

BEST PRACTICES GUIDE 03: SUBTITLING

Subtitles

Text that appears at the bottom of film or video, providing a translation of the voice track.

Titles

Any text appearing within the original post-production of a film or video.

Closed Captions

Text appearing in a black box that is a transcription of the original spoken language of a film or video, provided for hearing impaired viewers.



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Multilingual Media Services

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New York City, New York 10007

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Good subtitling, like a good roof, generally goes unnoticed. However, when subtitling is done badly, like a leaky roof, it is a real problem. Fortunately, good subtitling is easily achieved by qualified professionals following industry standard methods. The following summary of standard procedures provide the basis for excellent subtitling results.

Step 1. Evaluate the material carefully. Subtitling is often the most sensible and economical way to localize a film or video product. Sometimes, however, it is not the best way to proceed. If there is abundant use of on-screen text, subtitling is generally not appropriate. If there is rapid editing, or just a very busy background, subtitles may not work well. Foreign language post-production experts at InterNation can review the material and make necessary recommendations. They may suggest using a combination of subtitling and voice replacement or just voice replacement. This combined approach often produces an excellent result. On another note, depending on the intended audience, subtitles may not be appropriate for reasons of literacy or cultural habit.

Step 2. Select the subtitling provider carefully. What are the provider's capabilities? Are they using a computer based character generator, or will they insert graphic files that are generated off-line? If the target language has non-Roman, double-byte characters e.g. Chinese and Japanese, or bidirectional characters e.g. Hebrew or Arabic, the subtitling studio must have special capabilities. InterNation regularly creates subtitles in over 40 different languages containing all types of characters.

Step 3. Prepare for the translation. The voice track(s) must be transcribed as written text. This should be done well in advance so that the linguists can review the material. In addition, provide a VHS tape with visible time code—also know as “window time code.” This allows the translators to time the translation with the edits and the original spoken text. This is commonly referred to as **timecode spotting**.

Step 4. Translate. Translating for subtitles is a specialized process. The translation must be accurate and well written to be sure. However, it must also be timed properly and be edited such that each segment is the right size on the screen and the proper duration with respect to readability and the film or videos editing.

Step 5. Review/Edit. A linguist other than the translator(s) who did the translation reviews the translated text against the timed video, reading it for both translation and post-production quality assurance. Corrections are implemented as appropriate.

Step 6. Character generation. This is the actual creation of the subtitles.

Step 7. On-line editing. This is the marriage of subtitles as generated to the video or film master.

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Step 8. Final review. This is done on-site at the end of the editing by a native speaker other than the translator or editor i.e. by a fresh set of eyes.

InterNation, Inc. provides a full spectrum of foreign language services to a Fortune 1000 clientele. Services include translation, Web localization, electronic publishing, interpreting, subtitling and voice replacement for audio and video.

Our staff is dedicated to producing the highest quality work on time and on budget.

This guide is one of a series provided as a resource to current and prospective clients.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information.