

Crowdsourcing of Translation Services: 9 questions and answers

(as guidance for professional translators)

1) What is meant by "crowdsourcing of translation services"?¹

- getting translation completed in parallel rather than consecutively
- getting translation completed via a large pool of bilinguals, who are either amateur or professional translators, or both
- crowdsourced translation is often done on a volunteer or (poorly) paid basis

2) What are some examples of crowdsourced translation projects?

A few examples of crowdsourced translation projects are:

- localisation of the Facebook website
- fan-based translation of anime films
- localisation of Evernote software
- translations for MOOC platforms (massive open online courses)
- the EU Commission's recent initiative aimed at crowdsourcing the subtitling of films to increase the circulation of European works²

3) What are the expectations of customers (profit-oriented companies and other entities) as regards crowdsourcing?

- lower costs through a new pool of cheap labour
- greater speed due to a high number of collaborators
- more flexibility
- chance to handle greater volumes of content

4) What do customers (profit-oriented companies and other entities) rely on or assume in respect of the crowd members?

- They rely on the commitment and enthusiasm of bilinguals, be they amateurs, translators with little experience or experienced translators.
- Doing crowdsourced translation will in many cases be regarded by the crowd members as a form of direct user involvement.
- Often the crowd members will do crowdsourced translation as pro bono work to get visible credit for the translation³.

5) Where might crowdsourcing be a feasible option?

- when dealing with fast growing types of content that might otherwise not be translated at all

¹ <http://www.language-translation-help.com/crowdsourcing.html>

² <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/commission-launches-eu1-million-initiative-crowdsource-subtitling-increase-circulation-european>
and a reaction:

<https://anglosubtitlers.wordpress.com/2015/09/29/open-letter-from-untertitelforum-atve-to-the-european-commission/>

³ For example: <https://www.ted.com/about/programs-initiatives/ted-open-translation-project>

- when handling content in minority languages

6) Where are human translators indispensable?

- in areas where professional translators with the appropriate skills and qualifications produce reliable translations and deliver reliable services
- in areas where demanding, high-quality products are needed, such as
 - highly specialised legal texts
 - highly specialised medical documents
 - marketing texts
 - confidential documents

7) What are the drawbacks and pitfalls of crowdsourcing?

- The "crowd" may be a heterogeneous, anonymous mass or a group of specialists
- Users of a crowdsourced translation cannot be sure that the translation was done with the necessary linguistic and technical knowhow
- Motivation of the members of the crowd is dubious
- There is a risk of unmotivated members of the crowd quitting the project at any time
- The crowd has no professional ethos
- Workflow and quality management has to be handled
- Time-consuming and demanding coordination and supervision are necessary
- It has to be decided who is accountable for errors, their elimination and ensuring the requisite quality (translation fulfilling the intended purpose)
- Ultimate accountability both for the translation and for the project management has to be determined
- Revision of translations cannot be done by other members of the heterogeneous, anonymous crowd

8) What else do you have to watch out for?

- Copyright of both the source and target texts has to be respected.
- Confidentiality infringements have to be avoided.

9) What role can professional translators play in this context?

- Professional translators should provide suitable information so that customers are fully aware of the appropriate and inappropriate uses of crowdsourcing.
- In the case of crowdsourcing projects, professional translators can become involved in handling the preselection procedure as well as workflow and quality management on the basis of adequate remuneration.
- All in all, they should extensively advise customers, who may well discover that, organisationally and financially, crowdsourcing is not worthwhile in the long run and that it is better to draw on the services of professional translators in the first place. After all, correcting a poor translation can take longer and will definitely be more expensive than having the translation done from scratch by a professional translator.