

# Vendors, Proposals and Other Necessary Evils

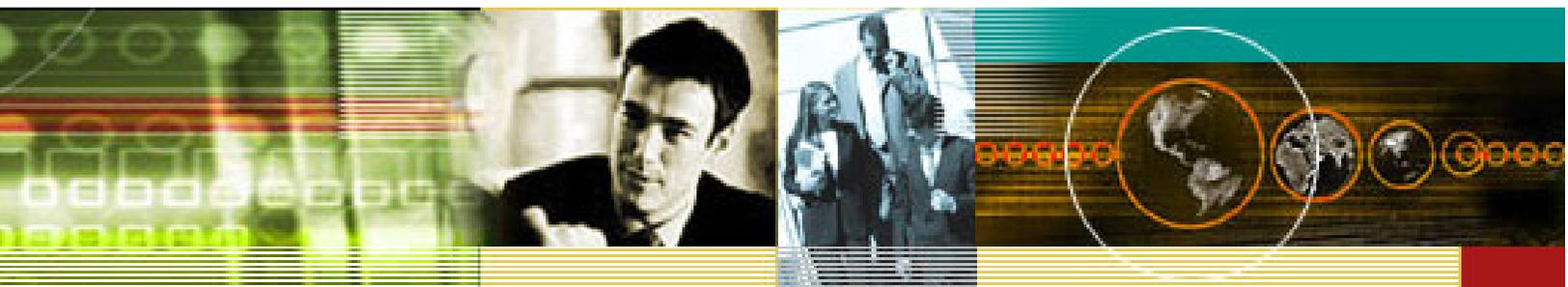
Ten Tips for Finding, Selecting and Living With Your Localization Vendor

By

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- What do I do now that I have the proposals?
- Which other criteria are there for selecting a vendor?
- How can I reduce other project management risks?



Although the process of bidding out a software, documentation or Web project to localization vendors may seem daunting enough to those who have never been through it before, it's only the first mile on the 5,000-mile journey. Anybody responsible for evaluating competitive bids faces plenty of variables, and a localization project – with its code pages, charsets and accent marks – occasions even more of both, adding to the cloudiness of the process.

Once you've received the proposals from the candidate vendors, it should be obvious to you which is most expensive and which is least expensive. If price is your sole criterion, you now have your answer. If not – for example, if you yourself have to live with the decision and manage the project – you'll next apply softer criteria to arrive at your decision, or to help inform management so that they can decide. Here are some tips:

1. If you have the time, let vendors know that you're paring down a field of, say, five vendors to a field of two before making your final decision. Then ask them to visit you in person. If the job is too small or they're not hungry enough, they won't bother, and you can eliminate them on that basis.
2. Sometimes customers balk at telling vendors who else is in the running. That can be short-sighted, because almost every vendor has cleaned up after at least one other, and they can explain their own relative strengths to you. There's no real advantage to keeping the competitors mutually anonymous, although you should treat their pricing information as confidential.
3. No single vendor is always the best. Project managers and translators come and go, and the vendor who did a good job for me three years ago could do an awful job for you this year. Look for strong process-orientation and depth of translation resources.
4. You need to assume – because it will almost certainly prove true – that no vendor will get everything right the first time. If you've never localized before, you don't know what you don't know, and there will be gaps between your expectations and those of your vendor. Besides, there will be a few things the vendor simply bungles; if the vendor doesn't recover from them gracefully, or if the quantity/nature of the gaffes is unacceptable, shop elsewhere next time.
5. Never award a job to a vendor until it has put you in contact with the project manager you'll be dealing with on a day-to-day basis. The account manager/salesperson will likely disappear once the work starts, and you absolutely must be comfortable with the person who heads up your project. There's no guarantee that you'll keep the same project manager for the duration of your project, but you should plant the expectation that you'll be able to speak with the project manager who is meant to kick the project off.
6. Once you've awarded the job, you should plan a one- to two-hour training session or product demonstration for the project managers and translators, by Web or

conference call. Even if the translators know what your company does and understand the terminology the product uses, there are nuances that only a training session can adequately convey. This also demonstrates to the vendor the priority you place on the project, and the fact that you're not just babysitting it.

7. You can't wrap yourself in Teflon. The buck will stop at your desk. If the project goes well, nobody will remember; if it bombs, nobody will forget. Take notes on your conversations with the project manager – rest assured that s/he is taking notes – keep your boss apprised of project status (both the good and the bad), and make project slippages known as soon as you see that they're inevitable.
8. Your best chance at having your project managed well on the vendor's side is to manage it well on your own side. Good vendors (and project managers) respond well to active, engaged clients. They don't like clients hollering at them, but if you agree to regular times and means of communication, contact them frequently and answer their questions promptly, they'll generally stand and deliver.
9. Most vendors operate on the same business model as waitresses: Do a good job on each customer so that they'll leave soon and happy, freeing up the table for the next customer. Everybody on the vendor side hates a project that grinds to a halt because you're not returning phone calls, answering questions or moving files, so do your best to turn things around quickly. Otherwise, your project will become as welcome as the restaurant patron who sits down at a table at 5:00 p.m., orders a cup of coffee, and spends the evening reading a Russian novel (or worse, writing one).
10. Keep in mind that your goal is to have a satisfactory relationship with a vendor who will help you release a product localized to your customers' satisfaction.
11. (10% bonus!) If your first project goes smoothly with no need to heed any of these tips, you lead a charmed life. If it has a few rough spots and the vendor is willing to work with you on resolving them, don't discard the vendor. As mentioned above, the vendor rarely gets it all correct the first time, and you probably won't either, so chalk it up to the learning curve, which will be shorter for both of you on your next project. If, however, the first project goes catastrophically, and you can demonstrate that most of the problems were on the vendor side, then you'd better dump the vendor for the next project. "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me."

## Next Steps

You've learned something from this paper, haven't you? You'd like a strong process, plan and player for your localization project, wouldn't you?

To give your localization effort every chance of succeeding:

1. Help yourself to other resources on our Web site.
2. Become as conversant in localization terminology as you can.

3. Contact us for a **free assessment** of your project, before you paint yourself into any corners.

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