

How to build a global L&D programme



Comtec

Your translation partner

A guide to driving learner engagement and measurable ROI for global L&D programmes through effective translation and localisation of training content.

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Facing the challenges in building a global L&D programme

The world of L&D is fast-paced and high demand. As an L&D professional, you want your programmes to engage employees so that they achieve the desired learning outcomes, whether that is a new skill or vital safety knowledge.

When you work for a global business, this challenge becomes more complex. With different regions come varying cultures and languages. Translating and localising your training will give you the best chance of meeting learning goals. By speaking the different languages of your workforce, you will drive engagement and understanding. This means better results and greater business impact.

Translating and localising learning programmes can be daunting, but it doesn't have to be as complex as you may think. By streamlining the process and applying tried and tested techniques, you can deliver training that not only improves learner engagement, but delivers on ROI.

This guide has been written to help L&D professionals navigate translation and localisation for global learning programmes so they can get the highest engagement in every language.

From our experience in working alongside many L&D professionals during their translation projects, their key challenge areas are:



Managing the translation process

Handling the translation of learning content is complex, so how can it be managed in a way which avoids lots of additional work and stress?



Use of digital tools and innovative formats

How can translations be implemented in digital formats such as games, VR or user-generated content?



Quality

Being confident that the translations are on-brand and of high quality. How can we check they're accurate?



Time

How can turnaround times for translations be improved?



Costs and ROI

How can escalating costs be stopped and more value for money be achieved?



Creating a 'pull' for learning

How can learning experiences that engage employees be created in every language?

Sounds familiar? Then you're in the right place. This guide will provide you with the answers to all of these questions and more.

How to build a global L&D programme



The way we work has changed. New generations entering the workforce, together with advances in technology have allowed businesses to access international talent more easily.

As teams spread out across the map, gone are the days of outdated company training videos. How can L&D professionals align a training strategy for a multilingual team, in different time zones and on different continents? Here are some tips to get you started.

Consider multiple formats and methods of delivery.

Not only do individuals learn differently, but different offices and locations will have varying levels of equipment, connectivity and training space. Factor these types of restrictions into implementation planning.

Involve local colleagues.

Even if content is designed and developed centrally, local teams will be essential to rolling out your programme, so involve them early and encourage their input.

Make it relevant.

Consider how you can include more local stories or examples in the training content so it isn't overly 'head office' centric.

Review regional training readiness.

You might find that there is some disparity between how different regions participate in global communications or initiatives. Training needs to be in line with the wider context that these groups are operating in.

The Business Case for localising L&D programme content

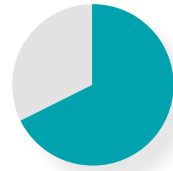
English is the business language of many international organisations. However, when it comes to learning and increasing engagement with a global workforce, there is nothing more effective than receiving communications in your native language. When we're talking about staff learning or understanding key corporate messages, compliance and anti-bribery for example, it's essential that miscommunications do not happen. Non-compliance costs can escalate quickly, so making sure staff have the required knowledge is essential.

There's a wealth of evidence to show how much more receptive people are when communicated to in their own language¹. This includes an increase in learner understanding when training is delivered in an employee's native language. People are simply more willing and able to engage if communicated within their own language.

Whilst English may be seen as the dominant language or even the official language inside an organisation, in reality employees are likely to revert to local languages in everyday interactions. If English is used for all communications, including training, employees with lower level of English proficiency are likely to feel disengaged and disempowered². By choosing to deliver learning in English, companies are at risk of diluting the impact of the learning messages they have spent so much time crafting.

¹ https://images.forbes.com/forbesinsights/StudyPDFs/Rosetta_Stone_Report.pdf

² Kankaanranta, A. Karhunen, P and Louhiala-Salminen L (2018) English as a Corporate Language in the multilingual reality of multinational companies. *Multilingua*. Vol 37, No 4.



67%

said a language barrier caused:
— Significant inefficiencies
— Lack of productivity
— Weak collaboration
— Poor engagement



67%

said miscommunications contribute to inefficiency



46%

said employees couldn't collaborate effectively



42%

said employee productivity had gone down when communications were **NOT** delivered in native languages



41%

said recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce is one of the biggest challenges a global company faces



<10%

multinational employee engagement occurred when training was delivered in English

When training and learning content is available in learner's native language, you can expect to see:

- Higher learner engagement
- Increased collaboration
- Lower levels of miscommunication
- Better learning outcomes

For more information on the business benefits of multilingual training programmes see our [mini-guide here](#).

* Survey by Forbes Insights and Rosetta Stone Business

Getting off on the right foot: considerations for developing a multilingual L&D programme

By looking at the overall approach from the start, you can avoid many hurdles along the way when it comes to your multilingual L&D programme. These decisions will help you keep to budget, save time and keep stakeholders happy.

To help, we've explained some of the key decision points you are likely to come to during your planning phase to offer guidance on choosing the approach that suits your business best.

I. Centrally led or locally led co-ordination of translations

Definition of each:

- Centrally led - content and translations are managed usually by a global L&D team. Local teams, in the form of reviewers, are still involved in the process, however the central team manages the content and the translations.
- Locally led - content, or in some cases raw material, is prepared centrally and local teams then manage the translation into the language(s) appropriate for their local employees.

We've created a scale with 6 questions to help you determine which route to take depending on the needs of your programme. This will help you to see the best path based on your criteria.

The need for consistent messaging across the region is...	LOW _____ HIGH
The availability of local resources to support the translation process is...	HIGH _____ LOW
The number of different languages required is...	LOW _____ HIGH
The desire for reporting of total cost of translation is...	LOW _____ HIGH
The level of involvement from local teams in translation is...	HIGH _____ LOW
The level of experience of translations within the company is...	HIGH _____ LOW

Majority of your answers towards this end of the scale, a **locally led** approach is most suitable.

Majority of your answers towards this end of the scale, a **centrally led** approach is most suitable.

Whichever path you choose, there are some watch-outs that are useful to be aware of.

- **A locally led approach, although appropriate in many instances, does run the risk of inconsistencies creeping in across multiple markets. This can be a particular issue with regulatory, legal or safety messages as mistakes could cause significant issues for the business. Introducing a quality assurance process can reduce that risk.**
- **Costs will often be more visible with a centrally led model and so measuring ROI can be more easily monitored. This is especially important if identification of cost savings or efficiency opportunities are required.**
- **The workload for internal resources can be lower with a centrally led model as the process can be managed more efficiently and therefore clarity on role and time required by local teams can be more easily defined.**
- **With a centrally led model, however, there is a chance that local teams will not feel as involved and may query the source content or the translations. This can be managed with a clear process for involving the local teams at the right stages and helping to provide clarity as to how they will be involved during the review process.**

2. Translation vs Localisation

With factual copy, such as technical guides, the translation process can be more straightforward with a focus on technical accuracy and use of specific terminology. However, when a communication message has been carefully crafted to have an emotional impact on its readers, a more sophisticated approach is needed – that of localisation.

Localisation adapts content to suit the local culture so that nuanced messaging retains its meaning and impact. It ensures that employees are communicated with in ways which they are most receptive to.

Transcreation is an advanced form of localisation which combines translation skills and creative licence to preserve the core meaning of the source text for its new region. In essence, it is the translation of ideas, not just words. Ideally suited for creative content designed to increase engagement, transcreation can change the source text dramatically, but still elicit the same emotional response.



Application to L&D programmes

For activities such as learning and training programmes, it is critical that the messages land and resonate with the learner. This is achieved by localising the content rather than simply translating it. It is therefore likely that a localisation rather than just translation is going to be required for your programme. Here are some examples of localisation we've used in real-life L&D projects:



Acronyms

Some learning programmes will have acronyms that spell out a word in English (e.g. ASK = Activity, Skills, Knowledge). When these undergo translation, the translator will need to consider whether the acronym will still work. Does it need some adjustment or is it better to keep in English, and add an explanation?

In these cases, we will liaise with both the client and our expert linguists to decide on the best approach. Sometimes, the acronym is established company jargon, and is familiar to everyone in the company regardless of their native language. This means it's perfectly acceptable to keep in English, with a small explanation of each letter in the target language. Other times, keeping the acronym in English will hinder learner engagement. After all, acronyms used in mnemonic devices are aimed at helping learners remember, so it works better to localise them completely. As with all translation projects, there's no one-size-fits-all approach.



Images

In another project, there was a background image that was, on the face of things, just a geometric design. However, an Arabic speaker was able to pick out Arabic characters within the design of this image that made references to Islam. This made the course completely inappropriate to a Muslim learner, so the image was replaced with a more suitable alternative.



Gender

One recent example was a course on diversity, which included a character named Charlie. Both Charlie's name and photo were deliberately gender-neutral. The challenge for translation was that in many languages, the idea of gender-neutrality is not yet possible to convey via grammar. For example, in Spanish adjectives must end in 'o' for masculine objects/people and 'a' for feminine objects/people. The default gender in Spanish is often the masculine, which isn't that successful at conveying the idea of neutrality.

For this particular challenge, it was important to take advice from our translators. This meant the issue was handled with the utmost care and sensitivity. Some languages, such as Swedish and Hungarian, had gender-neutral options built into their grammar. This made the translation process simpler. The approach for other languages varied by what was most socially acceptable in each culture. This included using a his/her approach, the masculine default, or rewording the translations to avoid any mention of gender altogether.



Cultural Context

Another example is learning content that referred to the folk story of the goose that laid a golden egg. The content was accompanied by a cartoon of a goose. However, in the languages we were translating into, the story was known as the hen that laid a golden egg instead, so the image had to be changed.

3. English first vs Local language

A Forbes Insights research paper went so far as to say that “in global, multicultural organizations, simply expecting all employees to speak one common language, such as English, marginalizes the potential impact of international talent and leaves monolingual staff ill-equipped to help the organization compete effectively in a globalized environment.”³ It also states that “organizations with a high degree of multilingualism—not to mention, an understanding of and respect for other cultures—will commit fewer mistakes and increase efficiency, productivity, and quality. Language proficiency may also promote a safer work environment, an issue of significant importance for many firms that have opened overseas and domestic manufacturing facilities employing foreign-born workers”.

Although your company may have English as its official language, in order to get messages to resonate local languages should be used wherever possible.

Studies have shown significant and potentially harmful consequences of delivering learning material in English to non-native speakers. NIOSH reports that “Language differences between immigrant workers and their supervisors and co-workers are one of the most frequently cited challenges companies face in promoting safety among immigrant workers.”⁴



Issues that relying on English for learning programmes can raise:

Misunderstanding

When reading or hearing messages in a second language it is highly likely that staff may misunderstand key messages. Nuances or subtleties could be missed or even worse, critical safety, regulatory or legal information could be misinterpreted.

Indifference

Effective learning is not just about understanding the language. Throughout strong impactful learning programmes, there may be cultural references, humour or examples that simply won't land with global audiences. Opportunities to localise these creative concepts will be missed and therefore so will the opportunity to engage and create the desired impact.

Exclusion of ideas and best practice

It was found in an academic study that in a case of a British-Italian joint venture, English was adopted as the common language, but in practice that resulted in key systems and processes being adopted from the English partner rather than the Italian as they were already in English. This could result in good ideas and best practices that are carried out at a local level being more difficult to share simply due to the language being used.



³ <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/19306181/reducing-the-impact-of-language-barriers-rosetta-stone>

⁴ <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-scienceblog/2014/12/04/immigrant-osh/>

4. Internal translation vs external translation partner

In thinking about selecting a translation partner, you might be wondering why not to use internal resources for translation. Through our extensive experience of assisting global L&D managers with their global learning programmes, we have found that three main issues arise:



Quality

Getting a colleague in the local market to handle the translation can seem like a good idea at first, however, being fluent in another language certainly doesn't make someone a skilled translator. This may impact the quality of the translated content, so it falls short of the quality of the English. After all, you've spent a long time creating and developing the content so why let the translated versions not meet the same high standard?



Priorities and speed

If an internal colleague has been assigned a translation task, often that member of staff already has a busy schedule - this can mean that the translation of content falls to the bottom of the to-do list, causing delays to the launch of global programmes.



File Format

If, for example, you have developed content in an authoring tool, your colleague may be unable to work with the exported file formats (e.g. json files, xliif files, html files). They may ask for a file format they can work with, which can then mean that you have to copy and paste the translated content back into the modules (rather than a straightforward import/export).



Getting content translation-ready

Although a good translation partner will be as flexible as possible, being aware of translation requirements during content development and design will save time and money.



Adopt a localisation mindset

The more creative the content is, the more involved the localisation process will be. Ensure the content writer understands the [localisation spectrum](#) so they can review their own copy and ensure any emotive text or cultural references are necessary and appropriate. Ask them to flag up content which will need to be carefully adapted.

Follow the rules

Follow global guidelines on how to handle the tone of voice and the employer brand. It may be necessary to dial-up or down specific characteristics depending on the audience.

Use clear English

Use clear, concise sentences to make translation easier. Standard English should be used, where possible.

Be consistent

By being consistent in the use of terminology and common phrases, translation will be faster, more consistent and more transparent.

Check their copy

Eliminate the unnecessary use of location-specific symbols, numerals and text (e.g. £ signs, dates, times and English words).

Three things your designer can do

Leave white space

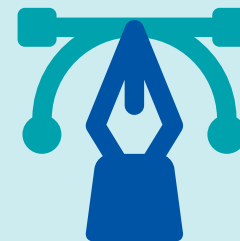
Translated text can often be significantly longer than the original. Allow enough white space in their designs to accommodate text expansion after translation.

Keep things separate

Separate text layers in the source file rather than embedding text into graphics.

Remember to replace location-specific imagery

Jointly decide if you're going to restrict the use of location-specific imagery. Using more generic 'global' versions will keep design costs down, speed up production and reduce the risk of an inappropriate image slipping through the net.



Working with local review teams

Whatever approach you take, your local teams are a critical part of the process. Getting your local market or in-country teams involved sooner rather than later, can save time further down the line. By working together from the start, both teams benefit from each other's knowledge. It also sets the foundation for collaboration, making everyone feel involved and accountable.

When planning your working relationship with your in-country teams, following these steps can help create a strong working relationship.



1

Recruit local market champions

Identify someone in each region who can review translated content and/or manage a team of local reviewers. They can help you ensure that nuanced messaging remains impactful.

2

Prove that you're listening

Demonstrate your commitment by taking the time to understand their needs and by giving them plenty of opportunities to contribute ideas and feedback. Start by finding out what they feel makes existing content effective or ineffective in their particular region. You can use the lessons learned to develop a localisation brief which explores the style and tone of voice for each region.

3

Encourage collaboration

Create an easy-to-access digital space where your local champions will feel comfortable sharing their insights and local knowledge.

4

Establish clear guidelines

Set out what you expect from your local reviewers, so they understand their role, the translation processes, and what the limitations are. This can be done together to strengthen your collaboration.

5

Make them feel appreciated

Find ways to recognise their contribution. The entire company will benefit from higher-quality translations delivered to tight deadlines, and their input will help your budgets stretch further.

6

Build consistency into your approach

Use local style guides, glossaries of terminology and review guidelines to achieve consistency across multiple campaigns. Translation memories can also help as can using the same local review team.

7

Develop a clear translation and review process

Set out what your process looks like and define roles and responsibilities. Make sure your local champions understand how you manage projects and are familiar with the platforms you use. Ensure that any changes to your process are clearly communicated to all stakeholders to avoid misunderstandings.



Conclusion

We hope you've found this guide useful and it's helped you to feel more confident with training translations. In the additional resources section we've included a list of FAQs that we've come across over the years, which you might find helpful. You'll also find a list of questions to ask your translation partner to evaluate their quality procedures.

Please get in touch with any particular challenges or questions you have. The team is happy to help and it would be great to hear what you thought of the guide.

We'll leave you with 3 final tips for best practice when it comes to L&D translations:

- Ensure your translation provider has robust QA procedures - ISO 17100 is a good indicator
- Identify reviewers early and give them a clear brief
- Consider translation requirement during the development of source material

Additional Resources

FAQs for building a global learning strategy

Q: We are needing to develop new material in new formats very quickly - how can a translation partner help?

A: A translation partner will help advise how to streamline the process to reduce any rework as well as advise on technologies to create efficiencies and improve turnaround times such as translation memory.

Q: At what stage should I engage a translation partner?

A: The earlier the better as they can highlight potential challenges which can be mitigated in the design stage. Although a translation partner can be introduced once the content is finalised, the content may require adaptation before starting translation, which can add time.

Q: We have multiple types of learning formats i.e. elearning, games and face to face - can all of those be translated?

A: Yes! We would recommend working with an elearning provider who has experience of translating digital programmes as they will understand the complexities of translation and how best to incorporate translation requirements into the design. We have strong relationships with elearning agencies where we have successfully translated cutting-edge digital solutions they have developed such as VR. We are happy to provide recommendations where required.

Q: What is the role of the learning/training manager in the translation process and how much additional work does it involve?

A: This will very much depend on the translation partner you choose to work with. By choosing a translation partner with robust process management and quality assurance procedures in place, then the effort required by you will focus on stage-gate approval and stakeholder engagement. By working with a translation company who rely on client resources to manage the process then the workload is likely to be significant as most L&D translation projects require multiple reviewers in multiple countries who will all be feeding in opinions, feedback and changes. With a strong translation partner, this will all be managed for you.

Q: Last time we tried translating learning content there were errors in some of the languages, which caused a lot of frustration. How can I be sure the end result is correct?

A: If you don't speak the target language then there is no way of you being able to personally check the end result, which we understand can be worrying. A good translation partner will be able to demonstrate their quality assurance procedures and checks ensuring that the end result is of high quality. The right translation partner will also work with you to develop glossaries of approved terminology and a style guide. These can then be used across content and projects. They will also provide samples for review throughout the translation process. We would always advise choosing a provider with ISO 17001 as a minimum.

Q: We use a lot of videos with a voiceover - can that be translated and localised?

A: Yes! Pretty much any content including digital, video and gaming can all be translated and localised.

Q: What factors will impact on the cost of localisation?

A: Factors such as complexity of the design, the level of technical/specialised content, the number of languages, which specific languages are required, the length of modules and voice-over requirements will all have an impact. Speaking to a trusted translation partner early can help identify opportunities for cost reduction.

Q: How are the local teams involved in the process?

A: It is important to have a network of local reviewers who can check and provide feedback on the translations. See chapter 6 for more details on their role and how you can engage them effectively in this process.

Q: How can I convince stakeholders that investing in translation is worth it?

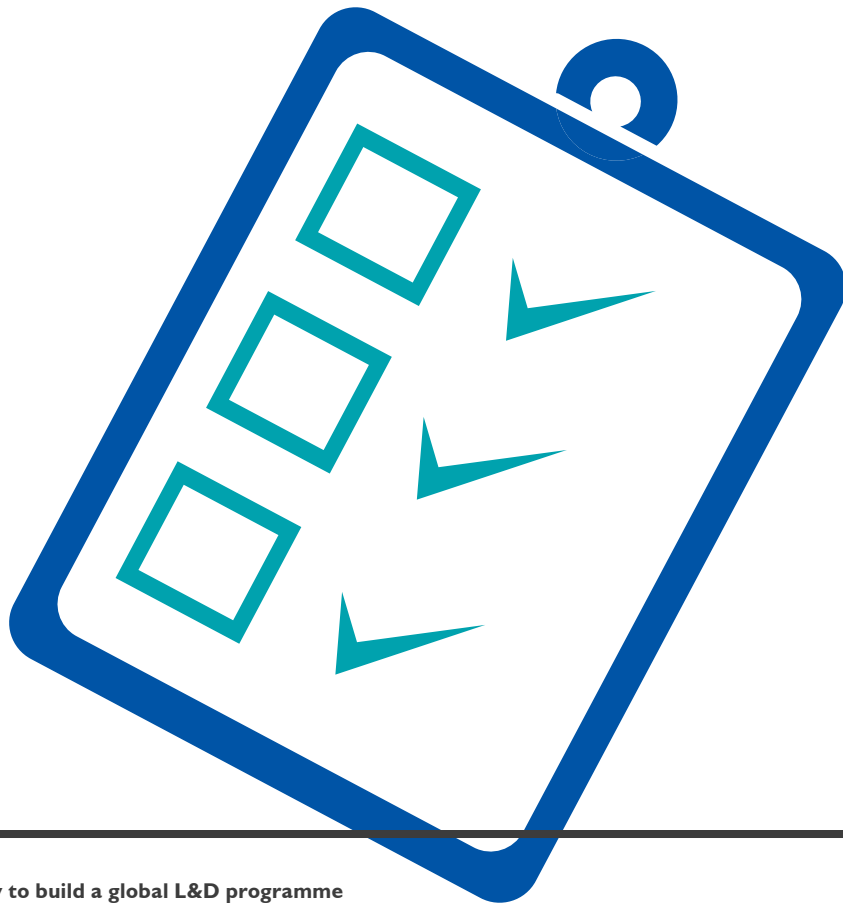
A: The complexity and therefore the cost of translation is often a surprise to decision-makers, especially if translation is relatively new to them. Our guide on '[The business benefits of multilingual training programmes](#)' explains the benefits and costs associated with translating L&D content to help build a business case.

Q: Our deadlines are tight, can my material be translated in time?

A: Process management and effective up front design to prepare the content for translation is key to achieving tight deadlines. Bring your translation partner into the process early to identify ways to expedite the whole process.

Translation Partner quality assurance questionnaire

Use this questionnaire to help you shortlist translation partners.



-
1. Can you take care of additional language services – subtitling, voiceover, desktop publishing?
 2. How can you support the review process?
 3. How can you help with elearning projects – can you handle eLearning authoring tool exports?
 4. Can you implement the translations directly into these authoring tools?
 5. Can you share any methods we can use to streamline the process?
 6. Can you provide translation and localisation of:
a. Text b. Imagery c. Audio d. Subtitles
 7. Do you have the relevant industry expertise?
 8. Are you ISO 9001 & 17100 certified?
 9. Do you know how to handle exports from authoring tools, e.g. Storyline, Evolve, Adapt & Gomo?
 10. Do you use translation memory software to reduce costs, turnaround times & improve consistency?
 11. Can you share your quality assurance process?
 12. What tools do you provide to help us manage the translation process internally?
 13. Do you provide a full end-to-end localisation process, for example, implementation and re-build services?
 14. Do you handle the market review process?
 15. Do you offer a translation sample?
 16. What cultural value can you add to my project?

Why Comtec?

For almost 40 years Comtec has enabled international businesses to streamline their translation process and get better results from their global comms – in over 200 languages.



Our mission

We work with a wide range of innovative organisations, from high-growth start-ups through to established FTSE companies, to help them deliver their message worldwide. Wherever you need multilingual content to engage, inform and inspire, we've got you covered. However large or complex your project, we ensure your message is strong, compelling and ready to resonate in every region – from websites and social media posts to elearning programmes and training videos.

Our people

Our people have a passion for languages, expertise in translation and a real desire to make a difference for our clients. Clients value the focus we place on delivering the highest possible quality, building a partnership with them to share our experience and providing a service they can truly rely on.

Our commitment to you

We're not just a translation company – we're a translation partner. No matter the scale or complexity of a project, we ensure all communication materials are fully localised to resonate in every region and culture. That's why we're trusted by leading global organisations, together with their communication teams and creative partners, to localise content, for every market, in every industry and in every language.

Looking to find out more?



This is Susan, she's here to answer any questions you might have.

Drop Susan an email on slankfer@comtectranslations.com or book a 10-minute discovery call [here](#) to see how we can support you in getting the best results from your global L&D programme.





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