Guide

Foolproof guide to translating elearning content

Comtec

Your translation partner

Demand for elearning is booming, the sector is predicted to grow to $375 billion by 2026. But you already know this, you're the people doing all the hard work.

Whatever the course, your goal is the same – engage learners to achieve the desired learning outcomes which are tied to KPIs or strategic plans and make an impact. You're confident in creating great programmes, but what about translations and elearning localisation?

Whether you've been burnt by low-quality translation services before, or are overwhelmed by the idea of localisation – it doesn't have to be that way. Great translations boost learner engagement, impress end-clients and unlock global opportunities. So how do you do it?

We have a saying: preparation and process make perfect. With the best processes, tech and partner in place, you'll be on the path to success. We work with digital learning agencies providing global learning for large corporates and game-changing disruptors, and this guide gives you an idea of how we do it.

In this guide we'll show you how to:

- Manage the translation process so it's streamlined, on budget and within deadline
- Translate different content types (like video) and integrate with different authoring tools
- Implement translations into modules simply, methodically and consistently
- Optimise the process of working with review teams to get the best feedback
- Ensure translations are of high quality to gain client confidence and protect your reputation

Hopefully, this will cover any concerns or challenges you're facing, but a guide can only do so much. If you need any of these suggestions expanded on, or have a specific challenge, feel free to get in touch and we can help.

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Well begun is half done

Setting up your project for success

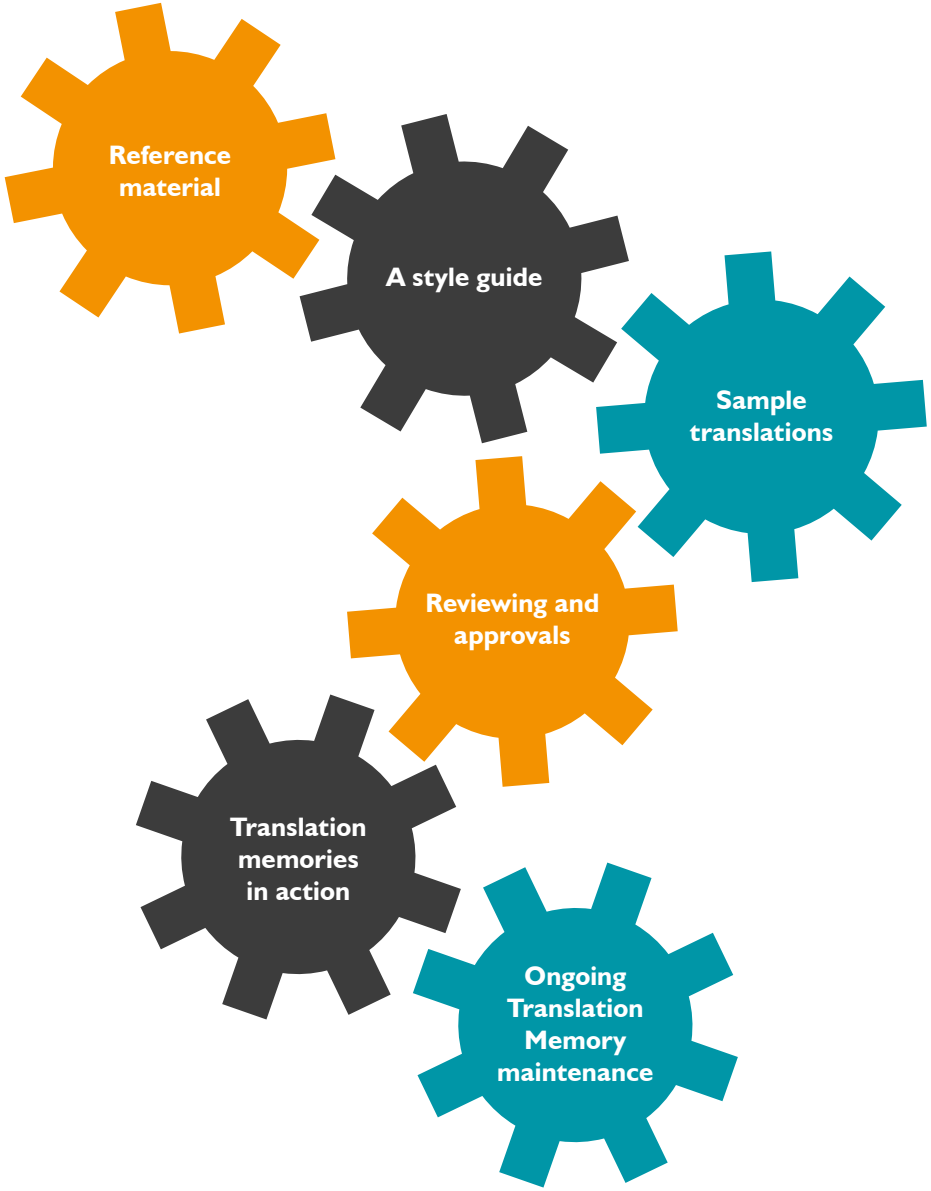
Great agencies, be that elearning or translation, have two things in common: excellent work and successful client relationships. That's why streamlining the translation process and having an overview of how it works is so important. It gives you back the time you need to focus on creating great work and it gives your clients confidence that everything is running smoothly.

Some end clients also want to ensure that translations will be managed in accordance with recognised quality procedures. That's why we also help you to understand these processes so you can speak with confidence to your clients.

We put a lot of effort into onboarding our new clients. Why? Because thanks to transparency in our processes, they can be confident that we know what we're doing and that we'll deliver high-quality work. The same applies to elearning agencies using a translation provider.

If your end client can see how seamlessly things are running, they'll be more confident in the result. This is particularly important for those clients who don't speak the language you are translating into. They need to have confidence that the translation process has been conducted thoroughly and diligently from start to finish. By setting down some groundwork early, you ensure that your team, your translation partner and your client all know what to expect.

Here are six elements you should establish at the start of your project



Reference material
Provide relevant reference material, such as existing translations, previous learning material and details of your client's tone of voice and brand guidelines. Your translation provider will handpick their translators based upon this information so comprehensive and timely information will help them select the best people for your project.

A style guide
A style guide will be created and used as reference by the translation team for every project. This helps to ensure a consistent style and tone of voice for all learning, which fits the end client's preferences. It saves both time and money (as it means getting translations right the first time), so it must be reviewed by your client both centrally and with their local review teams before being sent to your translation provider.

Sample translations
Your translation partner may ask you for feedback on sample translations to ensure they have used the right style and tone. This provides a good reference point on which to base translations, avoiding the need for style changes further down the line. This exercise can also help to strengthen the style guide.

Reviewing and approvals
Your translation partner will ask you to review and approve your translations, so you may need to work with your client to establish a team of local reviewers, who will be responsible for checking translations in line with the approved style guide. (See page 9 for more information on how to manage this process.)

In some cases, your translation partner will do most of the liaison with them on your behalf, however, they will need to know who they are and what information they have had about their role to date. You may be provided with guidelines to help you, as well as a glossary of terms.

Translation Memories in action
Translation Memory (TM) software captures all content that is translated by your translation partner. This allows them to easily retrieve 'pre-approved' translations for terms, common phrases or regularly used paragraphs of text for subsequent projects across various channels and projects. They can also be updated with feedback or learnings from one translation to the next. It is therefore important that your translation partner is given any feedback from the client so they can update the TM. Doing so makes it more efficient and consistent for next time.

Ongoing Translation Memory maintenance
Once the translation has been reviewed by your client locally, any feedback can be entered into the TM. This ensures that any alterations their local market colleagues have made are acknowledged and reflected in future translations, saving time and avoiding frustration.

Creating translation-ready content

When you're creating content in the source language, it's important to have translations in mind as it will save time and effort later on. If your course is already created, don't worry - a good translation partner will be as flexible as possible. Either way, here are some helpful tips and things to consider for your content ahead of the localisation process.

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 guidelines 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 that 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.

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

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

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.

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

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

Retain editable files
When using graphics, elements contained within them may need to be localised separately. This is usually achieved by using a desktop publishing service or by using editable graphics. Whichever method is used, having editable files ensures that they can be localised separately.

These tips may not be relevant for an existing learning course, but they are useful to keep in mind when creating content in future to help save time and costs.

Preparing specific elearning content and authoring tools

Now you have a general idea of preparing content, let's focus on specific applications. Elearning translations can seem complex. There are so many elements within courses that without proper management, it's easy for things to get muddled or problems to escalate. One way to mitigate these risks is to think about the specific types of content and the authoring tools you use at the start of the project. This will allow you to find solutions before they become problems and make the process far simpler.

Content and Authoring Tools
With a wide range of authoring tools available to produce creative and engaging learning content, it's essential that you get good, timely advice on the best localisation process for each platform. The process will vary depending on whether the tool is desktop-based, web-based or cloud-based. We won't go into detail about the different platforms here, but for more information on how different authoring tools work with translation, take a look at our blog.

To keep the process as streamlined as possible, it's also useful to know if your translation partner can handle the export files from your authoring tools. Depending on the authoring tool, this could be .XLIFF, .JSON or .HTML for example - all of which ensure that no copy and pasting is needed!

Visual elements
Your elearning content will likely include images or visual representation to convey messages or key points. Although many images are global, you might be surprised at what needs to be considered when using visual content in different countries and cultures. Here are some key factors to look out for in images you may use:

Location-specific images

- Metaphorical images (i.e. dollar signs for money)
- Images with text embedded – these will require additional localisation services
- Images of people that don't reflect your client's workforce
- Anything that reflects cultural traditions or customs
- Pictures of people making gestures i.e. a thumbs up

If time and budget are a concern, then using consistent images across all regions will make the localisation process smoother and more efficient. But, if you want to tailor content with localised images, it's important to do this as part of the localisation process. Make sure you allow time in your project to source region- or culture-specific imagery.

Tip: Don't forget that some languages use right-to-left scripts, which can impact visual elements too. Sometimes images can be flipped to retain the design elements of the module. However, not all images will work like this. Watch out for text or numbers in a photo (such as a car registration plate), clocks and other elements that can't be flipped. Avoid, where possible!

Audiovisual elements
Start with the visuals. As with photos and graphics, it's worth checking if video content that includes culturally-specific elements is appropriate in all markets. While it's relatively easy to replace a photo in a slide, it could be costly to replace video footage or animations with a different version. Look out for location-specific references, symbols and gestures. By avoiding these when creating new content, you can save time and money.

Also consider whether any text, such as titles and captions, will require localisation. If it does, make sure the original files are available, so that your translation team can easily translate them and replace the source version with the multilingual one.

Should you use voiceover, subtitling, or both?
Often, the answer can be both. Both voiceover and subtitling are effective means of making your content more accessible for the learner; often it is other factors that dictate your method of localisation.

If there's already on-screen text in your video, voiceover may be a cleaner way of making sure your content is understood, as it avoids cluttering the screen with too much text. If budget plays a part in the decision, subtitling may be preferred as it's often more cost-effective. When considering global trends, learners in some countries engage more with subtitles than voiceover, and vice versa, so your overseas colleagues' preferences may also be a driving factor in your decision. By fully understanding the context, and asking your translation partner for advice, you can pick the most suitable approach for each target market.

Working with voice artists

If voiceover will form part of your elearning localisation project, make sure you agree on a brief with the client so that your translation team can find the right voice artist.

Things to think about include:

- Does the voice artist need to sound young or old?
- Should they be upbeat and informal?
- Alternatively, should they be more mature, professional and formal?
- What gender should they be?
- Should they have a specific accent, or use a regional dialect?

By getting the voice brief right, the localised content will have the best chance of engaging learners.

Scripts, time-coding, text expansion and contraction

To ensure voiceovers and subtitles appear when they're required, you can use time-coded scripts. The script is time coded and then translated by a native speaking linguist with subject matter expertise. This means that subtitles or the voiceover recording get added at precisely the right moment in the video or animation.

Take into consideration that some words, when translated, take longer to say than they do to read. Allowing space/time between sentences will create room for the voiceover in the video timeline. You can also pace the original English voiceover so that the multilingual versions fit in as naturally as possible.

Text expansion is a consideration with subtitling. If you're creating original audiovisual content for multilingual audiences, using short and concise sentences will help overcome this challenge. Text contraction can also occur, for example from English into languages such as Norwegian, Swedish, Hebrew and Japanese, resulting in shorter sentences and fewer spoken words.

Now that you have everything ready to get started with your project, you should find things run much more smoothly than they might have before (or than you anticipated). But what happens when the translations are ready to be implemented back into the learning module?

Implementation: putting your programme together again

As you will know, an elearning module contains a variety of elements across multiple media and all these pieces need to come together to provide a seamless learner experience.

There are typically two ways in which elearning content can be delivered back to you:

1. **As individual files (i.e. text, video, visuals, etc.) which then need to be re-imported back into the authoring tool by your in-house team or third-party agency.**

2. **As a fully localised package (e.g. SCORM file) where the authoring tool implementation has been completed for you.**

When translating elearning content, each element needs to be extracted and localised separately. This can be complicated to manage and time-consuming to get right. If you're not used to managing this type of work, it can be an intense administrative undertaking and human error can creep in.

It's important to speak to your translation provider about how they can help you with the implementation process. Highly experienced translation providers can provide you with a full end-to-end service, delivering all the elements translated and re-built as fully localised learning modules.

The implementation process will typically cover:

- Ensuring consistency between different elements
- Importing all assets (text, video, visuals, etc.) back into the authoring tool
- Checking that each element technically works as it should
- Ensuring all assets have been translated and nothing is left in English
- Checking that all translations display correctly, including special characters and line-breaks
- Reviewing the end-to-end module to check transitions, links, action buttons and different routes through the content are all correctly localised
- Compare the translated module with the original version to ensure the same learning experience is provided

This invaluable step saves you from juggling multiple files, formats and suppliers, and also frees up your in-house development teams. That way, they can focus on creating new content rather than rebuilding existing courses and you can rest assured that your programmes have been fully checked and are ready to go.

"The Comtec team have delivered their first translation project for us. We loved the care, versatility and dedication to excellence provided. Our client was delighted by the speed and accuracy of the translation and video subtitling."

Andy Moorman, Juvo Learning Solutions

Working with local reviewers

The translation review process can be arduous if not managed efficiently. You don't want to get caught up in rounds of reviews, multiple versions and chasing feedback. Thankfully, there are lots of ways to streamline this process, which we've outlined in this section.

Firstly, we recommend working with your client to identify someone within each region who can review translated content and/or manage a team of local reviewers. Local-market teams have on-the-ground knowledge and are well placed to advise on in-house style, tone and terminology in the target language.

A robust review process can come in all shapes and sizes, and a good translation partner will fit into your workflow if that's what works best for you. However, to maximise the expertise of your local markets, but minimise their time involvement during your review process, here are three crucial stages where you can get them involved:

- Small sample at the start of the project (500 words)
- Full market review
- In-situ review

Stages 1 and 2 are usually completed in bilingual format, either in a Word document or via an online translation review platform. This allows reviewers to view translations line-by-line against the original English source for reference. Completing this review in bilingual format not only helps reviewers to see the translations easily against the English source content, but also ensures that all changes made and preferences communicated are saved in the translation memory for future reference.

You may decide to manage the review process yourself or ask for the expertise of your translation partner to manage this on your behalf. Whichever option you choose, here are some steps to ensure things run smoothly.

How to create a strong working relationship with reviewers

Develop a clear translation and review process
Set out what the process looks like and define roles and responsibilities. Again, if you are working with a translation partner, it is likely they can help you or do this for you. This will then need to be communicated to the reviewers within the client organisation. Make sure the client review team understands how the projects will be managed and are familiar with the platforms you will be using.

Prove that you're listening
A localisation brief is a great way to learn about and document what makes the target markets tick. It not only helps to provide a good reference point for the style, tone and terminology of the translations, but also demonstrates that you are making the effort to listen and incorporate their ideas and feedback.

Encourage collaboration
By using an easy-to-access digital space, the local champions will find it easier to share their insights and knowledge. This will also make collating and incorporating this feedback a much more straightforward process.

Establish clear guidelines
By being clear about what is required from local reviewers, they understand their role, the translation process, and what the limitations are. This is best achieved when conducted alongside your client representative so everyone involved has the same understanding as to what is required.

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

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

We would always suggest talking to your translation provider as it is likely they will have significant experience in managing the local review process. By involving them, they can support you in how best to manage and streamline this process for the benefit of all stakeholders involved.

Conclusion

Undertaking digital learning translations is no small feat, but the benefits of doing so are wholly worthwhile. We hope that this guide has given you the confidence to offer elearning translation services to your clients and provided peace of mind that it isn't an impossible task.

If you still have some unanswered questions, in the appendix we've included a list of FAQs that we've come across over the years — we also encourage you to get in touch with us about any challenges you're facing.

If you want to find out more about managing elearning translation projects, take a look at our webinar.

We'll leave you with 4 final tips for best practice when it comes to elearning translations:

- Preparation and process makes perfect - think about your source material in advance
- Decide how you plan to implement translations - outsourcing can save time and costs
- Identify reviewers early and give them a clear brief
- Ensure your translation provider has robust QA procedures - ISO 17100 is a good indicator

Appendix

FAQs for elearning translation services

Q: We are needing to develop new courses very quickly - how can a translation partner help?
A: A translation partner will advise how to streamline the process, will put together a bespoke project plan, and also advise on where technologies such as translation memories can create efficiencies.

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 process. Involving your translation partner from the very start can also help give your client a clear idea of budget and timelines, and get the ball rolling on identifying in-market reviewers for each of your client's target markets.

Q: Last time we tried translating learning content, there were errors in some of the languages that caused a lot of confusion. How can I be sure the 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 result, and we understand this 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. 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, VR and gaming, can all be translated and localised.

Q: What factors will impact the cost of localisation?
A: Complexity of design, technical/specialised content, number of languages, rare/right-to-left languages, length of modules, voiceover requirements.

Q: How are client 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 page 9 for more details on their role and how you can engage them effectively in this process.

Q: Our deadlines are tight, can my material be translated in time?
A: Again, process management is key to achieving tight deadlines. Bring your translation partner into the process early to identify ways to expedite the whole process.

Q: When we have had modules translated before, it has been time-consuming to piece it all back together again. Can this step be made easier?
A: Yes! Ask your translation partner whether they can support with the full end-to-end localisation process, including implementing the translations within the elearning authoring tool. Having your translation partner take on the full process can free up your time to focus on other aspects of the business, and comes with the added bonus of receiving fully localised, ready-to-go courses to deliver straight to your client.

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.

We are the trusted translation partner for many L&D teams and elearning companies, delivering a wide variety of projects, including traditional training translations and digital learning translations.

Having supported clients with many types of learning programme translations over the years, we can share advice on the best tools and practices, as well as collaborating with your developers, to provide a holistic translation and localisation service. Great teams produce the best work. That's why we align our language expertise with the skills of your team, to create a partnership that delivers quality results.

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 Emily, she is here to answer any questions you might have.

Drop Emily an email on edecker@comtectranslations.com or book a 10-minute discovery call here to see how we can support you in getting the best results from your elearning localisation plans.

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