Rubric®

5 essential questions to ask when purchasing a TMS

Thinking of buying a translation management system but not sure where to start? Find out what to look for in a TMS (and if you even need one)

Already purchased a TMS?
Read our How to get the most from your TMS eBook.

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Introduction

If you're reading this, you've probably decided—or been told—that your global company needs a translation management system (TMS). The question of whether to purchase a TMS often gets asked when a company's globalization efforts mature and international markets grow in importance.

If current localization efforts feel messy, misaligned, and out of control, a TMS can feel like an easy way to streamline and centralize your translation processes, saving you time and money.

What exactly is a TMS?

A translation management system (TMS) is a piece of software used to manage the translation process.

It acts as a hub where project managers, translators, and others can interact and collaborate on projects. TMSs also drive efficiency by automating certain tasks such as content parsing and filtering and workflow management. They also play a key role in quality management as they are a centralized hub for vital translation resources such as Translation Memories and terminology databases.

Whatever your reasons for buying a TMS, it's likely to be a significant investment, and you want to get it right. But that's not easy in today's crowded marketplace. There are so many options out there, the choice can feel overwhelming.

What's more, not all TMSs are created equal. Some are best for software localization, while others have machine translation at their heart, or are focused on AI.

That's why it's critical to identify what you really need from a TMS before you take the plunge. In our experience, the following are some of the most important questions to ask yourself to help inform your decision.

1. How does a TMS contribute to our global content strategy?

Every translation decision you make should contribute to your global content strategy, and buying a TMS is no different. Consider why you want the TMS and what you need it to do:

- What's the business case?
- What business problem are you trying to solve?
- Or what opportunity are you trying to exploit?
- What's the scale of the problem/opportunity?
- How much is it costing you right now?
- What other options are available?

A TMS can be a useful tool in the localization process, but it won't be the right choice for every business handling global content. Do your research carefully to make sure it will deliver long-term value for you.

2. What are our must-haves?

Different TMSs have different features and strengths, so it's important to establish what your business really needs before you choose one.

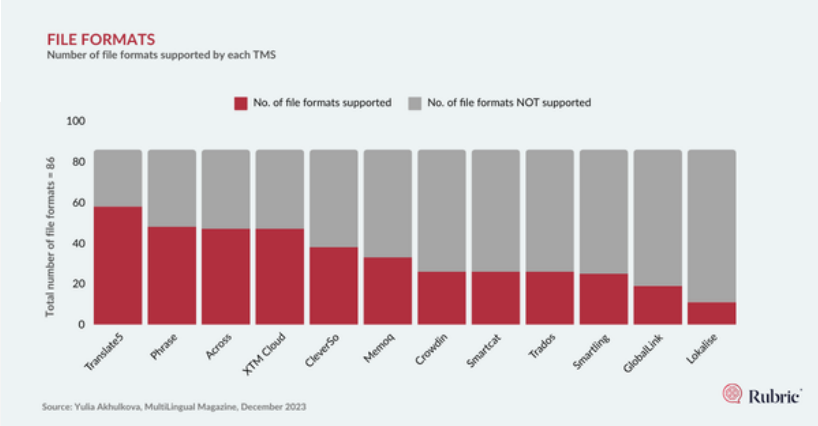
Look at your translation process as a whole. Remember to consult all the relevant departments and stakeholders—including third parties like translators, content creators, or your existing LSP. Find out how they would use the system and what features would benefit them most.

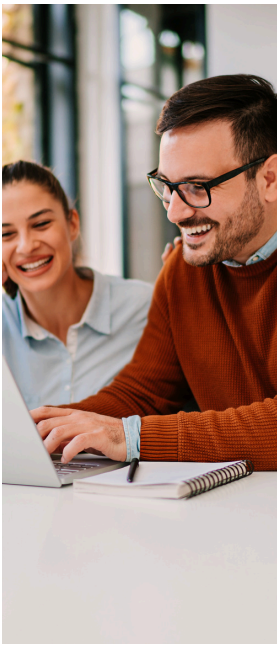
Not all TMSs can do everything. But, with your must-haves and nice-to-haves in mind, you can better judge the features, integrations, and add-ons that each system offers. Recent examples we have encountered are shown below:

Alongside core functionality, look carefully at the user experience. Is the system easy and intuitive to use for all parties? What support is on offer to get you and your team up to speed?

It also needs to be secure and reliable. How is your data protected and backed up? A tool that constantly crashes won't be a sound investment. But if something does go wrong, you need responsive, effective customer service.

Don't assume a TMS can support the content and file types your organization uses out-of-the-box. They offer less support for common file types than you might expect:





3. How will our operations scale and change in the future?

We have clients who have purchased a TMS that initially met their needs—but then struggled as their operations have grown and diversified.

Whether your projects become larger, you add languages, need more user licenses, or adopt new file formats, your TMS should be able to scale to meet your needs.

For example, we find that many TMS systems, particularly cloud-based ones, quickly start to struggle with large numbers of files or concurrent projects.

This future-proofing is one of the more challenging aspects of choosing a TMS, as we don't always know what lies ahead. But it all comes back to the strategy point—rather than simply shopping for today, keep in mind your business's long-term plans and objectives.

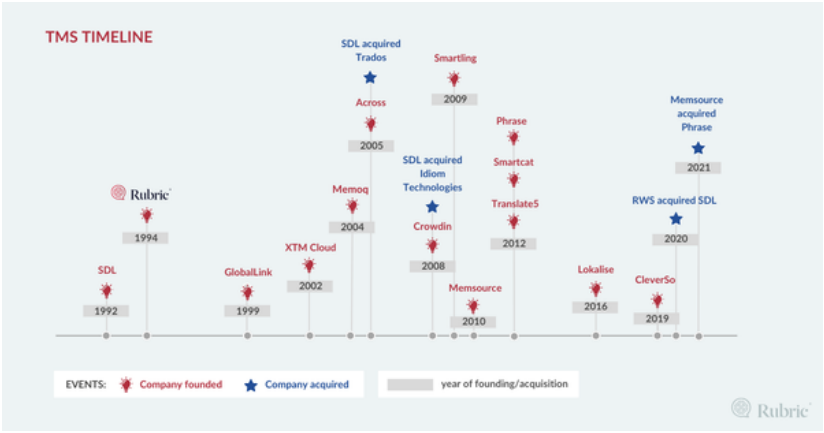
Beware product demos!

Whilst product demos offer a useful insight into a tool's interface and features they fail to show how the tool will work in real life.

If a user needs to set up a project to translate large files into 64 languages, while 12 translators are trying to access the CAT tool, four reviewers want to check content, and a project manager is trying to upload a new glossary, can the system handle all of that?

Product demos may also showcase features that aren't part of the standard set-up. Do your due diligence to avoid falling in love with a feature that ends up costing you extra.

Another consideration is how technology may change over time. The TMS landscape continues to evolve at pace and the last five years alone have seen significant changes with mergers and acquisitions alongside rapid developments in AI.



Will the TMS still meet your company's needs in the future?

4. What's my budget?

Buying a TMS can be expensive: one client we spoke to was quoted double their current annual localization spend.

And it's usually not a one-off cost. You'll need to factor in subscription fees and enough licenses for all your users (make sure you can scale up if your team grows). Custom features sound appealing, but you could find yourself paying dearly for add-ons such as machine translation engines or AI, integrations, or customized workflows and file type filters.

And don't forget the costs of set-up, maintenance, and training. A TMS isn't an out-of-the-box solution, and if it's not configured properly for your business you could end up spending more to fix problems down the line.

“A man is only as good as his tools”

This quote from Emmert Wolf is over a hundred years old. Perhaps the modern equivalent is “A tool is only as good as the humans that set it up and maintain it.”

A TMS must be optimized and customized to make a positive impact on your global content processes. That could mean optimizing workflows, integrating with content repositories or systems, customizing content filters, adding new file types, adjusting QA automations, or maintaining glossaries and translation memories… The list goes on.

Setting up and maintaining a customized TMS that meets the changing needs of a global business requires significant expertise, cost, and effort.

Who in your organization will take this on? How much support will your internal team need from the TMS provider? Do you have the budget and resources necessary to operate on your own?

If you opt to pay for technical support and/or upgrades, factor that into your costs. Ask how quickly your provider will fix bugs, adapt configurations, or make enhancements.

Be sure you understand the pricing structure—for example, it may depend on a certain number of users, volume of words, or files processed. Check that what you’re signing up to today is realistic and sustainable for the future.

To get buy-in for the new system, you’ll need to be able to demonstrate return on investment (ROI) and total economic impact (TEI). You may be challenged to find a cheaper option, but beware of making a false economy by cutting back on essential features. This is why it’s so important to understand what your TMS will deliver, and the value this represents compared to your current solution.

5. What's the alternative?

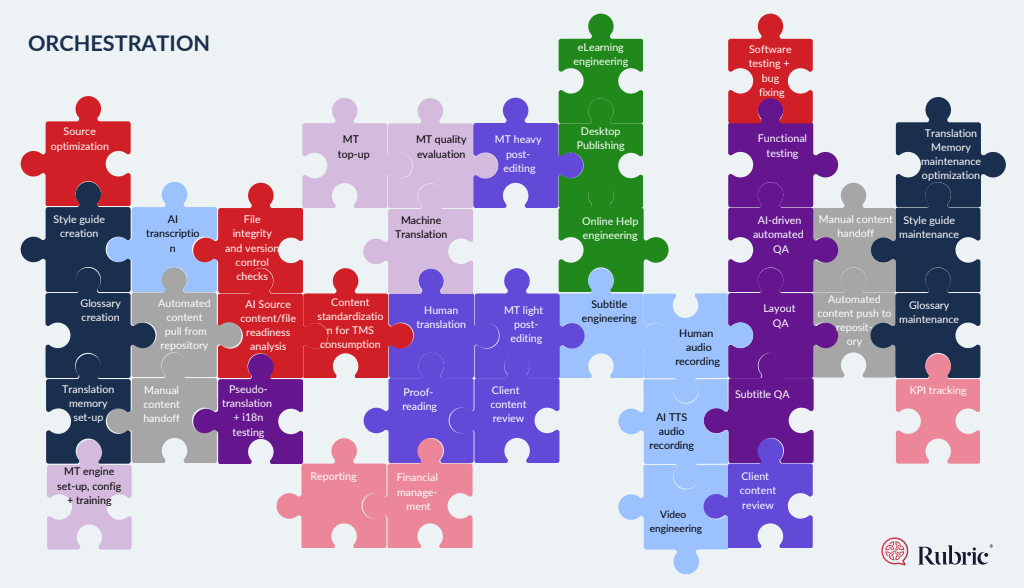
Can't find a TMS that fully meets your organization's needs? Unsure you have the expertise to make it work? Or maybe you can't justify the cost?

You're not alone. Many of our clients have asked the same questions. Rest assured that while a TMS undoubtedly plays a vital role in global content processes, it isn't a silver bullet.

In fact, we've found that no TMS can handle *all* steps of the localization process across *all* content types, departments, and workflows in a large global corporation. That's why we prefer to think of a TMS as one tool in the global content toolbox.

And at Rubric we're tool-agnostic. That means we figure out the best way to use our own unique suite of tools alongside best-in-class industry tools and a TMS—either our own, or one the client has chosen. This allows us to create bespoke workflows based on the most appropriate and effective tools and technology for your projects.

We call this approach orchestration: it's about bringing together the pieces of the localization jigsaw that will work for you and your content.



So, whether you buy a TMS or not, consider partnering with Rubric. You can rely on our 30+ years of experience, cutting edge tools, skills, knowledge, and process-building expertise—allowing you to concentrate on what you do best.

Why use our TMS?

Many of our clients start out thinking they need a TMS of their own. But, after researching all the options, they find greater benefit in using ours. Here are some of the reasons why:

- **Cost:** Enterprise-level TMSs are expensive, particularly when you factor in integrations, customization, and ongoing maintenance. Using our system lets you bypass those ownership costs, while our scale generates savings that we pass on to you.
- **Expertise:** We have dedicated experts managing and customizing our TMS. We know what works and we have the expert resources to constantly evolve and improve our TMS.
- **Efficiency:** Our TMS is built to support global businesses like yours.
- **Effort:** We take on the risks and the admin of managing the entire system, so you can concentrate on your business.

If you do decide your own TMS is the way forward, we'll be more than happy to work with you. But if you're still unsure, why not try using ours and see if it could make your life easier?

About Rubric

In 1994 Rubric was born as a result of our co-founders' passion for language, technology, and process optimization. Today, we are an employee-owned company and everyone at Rubric continues to be passionate about the way we work and feels empowered to give our clients the best experience possible.

Global success is not just about translating content. It requires much more than that.

Rubric works by embedding with our clients to become your localization partner. We take time to understand our clients' business, terminology, technology and content.

We work across all stages of the content lifecycle and become embedded in content processes. Our aim is always to reduce waste and minimize effort for all stakeholders whilst delivering content of the highest quality for our clients' global audience.

To learn more about how we can help you to develop a localization process that serves you well for years to come, email rebecca.metcalf@rubric.com.