

## ***Reducing Translation Cost While Maintaining Quality***



*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.*



7101 College Boulevard  
Suite 500  
Overland Park, KS 66210 USA

T: 913.747.0410  
F: 913.747.0417

[www.sh3.com](http://www.sh3.com)

**True story:** A few years ago, the authoring staff of one of our customers asked what they could do to reduce translation costs. We recommended four steps: 1) editing text to reduce word count; 2) re-purposing text where possible; 3) simplifying page layout; 4) adopting FrameMaker as their publishing program.

Following through on all of these suggestions took some time, but it was well worth the effort. The average cost of providing print-ready translation of their manuals went from \$75 a page to \$18 a page. Multiply that times hundreds of pages in eight to ten languages and it adds up to real money.

In this white paper we'll share some of the same tips that helped that team of writers become cost-cutting experts. Following these suggestions can help your company save money. Best of all, your documents will be more translation-friendly which will result in better translations.

## **A cheaper rate is not necessarily a better value.**

The first thought is often to find a cheaper translator when cost reduction becomes a goal. That's easy to do with the resources available over the Internet. But going cheap almost always results in poor-quality translation. Will it be a bargain when you receive so many complaints that you have to scrap the translation?

Remember that the documents you are translating will have a direct impact on critical components of your company's business:

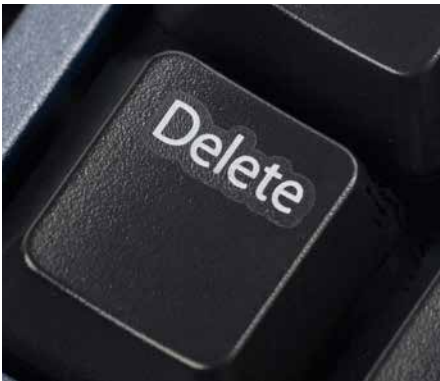
- Corporate and brand image
- Product performance and customer satisfaction
- Safety and liability

There are many steps you can take to get more bang for your buck instead of searching for a low-cost translator.





## Managing Content



### Translation is priced by the word

These two examples illustrate how much can be saved by editing text.

Be brief and keep it simple; content has a direct impact on the price you pay.

The standard method of pricing translation is to charge by the word – the number of words to be translated is multiplied by a rate per word for a particular language, falling somewhere in the range of \$.20 to \$.35 per word. There are several other steps that are added into the overall price, but word count is one of the most important factors. Therefore, reducing content lowers cost.

*It is important to remember to change the oil in your new fuel-efficient vehicle's engine every 3000 miles (4800 km). This will help to increase your new car's operating efficiency and result in better fuel efficiency in both city and highway driving. For further information see Section 3, "Making the Most of Your New Vehicle," page 198 of this manual.*

*60 wds x \$.25/wd x 5 languages = \$75.00*

*Important: change the engine oil every 4800 km to increase fuel efficiency. See Section 3.*

*18 wds x \$.25/wd x 5 languages = \$18.75*

**70% COST REDUCTION**

Edit your content to eliminate wordiness. For instance, compare "Read through the manual and make sure you understand all of the instructions" to "Read and understand the manual" – the same thought in fewer words. Eradicate lengthy noun strings which are hard to translate. "Tighten the clamp" replaces "Tighten the worm gear hose clamp."

Eliminate redundant modifiers such as "step" or "item" – label your illustrations with "1," "2" or "3" instead of "Item 1," "Item 2" or "Item 3." Use a simple dash in tables to indicate "not available"

instead of “N/A,” which requires translation. Include only metric measurements so you don’t pay for translating English units like “inches,” “horsepower” or “acres.”

These are just a few examples of ways to reduce words without affecting content. Judicious editing before translation pays off. And while you’re editing, make sure that your message is easily understood. Clear writing results in more accurate translation because the translators don’t have to guess at ambiguous meanings.

### **Translate only the necessary parts of the message.**

In addition to prudent editing, consider exactly what needs to be translated and eliminate chunks of content that don’t impact the message. Determine if there are portions that can be purged. For instance, an introductory section describing your company background and product features is superfluous in a user manual; the customer has already bought your product. Another example – many companies don’t translate parts listings because their customers order by part number, not by description.



### ***Recycle and Reuse***

#### **Store and recycle content.**

Think boilerplate. If certain portions of your documents never vary, translate them once and store the translation for future recycling. Content Management Systems are a high-end method of doing this; you can realize the same benefit by “modularizing” your information.

The warranty, safety section or “How to Get Help” section may be the same in all of your manuals. Save those translated sections and place them in your documents after the rest is translated. Even though there are discounts for text retrieved from translation memory, there is still a fee involved. If translators don’t see it, you don’t pay for it.

Be generic wherever possible. Discuss “the machine” instead of the “Model 1900 excavator.” Often the model name is the only difference in text which is repeated from one manual to the next.

## Learn about translation memory and how it can save you money.

Make sure your translators are utilizing translation memory (TM) software to store and retrieve translated sentences. With the help of this technology, professional translators build an electronic database of translations in each pair of source-target languages (i.e. English-Spanish, French-English, etc.). New sentences are compared to the stored database in the same language pair and matching translations are retrieved. This results in reduced cost and faster translation. Technical manuals are an ideal application because of the presence of repetitive content.

Ask for a demonstration of translation memory and learn how the software recognizes matching phrases and what can affect matches. Small changes in previously-translated text, like replacing "dealer" with "representative," can reduce matches.

Translation costs can be reduced over time through the use of translation memory (TM) software, especially for repetitive text in the same languages. Adapting your authoring to take advantage of TM benefits can have a big impact on your translation spending.

### Cost of Translations:



When you understand the value of translation memory, put that knowledge to work by applying it to your own authoring. The more consistent you make your documents, the more your cost will be reduced. One customer cut translation costs in half by learning

how TM software works and then adjusting their authoring process accordingly.

## ***Plan Ahead***

### **Keep revisions to a minimum.**

Alterations (“author’s alterations”) that occur after the translation has begun add time and expense. Many last-minute revisions can be avoided by planning ahead. Changes made by your in-country reviewers can also affect the price, especially if reviewers get “red ink syndrome” and re-write the entire document. Communicate the cost of revisions to all of those who are involved with your translated documentation.

Obviously there are cases where you must revise a document – new features have been added or operating procedures have been revised. Resist the impulse to tweak the rest of the text with stylistic changes when making those necessary revisions. For instance, changing “Read all product information” to “Read all Model X information” will require editing the existing translation. Stylistic changes can add up quickly.

### **Avoid minimum charges by grouping small projects together and waiting to submit documents until they are final.**

A minimum charge for each language is standard practice for professional translators. Small translation projects (a single paragraph or a few miscellaneous phrases) entail the same amount of care and handling as larger projects because the wording is often out of context and can be difficult to decipher.

Waiting to submit your document until it has been approved and finalized will help you avoid minimum charges for those last-minute items. Combining several small requests is more economical than sending them individually.

### **Give the translators enough time to do their job.**

You’re in a hurry. By the time a request for translation comes along, the product is on the dock ready to ship. But rushing translators is not a good idea; quality suffers and costs go up. Translators can



only translate a certain number of words per day (1500 to 2000 is an average). Secondary editing must follow to ensure accuracy. Plus, highly technical documents often require additional time to research the subject matter and terminology. Translators may have to skip important steps in order to meet your deadline and the final product will suffer.

Another consideration is that most translation suppliers charge for rushing to meet shorter-than-reasonable deadlines. Rush charges cover overtime fees – anywhere from 25% to 50% of the total.

It's always better to plan in advance whenever possible and do what you can to work with the translator's schedule.

## Adobe® FrameMaker®



## Adobe® PageMaker®



### ***Be Efficient with Publishing Process and Layout***

#### **Use the best publishing software for technical manuals**

Technical documents tend to be lengthy and contain numerous illustrations, tables and diagrams. Your choice of publishing software can have a real impact on translation cost.

Because translators work in translation memory software, your electronic files must be “prepped” (converted to a continuous text file) since TM software doesn't run in publishing programs. After the translation is completed and stored, the translated text is formatted to mirror the look of the original document.

These two steps are quick and efficient in some programs; therefore the resultant costs are lower than with other types of electronic files. FrameMaker is the most translation-friendly, followed closely by InDesign. PageMaker and Quark are on the other end, requiring manual intervention so the costs are higher. Word for Windows falls somewhere in the middle, depending upon the complexity of the layout. The difference in prep and formatting costs can be dramatic when technical manuals contain 50 to 500 pages – from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars more or less.

These prep and formatting steps are streamlined with FrameMaker files. With the help of some unique filters, FrameMaker documents are saved



into a text file with the formatting elements like fonts and alignment becoming protected tags. After translation, reversing the process causes the tags to reapply formatting elements to the translated text. Some adjustments are always required, but both steps are faster and less expensive than with other publishing programs.

Authoring in XML is another possibility. XML is not actually a publishing program but rather a markup language – a method of encoding that is derived from SGML. An XML file contains only tagged text. File prep is greatly reduced and there are no formatting costs. Composition is done as an automatic process on the customer's end and is not a cost factor.

Of course, there is a significant investment of time and expense in the purchase, training and start-up time that go into adopting a new publishing process. That cost should be weighed carefully before making a change.



## **Simplify layout, plan for expansion and follow good typesetting practice**

Post-translation formatting cost is based on the amount of time required to make the document publication-ready, including fonts, style, leading, spacing, hyphenation, graphic editing, etc. Simple layouts are best. More time and cost are involved in formatting translated text in complex layouts. Ask your translation provider for input on your layout and electronic files, and consider their suggestions.

### **Here are a few points about layout:**

- Plan for text expansion. Translation into many European languages results in 25% to 50% more words. Leave white space and use a large font size (12 point type is excellent).
- Place text in tables instead of using tabs to line up text. After translation, table cells allow for expansion without manual adjustments.
- Avoid stacking headlines or captions with manual line breaks. This will cause the translation memory software to present the text as two separate thoughts. Manual line breaks must be removed before translation.



- Simple layouts with standard font choices are best. Formatting a 200-page manual with multiple columns, complicated tables, complex visuals and detailed graphics is a costly project. Special text effects, narrow columns, and unique fonts make formatting translated text more time-consuming. Simplify and save money.
- Use styles or master pages wherever possible. This makes the post-translation formatting go much faster. Where styles or master pages are in place, one adjustment can be replicated on many pages at once.
- Place text in the publishing program, not on images created in another program and imported into the document. Or leave text off of illustrations and place in a legend below. An additional step is required to replace words embedded in a graphic image, and that is a cost driver.
- Place as much of the text in one text flow as possible. While some authors like to use text boxes to position text, it is time-consuming to work with dozens of small chunks of text.
- Make it a practice to leave words off of illustrations. If an explanation is required, place it in the text of the message. This will make the translation go faster and cost less.
- Include metric measurements. If your document includes dual dimensions, specify the order in which they should appear.

## ***Final Thoughts***

### **You can have a major impact on translation cost**

Some companies have turned to low-cost translators as a way of stretching the budget. This is risky at best. Amateurish translation is often the result when price is the only factor. Poor quality translation affects product satisfaction and corporate image, not to mention liability. A better alternative is to evaluate your authoring process and how it impacts translation cost.

We've given you many tips in this White Paper that can stretch your budget. A final suggestion is to view your translation vendor as a partner and encourage two-way communication. Ask about ways that

you can work together to reduce costs. And consult on any process changes that affect translated documents before you spend a big chunk of money on software which could have an adverse affect.

In the end, translators can only translate what they are provided; they cannot shorten or re-vamp the text, or revise a complex layout. When it comes to the cost of translating, you are very much in the driver's seat.

### ***A few words about "free" translation***

Online translation websites can be quite useful for certain applications, such as deciphering foreign e-mail messages or getting the "gist" of a document. But free online translators (also known as "machine translation") do not provide publication-quality translation and should not be used for anything that impacts your customers or your business. A recent incident confirms this advice.

A regional business publication was embarrassed after using an online translation website to create an illustration for a story about translation. The article by Adam Wooten, "Lost in Translation: Preserving Brand Strength in Foreign Markets," specifically warned against using online translation websites as a substitute for professional translation. The illustration in Chinese characters was supposed to say "Lost in translation" but actually said "Lost Tokyo." Lesson learned.

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**R** Return  
**O** On  
**I** Investment

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