

The Five Phases of the Translation Workflow

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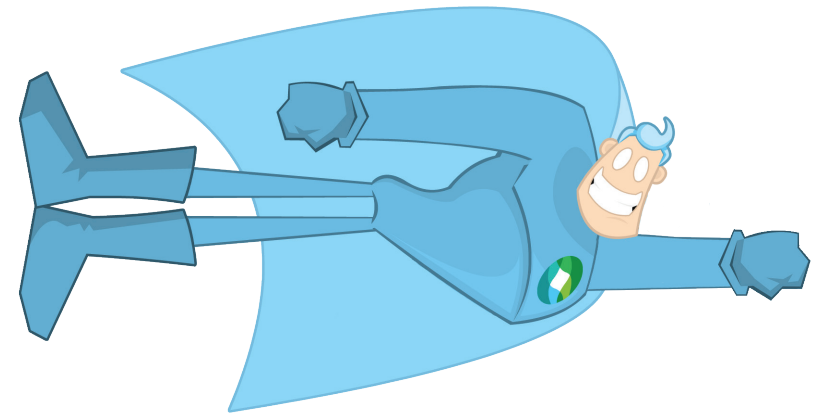
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The Five Phases of the Translation Workflow

By Val Swisher

Recently, I was asked to streamline the translation workflow for one of my customers. In the process, I created a fairly long list of questions to ask them. The answers to the questions helped me to define a new workflow that was less cumbersome and complicated than the original.

By translation workflow, I do not mean the steps that a translation company follows during the translation process. Instead, my focus is on the workflow that surrounds the translation process. It includes all of those nitty-gritty things we have to do to manage the content as it moves through the entire process. This workflow covers everything but the work that the translation company does. They have their own workflow.



**So...with no further ado:
Here are the Workflow
Phases...**



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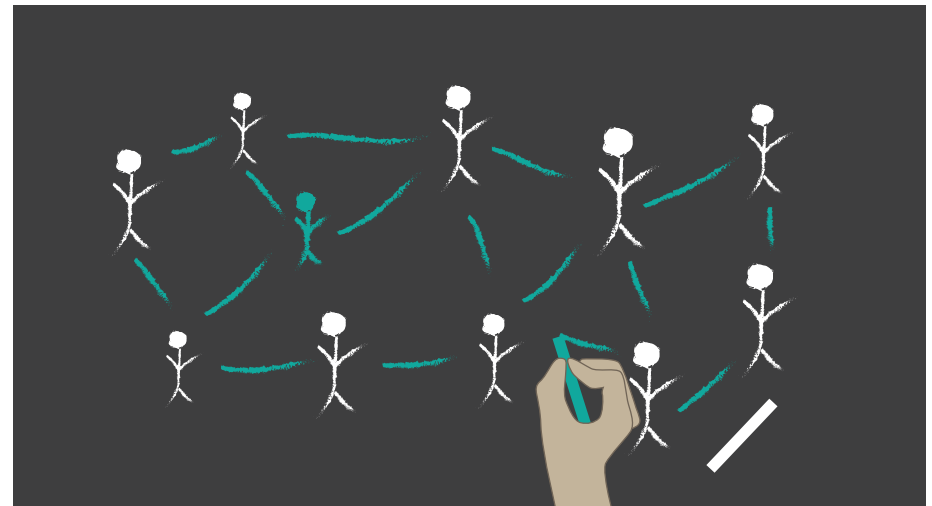
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Phase I: Before Content Goes to Translation

Long before your content ever goes to translation, you need to think about the communication between your company and the Language Services Provider (LSP). Sorting out the communication in advance will save you a lot of time and headaches when the day comes to start translating. If you wait until you actually need your content translated to first start thinking about how to communicate with your LSP, you have waited way too long. And much of this communication revolves around expectation setting.

Years ago, before I knew better, I had an, “If I don’t say anything, then no one has to deal with it” attitude of setting expectations. As you can imagine, it didn’t always work out so well. Being more experienced, I know that it is critical to clearly state your expectations for everything in a relationship at the start. Sometimes topics are uncomfortable, such as money, timelines, quality markers, and so on. My rule of thumb: the more uncomfortable the topic, the more critical it is to state the expectation and get agreement. The same is true in the opposite

direction. You want the other party to let you know what their expectations are. That way, you can determine if their expectations are reasonable or if they need to be negotiated.



Game plan for communication.

The following is a list of items, including expectations, to think about before you send the source files to your LSP:

- Who informs the LSP that content is coming for translation?
- How soon before the content is ready is the LSP notified?
- Who is informed at the LSP?



Phase I: Before Content Goes to Translation (cont.)

- What is the method of informing them?
- What does the LSP provide (bid, proposal, scope of work) before translation?
- Who is that information provided to?
- How long does the LSP need to create the bid, proposal, or scope of work?
- Is there a sign-off process prior to the files going to translation? Who is involved?
- When is a purchase order issued?
- When does work commence in relation to the purchase order being issued?

It surprises me that many companies do not have a set communication methodology that is used over and over again. Instead, they send content to translation in a haphazard fashion. Without a stable workflow, you run the risk of incurring additional costs, negatively impacting the quality of the translation, increasing time to market, and creating a lot of confusion for everyone involved.

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After you have set the expectations on both sides, be sure to write them down. The best way is to use some type of legal agreement, such as a proposal, a statement of work, and so on. At minimum, send an email that clearly states what everyone has agreed to. If you don't, you will forget. You think you'll remember, but trust me, you'll forget.



Phase 2: Sending Your Content to Translation

The process of sending content to your translation company has its own series of steps. I know what you're thinking: "How hard can it be? I take the files and get them to the Language Services Provider (LSP)." It's the words "get them" that you need to determine.

Here are some things to think about:

- At what point in the process does content go to translation?
- Where are the files physically located before they are sent to the LSP?
- Does the location of the source files change after they are sent to the LSP?
- How are the files delivered to the LSP?
- What types of files are delivered to LSP?
- Does the LSP provide a receipt when they get the files?

- Does any additional information go to the LSP with the files?
 - What information?
 - When does it go to the LSP?
 - How does it travel with the files?
 - Who in your organization supplies the additional information?

The answers to many of these questions will be very different depending on whether or not you are using a Content Management System (CMS). Using a CMS can streamline a great deal of the workflow to transmit source content, and receive, store and version the translations. If you do a lot of translation and you are not using a CMS, consider this one of the many reasons you should purchase a CMS soon.



Phase 3: Interaction During Translation

During translation, you need to consider the interaction that takes place between your company and your LSP. Most of the interaction that happens during translation falls into one of two categories:

- Asking for and receiving clarification on source content
- Reviewing the translations

Clarifying Source Content

Before you send anything to your LSP, make sure that you know how you are going to handle questions from the translators. Someone at your company will need to answer each question.

In my experience, the best person to have available to answer a translator's question is the writer of the original source content. For reasons that I have never understood, this communication is rarely established. In all of the years that I was a writer and then a manager of writers, I cannot recall a single instance where I was asked by the translation and

localization team for clarification. I never really thought about it. Translation was not in my silo.

If you do not establish the line of communication for clarifying the source content, then you are leaving the translator to make his or her best guess. Not a good idea.



Someone at your company will need to answer each question.



Phase 3: Interaction During Translation (cont.)

Reviewing Translations

You also need people to review the translations. There is likely no one at your company with the title, “Translation Reviewer.” Therefore, you will need to enlist the help of people who have other jobs.

The best practice for translation review is to have an in-country reviewer (ICR) for each language/location that you use. As with all communication, setting expectations for the role of an ICR is paramount to the success of your project. Remember, these people almost always have full-time jobs that have nothing to do with reviewing translation.

If you do not have an ICR for each language, then you need to have someone who speaks both the source language and the translation fluently - preferably someone who is a native speaker of the language used for the translation. The same expectation rules apply. The more you plan, the better off you’ll be.

One thing I would definitely caution against is not reviewing each language. I have customers that actually do not have any reviewers for certain languages. This is a terrible idea. I’m sure you can list the reasons why.

Food for Thought

Here are some of the questions you should think about:

- What type of communication occurs during the translation process? phone? email? Skype? text?
- Who is responsible for answering questions that come in from the translator?
- How are those questions handled?
- Does every language have an ICR? Do you have a list of those people? Have they been informed?
- On average, how many iterations can you expect between the translator and the ICR?
- Do your ICRs like cookies? (So you can thank them profusely for their help.)



Phase 4: Content Returns from Translation

Once your translations are finished, the workflow for their return is another area that needs to be clearly spelled out. This phase is similar to Phase 2: Content Going to Translation, except in reverse. One thing that can complicate this stage is the number of files that you now have to account for. For each file that you sent to translation, you will have that number multiplied by the number of languages being returned.

It's best to be prepared for all of the translated files - you'll be dealing with a lot of them.

Here are questions to consider:

- Are all of the languages returned at the same time? If not, who is responsible for tracking each language?
- What is the process for returning the translations?
- What format are the translations in when they are returned?

- Who are the translations delivered to?
- Who does the desktop publishing (if needed)?
- Is there a special file naming scheme used for the translated files?
- Is there additional information about each file returned at the same time? What type of information? In what format?

I have seen companies that pay little attention to the process of receiving translations from their LSP. When they aren't looking, havoc ensues. They lose track of which languages were delivered, to whom, and when. They end up with version control issues. They don't have the answers when their product managers ask questions about time to market. It is a problem. You need to pay as much attention to the files as they return as you did when you first sent them. In fact, maybe more.



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Phase 5: After Translation

You are at the home stretch of the translation workflow! But you're not done yet. Last, but not least, you need to figure out what you are going to do with the content after it has been translated. It is best for you to have this figured out well in advance. If not, you will end up with a whole lot of files that are all dressed up with no place to go.

Last, but not least, you need to figure out what you are going to do with the content after it has been translated.

If you have a content management system, you will need to think about how the translations will be stored in the CMS. For example, will the files be linked to the source content, how will the translations be tagged, how will reusable pieces of content (such as illustrations) be handled, and so on. Without a CMS, you have to consider manually naming, storing, versioning, and retrieving the files.

Important questions to ask include:

- Who needs to be notified that the translations are complete?
- What file types are the translations stored in?
- Are the translations linked to each other?
- Are there additional files, such as illustrations, to consider?
- Is there a strategy for reusing applicable content?
- How are the translation files being delivered to the end customer?
- Are they printed?
- Are they provided online?
- Who is responsible for printing translations?
- Who is responsible for posting translations?
- Are translations released simultaneously with the source language?

There are additional types of assets to consider, as well. For example, your translation memories (TMs). If you have multiple LSPs working on similar content, you want to make sure that all of the TMs are in sync. The same is true with glossaries.



Phase 5: After Translation (cont.)

Responsibility for the glossaries and translation memories can differ, depending on your company and your LSP. I always advise that you, the customer, maintain control of all assets. If you cannot maintain them in-house, be sure that you legally own them and that your LSP provides them to you on an as-needed basis.

TMs and glossaries are almost always neglected after the project ends. We have good intentions. We always think that “someone” will get to the clean-up tasks “later,” but it can wait. After all, we have important work to do now. Unfortunately, later almost never happens, which means that the next translation project starts from the place where the prior project ended. Imagine how much easier the translation task would be and how much higher the quality of the translations would be if we cleaned up the TMs and glossaries after each translation project? Language nirvana!

Lather, Rinse, Repeat

These five phases of the translation workflow should be repeated each time you have a new translation project. Sure, there are some tasks that you will not have to figure out completely. But, overall, you should pay attention to expectation setting, delivery of source content, review of translation, receiving translated files, and sending the content on its way each and every time your content is destined for another language, culture, or part of the world.

If you pay careful attention each time, the quality of your translations will improve, your costs will decrease, and you’ll be quick to market. Everyone wins!



About the Author

Val Swisher is the CEO of Content Rules. She is a well-known expert in global content strategy, content development, and terminology management. Val helps companies solve complex content problems by analyzing their content and how it is created. Val thinks that content should be easy to read, cost-effective to translate, and efficient to manage. Her customers include industry giants such as Google, Cisco, Illumina, Facebook and Rockwell Automation.

Val's third book, "Global Content Strategy: A Primer" was just released by XMLPress and is available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other book sites.

In addition to running Content Rules, Val is on the Executive Board for Translators Without Borders. At TWB, she is responsible for creating and running the Simplified English program and working with non-governmental organizations to provide them with much-needed translations for humanitarian causes around the world.

Content Rules

Content Rules provides content strategy, content creation, and content optimization services. We help customers solve their complex content challenges. We are experts at increasing content quality, lowering the cost of translation, and speeding time to market by optimizing content prior to translation.

