

global update

How to Get Your Catalog Ready for Foreign Translation

Taking your catalog to global markets is a major decision that involves a rather large investment in translation services and time. The project's expense and level of difficulty will vary depending on how well you design your English-language catalog and how carefully you prepare it for translation.

Following are nine tips that can help with such a project.

1 Test with a smaller catalog. If this is the first time you're mailing a catalog version to other countries, test the market with a smaller version of your book that includes just your bestsellers.

2 Understand translation costs. Translation services often are quoted per word and are based on the language and level of difficulty — even more reasons to start with a smaller version of your catalog (*see No. 1 above*). Reducing the amount of data that needs translating is the most cost-effective measure you can take.

3 Decide what merchandise to sell. Look at each of the products in your catalog and decide whether it will sell to your target audience abroad. You either can change the copy to attract a foreign audience or decide to eliminate some products all together.

Also, verify if products have been adapted for the foreign country you're targeting.

Electrical appliances, for example, may not work overseas. And products displaying text (e.g., a warning label, instructions) may have to be localized. Indeed, many countries, in particular European Union members, require that products include packaging and instructions in the language of the user.

4 Test how to export data for translation from your database. To provide an accurate translation, your translation team will need to not only understand your products but also see the text in order to translate the copy in proper context. Offer your provider access to pictures of your merchandise selection.

5 Be sure your database system allows for the special characters of the foreign language into which you're translating. Your database should support Unicode, which is a standard that defines character sets and enables you to efficiently handle text in any language.

Also, ensure the foreign language in your database can be exported to your layout format. The English version of QuarkXPress, for example, doesn't support Asian characters. Again, test before proceeding.

6 Have your translation provider establish a "translation memory" of your content. This eliminates the need to retranslate the same content several times. Also, avoid modifying the content between your catalog's printed and online versions. Both of these actions may result in lower cost and turnaround time of your translation service.

7 Optimize your catalog's layout. Most foreign languages increase a text's length, often up to 30 percent. Leave enough white space to allow for this. Otherwise, you'll see the copy's point size shrink to fit the translation on a printed page.

8 Discern the standard paper format used in the country where you're mailing.

9 Consistently use templates and style sheets. Have them reviewed as early as possible by your translation provider. Poor page design can dramatically increase formatting costs in foreign languages. Style elements to plan for include international addresses and phone numbers; unit-of-measurement conversions; and graphics, tables, and indexes.

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