

**Shopping for translators: comparing apples to oranges when they are really Starbucks coffee.**

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So you have a translation project. Now what? How do you shop for a translator?

If translations were commodities, say like sugar, you would simply define the amount you need and send someone out to buy the cheapest sugar possible. But translations are not sugar, and in a worst-case scenario, a bitter experience.

Merriam Webster defines a commodity as a mass-produced unspecialized product. Like a music cd, translations cannot be made uniformly for all tastes. Market price has determined that a blank cd is worth under \$1.00. But would a country cd be worth more than an aria? How much would you pay for a cd with your favorite songs? Who decides what songs get included? How many people will be interested in exactly the same songs you want?

Translations are not a commodity. Shopping for price can be a costly mistake. Years back, when very few translators were around, translators themselves would refer you onto the appropriate person if they could not do your project justice. Nowadays, in this dog eat dog world, facing such stiff competition, code of ethics are rarely present. How then, do you shop for a translator if you do not know what to look for?

Hiring an agency will solve that problem. Agencies typically have a large pool of freelance translators, besides a few in-house translators and project managers. A good agency will pair you up with the right translator. After considering what type of document you are having translated, a good agency will verify the subject matter expertise of the translator tackling your project. A good agency will ask questions beyond delivery date, format and price. The target audience, the purpose of the translation, where and how the translation will be viewed all influence how the

translation project is approached. Just like with the music cd example, there is no absolute checklist, no cookie-cutter to automate the process. Translation remains a human, highly customized project. The best you can hope for is the measures to minimize if not eliminate room for human error. A good translation agency will start out with a good translator that is right for your project, a bilingual editor to check the translator's work and a monolingual editor to ok the final work with no language bias.

The volume of translation you require will determine how involved you need to be in understanding the workflow process. A good agency will not object to involving you in the process. At the very least you do have to be in close contact with your project manager. If you do not get "the third degree" on your project, how will the translator know you want the instructions for your floor operators, and not your engineers, or even for your human resources department? Clearly all three might make use of an operations instruction manual, but for different purposes and with different language needs.

Most importantly familiarize yourself and feel comfortable with the translation agency. Once you can trust them to do their work, you can trust them to do your work right.

If you would like a "checklist" of criteria to consider when investigating an agency, email me at [lulu@enlaceslinguisticos.com](mailto:lulu@enlaceslinguisticos.com)