps that need to be taken before the project can be considered "done".

The business situation

This article assumes that a company wants to localize "design documents" for distributing into foreign markets. The source documents that are in a single language (usually English) have been created and approved by a graphic design agency or the in-house design department. Then the company may use an external vendor to handle either both translation and document localization or just translation when the document creation in foreign language(s) is carried out in-house.

The challenge

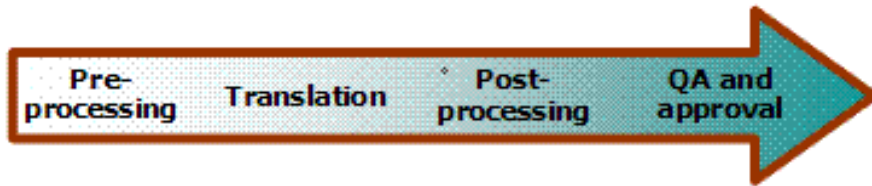
One may think that once the content translation is done, the tasks involved with foreign language typesetting would be straightforward. After all, the layout and the images are already prepared and one only needs to insert the translated text - how hard could that be? Well, a simple "Copy and Paste", or text import will not do it right.

- Pages may need to be reformatted in order to accommodate language expansion as well as to ensure that the impact of line and page breaking on the layout is suitable.
- Graphics containing text need to be localized
- Screens captured from localized applications need to replace source-language screens
- Indexes and tables of contents need to be generated and proofread for accuracy
- PDFs need to be generated to be sent as deliverables for the quality assurance step

Actually the challenge starts before the text translation can be launched. Depending on the file format(s) of the source "design documents", getting the text out of the layout so that a translator can work on it can be its own challenge. This is why a structured and planned process needs to be followed.



The process



Pre-processing tasks:

This includes the preparation of the source documents for export/import procedures. An export of the translatable text into a format that can be accessed by translators is generated. A PDF of the source document is created for the translator to use as reference because the export of the translated text may not reflect any of the layouts and features.

Translation of content:

Translators translate the content into the target languages using a PDF of the source document to have an overall view of how the document is designed and how the message is communicated.

Post-processing tasks:

This includes the import of the translated text into the DTP application and the adjustment of the document layout and features after the text is translated and imported. For instance, several language specific features require to be checked and potentially manually corrected: hyphenation, punctuation, page breaking, and adjustment of text elements for complete display and accurate positioning and formatting.

If there are hyperlinks and inline images, they may have to be restored. If there are table of contents and index, they may need to be generated. Sometimes after the import, parts of the text are misplaced because the original design may lack insufficient or inconsistent layout techniques. These potential predicaments require manual corrections.

Our recommendation is that the party that exports the translatable text should also be responsible for the import step.

Quality assurance and approval:

The localized documents should be reviewed by both the external vendor and the client and its in-house design department. The in-house DTP staff will record their changes and comments on a PDF export of the localized document.

Make it work

There are several conversion tools available on the market that offer the ability to export and import document features. The goal of these conversion tools is to be able to safely extract the translatable text in a format that is readable to translators. Translators are not designers and they usually don't own the formatting and layout applications used by graphic designers to create an attractive piece of marketing material.



But the localization process should produce foreign language design documents that appear as if they've been originally created for the specific foreign market. Therefore, the pre- and post-processing tasks are critical to the achievement of this goal. The actual work involved with pre- and post-processing depends on how well conversion tools work with the publishing application used to create the source document. Overall, **this manual work is time intensive and some design guidelines can be followed to simplify the process (see text insert below).**

These guidelines are especially critical if the same source document will be translated into multiple target languages. The adjustment of the source document layout may become an imperative to keep costs and lead time down.

Layout Guidelines for Preparing Design Documents for Localization

Many problems can be avoided if the graphic designer keeps in mind that the document will be translated into other languages. Sometimes, an attractive and very professional design in English can be a nightmare for other languages.

- Use a page layout that will not be disrupted by increasing or decreasing text lengths and leave plenty of white space. Western European languages other than English can on average, take up 30% more space than English. If not enough space has been allotted, the foreign language typesetter will be forced to reduce the font size, or change character and line spacing, or new pages may even need to be added. Since the text may be longer and flow differently, it is possible that some images will also have to be repositioned and the entire document will look a little bit different.
- Use style sheets and paragraph styles: Not only will this make your work easier and more consistent, it will also help the foreign language typesetter.
- Try to use fonts that support foreign characters and use OpenType fonts as much as possible. Some of the fancy font families do not have even the most common French or Spanish accents, let alone accents needed by Eastern European languages.
- Unlink text frames unless there is a good reason to link them and plan adequate space within each frame. This will prevent the translated text from "jumping around" and appearing next to the incorrect images and create inappropriate positioning.
- Provide all the native source files and fonts used for creating the source document. If you used layers with text and images to create art effects, make sure that the foreign language typesetter receives all necessary source files, and not just the ones exported after merging the layers. It also applies for graphs and charts. Acceptable native file formats are from Illustrator, QuarkXPress, Photoshop or InDesign.



Layout Guidelines for Preparing Design Documents for Localization (ctd)

- Use a minimum number of columns. In some languages such as German, words may be twice as long as in English. If the columns are too narrow, you may end up with lines that only have one word or many hyphens. Documents formatted that way just aren't as professional looking as they may otherwise be.
- Pay attention to cultural issues. If your document is to be translated into a language spoken in an equatorial or tropical country, try not to use pictures with Eskimos. This will work only in the case that your document is actually about Eskimos. Be careful when choosing colors (see past article "Cultural Interpretation of Colors" http://www.mtmlinguasoft.com/enews_sept_2004.htm).
- Finalize your design before sending the files for translation and foreign language typesetting. For most foreign languages like Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and many others, the foreign language typesetter will use a localized version of publishing and layout software and the localized documents won't work in the English version of the identical software.

Before starting a localization project, a test cycle of export/import tasks is recommended. This will confirm that the appropriate versions are compatible and supported by both the in-house designers and the external vendor. Also for a significant project or a large document, this is to make sure that all document-specific and language-specific technical issues are identified and addressed as early as possible. **As with all types of localization, a planned and tested process plays a crucial role in the success of multilingual desktop publishing projects.**

Multilingual Desktop Publishing (DTP) is the process of taking translated text and putting it into a program such as Adobe Pagemaker, Framemaker, or Microsoft Publisher. This is often the last step in the translation process of brochures and catalogs. Special linguistic skills and software are often necessary. Even when using the correct design application and platform, foreign language typesetting can be very challenging and requires the expertise of an experienced foreign language typesetter.