Your essential guide to choosing the right AI-powered translation solution for your business

RWS

In this guide

Introduction

Every business with international expansion plans wants the translation of their go-to-market materials (whether for physical or digital assets) to be fast, accurate and cost-effective. AI-powered translation tools and services have emerged as a potential game-changer in this space, offering businesses the ability to bridge language barriers and connect with diverse audiences more quickly and cost-effectively than ever before.

The question for many businesses then becomes: what about quality? Is it possible to leverage the speed and low cost of AI without sacrificing translation quality?

This guide will walk you through the AI-powered translation landscape, explaining the pros and cons of different approaches and the essential factors to consider when looking for a solution. It will help you make an informed decision to unlock the global potential of your business.

Outsourced or in-house?

This guide is for businesses at or near the start of their global journey. When choosing a translation solution, most organizations in this position opt for a solution delivered as a service – software-as-a-service, a human-led service or a combination of both. This guide focuses on these options, rather than the alternative of recruiting translation professionals or investing in an AI translation tool for the exclusive use of your organization.

Exploring the AI translation solution landscape

You may come across several categories of AI-powered translation solution in the market, each with its strengths and weaknesses. Here's a brief explanation of each.

Machine translation (MT)

Example: Google Translate

Almost all MT tools that you'll come across are of a type called neural machine translation (NMT). This is an advanced AI model trained specifically for translation, using large datasets of existing translations.

MT's key strength is speed, with on-demand, instant delivery that is especially valuable for large volumes of content. Accuracy can be very high, but free MT tools in particular can vary widely in quality depending on the type of content and other factors. Many businesses opt for a paid tool designed to address the known limitations of free options (see page 8).

Large language models (LLMs), a type of generative AI (GenAI)

Example: OpenAI's GPT, used in ChatGPT

LLMs are trained to generate text in response to prompts. They're trained with much larger datasets than MT, but not specifically for the purpose of translation. They can translate simply because their training data typically includes content in a range of languages.

The biggest strength of LLMs is their fluency with language, while their greatest vulnerability is 'hallucination', which is where the translation bears no relation to the source content. But this is a fast-moving field, with continual development to address hallucination and other known LLM weaknesses.

LLMs aren't quite as fast as MT, but still effectively instantaneous on a human scale. They also come in free and paid versions.

Hybrid solutions: a human-AI partnership

Example: HAI by RWS

To benefit from the speed and cost-effectiveness of AI translation tools while protecting against their vulnerabilities, hybrid solutions add professional human review to each translation project.

This human-AI partnership leverages the nuanced knowledge of a language specialist who is a native speaker of the target language, fluent in the source language, and expert in the relevant culture and industry.

While slower and more costly than using AI tools without human input, in many scenarios this approach offers a good balance of speed, cost and quality, representing great value for money.

As text generators, LLMs are a type of AI known as generative AI (GenAI). Image generators such as Midjourney and DALL-E are also examples of GenAI.

Key factors to consider when choosing your preferred solution

Because there are free MT and LLM tools available, you can always experiment to see if they are suitable for your needs. But be aware that a paid-for tool may offer features that deliver better results. Whatever you choose to do, your decisions should also be informed by the following factors.

Content value and objectives

In the absence of unlimited time and budget, it's natural to choose carefully where to put greater effort and resource. For localization, this means identifying content of higher value, or where accuracy and nuance are particularly important to protecting your brand's reputation and achieving your global growth objectives.

If the value of the content or risk to your brand or growth objectives is too high to trust AI alone (even if the risk of poor translation by the AI tool is low), then the hybrid approach will be your choice.

Information security

Ensure that the solution you choose has robust security measures in place, such as encryption and secure data transfer protocols, and that it's designed to keep your content private. Nearly all free, publicly available MT and LLM options will use your data to improve their models, for example.

Scalability

As your business grows, your translation needs will evolve. Choose a solution now that can scale with you, easily accommodating increasing volumes of content, different content formats and additional languages. This will save you time and effort in the long run.

> **Remember, you don't have to choose the same approach for everything. You can use different translation solutions for different types of content.**

Ease of use

You want a solution that is really easy to use as you start out, but not so basic that you outgrow it too quickly. Consider, for example, whether you can upload a batch of documents of different formats and request translation into multiple languages in one go. Or, for hybrid solutions, whether they give you built-in visibility and control rather than making you resort to emails and spreadsheets to manage projects. In other words, consider the essentials that go beyond translation speed and quality.

Customer support and advice

If one of your 'essentials' is the ability to speak to a human being – to get questions answered, issues resolved, or advice and help as your requirements evolve – make sure your chosen solution comes with responsive and knowledgeable customer support.

Value for money

Finally, weigh up the factors that are important to you against the cost of the solution. Consider your current and future needs and the languages, features and support you might need. On the cost side, make sure the pricing is transparent – if additional features will cost more, make sure you factor this in.
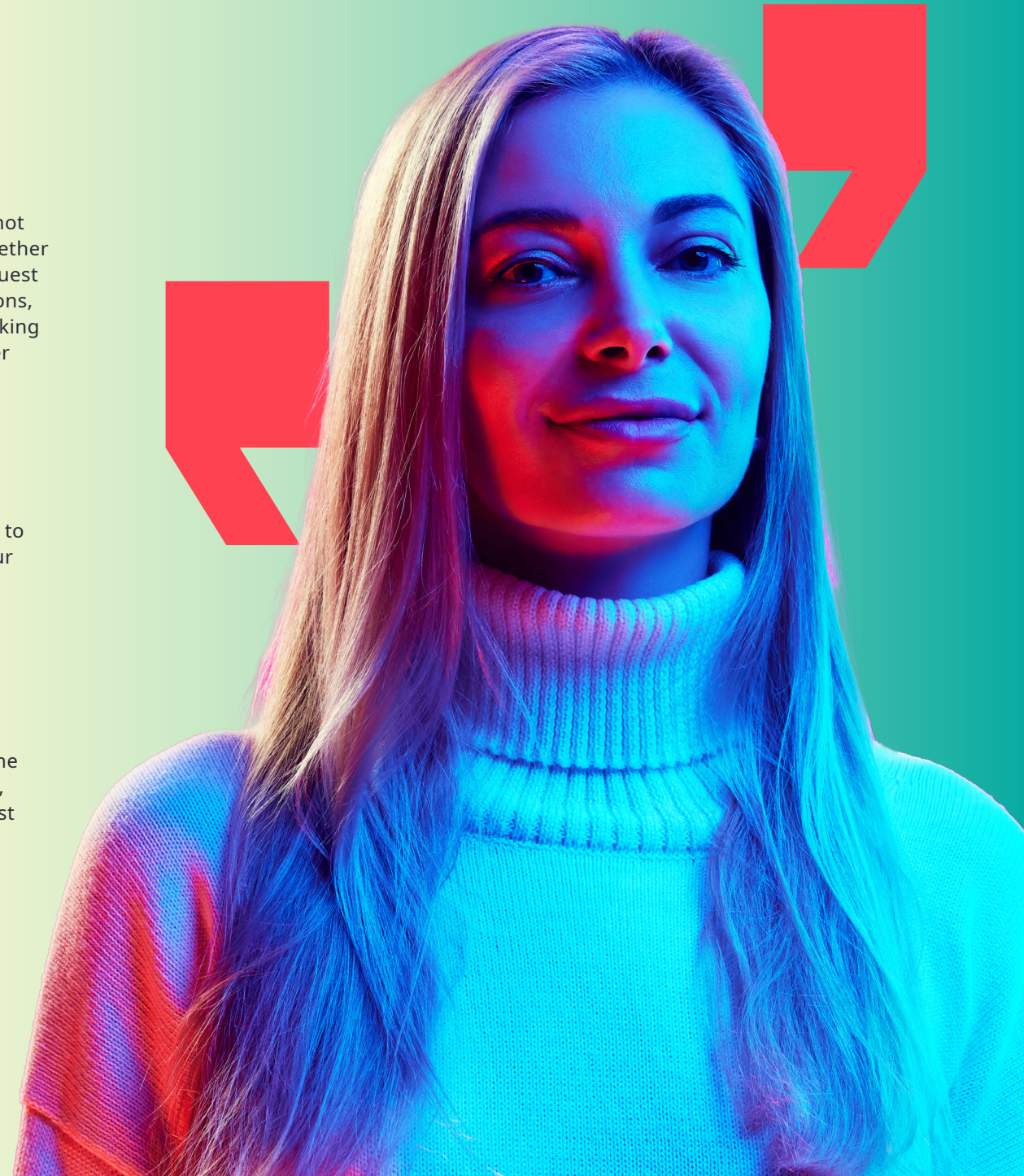
Comparing solutions

How do different AI-powered solutions stack up against the factors that matter to you? To be certain, you'll want to thoroughly explore the ones that interest you, but we can draw some distinctions that are generally true of different solution categories.

Free AI translation tools

It's not hard to appreciate the value of free translation tools. Just ask anyone who has ever used one to understand the local language while on holiday.

It's possible that you have business translation needs that one of these tools can satisfy. But for many business use cases, they will fall short. Because they're free, these tools typically don't come with any features to help you address some of the key considerations we've already covered, such as security or customer support. They're also vulnerable to a range of potential issues that can affect translation quality, including:

For LLMs

• **Failing to translate at all.** Besides 'hallucinating' a translation that bears little or no relation to the source content, possible outcomes of the way LLMs work include leaving some of the content in the original language or ignoring it completely (deleting it from the output).

Examples of

Free MT
Google Translate, Microsoft Translator

Free LLMs
free versions of ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude

Choosing the right AI-powered translation solution for your business

For MT

- **Domain-specific terminology.** For some industries or topics, a given free MT tool might excel, while for others it may struggle with the required vocabulary. The 'jargon' doesn't even have to be particularly technical for issues to arise. In a piece about bike racing, for example, MT may translate the English 'race' into Dutch 'race' or 'ras', rather than the term used by native speakers: 'wedstrijd'.

- **What NOT to translate.** If a product name is translatable but your policy is not to translate it, a free MT tool will have no way of knowing this (so will likely translate it). It might also try to translate other names – of people or organizations, for example – that shouldn't be translated.

For both

- **Brand requirements.** If your business has guidelines that specify a writing style or specific terminology to use or avoid in different languages, a free tool has no way of applying these.

- **Nuance and bias.** Any AI system may fail to treat cultural context and sensitivities appropriately or default to biases present in their training data. Gender bias in data, for example, can certainly lead to translation issues.

Whether or not you encounter any of these issues really does depend on your content and the specific tool used. But most businesses find that to communicate effectively with new markets as they grow, they need more than free translation tools typically offer. Better overall quality. Greater specificity to deal with domain and brand requirements. Specific security assurances. And so on.

This is why most free tools also have a paid version on offer, while some AI translation tools, such as Language Weaver from RWS, are designed specifically for these business use cases.

Paid AI translation tools

These tools exist to serve the needs of businesses by addressing the limitations of free tools. The specifics will differ per tool, but if you have security concerns, or expect an assured level of customer support, or want to be able to customize the solution to meet domain and brand requirements, or need to handle more file types... you'll probably be able to find a paid tool that meets your needs.

What you won't get with these tools is any process for reviewing the output. They simply don't include human review, so if you want to check for errors, biases, hallucinations, blindness to cultural context or anything else – that will be entirely down to you.

Another consideration is that you might need a level of expertise to make the most of some of the more sophisticated features of these tools. As you start your global journey, you may prefer a hybrid service that puts the AI tools into the hands of professionals.

Hybrid translation solutions

As already covered, the point of these solutions is to combine the strengths of AI – speed and cost-effectiveness – with the strengths that humans can offer to combat the limitations of AI.

They're essentially technology-enabled services – in fact, AI translation tools may not be the only important translation technology that they use. When considering any hybrid solution, make sure that – besides AI – they're leveraging a modern translation management platform incorporating a variety of tools designed to make translation as efficient as possible. This will help minimize the amount of human review and editing required and bring your unit translation costs down over time.

Hybrid solutions vary a lot in how they work and are priced, what they offer in terms of security and customer support, and how scalable they are (some services are aimed more at individuals than fast-growing businesses, and their language coverage can also differ). It's important to think carefully about what matters to you and ask the right questions.

Examples of

Paid MT
Language Weaver from RWS,
Microsoft Translator for Business

Paid LLMs
range of paid plans for
ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude

Examples of
hybrid solutions

HAI by RWS, Translated,
Wordsonline

Say hello to HAI

The HAI platform is your gateway to a hybrid translation solution from RWS, one of the world's most established and trusted providers of localization services to global businesses.

We work with more than 80 of the world's top 100 brands on some of the most complex projects, but HAI is specifically designed to keep things simple.

Keeping things simple – without compromise

HAI is really easy to use. Simply upload your files, indicate the source and target languages, and approve the quote we send you. Log in to your account to see a live dashboard showing the status and planned delivery dates for your projects.

To deliver your projects as quickly and efficiently as possible – and bring your translation costs down over time – we combine MT and LLM models with other translation productivity tools. Our AI tools learn from the input of our human linguists so that, over time, they generate even more accurate translations first time around – further helping to accelerate your projects.

Simple. But not simplistic.

With HAI you don't have to compromise on translation quality, cultural relevance or speed. Nor on security or customer support. If these things matter to you, then HAI offers great value for money and is the right solution for you.

What about scalability?

We work with every size of business – from the smallest to the largest – and with people at every point on the localization maturity scale, from completely inexperienced to expert. With RWS, you know that if or when you need something that HAI doesn't handle – a language, a file format, a process or anything else – we'll still be able to give you what you need.

HAI is specifically designed to keep things simple

Ready to experience the power of HAI for yourself?

Discover how HAI can transform your brand's global reach.
Speak to one of our localization specialists by using HAI's
Contact us option or simply explore and try HAI now.

rws.com/hai

About RWS

RWS Holdings plc is a unique, world-leading provider of technology-enabled language, content and intellectual property services. Through content transformation and multilingual data analysis, our combination of AI-enabled technology and human expertise helps our clients to grow by ensuring they are understood anywhere, in any language.

Our purpose is unlocking global understanding. By combining cultural understanding, client understanding and technical understanding, our services and technology assist our clients to acquire and retain customers, deliver engaging user experiences, maintain compliance and gain actionable insights into their data and content.

Over the past 20 years we've been evolving our own AI solutions as well as helping clients to explore, build and use multilingual AI applications. With 45+ AI-related patents and more than 100 peer-reviewed papers, we have the experience and expertise to support clients on their AI journey.

We work with over 80% of the world's top 100 brands, more than three-quarters of Fortune's 20 'Most Admired Companies' and almost all of the top pharmaceutical companies, investment banks, law firms and patent filers. Our client base spans Europe, Asia Pacific, Africa and North and South America. Our 60+ global locations across five continents service clients in the automotive, chemical, financial, legal, medical, pharmaceutical, technology and telecommunications sectors.

Founded in 1958, RWS is headquartered in the UK and publicly listed on AIM, the London Stock Exchange regulated market (RWS.L).

For further information, please visit: **www.rws.com**