

TRANSLATE ONCE, REUSE MANY TIMES:

SINGLE-SOURCING TO REDUCE TRANSLATION COSTS

Overview

Single-sourcing means maintaining one source of content for multiple deliverables and audiences. When you reuse content, even in English, you save costs and increase consistency.

When you translate single-sourced content, the cost savings multiply: you translate the source files once, and create different versions from those source files. For example, you could create an online help file and a PDF manual from the same translation. Or you create several different installation manuals for different platforms, all using 70% shared, aka single-sourced content. That way, you get two (or more) translations for the price of one.

A quick note on the terms “translation” and “localization”: Localization is the process of adapting a product or document to the language and location of the target market — including translation. In this eBook, we use localization to include the technical aspects of managing the single-sourced files, as well as the translation of the content into a new language.

Do I Need Single-Sourcing?

If you're translating the same content over and over, single-sourcing can save you costs in translation.

If you're already single-sourcing your content and publications, you're on the right track. This eBook will help you learn some of the best practices to make your single-sourced translations go more smoothly.

What Is Single-Sourcing?

Single-sourcing means that you produce multiple outputs from a single set of source files. You can use the same source content to create a variety of deliverables for different formats, products, and markets, audiences, and even different countries.



Why Would I Combine Single-Sourcing and Translation?

When you combine single-sourcing and translation, the benefits multiply quickly. The cost savings and efficiency you gain in the original content is recreated for each language you translate and localize the content into.

- **Cost savings** – One of the biggest advantages of single-sourcing is the massive cost savings in translation.
- **Consistency** – Translated content remains consistent across products, brands, markets, and other variations.
- **Ease of maintenance** – When you translate your updated content, you maintain all translations in sync, rather than having to update every version of the translations when features change.

How Do I Single-Source Content?

To create a single-sourcing system, you can use a master document or set of files that can create multiple variations of your publications.

Evaluate your needs and resources to develop a single-sourcing system that is best for you. Engage your technical communicators or consultants who have the expertise to implement these systems. Your translation and localization partner can help you evaluate your needs and recommend approaches.

How Do I Translate My Single-Sourced Content?

Typically, you'll follow this sequence:

1. Create your single-sourcing system in English.
2. Have your single-sourcing system translated, or localized, by your translation and localization partner.
3. Produce the multiple outputs in the new language(s), just as you did in English.
4. Update and maintain the translations as you expand your single-sourcing system.

Translating single-sourced content brings considerable benefits, as well as challenges. It's worth considering some of the implications and best practices as you plan for translation and localization.

Reasons for Single-Sourcing

As mentioned above, single-sourcing lets you provide variations in your content in several ways:

- **Format** – Different output forms such as web help, mobile help, and PDF documents.
- **Content** – Variations on the material such as different brands, products, or audiences.
- **Purpose** – Multiple groups in your organization can repurpose the same content for different uses, such as documentation, support, and training.
- **Region** – Some content might be location-specific.

All these factors can overlap, and the more variations contained in your single-sourcing system, the more you'll realize the benefits of translating your single-sourced content.

Single-Sourcing for Multiple Formats

You can use a single-sourced project to create documents in different formats. For example, from the same content, you can create PDF manuals and online help for desktop and mobile devices.



Single-sourcing lets you publish the same content in a variety of formats.

Single-Sourcing of Content

You can single-source by reusing content with multiple variations, such as different products, brands, audiences, or countries and regions.

Examples:

- Installation manuals across different products might share many sections. These can be written once and make up 60-80% of all installation manuals.
- Audiences might require different product information and training, such as end-users vs. system administrators vs. functional implementers.
- Installation manuals may be dependent on operating system (OS), where one OS could have very little text and the other very long instructions.

You accomplish additional content variations using variables and conditionals in the text. You can create content variations at a topic, sentence, or word level. Methods for single-sourcing content include:

- **Topic-based authoring** – Creating modular content that can be reused and combined in different ways.
- **Conditional text** – Turning a set of content “on” or “off” for different outputs.
- **Variables** – Setting a discrete word or phrase, such as a product name, that changes with each output.
- **Snippets** – Creating a whole chunk of content for reuse.

Depending on your single-sourcing tools, you can create some or all of these features. You can combine single-sourcing in a multitude of ways, with variations for both content and format.



With single-sourcing, you can create variations on the content — for different brands, products, audiences, or global markets — and publish in multiple formats.

Single-Sourcing to Repurpose Content

You can create a single-sourcing system at progressively more comprehensive levels of your organization:

- Within a document or set of files, usually within one group, such as the documentation department.
- Among related groups, such as documentation, technical support, and training.
- Company-wide, to maximize efficiency and consistency.

Usually you start from one group and spread from there. The more buy-in you can get across the company, the more you'll realize the advantages of single-sourcing, especially when it comes to translating the content.

You can combine single-sourcing in a multitude of ways, with variations for both content and format.

Documentation



Support



Training



You can repurpose single-sourced content throughout your organization.

The cost savings become even more advantageous when you translate the single-sourced content across groups or even your whole company. Translation should be an important priority in your company's globalization strategy as it is an important part in local market acceptance and market penetration — all of which drives revenue.

Note that some enterprise areas have very different objectives such as marketing and technical publications. In these cases, it might be difficult to agree on a common writing style and subsequent reuse. Typically, marketing material needs to be transcreated, meaning created anew for each local market because of nuances of language and culture.

At the very least, agreement on basic terminology by the departments involved would be helpful in assuring translation consistency of the words used to talk about your product.

Single-Sourcing by Region

Your content may include pieces that are specific to one country or region. These variations can be translated for the appropriate languages.

For example, a payroll package includes many general modules, but some are country-specific.

Start with source review. If you identify any sections that do not apply to every locale, take it out or conditionalize it so you only single-source content that can be used across the board. Then have the locale-specific sections translated only into the languages needed, and added back into your single-sourcing system to produce the final output.



Best Practices in Single-Sourcing for Translation

If you are single-sourcing with translation in mind, you can follow these guidelines to help your localization process go more smoothly.

- Use variables with caution, paying attention to language differences. Variables such as <ProductName> can create language issues, as we'll see below.
- Use conditional tags on standalone content, such as a whole sentence or paragraph. For example, don't separate parts of the sentence such as "<adjective> <noun> <verb> <object>" because languages use different word order.
- Create snippets of standalone content, not for reuse within sentences where the grammar could change in other languages
- Allow for text expansion. For example, your content in English will translate into much longer text in some languages, such as German. Changes in text length due to translation become even more of an issue when the text itself can change, based on variables and conditional text.
- Use layered graphics for localization of callouts (do not embed text in images — keep them separate so they can be translated).
- Review your content before and after localization to address language issues.

Challenges

Some of the constructions you used in English to produce single-sourced content may cause issues in localization. Variables and conditionals that create variations in the outputs may cause grammar issues in localized languages.

Examples of grammar challenges:

- Articles and combination forms: for example, French combines the article le or la when the following word begins with a vowel: l'exemple ("the example"). See the next section for more about variables with articles.
- Word order: for example, French often uses noun-adjective instead of adjective-noun; German and Japanese place the verb at end of the sentence.
- Gender: if the noun changes, the adjective form might have to change to agree with the noun.
- Number: in some languages, such as Russian and Japanese, the grammar changes depending on the number.

Use Variables With Caution

Let's look a little more closely at variables, since they're especially likely to be problematic in translation.

You might have a <ProductName> variable for two different products, one A-Product and the other B-Product.

Variable	Results
Install the <ProductName>.	Install the A-Product. Install the B-Product.

However, the variable will cause issues when translating into French:

Variable	Results
Installer le <ProductName>.	Installer le A-Product. Installer le B-Product.

What's the problem here? In French, the article *le* should contract before a vowel. *Installer le A-Product* looks wrong in French, and the error would jump out immediately to a French speaker, just like "Install a A-Product." does in English.

The result should be:

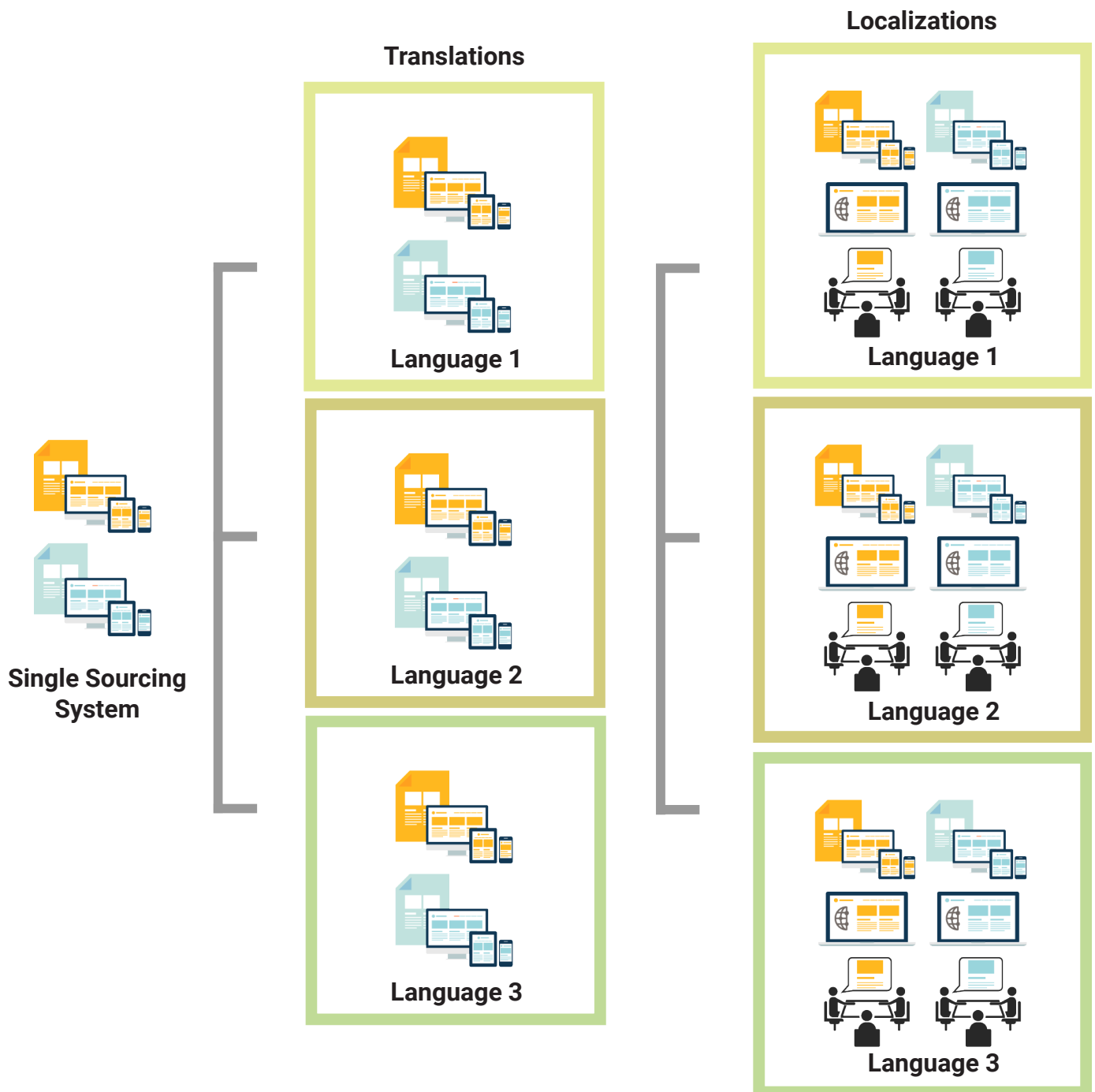
Installer l'A-Product.

You will need to adapt the variables in French to include the vowel contraction. Your translation and localization partner and your technical communication experts will know how to optimize for localization.

The Localization Process

Once you have created a robust single-sourcing system, you can send your single-sourced files to your translation and localization partner.

Where before you might have translated each document and help system separately, now you can have your entire single-sourcing system localized just once. From that one translation, you can produce all versions of your content in each language.



When you localize your single-sourcing system, the variations in content and format translate across languages, multiplying your cost savings.

1. Review Source Files Before Localization

Before you leap into localization, you will benefit from an independent review of your single-sourced content to prepare for localization.

Your translation and localization partner can help you with the review stages.

2. Localize and Build All Outputs

These are the steps your translation and localization partner will perform for you. You can also rebuild the outputs yourself to maintain your localized content.

3. Review Localized Outputs

Independent review of your localized content is strongly recommended with single-sourced content, since the variations could cause issues. Ideally, you should have each version of your content outputs reviewed for accuracy. If this isn't cost-effective, you could at least isolate some instances of where the variables and conditionals could change the sense of the translated and localized content, and have those specific examples reviewed.

During local language review, evaluate each "error" your independent reviewer finds to see if it is a simple mistranslation or if it needs to be changed in the source material.



About Argos

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You can expect a long-term and transparent partnership, backed by innovative solutions around technology, AI & data, creative content, and quality assurance.

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