DeepL

The state of translation and localization in 2023-2024

Insights, challenges, and opportunities

Content

Executive summary

This report analyzes a survey of global marketers handling translation and localization within their organizations. We will explore the return on investment (ROI) from AI-powered writing tools and machine translation. You will also gain insights into best practices for the accurate translation of industry-specific terms and integrating technology solutions.

Key findings

Across all respondents:

75%

agree localized content significantly boosts customer engagement.

77%

use AI-assisted writing tools and 98% are using machine translation, highlighting a trend towards AI reliance.

82%

express concerns about mistranslation of industry-specific jargon, which they address through custom machine translation models or vendor-provided glossaries.

81%

face integration difficulties with existing technology stacks, signaling room for improvement in system compatibility, despite the evident benefits of machine translation.

96%

of respondents report positive ROI from localization efforts, suggesting the significant value of these initiatives.
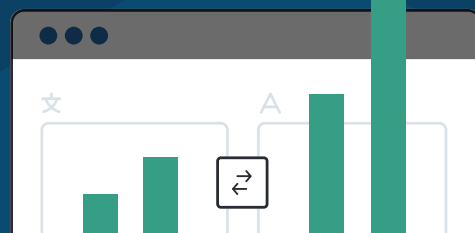
Introduction

For businesses that operate globally, creating multilingual content—from websites to email campaigns, social media posts, and more—is necessary for connecting with global audiences. It's also essential for driving growth.

In a recent survey conducted by DeepL and Regina Corso Consulting, an overwhelming 96% of respondents reported a positive return on investment (ROI) from their translation or localization projects, with a notable 65% reporting an ROI of 3x or greater.

> The data is clear: translating and localizing content is a sound investment. And to maximize the ROI of translation and localization, marketers across the world are increasingly working with machine translation and AI-powered writing tools.

This white paper examines the role of machine translation in global marketing, along with its challenges and opportunities. These insights are distilled from the aforementioned "Machine Translations Survey Report," conducted in 2023.

The survey was distributed to marketers in France, Germany, Japan, and the United States who are responsible for the translation and/or localization of their company's content, hold a director-level position or higher, and work in organizations with 100 or more employees. [1]
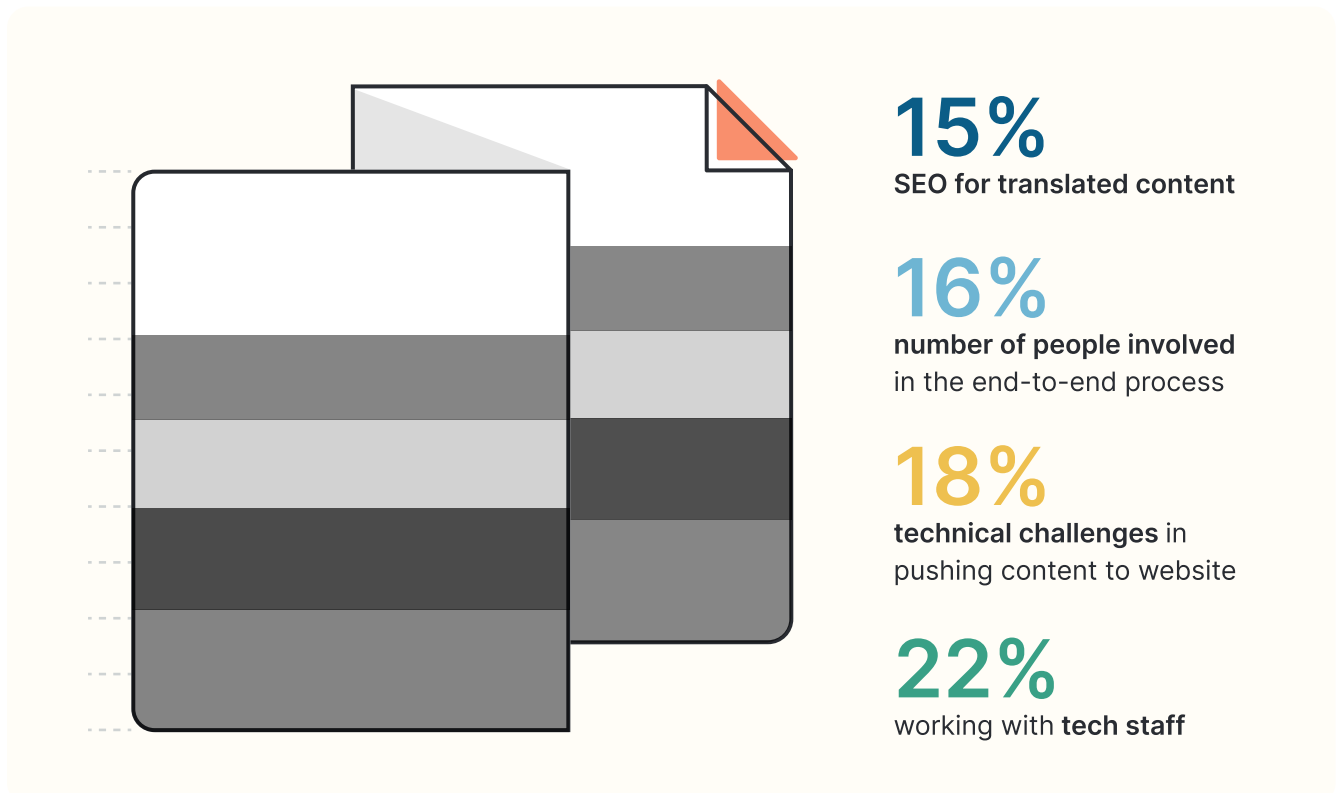
The purpose of the survey was to learn more about how these marketers approach translation and localization at their companies, whether they use machine translation and AI-writing tools in their workflows, and the challenges they most commonly encounter.

[1] While interpreting the charts and tables presented in this report, percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding or multiple response options. An "*" indicates a response rate of less than 0.5%. Unless otherwise specified, the base for all slides is the 415 respondents. Any differences highlighted between target industries (retail, e-commerce, and media/entertainment) and other industries are indicative of the varied localization practices and experiences across sectors.

Challenges in localization projects: From headcount to tech stack

Despite the apparent benefits, the localization process is not without its hurdles.

The biggest frustrations cited by marketers include:

15%
SEO for translated content

16%
number of people involved in the end-to-end process

18%
technical challenges in pushing content to website

22%
working with **tech staff**

A significant portion of these respondents (35%) work in companies with over 1,000 employees, suggesting that these challenges in localization projects are particularly relevant for larger organizations with expansive international operations.
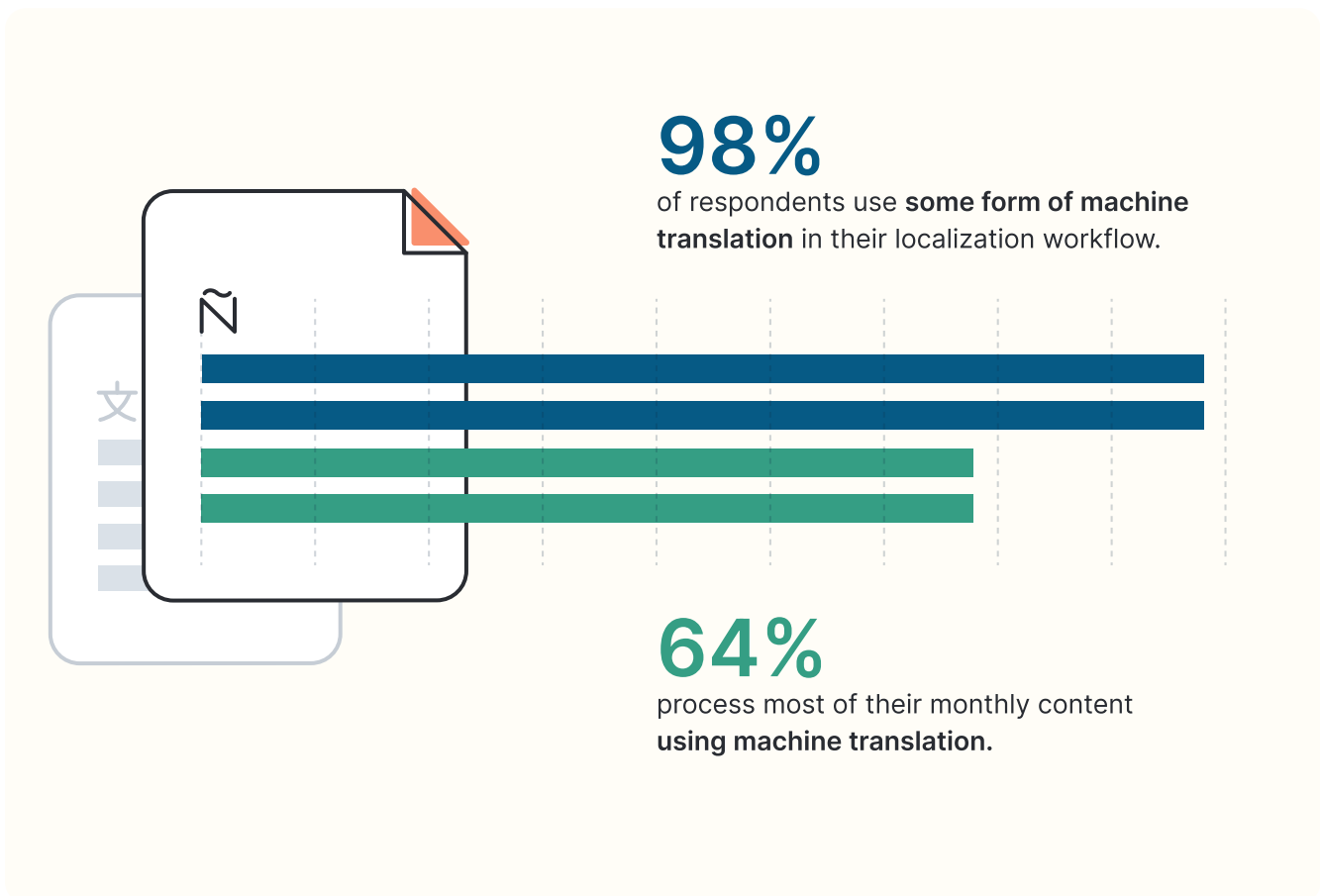
Evidently, organizations incorporating translation into their workflows need to find ways to reduce the headcount involved in the content translation pipeline.

> Key steps could include increasing their own autonomy and removing the reliance on more technical staff to create more streamlined and efficient localization processes.

98% use machine translation; glossaries boost effectiveness

With the increasing complexity and scale of localization projects, it's no surprise that machine translation has become an essential tool in localization workflows.

As per our survey:

98%
of respondents use **some form of machine translation** in their localization workflow.

64%
process most of their monthly content **using machine translation.**

The range of job titles among respondents was broad, with the largest groups being Content Marketers (20%), Localization Managers (15%), and Product Managers (10%).

> This data underscores that the use of machine translation in localization workflows is widespread across different roles and departments within organizations.

Though machine translation brings speed and accuracy benefits and frees up human reviewers for more meaningful tasks, there are valid concerns about its ability to translate industry-specific jargon.

As per the findings, 82% of respondents report that product, company, or industry jargon is not translated accurately when only using machine translation. Yet 61% handle such vocabulary by training their own custom machine translation models (33%) or using a glossary provided by a machine translation vendor (28%).

> When a custom model is employed, human reviewers spend an average of 20.36 hours on a typical machine translation job. In contrast, using a glossary reduces this time to an average of 14.37 hours.

These responses illustrate that manual revisions, although time-consuming, are often necessary for accurate translations. Tools like glossaries can considerably reduce this manual effort, especially when it comes to translating technical jargon or domain-specific words.

The rise of AI in content generation

AI's burgeoning role in content generation is an exciting trend that is reshaping the localization process.
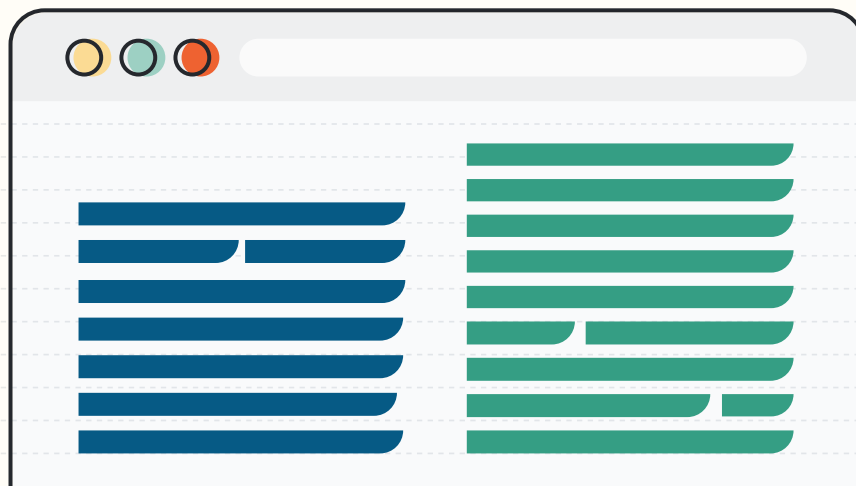
As per the survey:

77%
of respondents are using **AI-assisted writing** to generate content.

98%
believe that a significant portion of content will be **AI-generated** in the next 2-3 years.

Among respondents, 43% have been working in their current role for more than 5 years. This could suggest that experienced professionals who have witnessed AI's evolution firsthand are leading the adoption of AI in content generation.

> Generative AI isn't going away anytime soon. Rather than being seen as a gimmick or tech demo, marketers are already using commercial AI tools to augment their workflows. This area is set to expand even more over the coming years, and businesses must stay informed to keep up with these advances.

How two global companies are tackling localization with machine translation

1. HubSpot

HubSpot, a leading provider of customer relationship management (CRM) tools, serves over 175,000 customers in 100 countries worldwide. **The company's success is thanks in part to its innovative use of technology such as AI-powered machine translation.** This strategy has made the internationalization and localization of HubSpot's products and content a success, empowering the company to meet the unique demands of its global customer base.
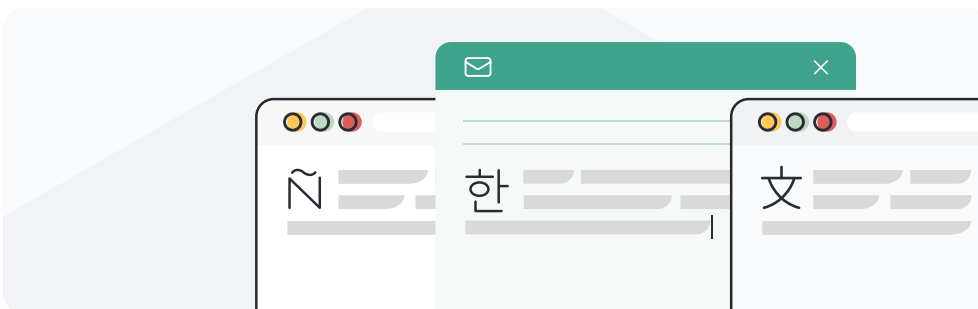
ⓘ **The challenge**
HubSpot owns and manages over 75,000 web assets like landing pages, blog posts, and more. These are frequently updated in real time. The challenge lies in overseeing these assets and providing correct and prompt localization to serve their diverse global customers.

⊘ **The solution**
To tackle this, HubSpot rolled out Mova, an internally developed system that acts as a central repository and combines functionalities of various tools like Slack, Jira, and Workato. Mova enables real-time monitoring of web assets, which can be sorted based on criteria like when they were updated, created, or published. This makes it easy for the company to quickly identify the assets that need localization.

Additionally, Mova integrates machine translation services such as DeepL and ModernMT for instant translation of content. Assets can be translated one at a time or set up to automatically translate and update the content when changes are made in the original language.

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Having technological literacy and the capability to come up with technological solutions for the challenges that you and your stakeholders face is pivotal for internal localization teams. You will also need the capability to implement these solutions, but that doesn't necessarily mean you'll need dedicated engineering headcount. There are other options like outsourcing or low-code/no-code solutions, depending on your needs."

Dierk Runne
Senior Manager of Localization and Systems at HubSpot

⚑ The outcome
Mova allows the HubSpot team to scale their localization efforts and publish multilingual content quickly. This efficient and accurate automation reduces the workload for their team.

Additionally, HubSpot can adjust its localization workflows based on how well assets are performing. For example, if there's a popular blog post, it can be assigned a workflow that includes human review. Alternatively, if there's an asset that isn't viewed as often, it can be designated for machine translation. This optimizes their team's resources and ensures high-quality translations where it's most important.

2. Phrase

Phrase, formerly known as Memsource, is a leading language localization and translation platform that has effectively utilized machine translation and translation management systems to establish a seamless translation process. The company champions quality assurance, deploying both external and internal reviewers to ensure accurate translations.

ⓘ The challenge
Global organizations often face significant hurdles in translation and localization because there are so many moving parts in the process. These include the need for system integration, maintenance of translation consistency, assurance of cost-efficiency, and adaptation to varied language pairs.

⊘ **The solution**
Phrase addressed these challenges with its product suite, designed to simplify localization and translation. **The suite includes Phrase Translate, an AI-driven tool that allows users to connect to multiple machine translation (MT) providers simultaneously.**

It continually measures each MT provider's performance, selecting the most appropriate one based on the content domain and language pair being translated. It ensures the right terminology is used across all translations, enhancing the consistency and clarity of translated content. Additionally, Phrase supports seamless workflow through integration with over 50 applications—such as HubSpot, WordPress, and Figma—and offers an automated pipeline for content translation.

⚑ **The outcome**
Phrase's integration of AI and automation into translation and localization demonstrates how these technologies can simplify complex tasks. By intelligently choosing the best MT providers and allowing for seamless integration with external systems, Phrase streamlines the localization workflow for global companies.

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Generally speaking, because of the features we provide—including terminology integration and making sure the right machine translator is available when needed—we've seen customers achieve an additional 55% in cost savings"

Tobias Scherf
Director of Solutions at Phrase

Selecting and working with machine translation vendors

Choosing the right machine translation vendor is a crucial decision that can significantly impact an organization's localization workflow. The survey results show that the ability to handle XML, HTML, and other document formats is the most important factor (23%) when selecting a machine translation vendor. This is followed closely by data security and whether an API is offered (both 20%).

Interestingly, most respondents (80%) work in the technology industry. This could suggest that the prioritization of factors such as data security, API offerings, and document format compatibility might be heavily influenced by the specific needs of tech companies.

Looking at the methods marketers typically use to work with machine translation vendors, the data reveals that:
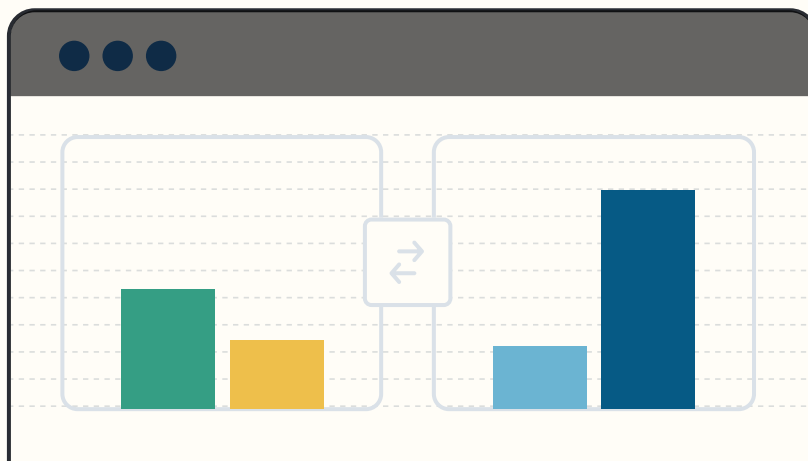
44%
work with a **technology partner** that uses the machine translation vendor.

33%
partner with an **agency** that uses the machine translation vendor.

23%
directly contract with the machine translation vendor.
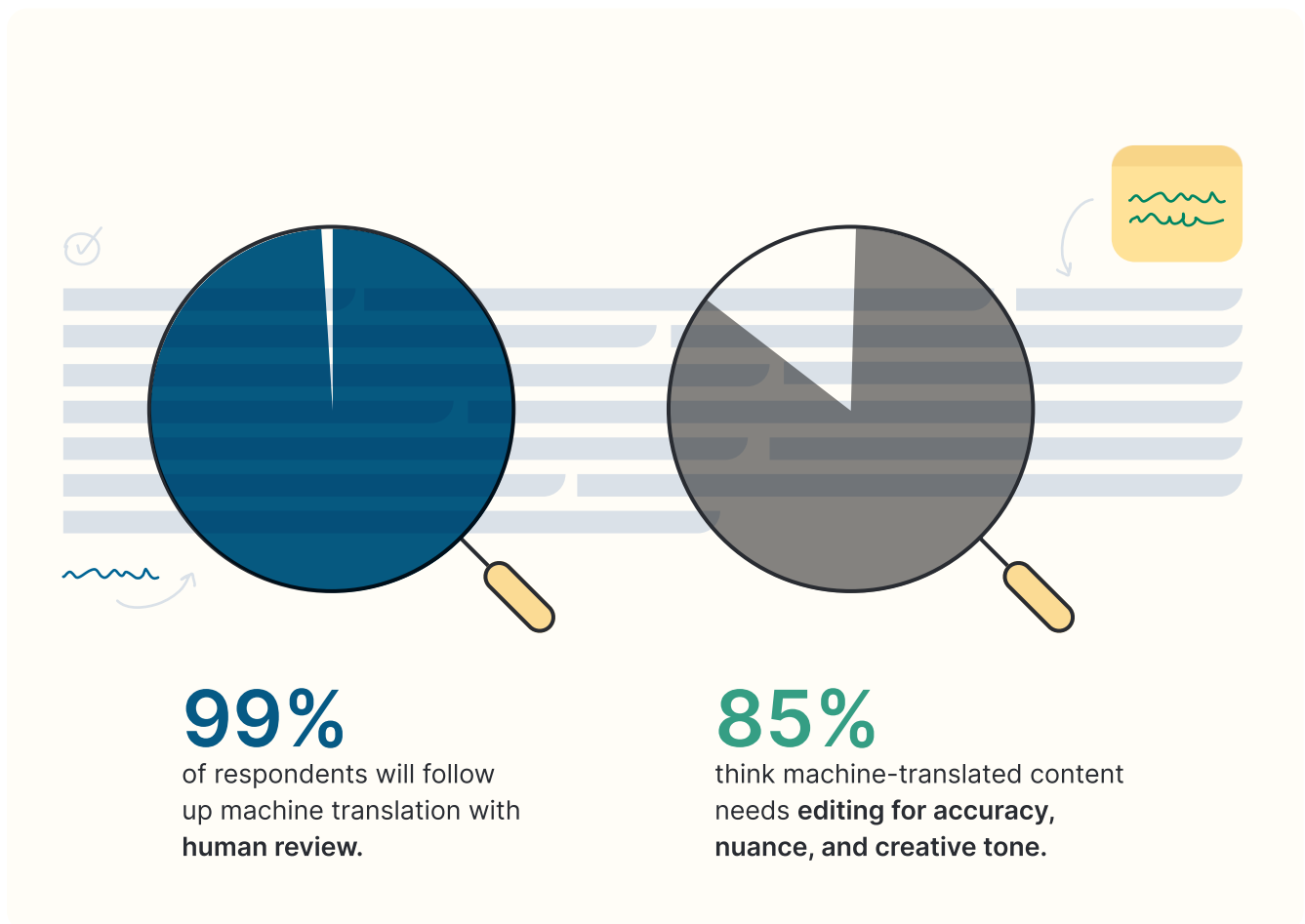
80%
are employed in the technology industry.

> These findings show that most marketers aren't going at it alone—they're supported by an ecosystem of technologists and advisers who strive to make the localization process simpler.

Human-in-the-loop localization is here to stay

Even as machine translation tools advance, human review remains an integral part of the localization workflow.

According to our survey:

99%
of respondents will follow up machine translation with **human review.**

85%
think machine-translated content needs **editing for accuracy, nuance, and creative tone.**

A significant portion of respondents (40%) handle more than 1 million words per month. This underscores the importance of the human review process in ensuring the quality of high-volume translation projects.

> The message is clear: machine translation isn't 100% perfect, and marketers are incorporating human review into their localization workflows to polish translations and ensure perfection.

Practical recommendations for improving translation and localization workflows

Based on the insights from this report, here are a few actionable suggestions for organizations looking to transform their translation and localization efforts:

1. Invest in machine translation tools
Given the proven ROI of translation and localization projects, companies should consider allocating more resources towards machine translation tools.

2. Focus on human review
Machine translation is a powerful tool, but it's not perfect. Human reviewers play a critical role in ensuring the quality of translated content.

**3. Train machine translation models**
For industry-specific jargon and vocabulary, companies should consider training their own custom machine translation models or using a glossary provided by a machine translation vendor.

4. Embrace AI
AI content generation is here to stay. By adopting AI-assisted writing tools, companies can stay ahead of the curve and leverage the benefits of this technology.

5. Choose machine translation vendors carefully
Companies should choose vendors who can handle different document formats, prioritize data security, and offer APIs.
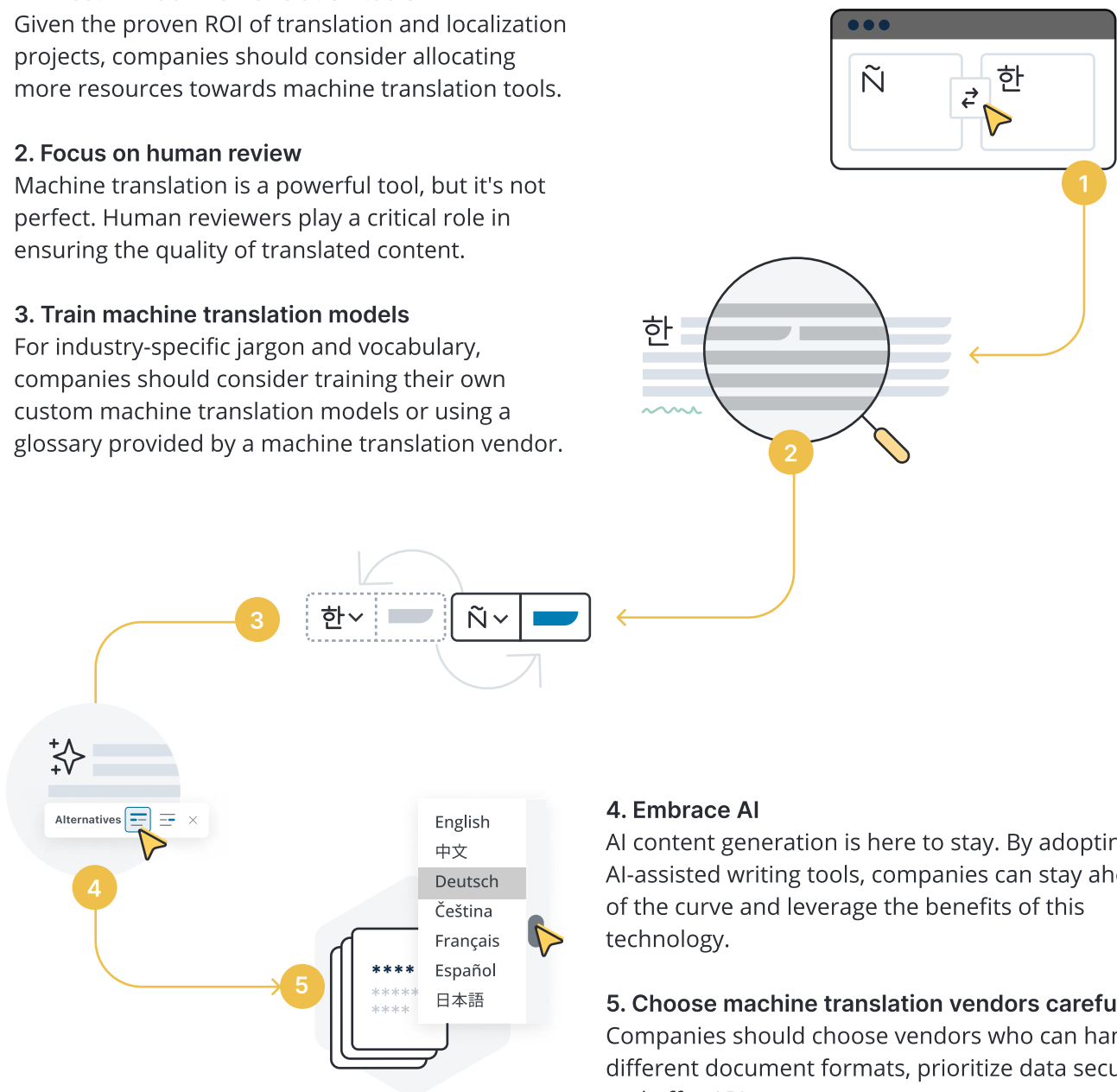
Looking ahead

Key takeaways:

- Machine translation is the established norm in localization workflows, used by 98% of survey respondents.

- Human review is still a key part of the translation process to ensure accuracy and nuance.

- AI in content generation is a force that marketers and content creators cannot afford to ignore.

- A significant majority of respondents currently use AI-assisted writing and even more predict a substantial increase in AI-generated content in the near future.

- Most valued features of machine translation vendors include support for specific document formats, data security, and API offerings.

- Our data reveals a strong reliance on partnerships with technology providers or agencies to simplify the localization process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our exploration of the landscape of localization in business has illuminated several important trends and challenges. With respondents coming from a mix of B2B (40%), B2C (35%), and hybrid B2B/B2C (25%) companies, we see that these trends and challenges have broad relevance across a variety of business models and industries.

Localization is a complex, multi-faceted process with many moving parts, and its importance in the global business landscape cannot be overstated. Moving forward, businesses should start incorporating AI and machine translation into their processes to stay competitive. Machine translation vendors like DeepL offer advanced tools that can help companies streamline their localization workflows.

> **By leveraging machine translation, embracing AI, and applying human review, companies can optimize their localization workflows, improve the quality of their content, and maximize their ROI.**