

How to

write your website for online free translation tools



How to series / RWC2007

This article is written for people who are considering how to write text for their website and who might want to consider how their text appears to non-native users when translated by a free translation tool.

OK. Your company is expanding. Maybe you've started getting some interest from abroad. You've looked into the cost of getting your website professionally translated and decided you can't justify the expense yet.

So what do you do next? Well most people cross their fingers and hope that one of the free online translation tools will make do for any potential readers. The wisdom of

this is questionable for the following reasons:

- Free online translation tools aren't great and might do more harm than good.
- People are much more likely to buy when professionally presented to them in their own language.

Nevertheless, you feel that it's the only option for the short term. We don't want to see your business suffering any more than you do, so read on for a few tips on how to make the free translation tools online work for you.

What is Free Translation?

Free translation? Is there such a thing? Yes, but free translation comes at a price, if you'll forgive the pun. The free translation

tools that you can easily find on the web such as Babelfish etc. are based on various Machine Translation (MT) engines.

MT is basically a bit of software that tries to translate for you. It doesn't always get it right. In fact it can go very badly wrong. We don't recommend relying on it for accuracy

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under any circumstances and won't be held responsible for any errors that occur!

So what do I do?

Here's our 5 tips for getting the best out of free translation:

1. *Keep it short*

The longer and wordier your sentences get, the more likely it is that the MT engine will struggle. Keep to an absolute maximum length of about 15 words.

2. *Avoid ambiguity*

Check your text... is there any way that the words you have used could be misunderstood. Try to avoid ANY words which have double meanings.

3. *Avoid the passive and modal verbs*

What's the passive? Here's an example:

The man had been bitten by the dog.

Which is more simply rendered as "the dog bit the man" in the active case.

The passive makes sentence structures more complicated.

Same with modal verbs, these are verbs like "could", "may" "might" "ought to", "would", "have to", "must" "should" etc. Whilst they seem quite simple to you they just make sentence structures much more complicated.



4. *Avoid nominalisations.*

e.g. "She reached the conclusion" should be "She concluded".

5. *Use correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.*

Basic but vital. A free translation tool won't make allowances for errors introduced by the user.

Can I use a free translation tool and get you to correct the text to a professional standard?

Yes, but it'll normally end up costing more than getting the whole thing translated from scratch.

Other documents in the How to series:

- How to get the best from multilingual typesetting
- How to save money on translation costs
- How to work with interpreters
- How to plan a multilingual meeting

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