

An illustration of two hands holding a clipboard. The left hand is on the left side of the clipboard, and the right hand is on the right side, holding a yellow pencil with a red eraser. The clipboard has a gold clip at the top. The background is a solid teal color.

# 7 Symptoms of A Broken Translation Process

And What Each One Could Cost Your Business

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*Thousands of broken translation processes go undiagnosed each year.*

*It's not like translation teams haven't felt the pain, however. Many limp through their review cycles, wince at the sight of their invoices, and cringe with every correction request.*

*The real issue is an inability to determine what's causing the pain — and the prevailing sense that what they're feeling isn't all that serious.*

*After helping hundreds of hobbled customers get back on their feet over the years, we've now seen translation processes bend, break, and mend in every imaginable way.*

*So in the following pages, we'd like to share a few diagnostic insights to put you on the road to recovery today.*

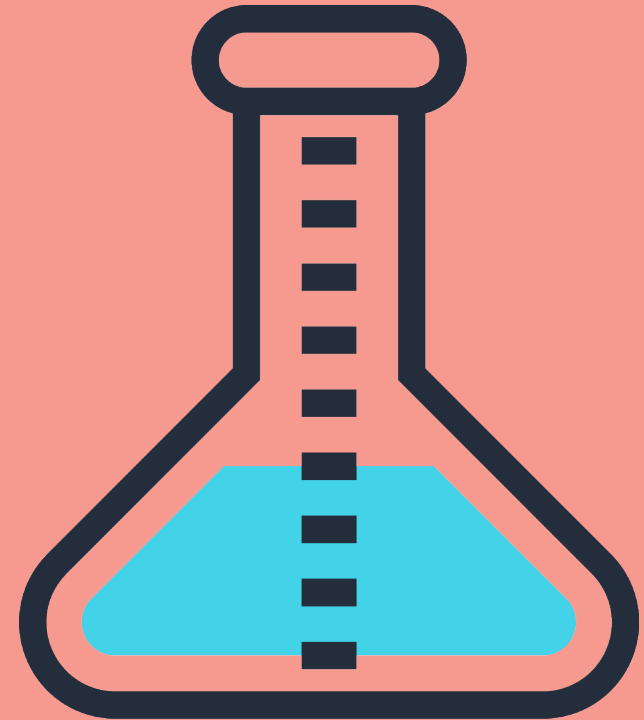
**Get Well Soon,  
The Smartling Team**



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# Symptom #1 *It Takes Weeks (Or Months) to Get Content to Translators*

## Common Causes

- Content is owned by many different employees
- Content is hosted in many different systems
- Content management systems have not been internationalized
- Text strings must be manually extracted and pasted into spreadsheets



## Business Prognosis

- Project managers will spend more time handling mundane tasks
- Product development and innovation will be delayed by internationalization
- Business will launch localized content significantly later



## Clinical Recommendations

- Automatically extract the desired text from your online content by using a:
  - Translation Proxy
  - Pre-Built CMS Connector
  - Custom API Solution
- Empower content owners to independently upload files and request translations



The first three causes underlying this symptom are almost inevitable. With more companies turning to content to fuel their business fortunes, the number of people and systems responsible for corporate publishing is only trending upwards. And even if that weren't the case, there's little hope of your company exclusively selecting systems that have been previously configured to support multilingual content.

**These stubborn circumstances do not, however, condemn you to copying and pasting text strings into shareable spreadsheets for weeks on end.**

A translation proxy, CMS connector, or custom API solution can forge an automated connection between your online content and your translator's interface — all with a fraction of the coding that would have been required to internationalize every supporting system. As a result, project managers and developers are spared from tedious

manual tasks and free to focus on more strategic priorities.

This approach becomes even more powerful when paired with translation management software that enables employees to upload offline content as well. That way, project managers can avoid the hassle of collecting email attachments from colleagues all across the organization and instead encourage content owners to submit their files directly onto a shared platform. All that's left to do from there is decide which requests get priority in a translator's queue.

# Symptom #2 *Translators Rarely Get Strings Right The First Time*

## Common Causes

- Content is provided without visual context
- Content is provided without sufficient guidance on style or tone
- Translators are not familiar with business terminology
- Translators have no easy way to raise and resolve questions



## Business Prognosis

- Expenses will be inflated by additional translation and review cycles
- Business will launch localized content late
- Stakeholders will grow frustrated
- Managers may consider replacing translators



## Clinical Recommendations

- Translate with visual context
- Create and share brand style guide
- Create, translate, and share glossary of key terminology
- Centralize team collaboration in a cloud-based platform



It's always tempting to blame the translator when accuracy becomes an obstacle. In many cases, though, translation quality is actually determined before a string even appears on their screen.

Content owners and project managers have a major part to play in reducing the ambiguity contained in corporate content. Cataloging key terms and standardizing your style in detailed guides is a great first step toward clearing the confusion, but ultimately **the most impactful way to empower any translator is to share the exact context in which their work will appear.**

The gift of visual context reveals all kinds of linguistic subtleties that even content owners may not have considered. As a result, translators can answer more of their own questions autonomously and squash potential errors proactively.

Nevertheless, there will always be some issues translators simply can't resolve on their own. When real-time advice from teammates is a click away inside a cloud-based translation management platform, translators trust that they'll soon have the feedback they need to find a solution. But when their inquiries have to be relayed and resolved through endless email chains, translators may just hold onto their questions for efficiency's sake and go with their best guesses instead.

**In the end, the decisions translators make and the risks they take all stem from the support tools you have (or have not) supplied.**

# Symptom #3 *Review Cycles Are Seemingly Endless*

## Common Causes

- No direct line of communication between translators, editors, and reviewers
- Recommended changes are recorded and debated in spreadsheets
- Spreadsheets get buried in email inboxes
- Review workflows are not aligned with content



## Business Prognosis

- Project managers will struggle to forecast final delivery dates
- Business will launch localized content late
- Stakeholders will grow frustrated
- Executives may begin to doubt localization strategy



## Clinical Recommendations

- Centralize team collaboration in a cloud-based platform
- Customize review workflows to fit content characteristics





Review is the fork in the road for most translation teams. It's the point at which strings either briefly pause before merging onto the path of publication or quickly careen down an avenue of infinite detours.

How quickly you manage to get that second category of strings back on track often marks the difference between a successful strategy and a squandered opportunity.

The first thing to do is reassess who you have recruited to assist with review. While most teams acknowledge that not all content is of similar sensitivity or value, very few customize their workflows to account for this variance. As a result, they end up creating costly delays by forcing even low-priority strings through the hands of every available inspector.

Once workflows have been tailored to more appropriately match the rigor of review to the characteristics of your content, it's time to reconsider how your reviewers work together. Spreadsheets have proven to be one of the least effective forums for debating delicate linguistic issues, and routing them through a maze of different inboxes could insert days between required responses.

Shifting these conversations to a centralized, cloud-based platform instead creates three powerful efficiencies. The shared visibility increases accountability and inspires colleagues to respond more quickly. The centralized storage prevents poor email hygiene from disrupting progress. And the ability to directly address fellow teammates in real time helps you quickly identify and address root cause problems in a truly collaborative manner.

# Symptom #4 *Translation Errors Are Still Slipping Through*

## Common Causes

- Review workflows are not aligned with content
- Review decisions are made without visual context
- Review decisions are made without glossaries or style guides
- Translation memory contains mistakes



## Business Prognosis

- Expenses will be inflated by emergency edits
- Localized content will be damaged by lingering errors
- Executives may begin to doubt localization strategy
- Product development and innovation may be delayed by emergency edits



## Clinical Recommendations

- Customize review workflows to fit content characteristics
- Review translations with visual context
- Share glossaries and brand guides with every team member
- Consider penalizing translation memory



Considering all the time lost to neverending review processes, or all the time spent engineering more efficient workflows, there are few things more frustrating than learning that errors are still leaking into your live content. Aside from the significant hit to team morale, these oversights also trigger a costly round of emergency edits and leave your brand liable to customer scorn.

As with review speed, **the first step toward improving review efficacy is to analyze how your colleagues have been recruited and deployed.** One of the most common elements of error-prone translation workflows is the absence of client-side subject matter experts. Some companies simply trust their language service providers, verify formatting, and press publish.

By contrast, you can dramatically reduce both content errors and executive anxiety by assigning a native, in-country employee or local partner to serve as the last layer of review. And for especially sensitive or complex content, you may even consider creating workflows that

overcompensate on quality assurance by deploying an extent cast of SMEs with complementary technical, strategic, and cultural knowledge.

**Once you feel confident that the right custodians are reviewing the right content, it's time to make sure they have the right tools for the job.** The same visual context capabilities and brand resources you have (hopefully) granted your translators must be embedded in review workflows as well. If not, your content quality will continue to rest primarily on the shoulders of external partners.

One final hindrance that could hurt even the most diligent team is an unreliable translation memory. If linguistic mistakes have historically been deemed accurate in translation memory files, those errors will be automatically suggested and frequently applied all across your localized content catalogue.

Thoughtful translation memory maintenance should root out these mistakes over time, but in the interim it may be wise to impose a penalty on any files that do not have your full confidence. That way every questionable match receives at least one layer of human review before being applied.

The screenshot displays the SMARTLING web interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the SMARTLING logo, menu items for PROJECTS, API, and REPORTS, a Help icon, and a user profile for ACCOUNT OWNER. A left sidebar contains navigation options: Switch Projects, Content, Global Delivery Network, Team, Project Settings, Translation Memory, Translation Workflow (highlighted), External Translation, Custom Dashboard, Sign In Settings, and Reports. The main content area is titled 'Translation Workflow' and features two tabs: Workflows and Language Settings. Below the tabs, three workflow cards are shown:

- Legal content** (Project Workflow): Last Updated December 04, 2015. Steps: Translation, Post-Translation-Hold, Legal Editor Review, External Review, Published.
- Event Marketing** (Project Workflow): Last Updated December 04, 2015. Steps: Translation, Professional Editing, Internal Review, Published.
- Resource Page** (Project Workflow): Last Updated December 04, 2015. Steps: Translation, Edit, Internal review, Published.

Each workflow card includes a progress indicator with circles and plus signs, and options to Edit, Copy, or Delete the workflow.

# Symptom #5 *Corrections Take Forever to Complete*

## Common Causes

- Content updates are dependent on developer availability
- Developers do not have linguistic expertise
- No direct line of communication between translators, editors, and reviewers



## Business Prognosis

- Localized content will be less effective
- Brand reputation may be damaged by lingering errors
- Product development and innovation may be delayed by emergency



## Clinical Recommendations

- Centralize team collaboration in a cloud-based platform
- Empower linguistic experts to directly apply corrections



Translation errors are unfortunate, but very few are fatal if resolved in a timely manner. The trouble is many companies are creating unnecessary delays by routing corrections through their development team.

Whether the translation errors are relayed by perceptive employee or an offended customer, content owners typically have to submit the same type of support ticket they would for a blog headline that isn't displaying correctly. The urgency of the issue is then weighed against the urgency of developers' existing priorities, and more often than not the ticket is tossed in a lengthy backlog. Once developers do find time to address the ticket, a whole new series of emails is often required to make sure they understand details of the foreign language content correctly.

Making developers more available for correction requests is rarely in the best interest of the business, and expecting them to acquire foreign language proficiency clearly isn't the answer. **The one solution that suits all sides is**

**empowering your linguistic experts to make content changes on their own.**

By automating the connection between content and translator (see Symptom 1), you can create an environment where real-time edits are suddenly possible. Linguists can quickly fix an erroneous string and submit it for publication within the shared translation management platform. If the changes are substantial enough, workflows can be arranged to alert developers and give them a chance to take a final look. Otherwise, project managers can approve the corrections themselves without distracting developers from their core responsibilities.

# Symptom #6 *Business Teams Can't Count on Delivery Deadlines*

## Common Causes

- (See Symptoms 1 - 3)
- Business teams have no visibility into translation progress



## Business Prognosis

- Morale will decline within organization
- Business teams will start setting less ambitious strategies
- ROI will not be as impressive
- Executives may begin to doubt localization strategy



## Clinical Recommendations

- Centralize collaboration in a cloud-based platform
- Select a platform with detailed reporting capabilities



We've already discussed several ways to increase translation speed (See Symptoms 1 - 3), but in many organizations, being unpredictable is worse than being slow. A project that is promised in two weeks and delivered in two weeks is received better than a project that is promised in one week but delivered in 10 days.

Unfortunately, developing flawless predictability may never be a realistic goal in a discipline with as many variables as linguistic translation. The next best thing, though, is operating with transparency. Because **even if your colleagues won't like the answer to a status inquiry, they will definitely prefer to know the likely answer long before deadline day.**

Cloud-based translation management software can address the concerns of all your business stakeholders by providing a clear, real-time perspective of how quickly translation projects are progressing. Instead of hounding project managers for updates, they can independently access their most relevant metrics in a continuously updated dashboard.

This fundamental shift in operating style may not take hold overnight, of course, but anything you can do to move your team from a reactive stance to a proactive posture will surely net results in both team chemistry and localization performance.



# Symptom #7 *Budgets Are Burned Ahead of Schedule*

## Common Causes

- (See Symptoms 1 - 4)
- Translation costs are not factored into content strategy
- Translation costs cannot be projected ahead of time



## Business Prognosis

- Business may have to settle for smaller addressable market
- Customers may be left with incomplete or inconsistent experiences
- ROI will not be as impressive
- Executives may begin to doubt localization strategy



## Clinical Recommendations

- Translate content in small, prioritized batches
- Consider full range of translation vendors
- Centralize collaboration in a cloud-based platform
- Select a platform with detailed reporting capabilities



Avoiding the internal costs of internationalization and strategically minimizing the external costs of translation review will definitely build some welcome breathing room into your localization budget. When money is tight and ROI expectations are high, however, there are several more advanced levers you may want to pull.

Many brands inadvertently forfeit a portion of their bargaining power from the beginning by insisting that all of their source content must be translated at once. Source text is treated as one single mass and its associated translation cost is accepted as a fixed expense.

Additionally, many of those same brands fail to acknowledge all of their available translation options. Viable resources like freelancers, bilingual employees, and machine translation are rejected as unacceptable alternatives and a professional translation agency wins exclusive rights to every piece of business.

As a result, budgets are exhausted earlier than expected and suddenly companies have to make difficult decisions over which target languages and localized assets must be sacrificed.

What their teams fail to account for is the fact that **enlisting a professional agency and translating your content in its entirety are both self-imposed requirements**. A more economical option would be to prioritize each unit of content according to its business value and vary the assigned translation vendors accordingly. Your 10 least-trafficked pages, for example, do not necessarily merit the attention of professional translators. In reality, they may not even need to be included in a localized website launch.

Another powerful advantage that comes with this agile translation strategy is the ability to monitor expenses at a more continuous interval. When an entire website is translated en masse, the only bill you'll receive is the final invoice. But when source content is processed in smaller units, you'll have a more precise perspective of each page's financial impact. And if you're working on a translation management platform with predictive cost quoting capabilities, you can **start proactively managing your budgets right down to the dollar**.

# Our Prescription



We hope this guide has provided you with the education and inspiration you'll need to shape healthier translation strategies, but we also realize that it's a lot of information to digest.

With that in mind, we'd like to leave you with the following recommendations:

- **Find a role model.** Few companies perfect their translation process on the first try, so don't be discouraged if you still have some inefficiencies to address. Instead, [study a success story](#) that discusses what life looked like before and after the strategic shift.
- **Ask an expert.** Once you have better idea of exactly what you'd like to change, [get in touch](#) and we'll get to work building a blueprint tailored to your unique needs.
- **Test a solution.** Sometimes the best way to figure out if a solution fits is to try it on for your self. That's why we encourage everyone to [take advantage of our FREE trials.](#)



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