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Ten Tips For Hiring Translation Services

1. Always hire professional translators.

Translation is a profession. Children, students, and other people you know may be bilingual, but that does not mean they have the training, practice, and knowledge to make a message clear in translation. Certified translators need to take difficult standardized tests to prove their literacy and ability to handle the subtleties of both English and the native language.

2. Always hire two translators for each translated piece you do: one to translate, and the other to edit, proof, and confirm the translation.

It helps a great deal if the translators know each other so they can hammer out differences together. Otherwise what is correct comes down to one person's word against another's, and no two translators translate exactly the same.

3. If at all possible, hire a translation agency.

If you work with a good translation agency it will always have the two translators you need, saving you the effort of finding two reliable ones. It is standard practice that more than one translator checks every translation before it is returned to you. In order to hire good people, some agencies use more difficult tests of their own on top of the required national tests for certification. Agencies typically guarantee their translations. They also have alphabets for a large range of languages and can desktop your material. In addition, a good agency is an invaluable resource for asking questions such as what dialects to use (see #7 below). It is easy to use Twin City agencies if none exist in your area; just e-mail the files you need translated.

4. Before translating, make sure your English version is as simple and clear as you can make it.

Complicated, wordy English is much harder to translate well.

5. Before translating, make sure your particular audience is generally literate in their own language.

Many immigrants aren't. Some have not had the educational opportunity to learn to read. For others, literacy may not have been part of their culture. Some languages that use the same alphabet English does, such as Hmong, Somali languages, and Vietnamese, existed in written form only in the last half-century. Western people have recorded them in written form and used their own alphabet

to do it. So while many people from these countries can read their language, many others cannot.

6. Use pictures to help you get across the message rather than rely solely on words.

This will make any translation clearer and help people with low literacy skills understand your information.

7. Be sure your translation is in the correct dialect.

All languages have dialects. Spanish can be especially controversial because Mexico is our closest Spanish-speaking neighbor, but Mexican Spanish is considered non-standard. Just as the University would not publish a handout in, say, Jamaican English, educational institutions do not publish in Mexican Spanish but rather use standard Spanish (which all literate Spanish-speaking people can understand).

Hmong is another language in which dialect plays an important role. Hmong has two primary dialects, White and Green. Both are considered correct but White Hmong is more common in Minnesota, so that is what we use in translation here.

8. Allow enough money to get a good translation.

The fewer translators available in a given language, the more expensive the translation. For instance, Indonesian will probably cost 20 to 30 percent more to translate than Spanish. Very technical material will cost about 30 percent more to translate than simple material. For Nutrition Education Programs information, you can use a very rough estimate of about 30¢ per word to translate, not including desktopping.

9. Allow enough time to get a good translation.

The average turnaround time to get a translation also varies with the language, length, and difficulty of the text. For agencies, a week is a reasonable turnaround time for documents of about 600 words or fewer.

10. Consider every translation a pilot or draft.

There is no translation that cannot be argued, changed, or made better in some way. Expect some disagreement as you gather community feedback, and get feedback from a number of sources before making changes.