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# Translating InDesign content

**Jake Cahill** explains how you can use a built-in feature in InDesign to help make the translation process easier.

Writing content for an international audience adds an extra layer of complexity to the writing process. If translation is not thought of at the beginning of a project, content often needs last-minute re-work before it can be released. Here are three of the most common problems that arise with translated content:

- Terms are misunderstood and mistranslated.
- Translated content doesn't fit in the document layout.
- Images are not appropriate for certain cultures.

In this article, I will discuss how to use InDesign's Auto-Size feature to automate the layout of translated content. But before I start, I want to take a quick look 'over the wall' at what happens to InDesign content when it reaches the translator.

## InDesign files types

InDesign (.indd) files are binary. Before an application can open a binary file, the application needs to know how the file is formatted. Therefore, to open an InDesign file, the translator needs an application (InDesign) that can anticipate the file.

However, since the release of InDesign CS4, Adobe offers the option to save an InDesign file as IDML (InDesign Markup Language) which is an XML based format for representing InDesign content. Unlike binary files, XML (eXtensible Markup Language) files provide a standardised syntax for exchanging information between applications. This standardised syntax means that other applications can be programmed to open the IDML file and manipulate the content.

## How does it work?

Translation applications such as SDL Trados take the content from the IDML file and convert it to something the application can use. For example, SDL Trados converts IDML content to sdxliff (SDL XML-based Localization Interchange File Format), which is a file format that translators work with in SDL Trados to translate the content.

## Best practice for layouts

I like to leave at least 25% extra whitespace around the text in a document. This extra whitespace allows for languages such as Italian, which generally use more words than English to express the same idea.

Leaving extra whitespace helps to avoid bad practices such as reducing the point size of paragraphs.

## Using InDesign's Auto-Size feature

The IDML file that the translator sends back is usually filled with text frames that have those little soul-destroying icons (Figure 1).

Even if the layout has 25% extra whitespace, the text frames will only fill that space if you tell them to. The way I used to expand text frames involved double-clicking the corner of each one; I do not recommend doing that as the results are variable.



Figure 1. Overset text icon

Instead, I recommend using the following trick that involves a clever use of InDesign's Text Frame Options:

1. Go to **Window>Styles>Object Styles** or press **Ctrl+F7**.
2. Click **New Object Style** and navigate to **Text Frame Auto-Size Options** from the attributes list on the left.
3. Choose an option from the **Auto-Sizing** dropdown menu.
4. Use the arrows to tell InDesign in which direction the text frame should expand (Figure 2).
5. Name the object style something memorable.

I have three object styles that I apply to my text frames before sending the file for translation. I name them according to how the text frame will expand:

- > only
- < only
- Down only

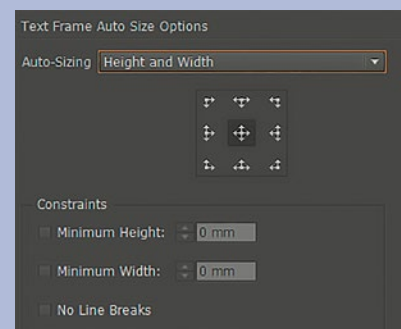


Figure 2. InDesign text frame options

## Conclusion

This technique is great for making sure that translated text does not run off into other parts of the layout, such as images. Using this technique also encourages you to think about translation when you're writing, which will improve the quality and efficiency of the translation process.

InDesign is full of useful, built-in features like this one. If a task is taking too long or getting monotonous, there's probably a better way to do it. If you can't figure it out yourself, it's always worth asking a question in the Adobe forum, as the Adobe community is so knowledgeable and willing to help. **C**

## Resources

Adobe (2017) Community: InDesign | Adobe Community (online) available at [www.forums.adobe.com/community/in-design](http://www.forums.adobe.com/community/in-design)

Adobe (2010) IDML File Format Specification (online) available at [www.adobe.com/content/dam/Adobe/en/devnet/in-design/cs55-docs/IDML/idml-specification.pdf](http://www.adobe.com/content/dam/Adobe/en/devnet/in-design/cs55-docs/IDML/idml-specification.pdf)



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