What to Look for in a Translation Solution: A Buyer's Guide for State and Local Governments

Eight features to seek out (and the questions to ask) to ensure a simple, streamlined, and scalable translation process

gobierno

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Contents

Government content deals with an array of serious topics, such as healthcare services and personal safety, transportation services, and taxation. Those in the public sector have a necessary but formidable task: they are responsible for disseminating this information efficiently and ensuring it's understandable to all constituents regardless of their English proficiency.

The need to ensure language access for all has led to the passage of a number of regulations geared toward making multilingual assets readily available. State and local government employees must navigate a complex web of federal, state, and local requirements and ensure that everyone in the community — no matter what language they speak — can access the full range of public services and benefits available to them. It's a tall order, further complicated by the time-sensitive nature of many government communications and, often, significant budgetary constraints. Still, many government entities make it harder on themselves than they need to.

Fortunately, advances in technology have made it so that departments and agencies can automate steps in the translation process, saving time and money while simultaneously improving the accuracy and fluency of translated passages.

It is time that government entities leverage this technology — specifically by investing in the right translation management system.

For those who haven't automated their translation process yet, here's a bit of a primer: A translation management system (TMS) is a means of automating content collection, managing workflows, and ensuring the quality and timely delivery of translated content.

It's also an ecosystem that leverages machine translation (MT) technology and provides translators with the tools they need to do their jobs well. Finally, it helps streamline communications between team members and professional linguists involved in translation. Before going into more detail about the key features to look for when evaluating translation solutions, here are some challenges that give governments the biggest headaches with translation.

# TMS

Translation Management System

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What are the main problems governments face when creating translations?

Problem #1

One of the main difficulties government entities face with translations revolves around the sheer volume of content that needs to be translated. After all, translation needs aren't limited to just one department or agency. Every department or agency has materials to translate — usually across multiple languages.

For example, one state government partnered with Smartling to translate all its agency websites into nearly a dozen languages — which amounted to almost one billion words translated in a single year. And that does not include other non-website materials that needed translation, such as public service announcements, legal documents, or forms. These various pieces of content are typically developed in different technologies, so the issue becomes how to make translation available across the tech stack.

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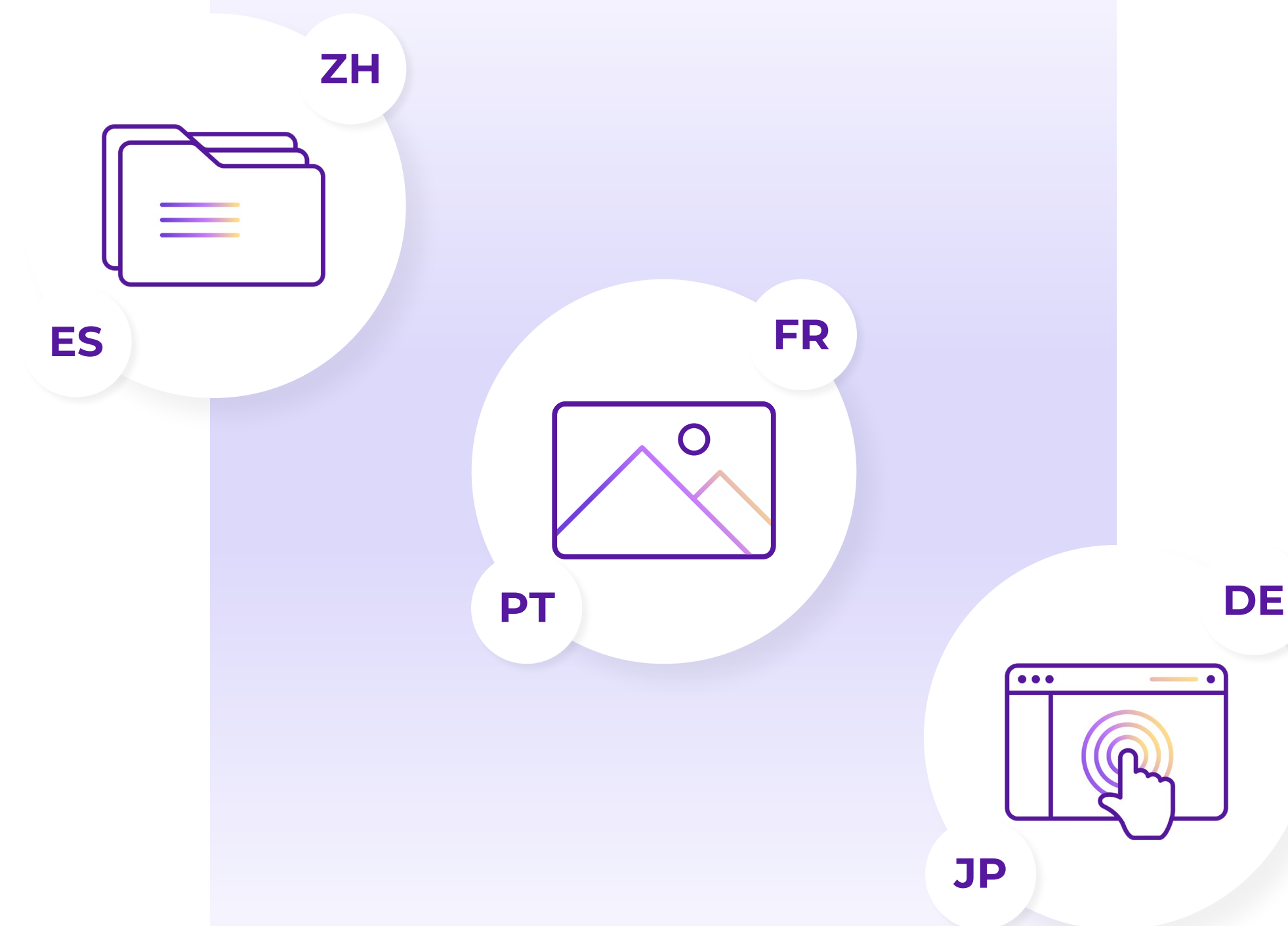
Problem #2

Another problem involves making sure that translations are completed efficiently. For example, government entities shouldn't have to pay for the same content to be translated a second (or third) time. When a translation from English to Spanish is completed for one government agency, the same translation process shouldn't happen again when the phrase is needed for another government agency. It sounds obvious that redundant work should be avoided.

But it happens all too often and leads to quality issues — especially when multiple agencies need translations and must rush to make translated material available — if there aren't processes in place that encourage automation and streamlined workflows.

**The Great Outdoors**

Les Grands Espaces

Los Grandes Espacios

Problem #3

Finally, when a government agency sends materials for translation, problems often arise around ensuring that those translations move smoothly through the translation workflow. This process should be frictionless and automated. But all too often, there are bottlenecks and more than a few manual steps.

From preparing files for translation and getting a cost estimate to sending the files for translation to manually importing the translations into their content management system, government employees frequently need to be very hands-on, which takes their attention away from other critical tasks.

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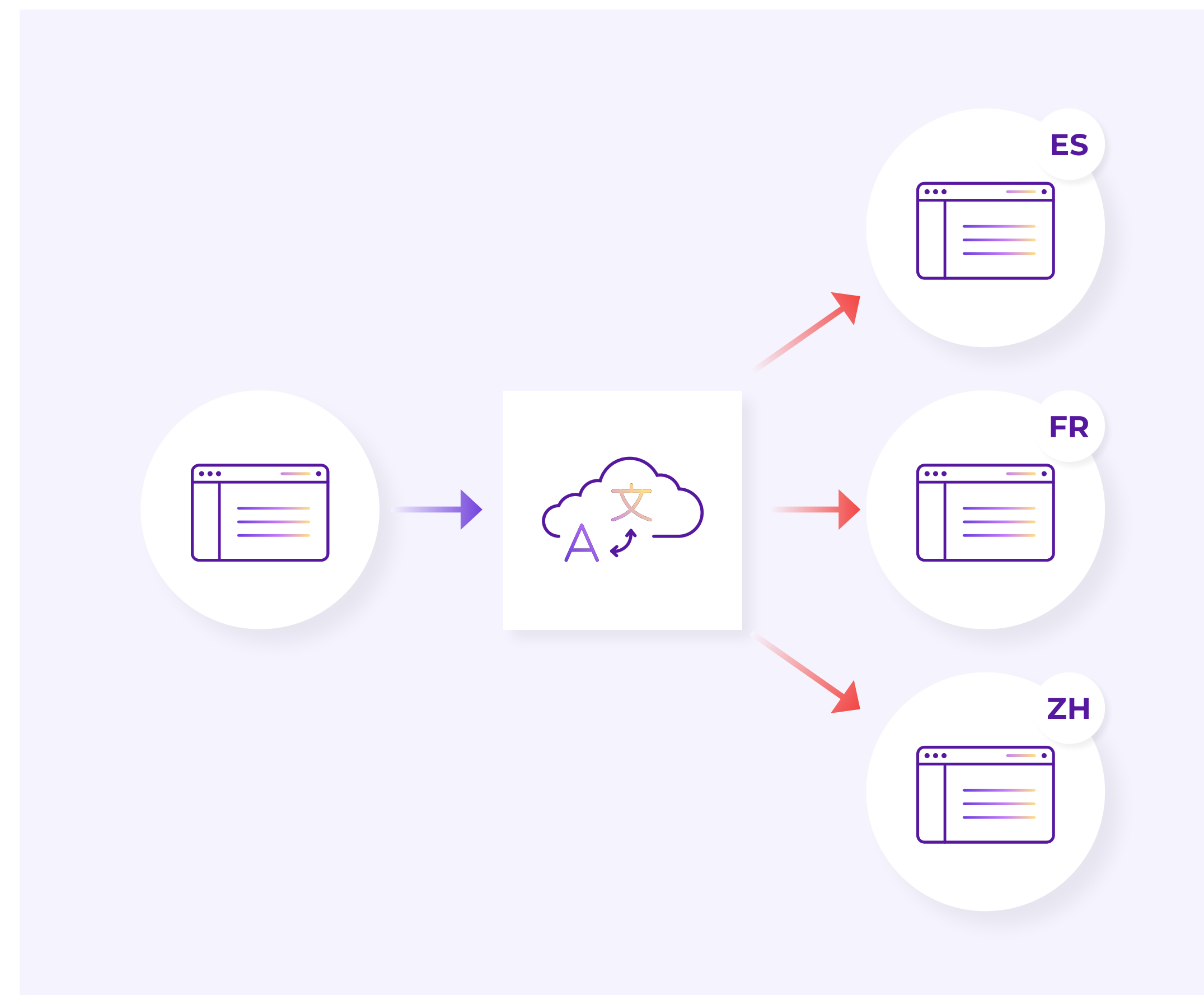
All of this is costly.

Tangible cost drivers include prolonged back and forth, redundant work, and manual tasks, which make completing translation projects on time and within budget extremely challenging. But just as crucial to consider are the intangible costs — namely, to quality and consistency. These challenges increase the possibility of translation errors.

If a government entity faces any or all of these problems, it is time to consider investing in a full-scale translation solution. Automating aspects of the translation process will result in cost savings and an accelerated time to publish. The right translation solution will help build consistency across government offices, define which unit or work group owns a process, improve transparency, and ultimately lead to higher-quality translations.

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The solution: Next-generation translation management solution

Before any outreach to potential partners begins, it's important to understand which elements of a translation solution are essential and which will be desirable in the coming years. Buyers should consider their goals or mandates, how their translation strategy will achieve those, and how they envision a translation solution fitting into their established workflows.

The questions that should always be top of mind are:

· Will it work for our government offices?

· Will it help accomplish our goals?

· Can we afford it at scale?

Will it work for our government offices?

Will it help accomplish our goals?

Can we afford it at scale?

Eight key features to look for in a translation solution.

All are essential.

1 Workflow management and automation

2 Integration to your existing tech stack

3 Linguistic asset support

4 Quality control and consistency

5 Centralized reporting and visibility

6 Scalability and security
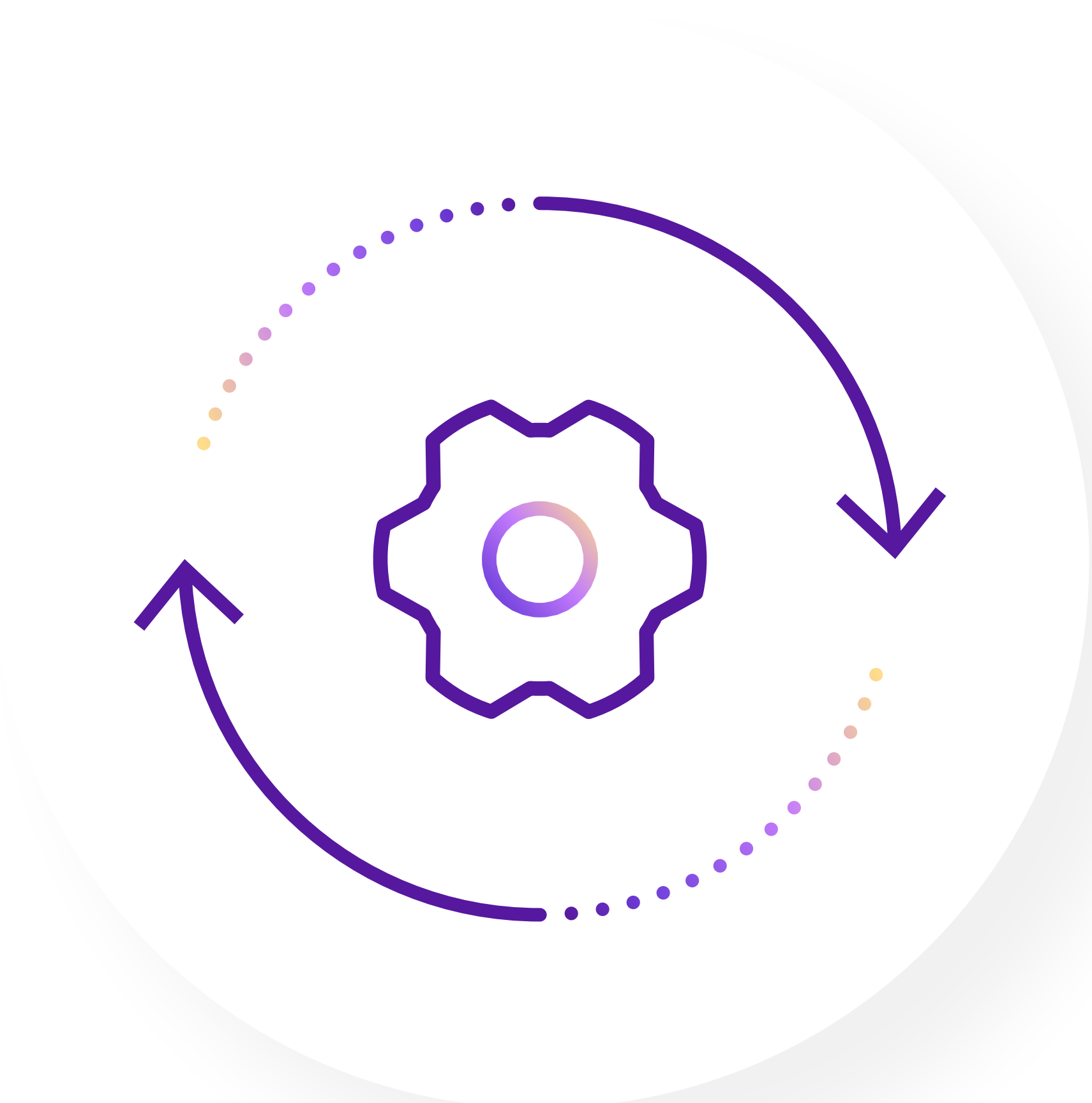
7 Translation or language services

8 LanguageAI, including AI-powered translation

Feature #1

Workflow management and automation

The best translation solutions will allow you to create streamlined workflows that all offices, departments, and agencies can use. At the same time, each government entity should be able to customize any workflow to fit its specific needs. That includes having the option to use any mix of vendors and internal resources and being able to easily assign (or unassign) users to each workflow step. Look for a solution with no licensing charges for bringing in external translation partners and no user limits.

In addition, your translation solution should also provide analytics to determine the best workflow for each content type. At Smartling, we refer to this as optimizing your translation mix: Customers can

choose to have certain content go through the traditional human-only workflow and have other content go through a machine translation (or AI translation) workflow, optimizing cost and quality.

Finally, as buyers map out the stages of their translation process and where each vendor fits in, they need to move translation projects from one step (and sometimes vendor) to the next. Automation is a critical feature to look for here, as having a human play the role of conductor invites delays unnecessarily. Once authorized for translation, content should instead flow smoothly through the workflow, with the translation management system analyzing and routing your content based on a set of parameters you choose.

Questions to ask:

- **Please describe your multi-vendor capabilities. Do you charge for licensing?**

- **Can internal and external translators and reviewers be incorporated into the process?**

- **Describe your system's workflow capabilities.**

Feature #2

Integration to your existing tech stack

Many government agencies start by localizing their website. With the right translation provider, this step should be straightforward.

For example, Smartling customers can leverage our powerful Global Delivery Network translation proxy to quickly and efficiently deploy multilingual websites with almost minimal to no IT involvement. Changes to website content are automatically detected and surfaced, making the translation of time-sensitive information quick and seamless — no manual uploading or downloading required. And everyone can rest assured that the most up-to-date information will be available in all mandated languages as soon as possible.
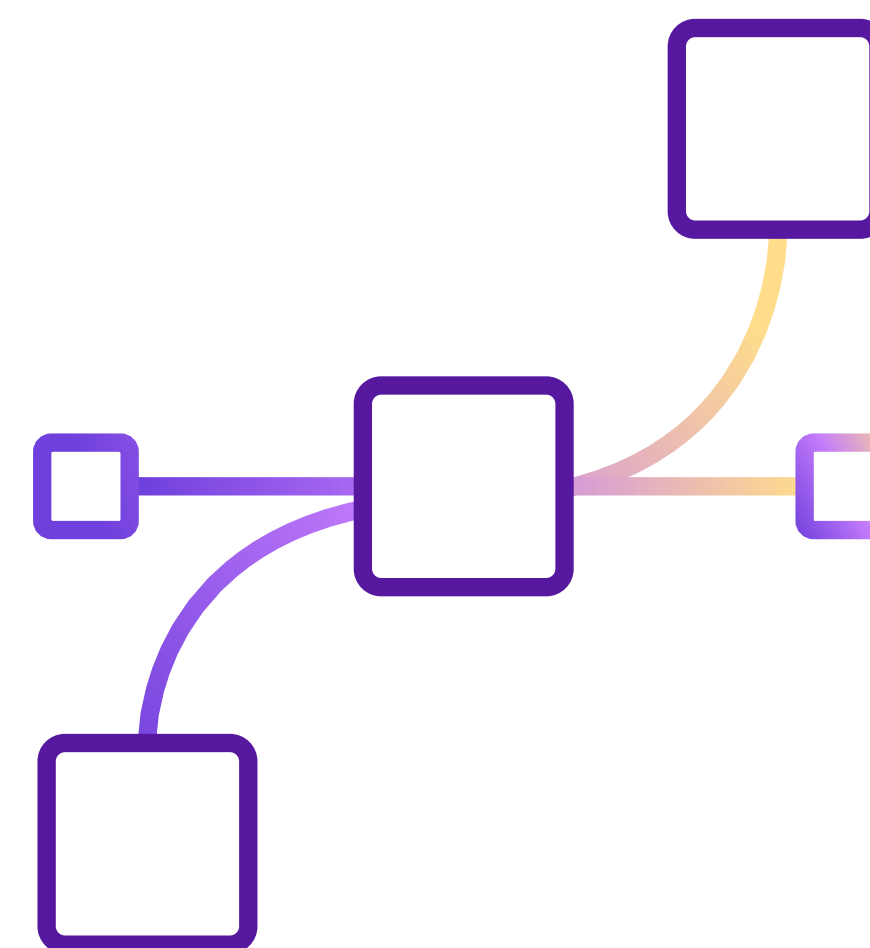
Eight key features to look for in a translation solution

But translation needs don't usually stop there. So, when choosing a translation solution, you'll want to consider whether the solution's software will work with your entire tech stack. That will make it easy to send content for translation without leaving the applications you use daily.

Questions to ask:

- **Do you offer an easy way to do website translation?**

- **Does your solution support frequent updates to the source site?**

- **What integration options does your solution offer?**

Feature #3

Linguistic asset support

Translation memory is a database containing your previous translations. Over time, building up your translation memory will help ensure consistency of translations and reduce duplication of work across departments and agencies. Translation memory is often more realistic to implement at the local level but can provide major efficiency gains when leveraged at the state level.

Other linguistic assets include your glossary, which dictates how preferred terms should be translated, and your style guide, which answers broad questions about how a translation should sound or the impression it should leave with readers. It can also include rules to follow in specific situations and answer questions about formal or informal registers needed for different content types.
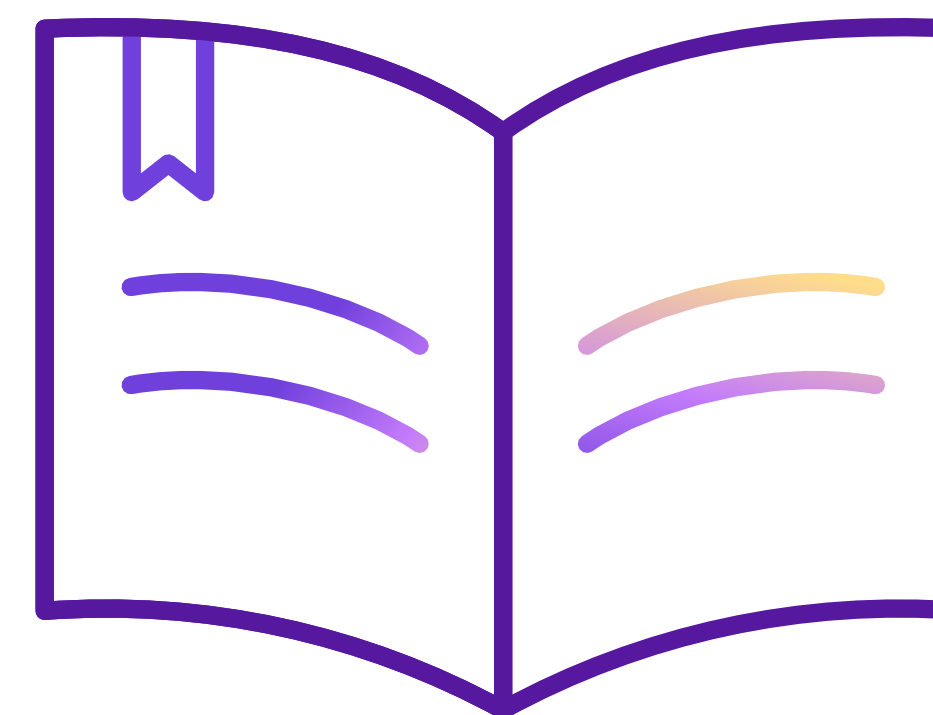
At the bare minimum, your translation solution should make storing and updating your linguistic assets a breeze, ensuring that the most up-to-date versions are easily accessible in real time to all.

Savvy translation buyers, however, look to partner with a translation provider that takes a proactive approach to linguistic asset management and can help them optimize those assets for higher-quality translations. The savviest among them look for a solution that incorporates the latest in AI technology to apply linguistic assets automatically, reducing manual work.

Questions to ask:

- **Can linguists access real-time changes to the translation memory from other collaborators, and if so, how does this function?**

- **Please describe your solution's glossary and terminology management capabilities.**

- **Can instructions and reference materials be added to the translatable content?**
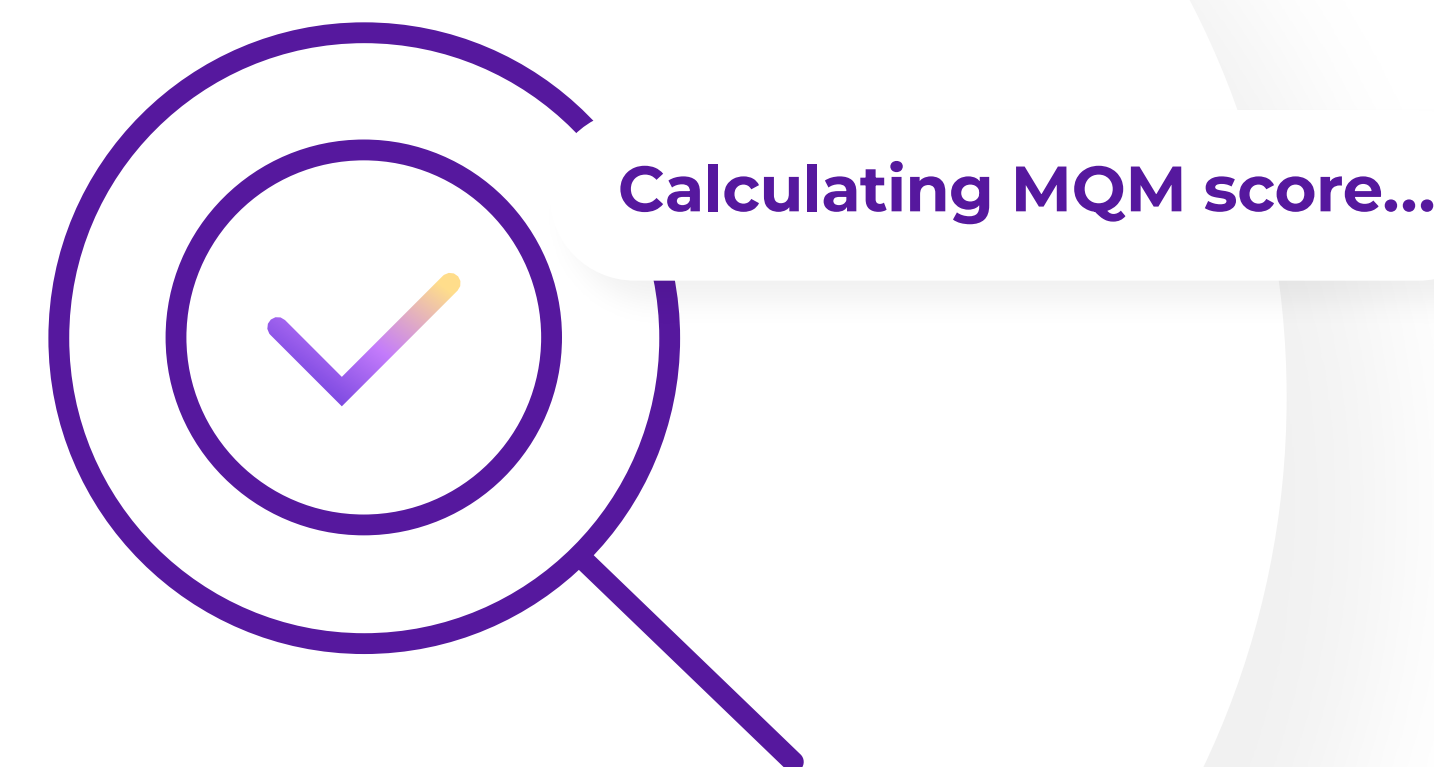
Feature #4

Quality control and consistency

Companies need a TMS that ensures accurate and consistent translations across various languages and content types. This includes managing the balance between machine translation and human editing to maintain the right level of quality, especially for specialized content or content where accuracy is an absolute must.

To that end, monitoring translation quality and addressing big-picture quality issues — e.g., ensuring that official titles are translated appropriately and accurately for the context, especially when dealing with gendered languages — should be made relatively easy.

Best-in-class vendors have built a repeatable process for evaluating translation quality and surfacing those issues before the translations

Calculating MQM score...

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are delivered. They also perform regular audits across all workflows — human and MT-driven. These processes should be built on industry-standard frameworks such as Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM) and should be performed regularly, to track quality over time and make adjustments as needed.

In addition, it is advisable to choose a vendor that offers both technology and services that make it easy to assess quality for your program. This includes quality evaluation tools that fit easily into existing workflows and reduce manual work, such as taking translations out of the platform for assessment. Quality evaluation services should include independent auditors to mitigate bias and the flexibility to scale evaluations across multiple locales. Finally, quality reporting should be transparent and easily accessible — more on this in the following section.

Questions to ask:

- **How do you define and measure quality?**

- **What quality evaluation services are available?**

- **Do you offer a quality satisfaction guarantee?**

Feature #5

Centralized reporting and visibility

Most government organizations want to make decisions impacting their bottom line based on hard facts and accurate data. A good translation partner will provide access to data via a combination of real-time and on-demand reports.

Government agencies should look for a vendor that makes it easy to glean actionable insights about all aspects of the translation process, such as pre-translation cost estimates, platform usage, resource productivity, content quality, and total translation spend. This should include views across all individual offices or agencies, so that reporting is centralized in one system.

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Eight key features to look for in a translation solution

The best translation providers provide drill-down reports on each translation project and locale and aggregate data across all the business's content and languages. Key stakeholders should be able to download the reports or view the results in a digestible format via an in-app dashboard in near real-time to make evaluating your process a straightforward endeavor.

Questions to ask:

- **Do you provide automatic and immediate cost estimates for projects?**

- **What reporting capabilities are available?**

- **What review capabilities does your system have?**

Feature #6

Security and scalability

Government entities handle a lot of sensitive information. They must place a lot of trust in their translation solution. Cybersecurity threats abound, and while compliance with the latest security standards is something translation buyers should generally expect from their vendor, the details matter.

Security standards and certifications should include the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), SSAE 16 SOC2, PCI DSS L1, and HIPAA. When inquiring about language services, also ask about compliance with ISO 17100 standards. In addition, ensure that your existing website security certificates can be leveraged in any website translation solution.
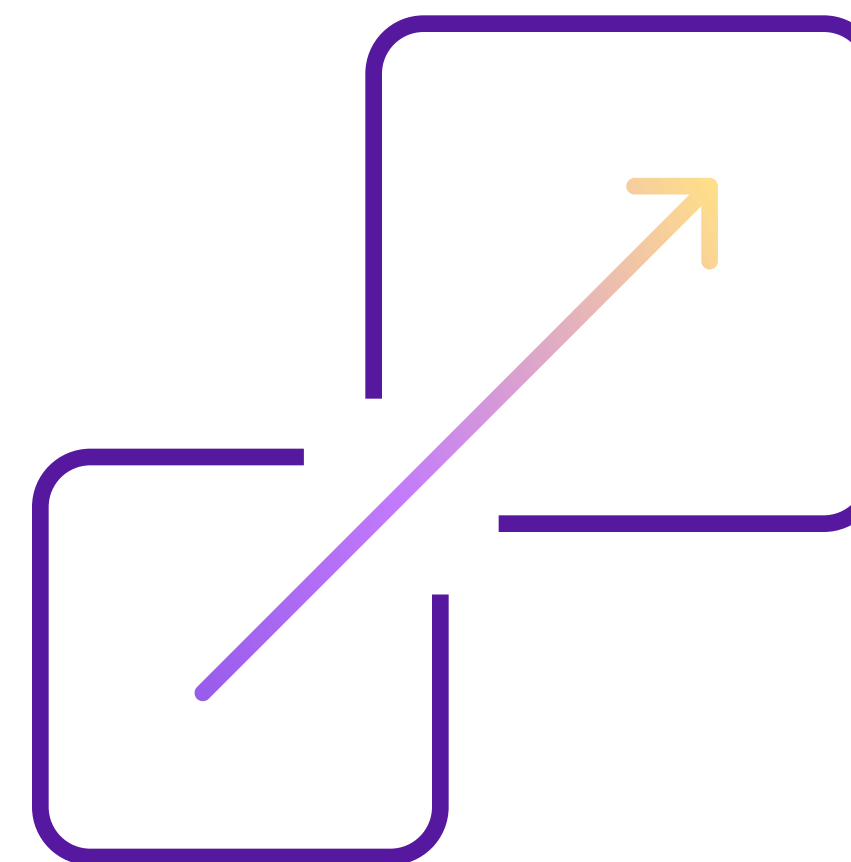
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Eight key features to look for in a translation solution

Uptime is another critical factor. Vendors should offer at least 99.99% uptime. For example, Smartling's web proxy, which guarantees a 99.99% uptime — or less than one hour of downtime per year compared to a vendor that boasts 99% uptime is still allowing for a little over 3.5 days of downtime per year.

The solution should also be a multi-tenant Software as a Service offering, ensuring rapid and frequent updates, bug fixes, security patches and enhancements. For example, Smartling's world-class engineering team deploys over 3,000 releases per year on a continuous basis.

Questions to ask:

- **What are your security and data protection standards?**

- **What is your business continuity plan?**

- **Please share performance statistics regarding your solution including uptime guarantee.**

- **How frequently do you release product updates?**

Feature #7

Translation services and support

With so many options, shopping for a translation solution can be daunting. Translation buyers may feel like they must split their focus: identify a robust TMS and, separately, find a competent language service provider (LSP) to support all their translation needs. Then, once they decide which TMS and LSP to use, their days often fill up with the minutiae of managing individual translation projects instead of focusing on their overarching localization strategy or other essential tasks.

It sounds exhausting! But it doesn't have to be.
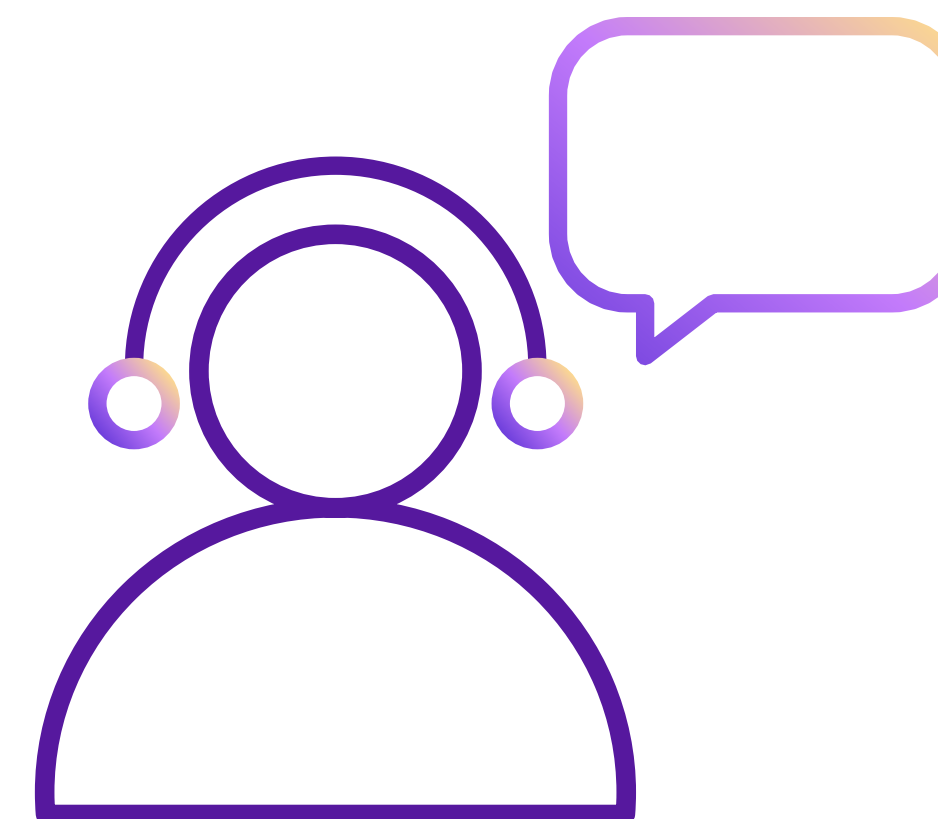
Government entities should look for a company that can support every element of their translation process — from providing them with a feature-rich TMS to offering high-quality language services and a team of dedicated localization experts to guide them through every step.

Government entities should also inquire whether they can offload some or all of their internal, day-to-day localization tasks, such as account administration, resource management, and training, to their prospective translation provider before deciding to buy.

Questions to ask:

- **What are the benefits of combining your language services and your software?**

- **Will customers work with a dedicated project manager?**

- **What support options do you offer?**

Feature #8

LanguageAI
(Including AI-powered translation)

There is a lot of excitement around artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) — for good reason. There is a strong potential for these technologies to be transformative. Many of the most promising applications in translation are still relatively new. However, we're already seeing how they can help deliver high-quality results at scale, all while saving translation buyers time and money.

Examples of current applications include workflows combining AI and MT with the expertise of human translators — an approach that produces better-quality translations than MT alone while still realizing significant time and cost savings over human-only translation — and the automatic application of linguistic assets. Such
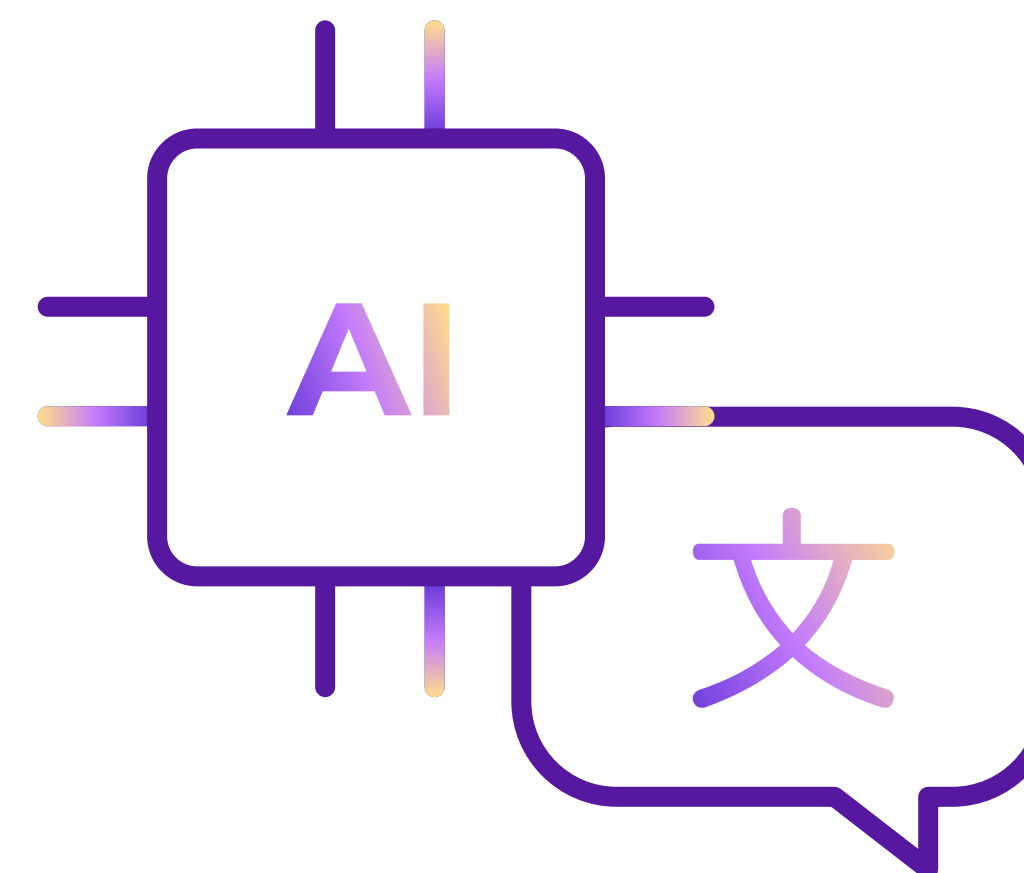
technologies are also being used to make quick work of adjusting the level of formality of a text, identifying and removing gender bias in translations, and even proactively evaluating the quality of every translation delivered.

The value these approaches can add and the time and cost savings they generate will only grow over time. Buyers who want to reap the benefits of these cutting-edge technologies should look for a company that is actively exploring ways to incorporate them throughout the translation process as a means to do more with less.

Questions to ask:

- **How does your workflow incorporate AI to improve quality, increase efficiency, and reduce costs?**

- **Does your MT offering support the use of translation memory and glossaries?**

- **How do you use, or recommend using, large language models (LLMs) in the translation process?**

Conclusion

To summarize, all eight of these key features are what government agencies should expect from a next-generation translation solution.

An effective translation solution should be customizable, configurable, and adaptable. It should automate the collection of content, workflow, and delivery of translated content. It should streamline the translation process for all involved — whether that encompasses a handful of departments and agencies or hundreds of them.
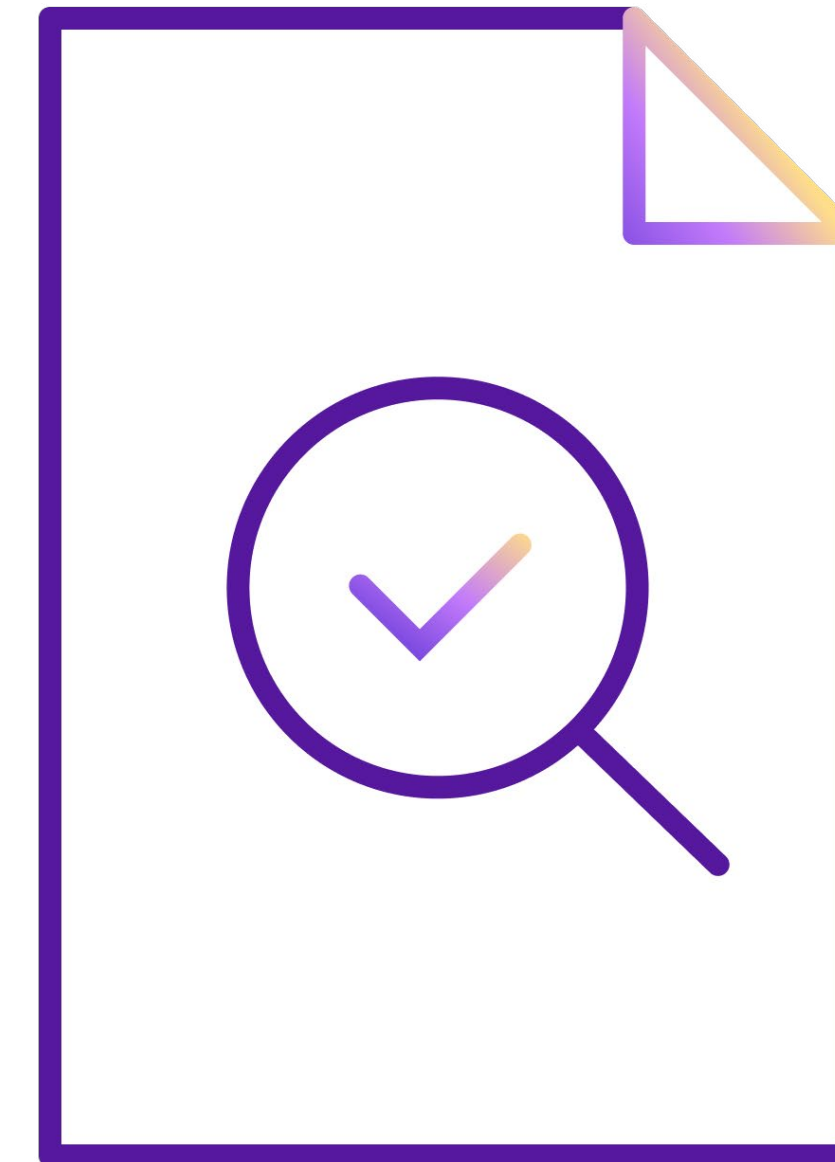
Conclusion

A modern translation solution should create a totally new approach to translation. It should effortlessly connect users within your organization with the right resources and innovative tools that make it easy to fulfill language accessibility requirements and manage the localization process from end to end — all while staying within budget.

Yet, it should also enable departments and agencies to be as hands-off as they wish by offering a number of different features and services that do the heavy lifting for them. This way, government employees can focus on their core mandate — serving the public — without worrying about how long it will take to translate and disseminate important or urgent information to everyone in the community.

Are you already translating or thinking about translation in your government agency?

Learn more about Smartling's end-to-end translation solution at smartling.com

About Smartling

Smartling's LanguageAI™ platform is revolutionizing the translation and localization of the world's digital content. Named as the top translation management system by CSA Research and by users on G2, Smartling harnesses AI and machine learning to enable the automation of workflows, integrates seamlessly with existing tech stacks and measures and improves translation quality at enterprise scale for a fraction of the cost of traditional translation.

Smartling is the platform of choice for hundreds of B2B and B2C brands, including IHG Hotels & Resorts, State Farm, British Airways, and Lyft. Smartling is headquartered in New York with an office in Dublin.

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