



Can't find the translation savings you're looking for?

We can help.

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Translation Memory Best Practices

Founded in 1983, Idem Translations, Inc. is a full-service provider of translation and localization services. Idem specializes in certified translations for medical device, biomedical, and pharmaceutical companies, as well as other organizations and entities working in the life sciences sector, such as contract research organizations (CROs), healthcare research centers, and institutional review boards (IRBs). The company is a WBENC-certified woman-owned business and holds certifications to ISO 9001:2008, ISO 13485:2003, and EN 15038:2006

What is Translation Memory? (and why you need to know about it)

You send your translation agency an English document and you get a German document back. Simple, right? Actually, behind the scenes, your vendor is creating a database of past translations, stored sentence-by-sentence. We call this Translation Memory.

Let's consider a hypothetical scenario. You have a training document that contains the following sentence:
Enter your ID and click **Go**.

Your translation vendor has translated this document into four languages. This means that your translation vendor has a Translation Memory ('TM' for short) entry for this sentence in each language. Now, if you use the sentence in a different document, your vendor will:

- search your Translation Memory database,
- find the existing translation,
- verify it in the new context, and
- give you a nice, fat discount.

This is the power of what is called a "100% Match" in the lingo of translation memory technology. There are other "match" types as well:

Repetition: the same sentence in the same document (that hasn't been previously translated)

Context: a "100%" match where the surrounding text is also identical

Fuzzy: a sentence that is very similar, but not exactly the same

Different vendors offer different pricing structures for these matches, but Context and 100% Matches are consistently the biggest savers.

Let's say your team now creates a new training document. It deals with some of the same screens, but you have a new technical writer, who drafts the instruction like this:

Enter your ID and select **Go**.

That one word difference, changing "click" to "select," has a big impact: you've lost your 100% Match! Now your vendor will:

- search your Translation Memory database,
- find the existing Fuzzy Match,
- update the translation,
- check the translation, and
- give you a smaller discount.

Translation Memory has the power to reduce long-term costs and to support translation consistency over time. In order to leverage this power, however, you need to know how to manage your source content and your translation vendors.

Five Best Practices for managing your Translation Memory assets

1. Create consistent English.

Translation Memory is at its most powerful when it sees identical blocks of text across different documents and over time. So the best way to leverage Translation Memory is to write consistent English. Be repetitive. Shun inventiveness. Whenever your team plagiarizes its own work, you may be saving yourself 75% or more on the cost of each word.

2. Know your native files.

Translation software creates the Translation Memory database by “reading” the source content. The fastest and most reliable way to do this is to feed in native file formats, such as .docx, .indd, or .fm. (PDF files are great for printing and quality control, but they keep file format information locked away and inaccessible to translation software.) For each print-ready PDF of your English content, keep a folder with all the files used to create it, including the original, editable image files for any charts and graphics, and all fonts used.

3. Format like a pro.

How does translation software know where one sentence ends and another begins? It looks at standard punctuation marks that imply the end of a sentence, such as periods, colons, and question marks. It also looks at hard returns (¶), which denote the end of headlines and subheadings. The hard return is a sneaky one. Make sure that your layout team resizes text boxes and pages to fit your content, rather than dropping a hard return in the middle of the English. Otherwise, you run the risk of undermining the usefulness of your Translation Memory and limiting its ability to find money-saving matches.

4. Rein in reviewers.

Your writers are working hard to draft repeatable English. Your translation vendor is using your Translation Memory to ensure consistent translations. All this effort will go to waste if your in-country reviewers have free rein to make changes that can lead to inconsistencies. For instance, let’s assume that the same sentence appears in two different documents reviewed by two different German reviewers. One modifies the translation; the other leaves it alone. Bad news: now you have two different German translations for the same English sentence. When your writers next use this sentence in English, which German version should your translation vendor use? Prevent problems by creating a strict, formal process for reviewers to ensure consistent review results.

5. Control your translation assets.

Even if you never look at your Translation Memory (which is typically stored and shared in files with a .tmx extension) you should periodically collect these files from your vendors. If you ever decide to work with multiple translation vendors and manage your translation assets in-house, you can streamline the transition by having your current Translation Memories already on file. Requesting your .tmx files also creates a regular opportunity to review how things are going with your translation vendor and provide them with feedback for an improved collaboration.

What you gain with proactive TM management

Because translation is one of the final steps before product ships, the budget is always tight and there is never enough time. Translation Memory was designed, in part, to address these problems by enabling translation vendors to reuse past translations. By actively managing your Translation Memory assets, you'll save time and money on your translations. You'll also gain better control over your translation suppliers, particularly if you need to change suppliers or add a new vendor to the process. Best of all, you'll have full transparency into how your translation vendors are operating.

Get Help

For more information about how we can take the risk out of translations for you and your team, please visit us online:



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