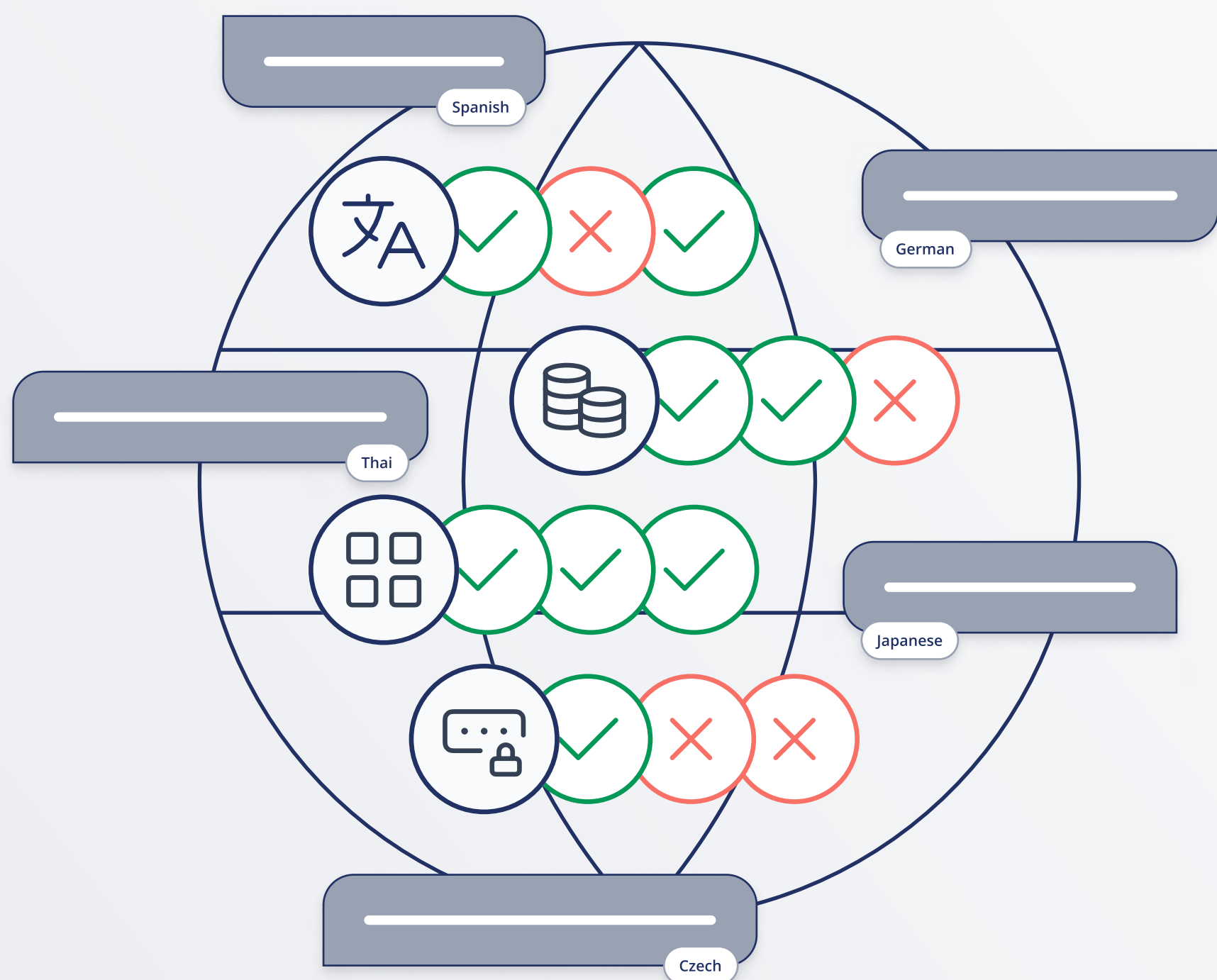


The Buyer's Guide to Multilingual Support Software



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Introduction

Customer-centric brands know that personalizing the support experience for each customer is critical for retaining their trust and business. As the Internet and technological advancements bring about a more connected world, organizations are expanding their reach and customer base into new markets with greater flexibility than ever before. This opens up new paths for customers and revenue, but also represents a challenge: **In order to deliver personalized support to international customers, brands must speak each customer's language.**

To provide multilingual support, many organizations hire fluent speakers of each language spoken by customers. However, this approach is expensive and time-consuming, and also leads to inefficiencies across the board. For this reason, brands are turning to technology in order to deliver personalized, in-language support to each customer—in a more cost-efficient way.

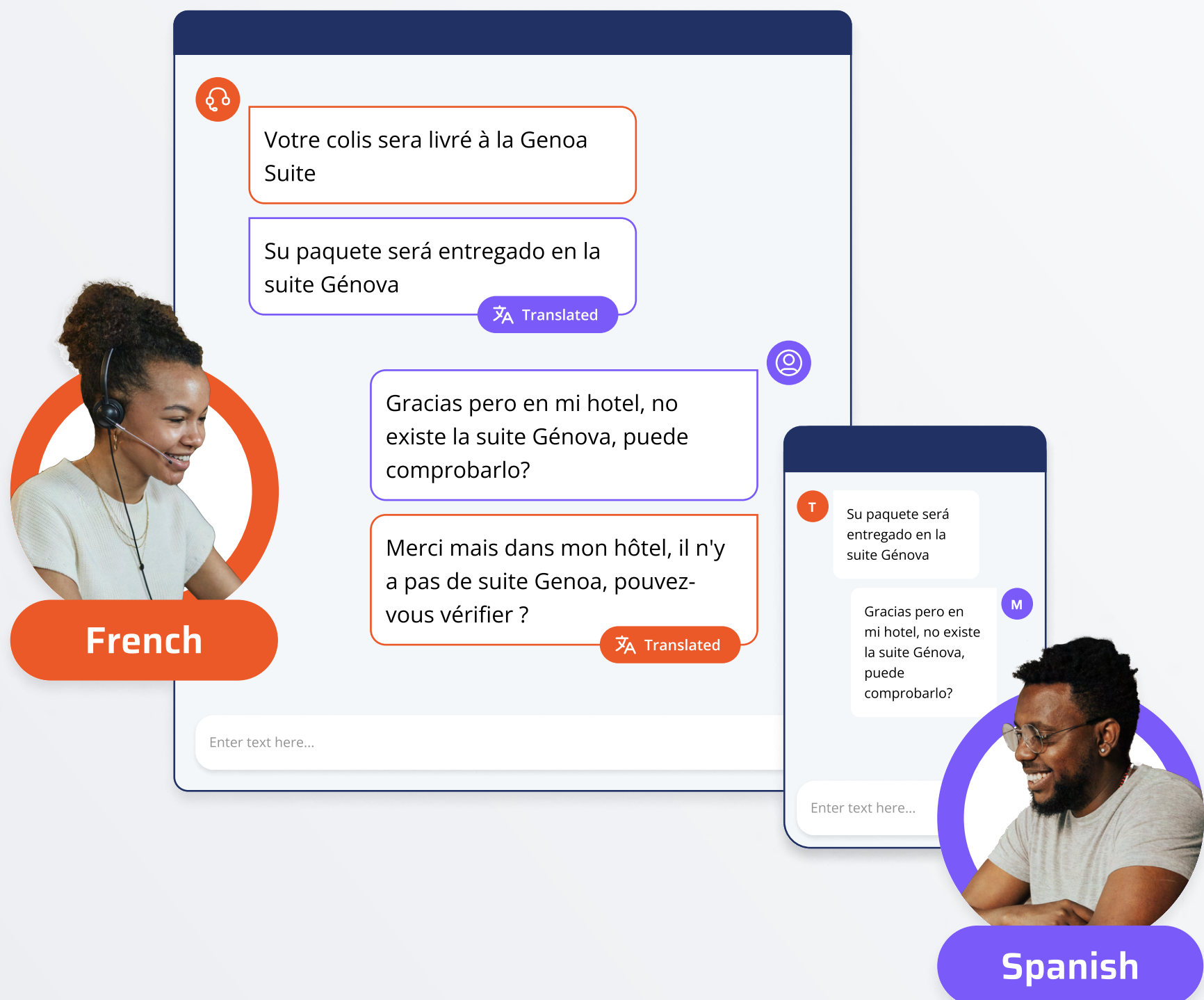
If you're reading this guide, it's likely that you are looking to do the same. Whether you're new to multilingual support technology or you already have a solution in place but are looking for better efficiency, ROI, and/or quality, this guide will cover the key aspects of evaluating and selecting the right multilingual support technology provider for your business.

Read the guide to learn:

- What multilingual customer support software achieves and why it is important
- How to know if you are ready for multilingual customer support software
- Key criteria for evaluating different multilingual customer support software providers
- How to prepare your internal team to onboard and use multilingual support technology

What is multilingual customer support software?

Multilingual support software is technology that enables organizations to deliver customer support in each customer's preferred language, without necessarily having fluent speakers of those languages on the team. This means that a team made of entirely monolingual (i.e., each person speaks only one language) agents can communicate with customers in any language using technology. Most often, this is accomplished via real-time translation of incoming and outgoing communications with customers.



Why is multilingual support software important?

Multilingual support software enables monolingual (e.g., English-speaking only) customer service agents and chatbots to communicate in other languages with the click of a button, directly within each of the channels you use to communicate with customers, such as chat and email. This has numerous benefits for brands:

Cost efficiency

Rather than staffing up a team of agents that together speak all of the languages used by customers, brands that equip their existing teams with multilingual support technology don't have to incur the steep costs associated with hiring and training new agents.

Scalability

If customer support requests in French spike one day but you only have one French-speaking agent, your agents who speak only Spanish can't jump in to help even if Spanish support requests are down. With multilingual support, this is no longer an issue.

Shorter wait times

If a brand has only one or two agents that speak Chinese, their Chinese customers have to wait for those agents to become available.

Customer satisfaction

By cutting down wait times and delivering in-language support, brands resolve customer concerns more quickly and effectively, resulting in a happier customer base.

Do you need multilingual support software?

If you can check any of the following boxes, then it's time to start seriously exploring multilingual support software:

- ☐ You currently provide multilingual support via fluent-speaking agents, but are concerned about the associated time and costs require to maintain this approach
- ☐ You don't currently provide multilingual customer support, but want to begin in a way that doesn't significantly increase costs
- ☐ Customers needing support in certain languages have long wait times, but you don't have the budget/flexibility to hire new agents, or offer robust support hours in their region
- ☐ The occupancy rates for your team are not in the ideal state
- ☐ You're testing expanding into a new market, but don't want to commit to hiring fluent support agents for the languages in that market just yet

Evaluating Multilingual Support Software

When evaluating multilingual support tools, here is the main criteria to consider:



**Language Support
and Translation
Quality**



**Support Capabilities
and Integrations**



**Data Security and
Privacy**



Cost and ROI



Language Support and Translation Quality

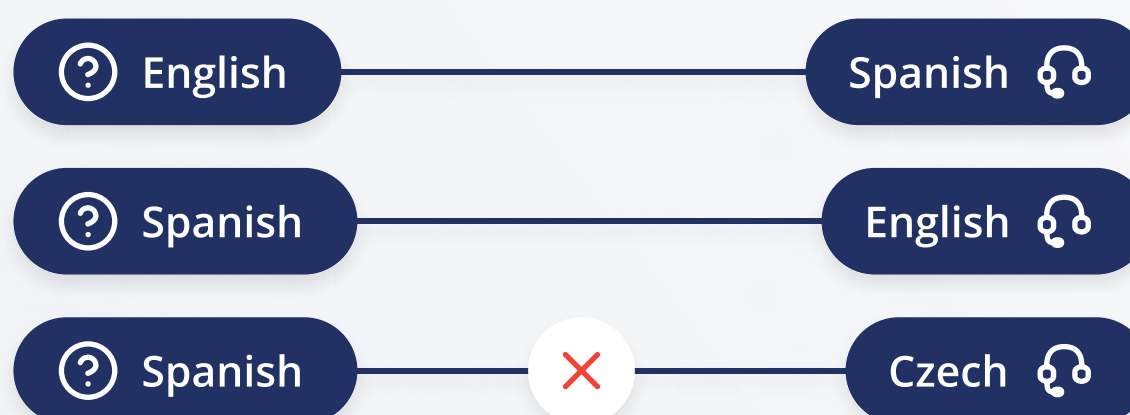
The quality of a multilingual support technology is only as good as the quality of its translations. Given that machine translation largely powers multilingual support software, it's critical that the translations provided are accurate, easily understood, and personalized. When evaluating providers based on language support and quality, here's what should be on your checklist:

Number of Languages Supported

An obvious consideration is whether the technology in question provides support for the languages your organization requires. Some providers only specialize in a handful of languages, which can be limiting depending on the needs of your customers and your future plans for expansion.

English is Not a Requirement

Many translation providers require English to be one of the directions required for a translation, either as the source or target language. This means that you can translate from English to French or Spanish to English, but not from French to Spanish or vice versa. This can be extremely limiting, as it essentially requires all of your support agents to be fluent English speakers in order to benefit from the technology.



When English isn't a requirement, it frees up your options significantly. Without the limitations of hiring speakers of only a specific language, you can instead focus recruiting efforts on those candidates with the right customer support skills and experience, rather than defaulting to language proficiency as a top factor. You can also extend the utility of your team: in situations where a customer speaks French, that ticket can be assigned to either a Spanish- or English-speaking agent, rather than just to the English-speaking agent.



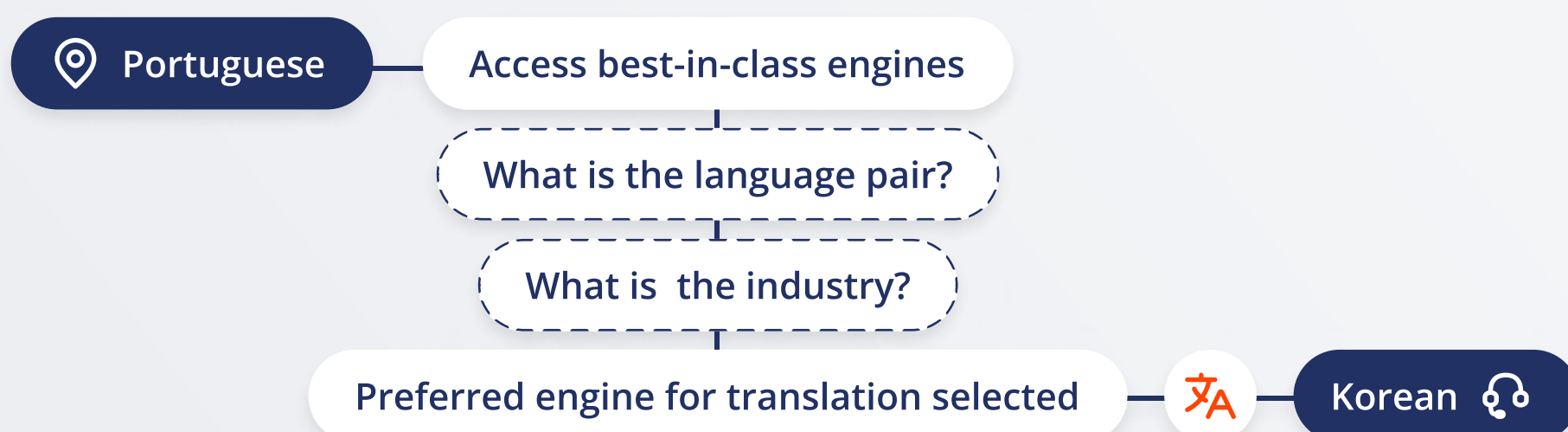
When evaluating tech providers, ask if English is a requirement for translations. If English is indeed a requirement, this may be a sign that the technology is too limiting to effectively scale your multilingual communications.

Quality of Translations

Once you have verified that the technology supports the languages spoken by your customers, translation quality should be the main focus of your evaluation in this category. Poor translations mean poor customer service experiences, which can jeopardize the relationship your brand has with its global customers.

Translation quality depends on many factors, one of which is the model used to power the translation. Some providers may develop a custom machine translation model for your brand. While this might seem like the best way to ensure high quality translations, it's almost always impractical and difficult to maintain, as developing a custom model requires a massive amount of data that your team needs to provide. This means you need to provide thousands of transcripts of conversations between you and your customers for every language that you seek to translate. Not only does this pose a security threat, as you need to be painstakingly certain that your transcripts are stripped of customer data, but it can also take several months and an exorbitant amount of money to achieve—all for minimal, if any, improvements to translation quality.

A better solution is to integrate with existing, general MT engines available for public use and apply a customized glossary of brand- and industry-specific terminology over each translation—all in real time so that the result is instantaneous.. The ideal technology integrates with multiple best-in-class engines and dynamically selects the most viable engine for each translation, based on language pair and use case. The ability to switch between engines is critical, as not all engines are equally proficient in all languages. Some engines excel in translation of European languages but struggle with Asia Pacific languages, in which case you want to have an engine in the mix that you can rely on for proper translations of Chinese, Korean, etc.



When evaluating translation quality, keep the following in mind:

- What engine(s) does the technology provider use to generate translations?
- Does the technology provider support the use of a glossary to ensure proper translation of brand- and industry-specific terminology?
- Does the technology have continuous learning measures in place to improve translation quality over time?
- Does the provider have a way of measuring translation quality?
- How is translation quality measured?

Speed of Translations

While translation methods that require human involvement can take hours or even days, machine translation output should be instant in order to support real-time conversations with customers. When evaluating providers, ensure that the delivery of machine translations is instantaneous, and that latency is not an issue.

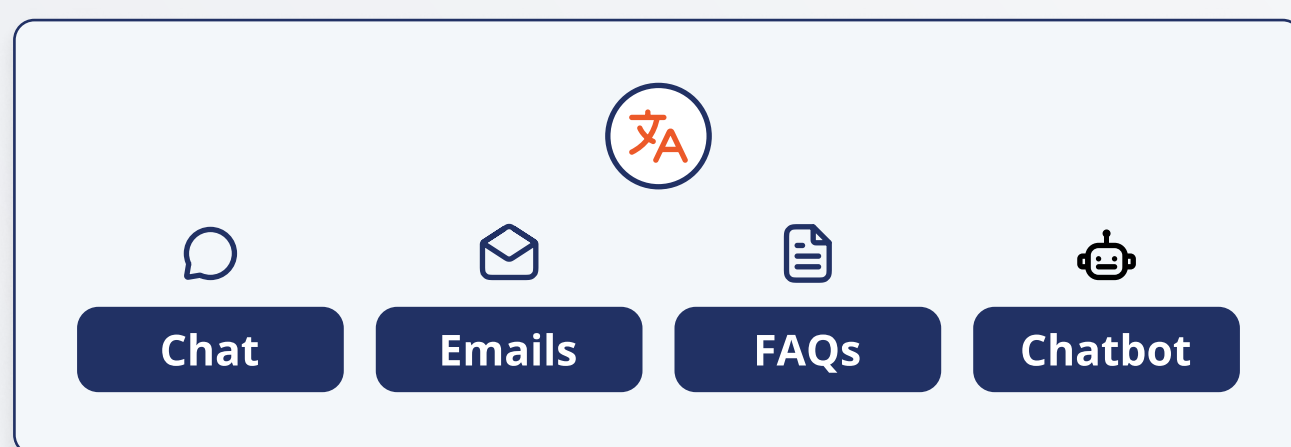
Support Capabilities and Integrations

Your technology provider should make it easy for you and your team to provide multilingual support. This means offering seamless translations across the various channels where you communicate with your customers and enabling you to integrate their technology directly into your CRM.

Omnichannel Support

A major element of providing high quality multilingual support is meeting your customers where they want to communicate. Some customers prefer to solve everything themselves via use of FAQ or knowledge base articles, while others want to communicate with agents over email or live chat methods. And when live agents aren't available, many customers still expect brands to have a chatbot in place to field questions.

Your technology provider should be able to deliver translations across every digital channel through which you communicate with customers. Even if you don't plan to provide multilingual support on every single channel at first, it's a good idea to find an omnichannel provider in case you expand support channels in the future.



CRM Integration

Your agents shouldn't have to flip back and forth between various windows in order to deliver multilingual support. Not only is that inefficient, but it also increases the risk of copying and pasting content meant for one customer into a chat window with another. It also reduces the likelihood of your agents wanting to use the technology in the first place.

Your ideal multilingual support technology should integrate directly into your CRM so that translating incoming and outgoing communications is as simple as clicking a button. If you've found the right technology provider but they don't have a native integration built for your CRM of choice, don't panic—as long as this provider has an API in place, you should still be able to use that technology in your preferred tool.



Data Security and Compliance

Customer support conversations are rife with personally identifiable information (PII). When a customer wants answers fast, they are willing to share all sorts of personal data with support agents—not just their full name and home address, but also their bank account information, social security number, and passport info. They rely on your brand to have proper security protocol in place that protects their data, which means your translation technology provider has to comply with those same measures.

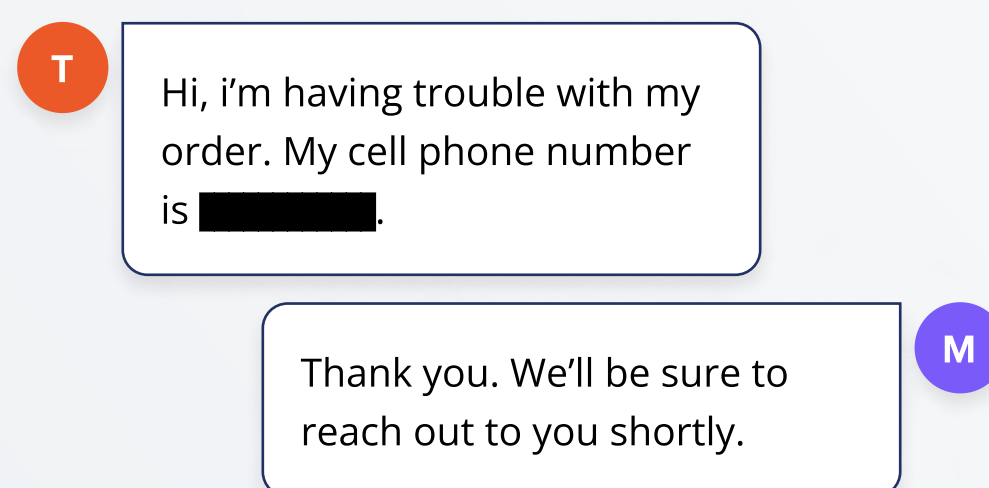
Certified Compliance with Data Privacy Regulations

GDPR and CCPA compliance is an absolute must for any provider of multilingual support technology. Many brands will claim GDPR and CCPA compliance, but that doesn't necessarily mean they truly adhere to all standards set forth in those regulations. To ensure that your technology provider is trustworthy, verify that they are ISO 27001 certified. This international standard dictates proper management of information security and requires a rigorous third-party auditing process in order to achieve certification. When evaluating vendors, ask to see their ISO 27001 certificate and verify that it is the most recent version of the ISO 27001 standard. As of time of publishing, the most recent is the 2022 standard.



Data Encryption

Translating content often requires the use of third-party MT engines. Not only is it important that your technology provider uses only those MT engines that adhere to strict security measures, but it's also critical that any PII is encrypted prior to being sent to those engines. Upon sending a translation request to your multilingual support technology, the absolute first thing that technology should do is scan the content for any PII. When detected, that PII should be encrypted so that it is not accessible by the MT engines translating the content.



Data Storage

Your multilingual technology provider should never store your conversational transcripts. If they store your content, it's likely sitting in a database somewhere that could be subjected to a breach. Not only are security breaches expensive, but they compromise customer data in a way that massively reduces trust in your brand. For this reason, be wary when technology providers want to maintain access to your data in order to train an MT engine specifically for your brand.

Further, if your selected vendor integrates with a variety of MT engines, make sure that they only integrate with those that are "zero-trace," as this means that the third-party engines used do not store translated content in their database, log files, or anywhere else. This should be validated via the ISO 27001 certification.



Cost and Return on Investment

One of the primary reasons that brands use multilingual support technology is for the cost savings it represents. The cost of hiring a team full of agents isn't just each person's salary—it's also the cost of recruiting, training, and providing benefits to each agent. These expenses quickly add up, and can be especially frustrating to incur when the personnel hired aren't even at max occupancy. With this in mind, it's important to find a technology provider whose pricing model can provide a demonstrably positive return on investment.

Calculating ROI

The ROI that each organization can expect from multilingual support technology varies significantly depending on the needs of the brand and the pricing model of each vendor. When evaluating the ROI that you may see, consider the following:

Real-Time Channels — Chat, Email, Social Messaging, Chatbots

- Number of languages requiring support
- Estimated number of multilingual messages per year
- Average number of words per message
- Number of fluent speakers required to support that volume

Static Content — Articles, Web Pages, Documents

- Number of languages into which those content pieces must be translated
- Estimated annual number of static content pieces requiring translation
- Average number of words per static content piece
- Number of fluent speakers required to support that volume and/or cost a third-party organization to translate on a project basis

Here is a simplified example to demonstrate how your organization may go about calculating the potential cost advantages of using technology:

A brand that provides support in 10 languages and processes 20,000 multilingual live chat conversations with customers each year. If each chat conversation averages 200 words, that’s 4 million words that need to be translated every year.

To cover this volume with native or fluent speakers, let’s imagine the organization needs to hire 8 team members (assuming some bi- or trilingual fluency among those speakers). At an average salary of \$35,984 USD per year ([source](#)), that is a baseline annual cost of \$287,872.



Compare that with how much a technology provider would charge for the same volume of content. In the case of Language I/O, which charges solely on the number of words translated, 4 million words would incur an annual cost of about \$60,000.



That’s a difference of nearly \$230,000 per year, and those savings don’t even account for the cost and time spent recruiting, training, and providing benefits to those agents hired. From a pure cost perspective, the ROI is highly appealing.

Time to Value

Along with ROI, something to keep in mind when evaluating on a cost basis is the time to value you can expect. Once you sign a contract with a technology provider, what does the timeline for implementation look like?

Some providers, particularly those that build a custom engine for each brand, can take weeks or even months to develop an engine that is viable for use in customer conversations. This setup time can extend based on the number of languages you need to support. All of that additional time spent on setup and implementation costs more than just the price of onboarding, as it also delays how quickly you can reap the benefits of the technology you've selected. Even when setup is complete, the work doesn't end there—there will be months of training and optimization prior to seeing the quality of output you were expecting.

This doesn't have to be the case, however. Look for providers that have invested in their technology such that it provides a high quality of output right away. After all, you're evaluating multilingual support technology providers likely because you have identified a problem needing resolution—ideally, as quickly as possible. For this reason, be wary of providers that will leave you sitting idle for months before you can take advantage of your promised solution.

Fee Structure

Each technology provider has its own way of charging users, with the main ways being one or any combination of the following:



Per user

Incurs a cost based on the number of users (typically the number of agents).



Per language pair

A provider may charge per each language pair for which you need translations. A baseline price may include translating from French and Spanish to English and vice versa, with an additional cost incurred if you want to add more languages.



Per unit

For real-time communications, such as live chat and email, each message that you translate incurs a cost. For static content such as articles or web pages, this may incur a cost based on the number of individual articles or have pricing tiers based on the number of words.



Per word

You are charged based on the number of words translated.

In the case of per user or per language pair pricing, note that it is unlikely a provider will charge you only based on this criteria. Providers that charge based on number of users, for example, often do so in addition to charging based on units or words translated. For organizations looking for the best ROI, it is recommended that you opt for a provider that charges you only based on the volume of content you are translating rather than the number of users or languages, as the latter can quickly result in hidden costs or unexpected limitations down the road.

In the case of per unit vs. per word pricing, it might seem like per unit is ideal, as a 120-word message would cost the same to translate as a 60-word message. While this is true, it also can work the other way around in a way that isn't cost-effective. A per unit model essentially penalizes agents who keep messages short, or incentivizes them to cut off conversations with customers quickly to avoid incurring additional fees per message.

For cost-focused organizations, per word pricing offers the most flexibility, especially when your team makes use of repeatable templates that only incur a cost the first time they are translated.

When evaluating providers, you should also ask about any costs associated with integrations. Some providers charge extra for each individual integration that a customer uses. For example, if a brand provides support over both Salesforce and ServiceNow, some providers will charge additional costs to set up and integrate with both. Other providers will simply charge a subscription fee that allows you access to all their integrations without additional costs, which is typically the solution that brands prefer.

Your Multilingual Support Provider Checklist

Now that you have a clear understanding of the key components of multilingual support technology, you are ready to begin conversations with providers or compare those with whom you’ve already engaged. Here is a checklist you can use to evaluate vendors.

Feature	Language I/O	Vendor #2	Vendor #3
Language Support & Translation Quality			
Languages supported			
English is not a requirement			
Customizable glossary			
Translation quality continuously improves over time			
Measures translation quality			
Support Capabilities & Integrations			
Chat support			
Email support			
FAQ/article support			
Chatbot support			
Integrates with your CRM via native integration or API			

Feature	Language I/O	Vendor #2	Vendor #3
Data Security & Compliance			
GDPR and CCPA compliant	✓		
ISO 27001 certified	✓		
PII encryption	✓		
Does not store data	✓		
Cost & Return on Investment			
Charges per user	✗		
Charges per language pair	✗		
Charged per unit	✗		
Charged per word	✓		
Charges for set up/onboarding	✗		
Charges per integration	✗		
One-time cost for translating reusable content/ templates	✓		
Can be set up in 24-48 hours	✓		
Does not require an extensive engine training period prior to seeing high quality results	✓		

Choosing the Right Multilingual Support Software

When implementing any new technology, knowing what to look for when evaluating providers can be daunting. There are a number of factors to consider, each of which may vary in importance depending on your organizational needs. With this guide, it is our hope that you now have the information and resources required to intelligently and effectively evaluate multilingual support technology providers.

About Language I/O

Language I/O is the leading provider of multilingual support technology for global brands. By integrating directly with your CRM, Language I/O empowers your monolingual support agents to chat, email, author support articles, and otherwise engage with customers in more than 150 languages, all in real time. Our software aggregates the world's leading translation technology and imposes a self-improving glossary over each translation, generating highly accurate translations of slang, acronyms, and business- and industry-specific terminology. Configurable in as little as 24-48 hours, global brands begin seeing value instantly.

Learn more at languageio.com