Designing Global Documents

Hitting the Nail on the Head

Avoid the "out" basket.

Translated documents with an American viewpoint can often convey confusing, or even offensive, messages overseas.

So how do you prevent your translated documents from finding the bottom of wastebaskets? Create a culture-neutral, global document.

Go global!

Global documents are created with the knowledge that they will later be translated. Their form and content are designed to be culture-neutral to ensure the consistency of your message in all markets. Properly designed global documents take less time and money to translate.

Dotting your "i's" and crossing your "t's".

Creating successful global documents takes a willingness to look critically at every word. Here are some basic tips that should help you get started.

Allow extra white space.
Translated text will run from 10% to 40% longer than in English. Allowing for this prior to translation saves time and money.

Plan column width.
Words in many languages (Russian, German) are much longer than in English. The use of narrow columns with these languages can result in excessive hyphenation and extremely ragged lines.

Consider paper size.
Standards for paper vary. For example A4, the standard size in Europe, measures 8.27" x 11.69" as opposed to the US 8.5" x 11". The live area of your document should be designed to fit within both A4 width and US length.

Avoid mixing artwork and text.
The text in a graphic element may need to be translated. This can require a complete reworking of the graphic. Keep text and graphics separate to avoid this expense.

Avoid using text as a background graphic element.
Text used as a background illustration will look odd if left in English—translating/producing it is an unnecessary expense.

Use editable graphics.
On-line graphics must be editable, as callouts have to be translated. Allow extra white space around callouts for translation. The easiest approach is to use numbered callouts outside the graphic.

Use color carefully.
In different cultures color connotations widely vary. Consider the target markets for your document when planning color use. In general, shades of white, black and gray should be used cautiously as they have negative connotations in a number of cultures. For example, white is the primary funeral color in Asian countries.
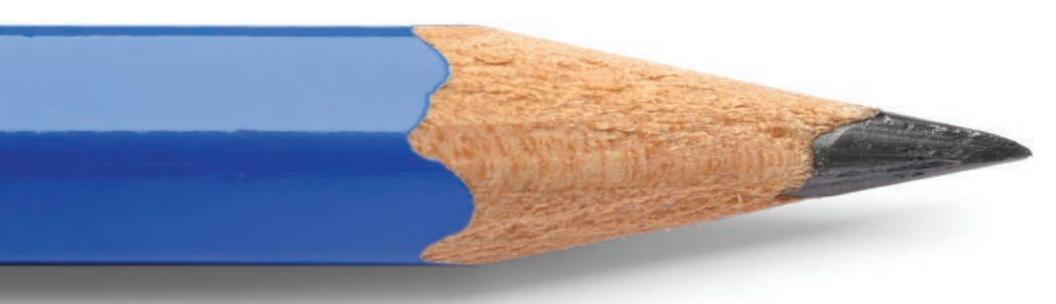
Plan tables for translation.
Make columns as wide as possible for the expansion of translated text and to reduce the need to hyphenate. Allow extra white space to the left or right of the table for expansion of columns to eliminate the need for extensive reformatting.

Avoid directional design elements.
Some languages (Arabic, Hebrew, etc.) read from right to left, back to front. Others read vertically. Directional design elements that assume a left-to-right orientation will not work in these languages. For example, a process flow graphic over a center spread would require an expensive re-design when translating the document into Arabic.

Use culture-neutral art.
Depictions of men and women in roles that are non-traditional in another culture may be offensive. For example, a woman shown instructing men, or demonstrating a product in public, still contradicts tradition in some countries. Images that evoke ethnic, or cultural stereotypes are inappropriate. Animals represent strikingly different character traits in different cultures.

Don't let your money go down the drain.

Following these simple guidelines prior to writing your document will save both time and money in the translation process.

We'll show you how we can bring a world of language management opportunity to your company.

Make a change towards better returns on your translation investment.

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