

WHITE PAPER

A Buyer's Guide to a Translation Management System

Eight features to seek out
(and the questions to ask)



Many companies translate their websites for global audiences in the following way:

- Copy-paste sentences into Excel spreadsheets
- Send spreadsheets to translators to work on
- Wait for translations to return

More often than not, this slow, tedious process causes enterprise businesses to waste time and resources, and even appear to have fallen behind the times.

By now, software has matured sufficiently to automate steps in the translation process—avoiding spreadsheets altogether—and improve accuracy in translated passages to reflect the intended context and tone. It is time that companies invest in a translation management system (TMS). Past time, in fact.

For any company that hasn't automated their translation process yet, here's a bit of a primer: A TMS is a means of automating content collection, workflow triggers, notifications, and delivery of translated content. It's an ecosystem that provides translators with the tools they need to properly translate content at the highest quality possible. A TMS also helps ensure that communications between different team members around the globe are streamlined. This type of collaboration within an organization is crucial for projects to run smoothly and meet deadlines.

Some history

TMSs, which first came on the scene in 2005, grew out of technologies that emerged in the late 1990s. Computer-aided translation (CAT) tools segmented content into small chunks to make it easier for translators to tackle, while translation memory (TM) comprised a database of previously completed translations that could be reused in future projects. Often, however, businesses did not have visibility into how language service providers utilized these tools, and updates to each client's TM were made manually. When the TMS concept was created, it automated TM updates and made sure the TM was reused when the same translation needs arose repeatedly. It also added systematic quality assurance to the process.

Today, many companies using those early versions of TMS are considering upgrades to a next-generation version that maximizes the automation of the translation process. Simply put, these newer translation management technologies are more configurable and more adaptable than in the past.

In essence, a TMS creates greater efficiencies in the translation process, greater accuracy of translated content in the context of the website or other formats in which it appears, and, ultimately, cost savings. Before describing the key features to take into consideration when evaluating a next-generation TMS, here are some insights into what gives companies doing translations their biggest headaches.



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What are the main problems companies face when creating translations?

One of the difficulties companies face with translations revolves around the sheer volume of content a company offers and the places where the content appears, whether it be on marketing websites or in products and services themselves.

There could be multiple client-facing digital portals that need to be translated. For example, a company may need the emails in their marketing automation platform translated for an international market. Then they need related landing pages translated within their content management system to handle customer requests and transactions. Lastly, they may have a support website to handle support tickets. The objective thus becomes: how to make a translation available for every sentence, phrase, or word that is repeatable and structured to be used in those multiple settings—and potentially even more as the company scales.

A second, related problem companies commonly face involves making sure that translations for the same content aren't done twice—and paid for twice. When a translation from English to French is made for one part of a company's website, a process would need to be put in place to prevent a repeated translation for the same phrase in another part of the company's website. It sounds obvious that redundant work should be avoided, but without the right process in place, it happens. That's because separate teams are often disconnected and not able to share resources. Plus, they are often in a rush to post or distribute translated material.

Third, once a company has material in the hands of the right translators, problems often arise around context. If a translator only receives a sentence or body of text in a spreadsheet, it might be completely divorced from a picture on a website or other contextual material such as a chart or graph. For example, if a translator is translating a single word on a website, he or she may need to translate it a particular way if that word lives in the top navigation of the website, compared to in the body text. Seeing the context in which the word is to appear helps the translator find the right word as well as ensure that the content is translated in a way that doesn't break the design or layout of the website. When it comes time to translate, it's important to have tools to communicate with translators the precise meanings of terms—in context.

If a company faces any or all of these problems, it may become time to begin choosing a TMS. They may benefit from automating aspects of translation for cost savings, improved context for translations, or increased speed in workflow. Also, a reliable TMS could help a company build brand consistency across business units or geographies, define which unit or work group owns a process, and improve transparency.

Starting at the very beginning with a next-generation TMS

Before any outreach to TMS vendors begins, it's important to assess which elements of a TMS are essential, and which are desirable in coming years. Buyers need to remember to research the basic concerns in any software procurement: Will it work in my company? Does it match our goals? Can we afford it at scale?

Eight key features to look for in a TMS. All are essential.

1 Integrations. A buyer's top priority needs to be to make sure a future TMS connects to existing systems that contain translation content. **Ask: Does the TMS provide the foundation for the automatic "pull" of source content and "push" of translated content?** A component of this key feature is whether the TMS supports the most important formats being used in an organization. For example, in the marketing and design space, does the TMS support Adobe InDesign or Illustrator for building print materials, and Photoshop Documents (PSD) for work with individual image layers in a stored image? In the transaction and outbound marketing area, does the TMS support HTML, including landing pages and email templates?



2 Vendor management + intelligent workflows. It's important for buyers to know if they can incorporate their custom set of translation vendors, translation methods, and resources into the TMS. **Ask: Does the TMS give my company the flexibility to choose the methods of translation, whether translations are done by professionals, machines, internally, or crowd-sourced?** As buyers map out the stages of their translation process and where each vendor fits in, buyers need to know if the TMS can move translation projects from one vendor to the next. **Ask: Does the TMS include ways to automatically move projects in the proper order, starting with a translator, then to an editor, and then to an internal reviewer, for example?**

3 Visual context. Anyone who works with source content needs to know its context, which includes the original format and layout of that content and how the translated text needs to fit into that layout and format. Otherwise the translation accuracy becomes conjecture on the part of the human translator. A translator could be left making assumptions about how the text is being used, which leads to output that is not aligned with the client's brand messaging or expectations. **Ask: Does the TMS provide visual context from the original source material in the form of a screen grab or other means?**

4 Real-time TM + linguistic assets. Translation Memory is a database of current and past translations performed by an organization. Linguistic assets include a glossary of terms, which dictates whether a term should or should not be translated. These linguistic assets also include a style guide to answer broad questions for how a translation should sound or the impression it should leave with readers. It can discuss questions of formal, informal, or casual style needed in specific content. Finally, linguistic assets include rules and advice about when to leverage changes to the translations in the TM. **Ask: Does the TMS include a TM and a set of linguistic assets, and what are the major components of each?**

5 APIs for everything. Application programming interfaces (APIs) are tools that buyers can use to streamline their translation process. These tools are particularly useful for integrating a TMS with other systems where content is housed, from website content management systems and product information catalogs to marketing automation platforms, support systems, and everything in between. Some vendors have out-of-the-box connectors for popular platforms. However, it is important for buyers to ask TMS vendors if their technology can support open API endpoints to customize integrations for homegrown technologies. **Ask: What sorts of APIs does this TMS provide?**

6 Reporting and cost visibility/control. Most businesses look to make decisions impacting their bottom line based on hard facts and data. A good TMS vendor will offer access to data through a combination of real-time and on-demand reports. It's important for buyers to understand if their TMS vendor can run several reports that holistically monitor and manage performance for translation speed and quality across specific markets and locales. Businesses should look for a solution that can distill key insights for all aspects of their translation process, such as platform usage, user and resource productivity, content quality, and total translation spend. The best vendors provide deep dives and drill-down reports on each specific translation project and can aggregate data across all of the business' content and languages to evaluate business performance and calculate overall ROI. **Ask: How do I get reports in the TMS, once set up?**



It's important for buyers to understand if their TMS vendor can run several reports that holistically monitor and manage performance for translation speed and quality across specific markets and locales.

7 Data-driven, cloud-based. With the ability to connect a TMS to cloud-based processing, it is possible to access data and intelligence about translation updates and other insights quickly that wouldn't be on-premise. This kind of intelligence could potentially help apply updates without the need to apply patches and service packs. **Ask: How does the TMS use cloud services to store data and intelligence, and does it automate updates to translations?**

8 Advanced security framework. With so many cybersecurity threats in the news affecting applications and services, storage servers, and even networks that connect cloud services, it becomes imperative to ask about how a TMS remains secure and to continue to follow how security is updated once a TMS is used. Security is listed last out of eight important features in priority in this white paper because it is something customers should generally expect from a TMS vendor. Yet insufficient security could be the one area to cause the biggest problems. Of all the security areas to be concerned about, one of the most pressing is the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which is now in effect. **Ask: Does this TMS support all these security standards and certifications: GDPR, SSAE 16 SOC2, PCI DSS L1, HIPAA, and any others?**

To summarize, all eight of these key features are what companies should expect from a next-generation TMS that builds on features contained in earlier TMS 1.0 systems. Today's TMS 2.0 systems are customizable, configurable, and adaptable. They work with the cloud to access real-time intelligence anywhere on the globe, empowering a dispersed workforce. An effective, modern TMS automates collection of content, workflow, and delivery of translated content.

An effective TMS should also create a totally new approach to translations, treating the translation process as a utility that works as efficiently as turning on a faucet. This way, a company deploying a TMS can focus on its core business, offering quick updates, improvements, and new products and services without worrying how long it will take to translate and share those updates everywhere.

Learn more about Smartling's TMS at [smartling.com](https://www.smartling.com).