The Ultimate eLearning Localization Guide for L&D Professionals

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations have greater access to a dynamic cross-section of global talent. But leveraging a global workforce demands a new approach to training and development.

Technology-powered globalization has given organizations access to a broader pool of talent than ever before. Employees are increasingly embracing remote and hybrid approaches to work, and companies are poised to benefit from growth opportunities unbounded by geographical barriers.

However, venturing into new regions comes with its own set of challenges. Learning & Development (L&D) professionals are face-to-face with unfamiliar audiences and languages. Also, sharing core messaging and developing employee skills are further complicated by communication differences.

Translating content from one language to another is a start, but it does not go far enough. Culture is more than language – it is *who* we are, *how* we communicate, and *what* we believe and value.

Localizing eLearning content is crucial for any organization expanding into overseas markets. This guide will equip you with the information you need to develop an efficient and economical localization strategy that empowers your employees to do better for your company.

WHAT IS ELEARNING LOCALIZATION? HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM TRANSLATION?

Translation converts text into your target language. Localization goes further – it makes your eLearning content culturally appropriate.

Organizations are having access to a competitive global workforce and the benefits are undeniable – higher-quality talent, new market opportunities, and greater capability to provide employees with autonomy over their work schedule.

However, delivering online training to a globalized pool of staff poses new challenges. Your international employees are likely to speak a different language to you and each other. You can translate learning materials into their local language, but what about cultural nuances? What if humor fails to translate, a reference does not make sense, an idiom confuses, or a graphic reflects the society *you, not they,* live in?

That's where eLearning localization comes into the fold.

eLearning localization vs. translation

Translation means offering your course in languages other than your own and basically rendering meaning from one language into another language. Localization, on the other hand, means adapting your course to a specific country or region and customizing it to meet the respective audience's expectations and preferences. Here is an easy way to conceptualize the difference between the two: translation converts language and localization converts culture.

In addition to translating the text, localization involves adapting the following features:

- Figurative language and idioms (e.g., break a leg, don't judge a book by its cover)
- Tone
- Storylines
- Images, graphics, and avatars
- Fonts
- Symbols, currency, and measurement units (e.g., inches and centimeters)
- Acronyms
- Date and time
- Addresses

The goal of localization is to communicate course material clearly and in a way that resonates with the intended audience – whatever their ideas, customs, and social behavior may be.

Here are three examples to further illustrate the difference between translation and localization:

- Your course contains a storyline that mentions the Fourth of July, the Independence Day holiday. Although their first language is English, your employees in Asia will not resonate with this reference. During the localization process, the Fourth of July holiday is removed and replaced.
- You know humor is a powerful tool that engages learners and bolsters information recall. However, the joke that delighted your local employees may offend those in other parts of the world. During the localization process, the joke is rewritten to better meet cultural expectations.
- You are teaching employees in Mexico and Spain – staff in both countries speak Spanish. So, you translate your text from English to Spanish. The word 'computer' changes to 'ordenador.' During the localization process, 'ordenador' is changed to the Mexican Spanish word for computer, 'computadora.'

THE BENEFITS OF LOCALIZATION FOR YOUR GLOBAL TRAINING STRATEGY

Make localization a core pillar of your global training pipeline and reap the benefits today, tomorrow, and for years to come.

The benefits of localization are far-reaching – they touch your workers, organization, and ultimately, your customers. Here are four must-know benefits of localization in your global training strategy:

Benefit 1: Employees thrive when learning in their native language

Workers want to learn, with three in four saying they would take a course their manager recommends. What's more, a staggering 94 percent of employees stay at companies longer when their employer participates in their learning.

Your workers want to contribute to your organization's prosperity. They crave workplace satisfaction and personal achievement. You, too, want your workers to participate in your company's growth, and, according to 71 percent of executives, employee engagement is critical to organizational success.

Employees that are productive and confident are engaged in their workplace, and comprehensive training is vital to bridging knowledge gaps and ensuring no worker gets left

behind. But misunderstandings and miscommunication prevent employees who are not native English-speakers from learning best practices, performance metrics, and company philosophy as quickly or thoroughly as required.

Put simply, employees that learn in their native language grasp concepts accurately and fast, empowering them to put their best foot forward.

eLearning localization is key to unlocking the full potential of your global workforce. Without localizing your content, you risk miscommunicating core messaging and sabotaging your employees' efforts.

Benefit 2: Localization delivers maximum ROI on learning initiatives

Clear, engaging, and relevant training is vital to your business's ongoing success. Well-trained employees deliver superior customer experiences that boost your bottom line.

When information is relevant and easily understood, learners are more likely to absorb and remember it. With better information recall, employees are equipped to utilize learned skills in real-life situations. What does that mean for your organization?

- Increased worker productivity
- More consistent brand messaging
- Improved customer experience
- Rapid response to errors or issues
- Safer work environments
- Boosted company reputation

Together, the above outcomes drive up your eLearning ROI.

Benefit 3: Localized eLearning materials enable optimal resource utilization

Catering to a globalized pool of learners requires time and effort. However, localization can minimize the amount of time and financial resources required to reach your organization's desired learning outcomes – and here's how:

- Localizing existing content is more economical than creating brand-new content – especially for organizations expanding into several distinct locations across the globe.
- Translated eLearning content is often rife with communication gaps and irrelevant references, both of which confuse learners who then reach out to company leaders for clarification. Localization gives your workers the best possible chance of understanding and retaining learning materials.

Benefit 4: Localization creates an even playing field for employees

Workplace equality matters and localization can help organizations uphold that value. eLearning localization allows companies to deliver the same learning experience to *all* employees, giving each individual the opportunity to improve their skills and reach their potential while boosting their Diversity & Inclusion strategy.

Without localization, companies risk unintentionally disadvantaging non-native English-speaking employees, who may have difficulty grasping key concepts using English or translated text. Localization evens the playing field and guarantees consistent training quality worldwide.

FOUR ELEARNING LOCALIZATION CHALLENGES

Navigating cultural subtleties and communication practices in a time- and cost-efficient way poses a unique set of hurdles that must be overcome.

More than eight in ten employees believe that employers should provide learning opportunities. In particular, Millennial workers value ongoing learning.

Delivering on employee expectations and remaining competitive in the global marketplace is no easy task. Here are four challenges organizations face when shaping their eLearning localization strategy:

Challenge 1: Selecting the language for your training program

English is the most spoken language in the world, and although most English speakers are not native, it is still a highly accessible option – especially in higher proficiency, mature markets. According to the English Proficiency Index, Scandinavia, areas of Western Europe, Singapore, and South Africa boast the highest level of non-native English proficiency.

However, as more organizations expand into emerging markets with low English proficiency, the challenge remains: which language is best? The answer is a simple one: the local language.

In lower proficiency markets, do not be tempted to present your learning materials in English, as staff may spend more time and effort improving their English skills than learning their core duties and developing critical skills.

Emerging markets include:

- Indonesia
- Vietnam
- Thailand
- Some Latin American countries
- Some Middle Eastern countries

Challenge 2: Meeting audience expectations without sacrificing effective eLearning materials

Consider the elements of your eLearning materials – think beyond the text to features like images, people, stories, and graphics. These additional elements must be tailored to meet the cultural needs of your audience without reducing their impact or changing their meaning.

Areas that may require tweaking to address cultural sensitivities include the following:

- **Color choice** – Some regions associate different colors with different moods, events, or connotations.
- **Gender** – Some countries or regions are more open-minded than others when it comes to gender.
- **Pop culture references** – Mickey Mouse and Elvis Presley might be ingrained cultural icons in the United States. But in other parts of the world, pop culture references may not resonate or may offend.
- **Humor** – Be cautious when making jokes – what is funny in one part of the world may be offensive in another. It is understandable that you want to make the courseware fun or that you feel like using colloquial language to boost your users' engagement. But humor is culture-specific, not international at all, so be prepared for your inspiration to be neutralized – literally and figuratively.
- That is not to say you should not use humor at all to delight employees, you just have to make it more generic and make sure to localize it for the target audience.
  One study found that humor reduces learner stress, makes a course more engaging, and improves information recall.
- **Business hierarchies** – Businesses are structured differently worldwide, and the people in specific roles and how those roles are depicted vary, too. Typically, Westerners adopt a top-down management style. In East Asian countries, for example, mid-level management consensus is the norm. What's more, context-conscious cultures prefer clear rules and unambiguous leadership styles.
- **Dates** – Calendar and date/time formats depend on the locale and the religion.

Besides the Gregorian calendar used in most countries of the West, there are also the Japanese, the Hijri, the Taiwanese, the Hebrew lunar and the Japanese calendars; you've probably heard about the Chinese New Year, which is nowhere close to January 1st. However, even in the same calendar, there are countries where the first day of the week differs, such as in the Arab-speaking world where Friday and Saturday are non-working days, but Sunday is the first day of the working week.

- **Numbers** – When it comes to numbers, the thousand and decimal separator is the most common issue, but then you should also keep in mind the negatives, the shape, and the grouping of numbers.

Challenge 3: Keeping eLearning costs in check

The more complicated your eLearning materials, the greater the investment required to localize the content. Here are three golden rules of keeping your costs in check and achieving a scalable eLearning localization strategy:

- **Wait until your source content is complete** – that means no further edits – before you begin the localization process. If you need to make changes to your original content, those changes must be repeated in all localized versions, too, a process that takes time and costs money.
- **Always provide native editable files.** To analyze and localize any file, your localization partners need to be able to edit the text in your native documents. For example, even though text could be extracted from PDFs, it requires extra formatting work that also brings additional charges. Also, avoid including text in your images, as this can complicate the translation and localization process. Texts within the images may increase cost and

time affecting the eLearning localization process, as there is a certain amount of extra work involved in the extraction and import of the text.

- **Decide between subtitling and voice-over.** Adapting multimedia content for another country is a complex procedure that involves a lot more than simply translating the language. One of the most important decisions one must make is between using subtitles or voice over. Subtitling requires less time and money, however when deciding which method to follow one needs to also consider other parameters.

    - *What is the purpose of the video and the visibility?*
      Example: A message from the CEO may be best conveyed if it is dubbed, but a training video can meet its purpose with subtitles only.

    - *How much on-screen text is there?*
      Example: If your video or interactive presentation is heavy on text, then subtitles may not be a good option as your audience will need to rush through both and thus attention and focus may be impaired.

    - *Which is the target country or locale?*
      Example: In Spain almost all foreign-language video is dubbed while Greece has traditionally used subtitles in most multimedia content

    - *What is your available budget?*
      This can be the most important factor as the cost for subtitling can be up to 15 times less than that for voice-over.

However, no matter which approach you decide on, there are still some technicalities you will need to be mindful of.

If you are subtitling:

- **Subtitles need to stay close to audio but there will also be cases where sentences may be adjusted in translation** to convey the required concept without sacrificing viewers' experience (eg. display time and reading speed).

- **Be mindful of display mode and time.** Subtitles need to stay long enough on screen so that readers can read it through while keeping up with the video. Display mode should also be considered. You can select the font and you can add background and color to subtitles to facilitate reading, depending on the color of the slides/screens. You can even select where to position subtitles depending on where your on-screen text is.

- **Choose between soft-coded or hard-coded subs.** The number of languages you need to deliver your multimedia content in as well as the technology or platform you are using to deliver it will play a role in this decision as it may support one or the other type.

If you are dubbing:

- **Select appropriate voice talents that match your training characters.** It's not always just a matter of selecting a male or female voice. Depending on your training content, you may also need to consider accent, warmth, articulation etc.

- **Validate your script before recording.** If you realize changes in the script are required after recording it, costs will be high.

Challenge 4: Not all language companies have L&D experience

Localization is not always a straightforward process – it requires both a nuanced understanding of cultural differences and up-to-date eLearning best practices.

Not all language companies possess the multi-dimensional skill set, in-country linguists and tool set required to successfully localize learning content, a process that may require animation adaptation, video recording, voiceover, and other specialized capabilities. What's more, all localized content must then be re-integrated into the L&D authoring tool or platform, which might be off-the-shelf or custom-built.
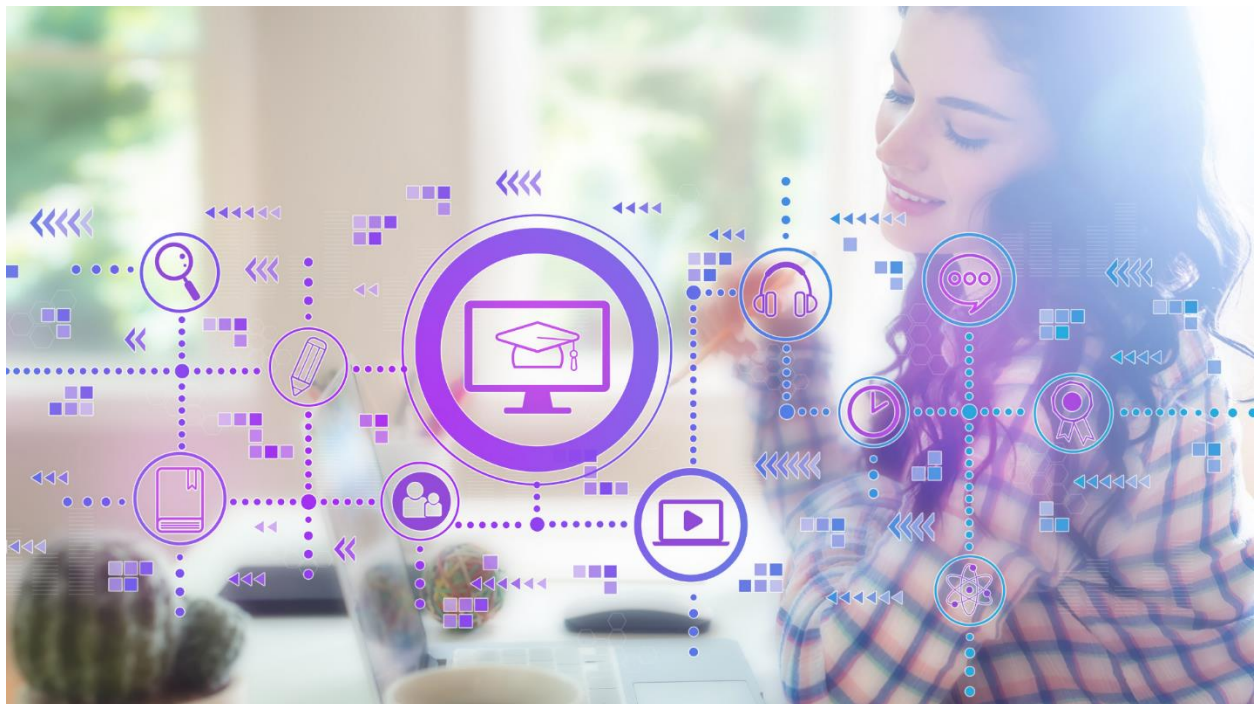
BEST PRACTICES FOR A SCALABLE ELEARNING LOCALIZATION STRATEGY

A scalable eLearning localization strategy maintains a high standard of quality while meeting time and cost restrictions.

While culture and language are unique and require a customized approach to translation and localization, several best practices ensure clear, engaging, and effective learning materials in every workplace environment.

Here are the must-know best practices for a successful, scalable eLearning localization strategy:

Allow space and time for expansion

Some languages are wordy and can take anywhere between 30 to 50 percent more space than the English version. So be proactive at the initial design level and provide enough physical space for text expansion. If there have to be character limitations, let your localization partners know what the maximum allowed number of characters is and consult with them for the best approach. Also, allow extra time for reading before displaying the next block of text on the screen. In case of software, apps or websites, consider using dynamic and responsive design.

The same issue with expansion also applies to voiceovers. Some languages will take up more time during the recording so leave ample time for audio expansion to cater to these languages.

Use compatible authoring tools

Ensure the authoring tools you use to create your course can be easily exported into a .doc, .docx, or XML file type – these formats are widely accessible and supported by the software translators use. Recommended authoring tools for eLearning materials include Adobe Captivate, Lectora, and Articulate Storyline.

Cater to your audience's logistical limitations

There is more to successful global eLearning than meeting cultural and language needs – cater to your audience's logistical limitations, too.

Are there any roadblocks you must work around specific to their geographic location? What about available technology? Do they have a fast and reliable Internet connection that can handle video?

Also, what device will they be using to access your course? A computer, tablet, or smartphone? More than half of all web traffic comes from smartphones, indicating that the world's population favors and has greater access to mobile devices. So, while you should not discount the needs of desktop users, make sure that your content is comfortable to read and engage with on mobile.

It doesn't matter how well you've localized your content if your audience can't access it.

Embrace imagery

You have heard the cliché, 'A picture is worth a thousand words.' Embrace it in your learning materials. Images, graphics, and graphs are strong cross-cultural communication tools that audiences around the globe can recognize and absorb near-instantly – the human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text.

When choosing images, aim for neutrality. Try to opt for neutral images of people, humanoid images or vector images.

Localize measurement

Training employees without measuring their progress is like driving blind. So, as you develop your localization strategy, make sure to also adapt both quantitative and qualitative measurement methodologies and metrics.

Ideally, metrics should be consistent across all regions your company operates in to allow for benchmarking, employee group comparison, and the identification of knowledge gaps. Key performance metrics include completion rate, engagement, learner feedback, and test results.

Choose the right narrator for voice-overs

It is very important to know that in some cultures, as in the Middle-East and South Asia, people expect the voice of the narrator to be very authoritative and firm. In other cultures, as in Western countries, people would expect a friendly, informal tone. Make sure your narrator sounds professional for the intended audience.

Invest in a style guide and glossary

The style guide defines the style, terminology and conventions from the beginning and provides uniformity in style and formatting throughout your eLearning and training documentation, but also across company initiatives and products. It improves the quality of your translations, minimizes inconsistencies, adds professionalism to your work and saves time and money.

Prioritize content

The Pareto Principle, also called the 80-20 rule, suggests that 80 percent of your outputs result from 20 percent of your inputs. In a learning environment, it asserts that in most cases, 20 percent of the training content achieves 80 percent of the desired outcome.

How does this impact your company's approach to its localization strategy for training? It merely suggests prioritizing content! Localize the most important content first, to deliver a high-quality product that better meets regional needs faster. Focus on the content that is most crucial for your employees' training, in order to get the quickest return on your investment.

Perform Linguistic QA & Functional Testing

Whether we are talking about an eLearning course, a PowerPoint presentation or a subtitling or voice-over project, the linguistic sign-off (and/or functional testing) is an integral step in the localization process. It should be performed by trained localization QA professionals that are native in the target language and it will help to expose possible technical issues related to text sizing and truncation, hard-coded strings and character corruption. This final step also gives the linguist the chance to actually see the translation in full context and in its final form and perform any necessary last-minute changes.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ELEARNING LOCALIZATION PARTNER

Localization is vital to thriving in today's diverse business landscape and selecting the right localization partner is the first step in your growth journey.

Your localization partner is key to unlocking the opportunities offered by a globalized workforce, but selecting the right company is not always an easy task. From the basics to the deal-breakers, here's how to choose an eLearning localization partner to support your international expansion.

Basic questions

Here are the fundamental questions to ask potential localization vendors:

- **Does the company have a trusted network of translators and editors in the countries you are targeting?** Your localization partner must be equipped with the expertise and experience required to translate and localize for all required audiences. That way, you can streamline your workflow and ensure quality and consistency across finished products.

- **Can the company integrate localized content in your preferred eLearning publishing tool?** Look for a localization vendor that can handle integrations. Why? Because it enables a fast and agile reviewing, editing, and updating workflow.
- **Does the company have the talent required to deliver high-quality voiceover?** Voiceover is a core component of most eLearning courses, so prioritize this area of expertise. Discuss different types of recording capabilities, such as narration, dubbing, and lip-syncing.
- **Does the company leverage a network of native speakers to test content before its publication?** Your localization vendor might be the best in the market, but mistakes will likely remain if they do not test their content on a fresh pair of eyes. Ensure your partner uses native-speaking testers to review content before it is unleashed into the world.

NEXT STEPS

If you are ready to capitalize on growth opportunities offered by a globalized workforce, localization is the key to unlocking your teams' potential.

When it comes to eLearning, translation alone is not enough. Regional differences go far beyond language. Cultural nuances and expectations influence not just *what* is said but *how* it is said and understood.

Contact the friendly team at Commit Global today to take the next step in your business's international growth journey. We are equipped to deliver industry-leading eLearning content tailored to global audiences.

ABOUT COMMIT GLOBAL

Commit Global has been helping corporations around the world translate their products, services & brands in local languages making them culturally relevant for more than 20 years.

At Commit Global, we see the biggest value in collaboration, and we strive to cultivate such a relationship with our customers. Our communication is to the point. Our action is prompt and transparent. Our delivery is consistently reliable and high-standard.

We consider our people being the key not only for our but also for our customers' success, and that is how we perceive the value of corporate training and e-learning solutions.

With our ISO 9001, 17100, 27001 and 13485-certified processes, we apply strict QA procedures in all projects.

Get in touch with us for:

- e-Learning Courseware Localization
- Rich Media Presentations
- Subtitle Creation/Translation
- Voice-Over
- Graphics and Animation Localization
- e-Learning Quality Assurance/Testing
- Website Localization & Optimization
- Software Localization

in more than 80 language pairs.

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