

# DIVERSITY

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## Restaurants translate key documents to help employees with limited English skills

**R**estaurant companies increasingly hire translation services to recreate their employee handbooks, HR policies, training material and employment applications in Spanish, industry professionals and consultants say. Others go beyond mere paper documents: They offer on-line learning in Spanish.

“It shows you care,” says Vici Wilkerson, HR director, Fired Up Inc.

About 10 percent to 15 percent of the Austin, Texas-based restaurant chain’s employees have limited English skills, Wilkerson says. Although the company has been translating some materials for the past eight years, top leadership in the company realized two years ago that they had to translate as many of their employee documents as possible, Wilkerson says. The company—and its Spanish-speaking employee base—was growing and would continue to increase, she says.

Susana C. Schultz, senior managing director, Strictly Spanish, commends restaurant companies with such foresight. The Loveland, Ohio, company translates documents for White

Castle, Wendy’s, McDonald’s and Bob Evans restaurants. It also works with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation to translate ServSafe materials for Wendy’s, Schultz says.

Many restaurant companies ask bilingual employees to translate recipes or build charts, but they typically rely on translation-service companies for employee handbooks, descriptions of drug-testing procedures or health-care-benefit enrollment forms.

Bob Evans Farms Inc. won’t risk letting a bilingual supervisor orally interpret English-language benefits documents or policies to Spanish-speaking employees. Instead, it hired Strictly Spanish to translate its critical HR documents, Schultz says. “It ensures that people understand what they’re signing up for,” she says.

Tiffany Stith, human resources manager for Pasadena, Calif.-based Lawry’s Restaurants, says the company uses an in-house translator for most of its documents, but it’s looking for an outside consultant to translate some HR documents. “We



want someone who understands legal Spanish,” she says. For help, she asked for suggestions from her restaurant colleagues on the National Restaurant Association’s Human Resource Executive Study Group. She’s evaluating their recommendations.

Like Stith, many restaurant executives aren’t sure where to find qualified translators. In this report, translation experts recommend which documents to translate into other languages, and restaurant operators offer tips on how to find a qualified translation service.

### 6 tips to help find a translation service and improve translation quality

**Know your audience.** One restaurant company came to Minneapolis, Minn.-based Workplace Languages Inc. with a Spanish-language training manual that none of its Spanish-speaking employees understood. The problem: Most of the employees were from Central or South America, but the manual was written in Castilian, a dialect used in Spain, CEO Ed Rosheim says. Not only did the company waste \$25,000 on

## Common documents restaurant companies translate

- Notices about company events, especially employee-appreciation events
- 401K plan/form
- Build charts (for sandwiches, burgers, etc.)
- Employee benefits enrollment forms
- Employee handbook
- Employee satisfaction surveys
- Explanation of drug-testing policy and procedure
- Food-safety training
- Franchise training material
- Menu boards
- Newsletters
- Performance review forms (and explanation of procedures)
- Procedural manuals
- Recipes
- Safety training
- Sexual harassment training and policy
- Sick-leave policy

the Castilian version; it had to have the manual retranslated, he says. **Tip:** Find out where your workers are from.

“Correct Spanish is the Spanish spoken in your restaurant,” he says. Joleen Flory-Lundgren, vice president of human resources and training for Eden Prairie, Minn.-based Famous Dave’s of America, agrees: “We want to make sure our materials are in a dialect that everyone understands.”

**Look for translators or translation services familiar with restaurant terminology,** Rosheim suggests. A lot of English restaurant terms don’t translate directly into Spanish, Flory-Lundgren notes. If necessary, have translators spend time at the restaurant so they understand what goes into a certain dish and how it is prepared, Rosheim suggests.

For example, his company works with Dairy Queen so his translators need to be able to understand and describe a “Blizzard,” including the peanuts or candies swirled into the ice cream. Likewise, Strictly Spanish translators must be able to explain how and when to turn off the valve

for a Wendy’s Frosty, Schultz says.

**Think quality.** Find out from your translation service how many people will review your document before it goes to press, Wilkerson advises. You also need to know their qualifications. She asks for at least four references and looks for restaurants among them.

Spanish documents should go through the same writing and editing process as English documents. Otherwise, your company could appear unprofessional or condescending to employees and potential employees and customers.

**Case in point:** A few years ago, Fired Up discovered some problems with part of its no-smoking policy translation for employees. In English, the section read, “Violation of the smoking policy is reason for discipline, including termination.”

The company’s original Spanish document used the verb “castigar” for “discipline.” Normally used to correct children, the term is demeaning to adults. Fired Up corrected the original translation to use the more appropriate “tomar medi-

das disciplinarias,” or “takes disciplinary action.” Likewise, the restaurant company’s original translation of “termination” read “correr.” That’s akin to saying “being canned” or “getting the ax” in English, Wilkerson says.

“The written word is so different from the spoken word,” Wilderson says. “We’re not taking any more chances.”

**Ask your bilingual employees to review samples from the translation companies and look for errors,** Wilkerson recommends. You don’t want to make your company look unprofessional, Shultz adds. She recommends asking bilingual staff to point out any mistakes in documents you previously had translated, Shultz advises. “You have to match your translation service with your standards,” Schultz says.

**Have your employee-satisfaction surveys translated into other languages.** More restaurants look for input from their Spanish-speaking employees, says Elizabeth Montague, operations director, Spanglish Unlimited, Raleigh, N.C.

That’s how they find out why employees choose to stay—or why they would leave. That’s especially important for restaurants with high turnover, she says. Plus, employees recognize that employers appreciate them, and “Satisfied employees work harder and better,” Schultz says.

**Don’t assume that employees are illiterate just because they don’t speak English.** That’s a common misunderstanding, Schultz says. Columbus, Ohio-based Bob Evans almost made that mistake when it was develop-

ing on-line training courses, says Natalie Ward, director of management development and training.

Originally, the company wasn’t going to offer a Spanish-language version of some coursework because it thought too many people might be illiterate. But after talking with Schultz and other consultants, Ward and her colleagues learned that the percentage of illiterate Spanish-speaking employees was as low as the percentage of illiterate English-speakers. So, two years ago, the company launched on-line training in English and Spanish.

**Consult your attorney to help decide which HR documents to translate,** suggests Stuart Jennings, human resources director for standards and support, Restaurants Unlimited. “There’s liability there,” he says. The Seattle-based restaurant company found a local translator with a legal background through its attorney. “Legalese is a language unto itself,” Jennings notes. “It’s not a vocabulary that many people have.”

*Sources: Lawry’s Restaurants; Restaurants Unlimited; Spanglish Unlimited; Strictly Spanish, Workplace Languages Inc.*

## Resources

- **Spanglish Unlimited.** Raleigh, N.C. (919) 833-7967 [www.spanglish-unlimited.com](http://www.spanglish-unlimited.com)
- **Strictly Spanish** Loveland, Ohio (513) 683-3078 [www.strictlyspanish.com](http://www.strictlyspanish.com)
- **Workplace Languages Inc.** Minneapolis, Minn. (866) 330-9419 [www.workplacelanguages.com](http://www.workplacelanguages.com)