

Best Practices for Translating Mobile Apps

**Find the Translation Management
System That's Right for Your Business**



Translating your mobile app is good for business. Simply put, the more people who can find and use your mobile application in their native language, the larger your potential market. But launching a multilingual app and keeping it updated is a challenge — one that requires agility and speed.

Before you start translating there are business decisions to be made. What languages will you use? What content in the app will be translated? Who will handle the actual translation? Once those are resolved, you need to apply best coding practices and tools to streamline translation and prepare your app for the global market.

More languages, more customers, better app store rankings

Twelve languages cover 80% of the globe's online population today, and thirteen cover 90% of online spending power. Right now, English and Spanish cover 30% of the online population — but add Chinese and you are over 50%.

Two billion people are projected to join the world's middle class by 2030. The figure for India alone is 450 million, while the middle class in Africa is projected to double. As the middle class grows and people gain access to content and commerce through mobile devices, many more languages will be required to connect with these global consumers.

How will these global consumers find your app? Just translating the app store description for your app into multiple languages can improve your positioning in store rankings. Since app store postings are reviewed by human beings (unlike web search results) high quality writing and translation for the description may enhance your position. Careful keyword selection for each language is also essential.



Categorize and organize your content

By categorizing the app content and setting priorities for what is most important to translate, you can make cost-effective translation decisions. If you are budget-constrained, you may have to make trade-offs between translating content and core app functionality.

Determine what content and functionality to translate

What functionality will you translate to provide an optimal experience for your users in every language? Typically, this will include the user interface elements like menus, button labels,

settings, and in-line help. When you translate, you also need to localize items like dates, times, measures and currency. You may also choose to localize some design elements, such as colors and images.

For many apps, choosing what content to translate is fairly straightforward, e.g. a tourist information app might need to translate locations and descriptions for popular destinations.

Some content may be displayed in an app but generated by a web server. In an e-commerce application, for example, the app may pull product information from the store website. For the user to see that information in the language of the user interface, you'll need to translate the content of the server application as well as the mobile app. Pricing and currency from the server application will need to be localized.

Figure out how to deal with User Generated Content (UGC)

There are significant business decisions required when a mobile app includes UGC such as user reviews and ratings. Should the UGC be translated, or should the app only display it in the user's language? Regardless of what you decide to translate, you will want to ensure that your app accepts user-generated text in any language, independent of the language of the user interface. The same applies for server side applications that work with the mobile app.



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Try to plan ahead for translation when writing copy in the app's "original" language. Some phrases are difficult to translate (slogans and jargon are notorious for causing problems). It's a good idea to consult with a professional translator or locale-specific marketing professionals to determine how best to represent your brand.

Select the translation method that fits your business and budget

You can translate your app using professional translation, crowdsourcing or machine translation. If precision and consistency in word choice are essential to the functioning of your app, you may need to work with professional translators. Crowdsourcing is a smart option for apps with active early adopters who speak the target language; you may be able to engage them to translate content, with an expert coordinating the work. For some businesses, machine translation may be sufficient, or you may decide to use a combination. Whichever path you choose, it's a key decision.

How to Code for Easy Translation

The key to setting up your mobile app for easy translation is to separate translatable content from executable code. Doing this eliminates the need to recode the entire application for each language. Just as important, it greatly facilitates the translation process.

Adhere to Platform Best Practices

Follow platform-specific best coding practices related to translation provided by the relevant platform—Android, Apple/iOS, Windows Phone, Blackberry or another. In iOS, resource files that will be translated are referred to as strings files (with filename extension .strings). A simple strings file has the format: “key”=“value”; . In Android, a “string resource” provides the text strings for an app.

Keep in mind that as the language of the app changes, objects (e.g. labels, drop-downs) may need adjustments to size and position to fit the new text. In iOS, the Auto Layout best practice allows for this. Another critical best coding practice: Make sure your code is set up to easily update dates, times, and currencies to fit locales.



Go the Extra Mile to Provide Context

Context is essential to determining the most appropriate translation for a string of text. Many English words can be either a noun or a verb, or a noun or an adjective—and the translations are likely to be different. The word “home” when used as a link to the application’s main screen may require a different translation than if used as the label for a home

address field. Context—where and how a specific string of text will be used—makes it clear which translation is appropriate, and will improve quality of translation.

Translators need to know when text will be on a menu or other button, when text labels a setting choice, when it will be a field where the value is determined by the app, and how it relates to other text on the screen. A good translator will also be grateful for instructions associated with a text string. For example, it’s helpful to know “This text goes on a button and cannot be longer than 10 characters; no text wrapping is possible.”

iOS provides for associating comments with each strings file. Android allows the use of descriptive metadata that serves as a comment (string.name attribute). Taking screenshots of all screens, showing text location and format, is another way to provide context.

Deploy the Best Translation Tools

Once your strings files/resources have been separated from executable code, and fully commented, those resources should be moved into a commercial translation management tool that can handle your translation files and assets natively. This will facilitate rapid and accurate translation, whether the work is done internally, through a translation service, through crowdsourcing, or through machine translation.

Your translation system should:

- ✓ Display each piece of text to be translated along with comments on context and translator instructions
- ✓ Allow the translator to see each text string to be translated in context via screenshots
- ✓ Provide for customized translation workflow suited to your project and your team
- ✓ Allow direct communication between team members, including queries and responses from the text the translator is working on (e.g. “The best translation for this phrase is three characters longer – can the field be enlarged?”)
- ✓ Support collaborative workflow, so that the translation team, editors and trusted reviewers have ready access to all versions of content with the ability to edit, comment and correct
- ✓ Have application programming interfaces (APIs) to automate the process of uploading and downloading files when the translations are ready
- ✓ Offer a translation memory database, which can be leveraged for future translations to cut costs and speed up translation

In Summary

Making your mobile app multilingual can help you grow your customer base quickly. Use best practices for coding and translation; don’t re-invent the wheel. Use a commercial tool that complements and supports best practices and enables speedy, high quality translations.

ABOUT SMARTLING

Smartling, Inc. simplifies and accelerates translation and localization for companies building a global presence. Using an innovative, cloud-based translation management platform, Smartling helps companies quickly translate their dynamic websites and web and mobile applications, keeping every language and location consistent and up-to-date.

Named “Most Innovative Startup” at Dow Jones/ *Wall Street Journal's* 2011 FASTech 50, Smartling is shaking up the outdated translation and localization industry with the first platform designed to manage the entire translation, localization and delivery process in the cloud. Brands that rely on Smartling to launch and manage localized multilingual websites and applications include SurveyMonkey, foursquare, Path, Vimeo, Nokia, Kodak, Shell, HotelTonight, Uber, GoPro, and more. The Smartling platform currently serves more than one billion page views per month for websites in over 100 languages.

Founded in 2009 and headquartered in New York City, Smartling is privately held and backed by First Round Capital, IDG Ventures, U.S. Venture Partners, Venrock and several prominent angel investors.