

# Software Translation: getting it right

Working in the IT industry has its own peculiarities, and there are many key aspects that can make the next product release either a failure or a success.

In this article, we want to give you an overview of the most important things to consider if you are thinking about including localization in your next IT project. We hope that you will find the information below helpful.

## The process: Doing things in the right order



There is a tried and tested order in which the content needs to be translated. It is the order followed by the main IT companies and it is the fruit of decades of seeing what works and what doesn't work.

## Step 1

# Software Translation (or UI translation)

Start with the software, always start with the software translation. It will save you inconsistencies with the support material – such as manuals, tutorials, and help articles – , last-minute fixes, and headaches (as if software development didn't have enough headaches as it is).

Once you have a stable version, or at the very least a UI freeze, you can send us the software strings for translation.

Translating the UI strings first allows us to create a glossary of UI terms, this will help maintain consistency between the UI and all the supporting materials.

This also gives the development team the opportunity to test the new translated UI and see how the software is holding up, and check if fixes are needed. We will discuss some common problems at the very end of this article.



## Step 2

# User Manuals

The second step is the manuals. Since we started with the translation of the software, we now have a rich glossary of UI terms that will help us maintain total consistency between the UI and the Manuals.

Consistency is important since it is what will ensure that your users will find what is in the manual on the actual UI and prevent them from getting lost trying to find a menu item that has a different name.

For example, in English, imagine if your software instructs the user to use the Cut feature, but in the UI it is actually called Crop. This type of inconsistency makes the manual hard to follow and defeats its main purpose as a reference for the users.



### Step 3

## Help Files – Online Help

This part is pretty straightforward on the linguistic side since all the terminology should be already well established from previous steps.

The one difference is how the Help files are structured. If we are dealing with the old, help document format, then these files are a collection of files that are translated, compiled into a Help file, and subsequently tested by our team to make sure that everything works.

If on the other hand, we are dealing with the online format, this step will be like translating a collection of webpages.



### Step 4

## Tutorials

This step is optional, but it definitely helps you foster user adoption of your software. You can create short videos or interactive tutorials to help your users (or would-be users) understand how to perform key tasks.

We can support you with either subtitling, for a simpler and cost-effective solution, or voice-over, for a more complete localization.

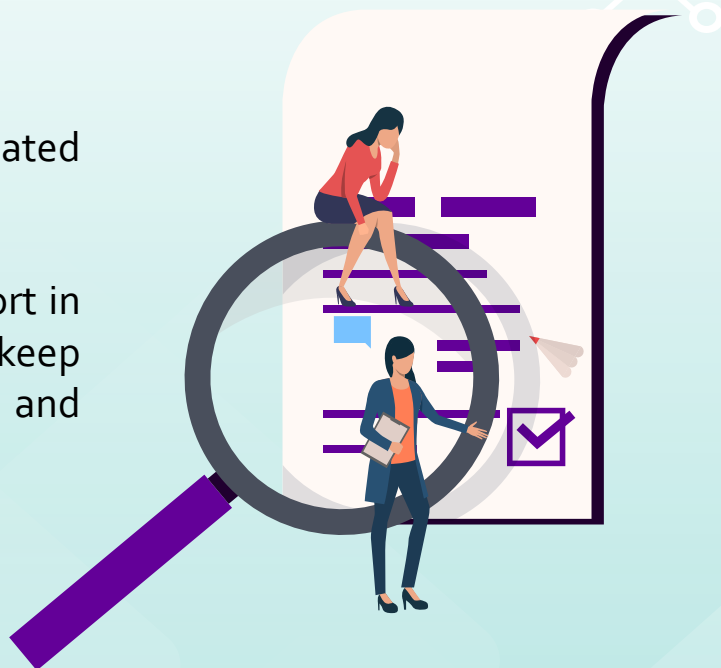


## Step 5

# Patch Notes

It is always good to keep your users updated and engaged with your software.

Normally, patch notes are relatively short in the text so it doesn't cost that much to keep everybody up to date on what's new and what has been fixed.



## Step X

# Marketing Material

Marketing material can be translated at any point in the process.

You can translate it during development to drum up interest for your product, before a release to increase your sales, or periodically after releases to share news and offers.



# Tips and Tricks

## Character Encoding

An important aspect of software translation is how the characters are going to be displayed. Your software may be displaying text in languages with special characters, or languages that have a completely different set of characters (e.g. Chinese).

In other words, what worked for English isn't necessarily going to work now.

As a rule of thumb, we recommend that you use UTF-8 or UTF-16, as it allows you to display almost all languages.

You can find a full list of the languages supported here:

<https://www.unicode.org/standard/supported.html>



## Character length and the UI

Besides character encoding, the length of the text that can be displayed in a UI item is one of the main challenges of UI strings translations.

This is especially important for software that is used on mobile phone apps, heavy machinery, medical devices, or any device that isn't a Mac or a PC.

If you want to tackle the issue early on, try to perform a mock translation (i.e., a simulated translation): import a random set of characters that is 30%-50% longer than your existing text to your current UI. This is a good opportunity to test compatibility with the new charset

After doing the mock translation, please check for the following possible problems:

- Does it truncate text?
- Does it reduce the font?
- Does the text scroll out of the screen?
- Are special characters displayed correctly?

See how your software behaves and inform the translation team of any text size limitation.

Finally, please save some time after translation for testing the UI. If needed, you can send us back a list of strings to be shortened along with the maximum string length.



## Microsoft's Glossaries

Microsoft has been a big player in the software industry for many decades now, so it is of little surprise that they have humongous glossaries with thousands of UI terms translated into hundreds of languages.

What may surprise you though, is that they have been nice enough to make their glossaries public and available. You can access them following this link: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/language>

When in doubt about how to translate a UI string, it is always a good practice to check the Microsoft glossaries since their translations have already been read (and subconsciously, accepted) by millions of users.



If you are ready to tackle new markets and want your software to be used around the world, you need the right partner for your software translation.

At **Australis Localization**, we stay with you every step of the way. Contact us at [production@australis-localization.com](mailto:production@australis-localization.com) to discuss how we can help you launch your software to the World.