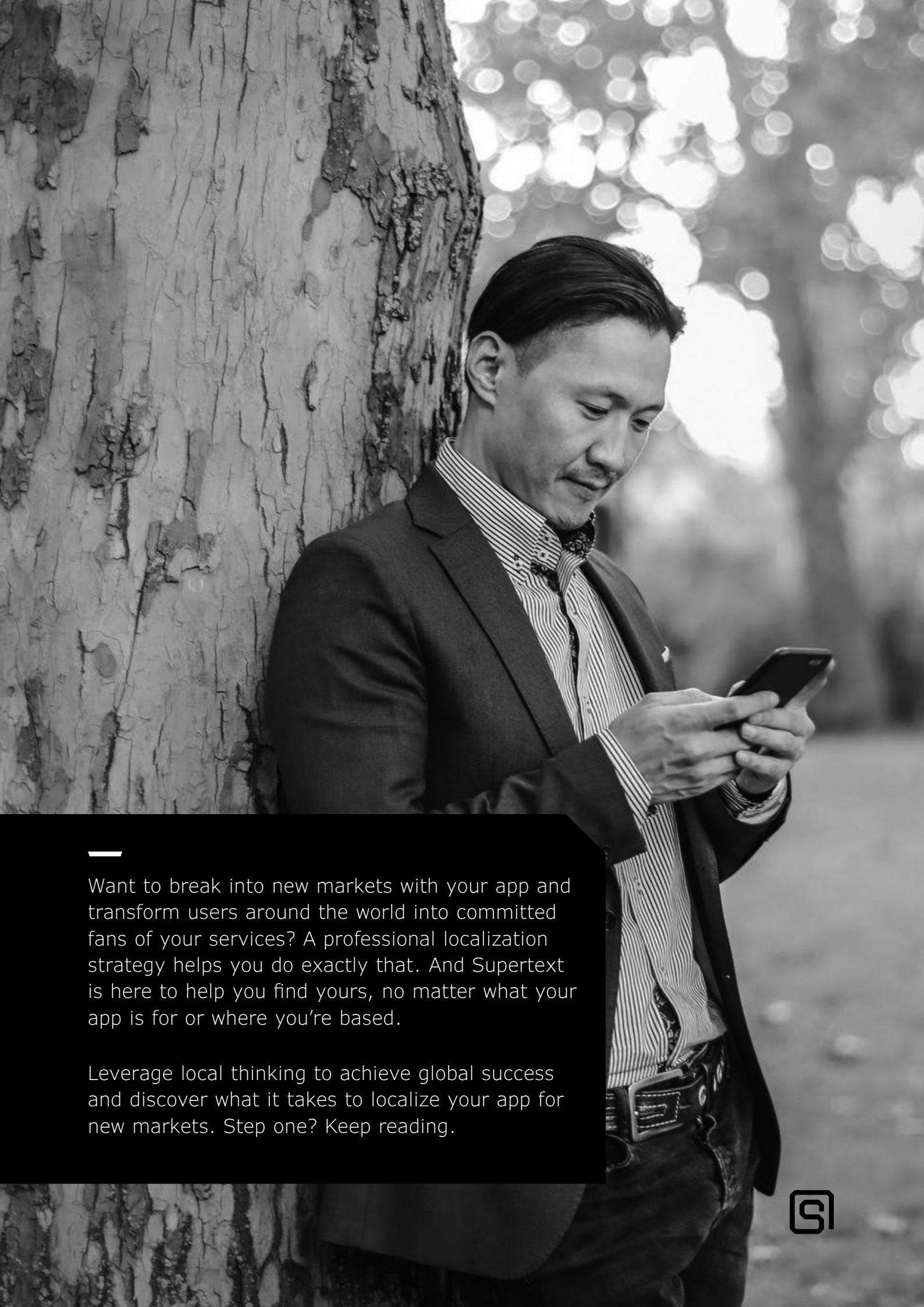




# App localization made easy: the ultimate guide to your international app

Checklist included





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Want to break into new markets with your app and transform users around the world into committed fans of your services? A professional localization strategy helps you do exactly that. And Supertext is here to help you find yours, no matter what your app is for or where you're based.

Leverage local thinking to achieve global success and discover what it takes to localize your app for new markets. Step one? Keep reading.



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# Three good reasons to localize your app

Consumers always prefer content in their own language – and that applies to apps as well. Need proof? Grab your cell phone and see what percentage of your own downloads are in your mother tongue. We're guessing it's close to 100.

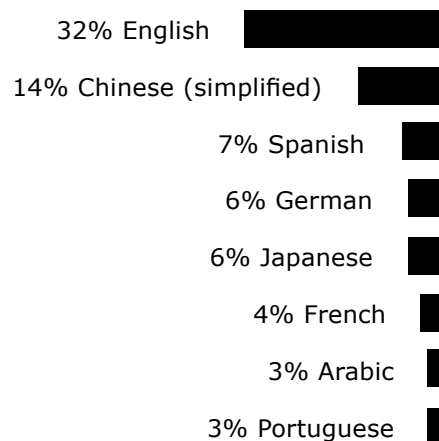
Your app might have a five-star rating and fantastic reviews in app stores, but that doesn't mean non-native speakers will be on board with it. The more languages you offer, the greater your app's chances of success. Here's why:

## Localization increases your visibility

There are 1.8 million apps in the Apple App Store and more than 3 million on Google Play. In other words, the chances of anyone stumbling across your app at random are fairly low. However, the more languages you offer, the more users you can reach and the greater your visibility – as measured in the number of downloads – will become. What's more, according to the statistics, the download rate of a localized app is up to 128% higher per country than a non-localized one. Each download improves your app's ranking, and with it your organic reach.

## Localization grows your user base

Is your app in English? If so, it gives you access to 32% of the world's consumers. That's not bad, but if you added just seven more languages, you could reach a full 75% of them. The most important languages for app growth by GDP are:



**Top eight languages by GDP**

*Source: CSA Research*

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## Localization nets you more active users

90% of all mobile activity takes place in apps. And users can be merciless, downloading apps only to delete them again a few minutes later. So your content needs to grab them right away – and for that, they need to be able to read it easily. What's more, a survey by the research institute CSA Research found that 72% of users prefer to spend their time on content in their native language. That's hardly surprising: a localized app is easier to use and offers a more authentic experience. The result is increased trust – and with it, higher engagement. This means that users will use your app more intensively, leave feedback and/or recommend it to their friends.

It clearly pays to have your app localized – in terms of both users and revenue.



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# Start to finish: 10 steps to launching a localized app

App localization can give anyone a boost, from startups to international corporations. And though every project is unique, the basic concept is always the same. Success is just a question of executing it properly. This step-by-step guide is designed to help.

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Before we get started, here are the terms you need to know

What is localization?

Localization is the process of tailoring apps to the cultural context of each market or country. The aim is to give every user the same emotional experience as in the original. Translating a text is just one part of the process – images, colors and appeals to the target audience can all be tailored as well.

What is internationalization?

Internationalization encompasses the technical requirements for localization and involves coding the app to enable it to handle multiple versions in different languages. This affects elements of the user interface (UI), such as character and date formats, numbers and currencies.

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# 1. Check the technical requirements for the app

In many cases, your app's technical specifications will be internationalized – in other words, programmed to accommodate multiple languages – by default, but it's still good to double check. If they're not, you'll need to change the code, which is why a good relationship with your development experts is essential for successful localization.

Here are the technical details you need to get right:

- Implementation of a reading mechanism for different writing systems
- Support for right-to-left scripts (e.g. Arabic, Hebrew)
- An input method editor for displaying dates, units of measurement, prices and currencies
- A dynamic layout for different text lengths (scroll bars, plural forms, etc.)
- Export of content in separate string files by operating system (see info box), incl. text length limits for individual strings

## Practical localization tools and instructions:

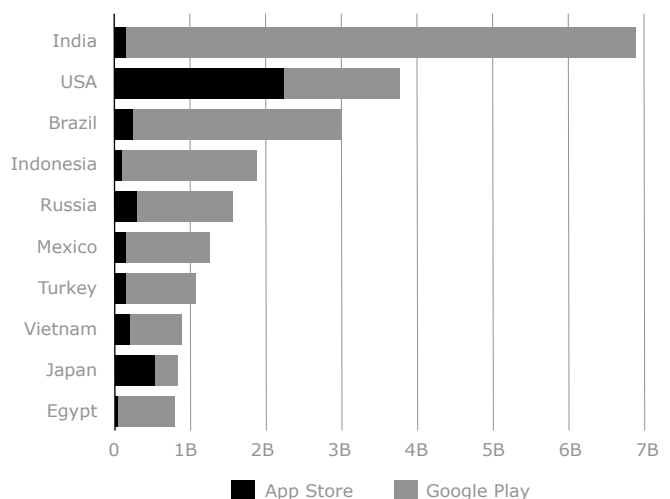
- Xcode (iOS)
- Studio (Android)

## Localization formats of commonly used operating systems:

- iOS: .strings
- Android: .xml
- Windows Phone: .resx

# 2. Define your target audience

Where in the world holds the greatest chance of success for your app? Your execs are usually the ones who will decide whether to target multiple markets or just the one. Getting your hands on statistics about the most popular target markets is a good starting point.



**Top app downloads by country and store, Q2 2020**

Source: Sensor Tower

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The fastest-growing app categories by downloads:

- Cars and vehicles, comics and entertainment (Android)
- Food and drink, education and finance (iOS)

Statista, App Annie and Sensor Tower all provide extensive statistics as well.

Your app's own download numbers in the Apple App Store or Google Play can also be a good indicator of markets where you have an audience's attention. Localizing your app's content for that market can boost your download figures significantly.

### 3. Check the conditions on the ground

Once you know which markets you want to focus on, you'll need to survey the terrain.

- How many languages are spoken there?
- How do local consumers behave?
- Does the app as it currently stands look visually appealing to them?
- Which technological requirements do you need to meet?

Depending on the market, you may need to keep other smartphone providers, screen sizes or operating systems in mind.



**Most popular screen resolution by country**

Source: DeviceAtlas

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Getting a clear picture at this stage gives you a better overview of the potential challenges involved. Online surveys or – even better – a language service provider with experts in your target country can help you identify the changes you should make for a strong launch in the new market.

Doing your research well in advance will give your developers time to make the necessary adjustments. If your app needs its code tweaked, go back two steps in your plan and get it done now.

### Flickr: an example of localization

Image hosting platform Flickr's UI shows how text lengths can vary between languages: one text element underneath the photo is called "views" in English, "次檢視" in Chinese and "visualizações" in Portuguese.

| Language              | Translation     | Ratio |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------|
| English               | views           | 1     |
| Chinese (traditional) | 次檢視             | 1.2   |
| Portuguese            | visualizações   | 2.6   |
| German                | -mal angesehen  | 2.8   |
| Italian               | visualizzazioni | 3     |

## 4. Set the project timeline

The next step is to decide when your app should be ready to go live. For large-scale projects, start by localizing the one or two languages that need to go online first. As a rule of thumb, an app localization of around 5,000 words will take around a week for each target language.

In addition to determining the deadlines, you should also ask yourself which internal and external teams need to be involved and how you're planning to localize the app. At which stage of the product's development cycle should you commission the translations? Do you want to localize the app in multiple languages in parallel or one after the other?

Find out more about the different project management methods you can use [here](#).

Your approach will ultimately come down to the resources you are relying on – and what your language service provider can offer you. This brings us to step number five.

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## 5. Select your language service provider (LSP)

Localizing an app involves more than just translation, which is why doing it yourself or using Google Translate are not realistic options. That's how you end up with a German homepage named *Zuhause* (rather than the standard "Home", borrowed from the English) or "page views" that have become "page consultations" in French.

Partnering with a professional language service provider will not only give you access to the linguistic expertise you need, but will also provide the requisite cultural insight and essential technology. Translation management systems (TMS) simplify the translation process even more, especially when dealing with multiple languages.

### What is a TMS?

A translation management system (TMS) manages and consolidates translation projects on a central platform. It also establishes a channel between the customer and the LSP, allowing the former to send all content for translation at the click of a button. The translated texts can then be integrated directly into the app again. Status tracking provides an overview of ongoing projects, and the processes can be automated to make them faster. As a tool, the translation memory learns continuously, while a termbase is there to guarantee consistency. The result: a great deal of time and resources saved.

Here are a few pointers that could help you when looking for the right translation partner:

- Quality standards (ISO certification, native speakers, etc.)
- Areas of expertise and experience (fields, content types, etc.)
- Price
- Size
- Technology and processes
- Location

For detailed tips on choosing a language service provider, check out [our blog article](#).

Your choice of partner depends on your specific requirements. A startup looking to offer its app in just one other language, for example, may go for a boutique agency. If you want to enter multiple markets or already have an international presence, a global full-service provider may be what you need.

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## 6. Make the necessary linguistic and cultural adjustments

Now we can get down to business: say the word and your entire app will be localized. Depending on the content, you can take advantage of human translation, machine translation or both:

| Content                            | Service                               |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| App texts, app store content       | Human translation                     |
| User comments, product texts, FAQs | Machine translation with post-editing |
| Marketing texts, claims            | Transcreation (creative translation)  |

### Choosing a service to translate your app – an example

You'll need to localize a lot more than just the app content: marketing materials, campaign texts, emails and your app store page's content – including descriptions, keywords and video clips – all need to be adapted, too. [Jump ahead to step eight for more information about this.](#)

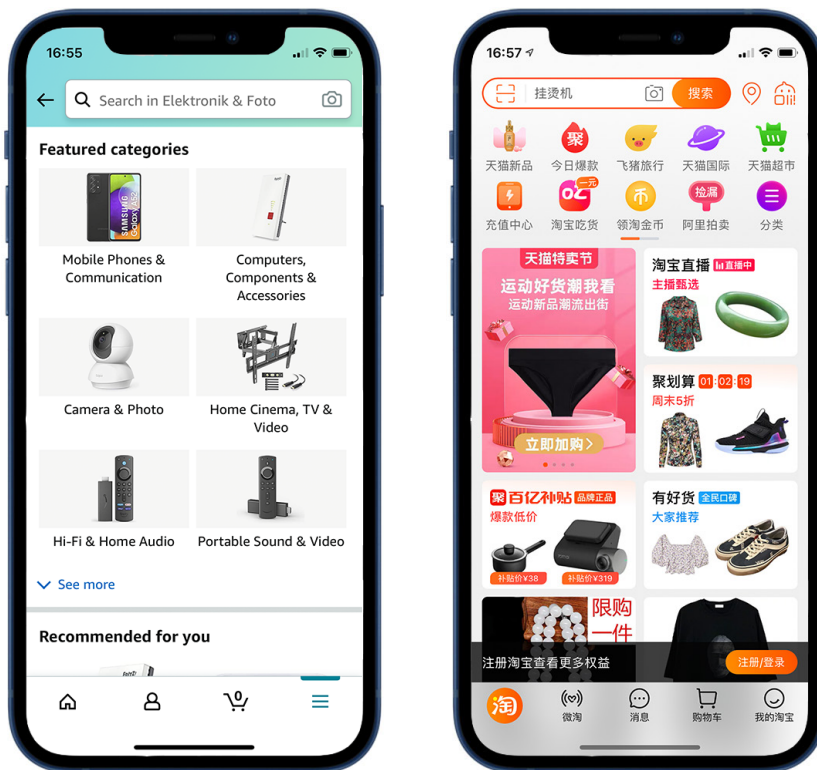
In most cases, the translation will take place in XML or XLIFF files containing all the app content in the form of strings. You can add screenshots or comments to provide translators with context, or integrate the translation directly into your app's design tool. A major benefit of this latter option is that you can begin work during the development stage and publish localized content independent of releases. [Find out more about the benefits here.](#)

For an authentic user experience, you'll also need to make cultural adjustments for your target audience. This means that users should feel as though the app was developed exclusively for them. Tailoring the user experience (UX) to the culture and habits of each market involves checking number and date formats, units of

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measurement, appeals to the users and imagery. Each market and region will have different color preferences, for example. By internationalizing your app, you've already laid the technical foundations for this.



#### Amazon vs. Taobao app design

Western users are accustomed to minimalist designs, while Asian users prefer colorful pages full of content.

## 7. Test the UX in the layout

Now that your translations are complete, the next step is to test the user experience and the app elements in your current layout. You can conduct the initial functionality test internally, with the next step being a beta test with users in the target market and their devices. Local experts from your LSP will often take on this task.

Checking for text completeness, length and line breaks in the different languages enables you to improve the user experience and iron out any final display errors.

Read the section on UX testing to find out how to conduct these tests properly.

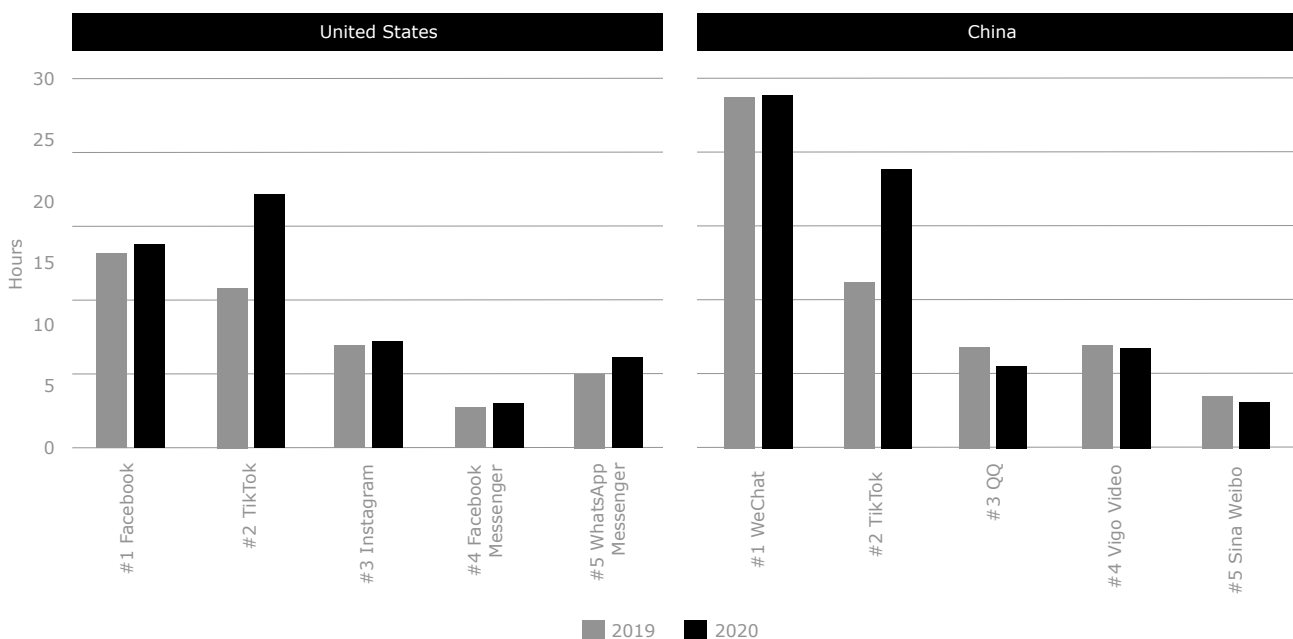
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## 8. Optimize your app store presence and your marketing

Most users will see your app for the first time in the Apple App Store or Google Play (or a different store entirely, depending on the market). However, this will only happen if you tailor the store content to the new market. We call this app store optimization (ASO). Keywords, descriptions, screenshots, videos and – depending on the app – even the title must be individually analyzed and adjusted for each new language and specific market. This enables your users to find you no matter where they're based and how they're searching. Find out more about this in the [section on app store optimization](#).

The two most important advertising platforms for apps are social media and paid search ads in app stores. Find out what the most popular social channels are in your target market – whether Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, WeChat, Snapchat, TikTok or something else – and base your marketing campaign around them.



### The most popular social media platforms in the United States and China by monthly usage

Source: App Annie

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## 9. Review feedback and rankings and update the app

The lion's share of your work is now done. Your localized app is ready for release. Once you've wished it *bon voyage*, you'll need to start evaluating the results. Check the analytics built into the app stores and filter the download statistics and ratings by market or language. As with search engines, search terms in stores can change to reflect new trends, so keep an eye on your app's performance and update the keywords as required.

The same applies to your app's rating, which plays a key role in how high your app ranks. The more positive reviews you receive, the more favorably the app will be viewed (about 80% of users check reviews before they download an app). In addition, potential improvements are often hidden in user feedback: look at points of criticism and address them in the next update. You'll increase the app's added value with each release and perfect the local user experience in the process.

## 10. Localize again. And again. And again.

You've made it to the final step in this journey – but localization doesn't stop here. The native app is always in flux due to the addition of new features, content and business areas, and this has to be reflected in the localized versions. In other words, localization is a continuous, never-ending process.

What's more, if your app is successful, you can always consider adding more languages and markets. In that case, go back to step six and start again. The best part? Your teams and LSP have already worked together and can jump straight back into the process. You've probably chosen continuous localization as the strategy for your app anyway. Congratulations – you've laid the foundations for limitless growth.



# Waterfall vs. agile vs. continuous – when does the localization process start and how?

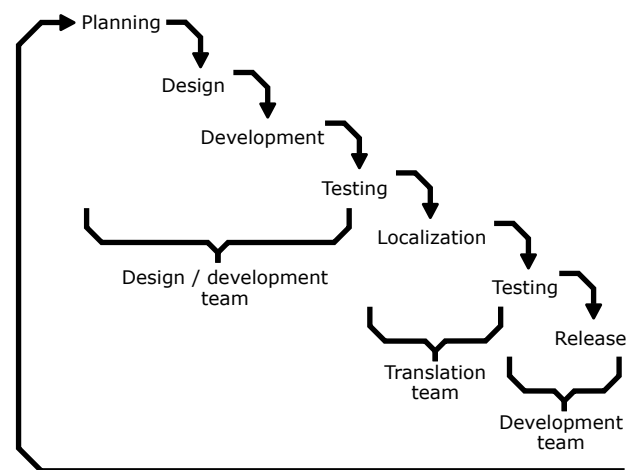
Translation projects all used to follow the same trajectory: once the text was complete, the translator would work their magic. And for projects with a definitive start and end point – documents, books and catalogs, for example – this worked perfectly. However, everything changed with the advent of new technologies such as apps, software and websites. Unlike traditional texts for translation, these are never truly finished, and the need to manage them has revolutionized the translation process.

Today, an app localization may follow one of three paths.

## Step-by-step – waterfall localization

The localization stage takes place after the app is developed. The design team creates the interface, the project management team coordinates the content (internally or externally), and the development department takes care of programming and tests the features. Once the app has been successfully launched, all the text elements are gathered together and sent out for localization. The final texts are then sent back to the developers to undergo another test round prior to going live. The project flows from one step to the next – hence the name “waterfall localization”. If, after the project is complete,

there is a new language or update to be added, the process starts again from the beginning. The disadvantage here is that it requires a lot of manual work and scheduling, so any missed steps or additional rounds of editing will delay the entire release.



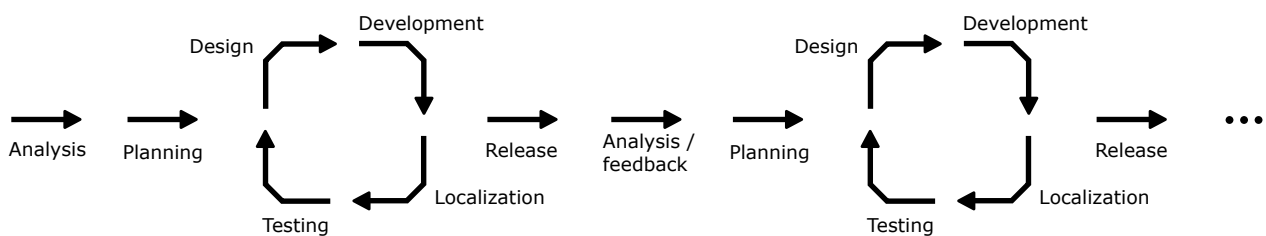
Waterfall localization

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## Agile localization

The project starts out small and agile, and the aim is to keep improving the product. The content is broken down into bite-sized packages for localization, which is done in parallel to the development sprints rather than after they are finished. This saves time and enables problems to be resolved sooner. However, it does mean files have to be sent back and forth more often, and makes a TMS essential in order not to lose track of things. Another issue is that smaller content elements may lack context.



Agile localization

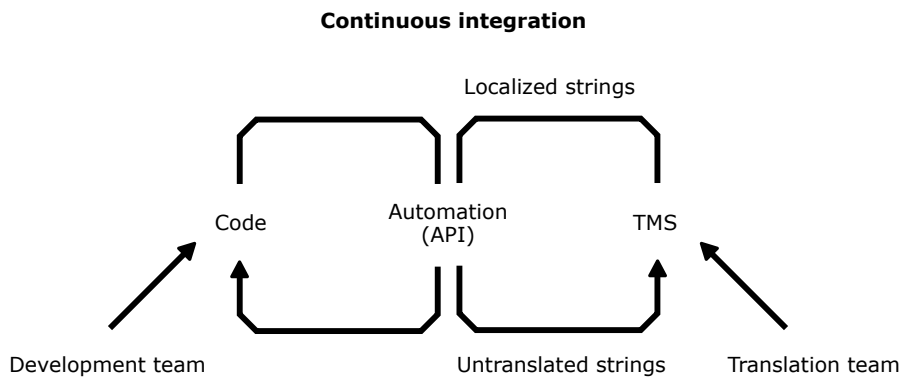
## Continuous localization

The third approach is based on agile localization, with the localization process taking place alongside the development trajectory as part of an automatic, seamless and synchronized cycle. What this means is that the content flows back and forth in a continuous process, is continually localized, and is then fed back into the app code via the TMS. Localized content can therefore go live at any time, regardless of whether a development sprint is taking place. The various teams aren't dependent on one another and the turnaround times are shorter. This also means that a project can easily cover multiple languages at the same time. The only prerequisite: having reliable technology in place – preferably a TMS linked to the design software – along with clearly defined roles in the workflow.

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The main benefit of carrying out localization in a design tool such as Figma or Sketch is that the translator can see the text in its context and provide feedback to the designers on a rolling basis. This makes the localization process a collaborative one that takes place in real time. Find out more about this [in our blog article](#).



Continuous localization

Which approach is right for you?

Think about your goals. Do you want to localize multiple languages at once? Are you keen on sustained growth? How about the ability to distribute resources while saving time? If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, continuous localization is the most sustainable route to take. Then you need to think about the team you’ll put together to work on this: to achieve a continuous workflow, you will need to assign specific roles to your development team, along with a localization manager to oversee everything if it is a larger project. The more areas of expertise covered by your team, the greater the benefits.

The long and short of it: all three methods will get you to where you need to go. It’s all just a question of when.

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# Multilingual app store optimization: the key to more downloads

Market research shows that more than 60% of all apps are downloaded following searches in an app store. So how can you make your app stand out in your target market? The answer is app store optimization (ASO).

## What is (multilingual) ASO?

App store optimization puts your app's public image to the test. It means taking steps to ensure users can easily find you, no matter whether that's in the Apple App Store, Google Play, the Microsoft Store or the Tencent App Store in China.

First, you'll need to do your research into regional search habits. Then it's time to apply the results and adjust your content for every new language and market. This will give you:

1. Better rankings in relevant categories and specific search terms.
2. More downloads and a higher conversion rate in your new markets.

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## What is affected by ASO?

According to the online platform The Tool, the following store elements have the greatest influence on search ranking and conversions worldwide:

- App name (iOS) or app title (Android)
- Keywords
- Ratings and reviews
- App description
- Screenshots and videos
- App icon

## What comes first?

- Always start with the product page  
The app description is the first thing a user sees in an app store. If potential users don't understand what your app is for, their interest will vanish. Localization should start here – even before you tweak the app's content! When adapting the text, remember to ask yourself the most basic questions. You already know the *what* (your app); you just have to answer the *who*, *where*, *why* and *how*. Check how your answers differ between markets to make sure your text ticks all the right boxes.

## Did you know?

The Apple App Store allows apps in 39 languages; Google Play allows 82. Regional variants are also listed: English, for example, is available in EN-US, EN-UK, EN-CN and so on.

- Research keywords again

A different target audience or market calls for different search terms, and a simple translation isn't enough to harness the full potential of this. For example, a user from the United States will look for an app to help plan their *vacation* in London, while a British user will do the same for their *holiday* in Los Angeles. It is therefore best to reanalyze the keywords for each new market. Search ads in the various app stores can help you here. Once you know which keywords the locals will be searching for, what you do with them depends on the store: the App Store has you enter them individually, while Google Play requires them to be incorporated into the description. Be sure to check performance regularly and update keywords as required, too.

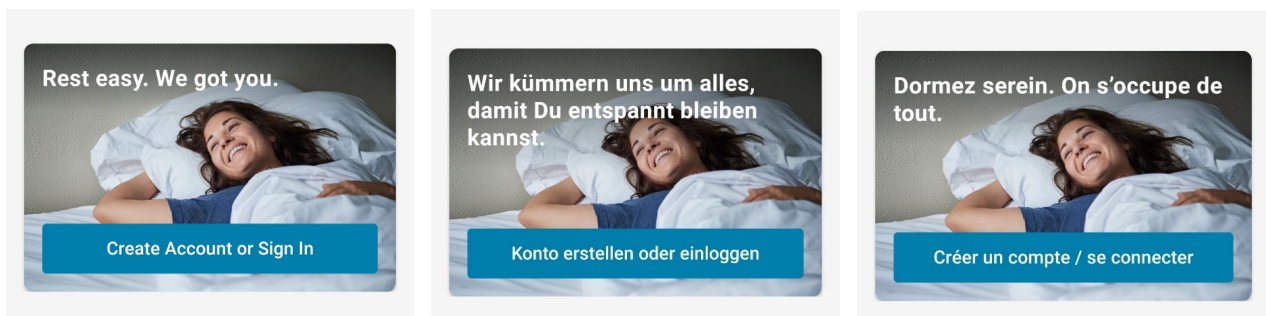
- Rethink your app's name

Ask yourself whether the original name or title of your app works in every language. Reevaluating it for ASO is also necessary: including the main keyword in the app title will increase its ranking by 10%. However, Apple only allows 30 characters in an app's name and subtitle. Google, by contrast, gives you 50 for the app title and short description. Make them count.



- Adapt your appeals

Appeals to the user can differ across markets, both linguistically and culturally. While English has no distinction between polite and informal pronouns, for example, other languages do – and referring to a French speaker with the informal *tu* in your app might sink it. You also have to take into account customers' expectations of how an appeal will be made. Some stereotypes have a grain of truth: German speakers like information that provides concrete added value, while US-based users respond more to emotional appeals.



#### How Trivago addresses users in English, German and French

English: neutral | German: informal | French: formal

- Localize creatives

"Creatives" are all the visual parts of an app's page: the icon, screenshots, images and videos. Adapt them to users' cultural references to make them feel at home in the app. Research local landscapes, typical activities, regional trends and customer habits. For more authenticity, find out whether particular colors have strong associations and add imagery referring to local celebrations where relevant.

- Evaluate ratings

The quality of your app is only one factor in the ratings that customers give: it's also about when and how you ask them to do so. Depending on the market, users may be used to being asked to provide a rating directly in the app, or they may be more familiar with requests for ratings at another touchpoint (e.g. customer service). Choose the right channel and you'll have a better chance of receiving positive ratings.

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# UX testing: perfecting the user experience

Sentence lengths, display formats and character sets can all change when an app is localized – all the more so when the localization is done after the product is launched. To ensure that the app looks good, works well and is linguistically sound in other languages, it is important to check the localized UX during a series of test rounds prior to its release.

What advantages does testing offer?

Plenty:

- It means products can be presented consistently across all app pages and webpages.
- It makes the user experience functional, simple and intuitive – regardless of the language, market or end device.
- It removes the need for additional bug fixes or rounds of editing afterwards, which results in a shorter time to market and lower overall costs.
- It prevents a poor initial user experience with the product and avoids negative product ratings. This improves the company's image.

What is the process?

The LSP tests the app to see how user-friendly it is. The questions are simple: is navigation easy and intuitive in the new language? Are there any translation errors that only become apparent due to the context? Are there any display issues, e.g. due to limited space in a heading, button or navigation feature?

TestFlight is the best beta-testing app for iOS, while on Android, you can test apps directly in the Play Console. These tools will show all the texts in a beta version of the original layout. Depending on the scope of your user tests, you can also have an external partner (e.g. TestingTime) recruit additional testers.

Why should language professionals handle the tests?

Product tests are essential for all facets of the app. Programmers, for example, will test whether it is functional and how the technical aspects work, while linguists will check the language being used. Shortening and altering texts, deleting elements and starting over: only a native speaker will be able to do this properly. They'll also draw on their cultural background to make sure no linguistic stone is left unturned.

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# Success stories

Read a host of success stories involving real companies – from startups to corporations and online stores to AI-based medical tools – to find out more about app localization.



## Headspace

65 million downloads in 190 countries – a localized meditation app thanks to Supertext

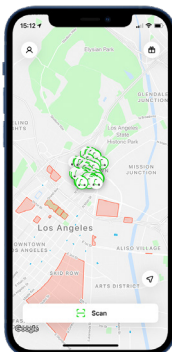
[Find out more](#)



## Kitchen Stories

Paving the way for international success with app localization

[Find out more](#)



## Lime

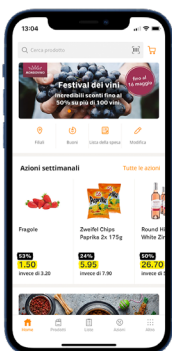
Supertext gets scooters and bikes on the road in more than 22 languages



## Medgate

Supertext puts Medgate's AI-powered doctor in your pocket – in multiple languages

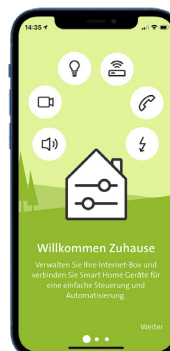
[Find out more](#)



## Coop

Supertext optimizes a retail giant's UX for iOS and Android in English, French and Italian

[Find out more](#)



## Swisscom

Smart home app available in four languages thanks to Supertext

[Find out more](#)

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# The app localization checklist

Creating an international app in a few steps – your checklist.

## Preparation

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- ☐ Define your target audience  
Check demand in various markets; evaluate public interest and download statistics

---

- ☐ Conduct market research  
Assess languages, cultural contexts, device requirements and trends

---

- ☐ Review and internationalize the app's technical specifications as required  
Multilingual reading mechanisms and input methods, dates, units of measurement, currencies and string exports

---

- ☐ Assemble a localization team  
Allocate roles among your internal product management and development experts

---

- ☐ Set the project timeline and draw up a schedule  
Agree on deadlines and how you will approach the project

---

- ☐ Select language service provider  
Request quotes, agree on how to set up the project and define processes

---

- ☐ Determine which services are required for the content  
Identify areas of the app that require particular focus

## Implementation

---

- ☐ Translate the app and make cultural adjustments  
Extract all strings, focusing on figures, units of measurement, design and how users are addressed when amending the text

---

- ☐ Test the UX in the layout  
Carry out internal and external beta testing with a target group; review the content's completeness, consistency and presentation

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- ☐ Optimize the content in the app stores for new languages  
Pay attention to the product page, keywords, title, form of address and creatives

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- ☐ Analyze marketing channels and localize content  
Analyze market-specific social media trends and have content transcreated

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- ☐ Check app ratings and ranking  
Implement optimized elements in new releases



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Ready to have a chat  
about your app project?  
We'd love to.

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Supertext. The name says it all.

Founded in 2005 as a copywriting and translation agency, Supertext has grown into one of the most innovative and creative language service providers in the world. With locations in Los Angeles, Berlin and Zurich, over 3,000 companies – from startups to global conglomerates – use Supertext's web-based services, which are delivered by more than 2,000 language experts. The LSP has forged a strong reputation as a partner for creative app localization thanks to projects for brands including Headspace, Kitchen Stories and Lime.