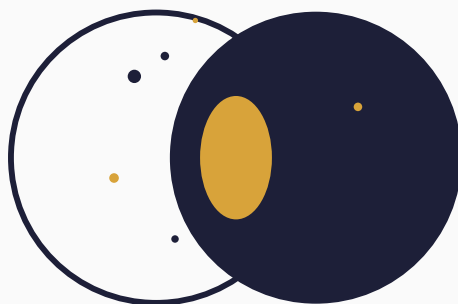


The Bilingual Site Checklist

A practical checklist for hiring (or being) the agency that builds your bilingual site.

Use this with any studio — including ours, including a competitor. If a vendor can't answer "yes" to most of these without hedging, they're selling you a translation plugin, not a bilingual site.

Plain-language explanations are built into every item. Where a term is genuinely technical, there's a link to an authoritative source so you (or your agency) can verify what "good" looks like without taking our word for it.



SECTION 1

URLs & technical foundations

URL written in each language: Your About page should live at `/about` in English and `/fr/a-propos` in French — not `/en/about` and `/fr/about`. The URL is part of how both humans and Google understand what a page is about, so it should read naturally in its own language.

Subdomain vs subdirectory: The French version of your site lives inside your main domain (e.g. `yoursite.com/fr/`), not on a separate address like `fr.yoursite.com` or `yoursite.fr`. The technical name for this is a *subdirectory*, versus a *subdomain* or a *country-code domain*. Subdirectory is almost always the right answer because it keeps your site's search reputation in one place instead of splitting it in two.

[Google's guide to multi-regional and multilingual sites →](#)

Canonical tag: Each language version points to itself as the "official" one, not to the other language. The *canonical tag* is a small piece of code that tells Google "this is the real version of this page." Your English page should say "I'm the canonical English page"; your French page should say "I'm the canonical French page." Never one pointing at the other. [Google's guide to canonical URLs →](#)

Hreflang tags: Every page tells Google which other languages it exists in. This is done with *hreflang* — a tag that lists all the language versions of a page so Google shows the right one to the right visitor. It's the single most commonly broken piece of bilingual SEO. Ask your vendor to show you a working example on an existing client site. [Google's guide to hreflang →](#)

Region codes: "French" can be written as `fr`, `fr-FR` (France), or `fr-CA` (Canada). Pick one strategy based on who your audience is, and use it on every single page consistently. Mixing them confuses search engines.

Sitemap: The file that tells Google every page you have (called a *sitemap*) lists each page in each language, with the other languages declared alongside it. [Google's guide to sitemaps →](#)

SECTION 2

Content (it's about localization, not translation)

Native authoring, not machine translation: Every public page is written from scratch in each language by a fluent speaker — never run through Google Translate or a translation plugin as the only step. Machine translation is fine as a starting draft; it is not fine as the finished page.

Page structure can differ per language: The French homepage doesn't have to have the same sections in the same order as the English one. The goal is a page that works for the reader in front of it, not a mirror of the other language.

Testimonials in their original language: A French testimonial in French on the French page is a trust signal. The same testimonial translated into the other language reads as theater. If you must translate one, label it as translated and include the original.

Case studies matched to audience: Each language version leads with a client recognizable to that language's audience. If all your French page's success stories are American companies, French visitors will assume you don't actually have French clients.

Calls-to-action rewritten, not translated: "Book a strategy call" in English might become "*Parlons de votre projet*" ("let's talk about your project") in French — not a word-for-word translation. The verb, the tone, and the microcopy should feel native in each language.

Imagery selection per language: Same visual style, but the photos on the French page should feature cultural cues a French reader recognizes, not stock photos of American suburbs.

SECTION 3

Ownership & operations

Named owners per language: Every piece of content has three named people per language: who writes it, who reviews it, who publishes it. Not "the team" — actual names. If you can't fill in a grid of six people (write/review/publish × English/French), your second language will fall behind within months.

Bilingual content calendar: A single calendar covers both languages, with one firm rule — *neither language is allowed to block the other*. If the French version of an article isn't ready, ship the English one anyway and add French when it's done.

Customer support policy: A written policy covers who replies in which language, and how quickly. Customers will email you in whichever language they prefer. Don't figure this out on the fly.

Reviews in the original language: You ask customers for reviews in the language they did business with you in. This produces a review profile that feels authentic to bilingual visitors, instead of looking like everything was sourced from one market.

CMS parity: Editing the French version of your site is just as easy as editing the English version. If one language is harder to update than the other, that language will rot. Test this yourself before launch by editing a page in both languages.

Primary market decided and documented: You have decided — and written down — which market is your primary market. Not which one you prefer — which one currently funds the business, or which one you're betting on. When the two languages disagree, this is how you settle it.

SECTION 4

Cultural defaults (the quiet conversion killers)

Pricing convention — match what you actually bill: Pricing follows the currency and tax regime you invoice in, not the language of the page. If you bill in EUR with TVA, show prices *TTC* (tax included — the French standard) on the French page. If you bill in USD pre-tax, show pre-tax USD on *both* language versions — but on the French page, label the currency unmistakably as USD and add one line on tax treatment for international clients (e.g. "EU B2B clients: reverse-charge VAT applies"). Don't convert to EUR on the fly — exchange rates move and the number goes stale. The credibility killer isn't using one convention over the other — it's leaving a French B2B visitor unsure which currency or tax regime applies to them.

Trust signals per market: US buyers want logos, scale, outcome metrics, and founder credentials. French buyers tend to want longevity ("founded in 2008"), seriousness, named clients, and restraint. Same brand, different proof.

Form length per market: US buyers expect short forms and get impatient fast. French B2B buyers often tolerate — sometimes prefer — slightly longer forms with more context up front.

Urgency tactics: Countdown timers and "only 3 left" badges are not used on French business-to-business pages by default. They work in some US contexts. They almost always read as pushy and cheap in French B2B.

Legal compliance per market: Your site meets the legal requirements of each market it serves:

- **GDPR** (Europe's data protection law) if you have any French, European, or UK visitors. [European Commission overview →](#)
- **ADA** (US accessibility law) for your English US audience. [ADA.gov web guidance →](#)
- **Bill 96** (Québec's French-language law) if you're targeting Québec specifically — French must be "markedly predominant" on commercial materials. [Québec government overview →](#)
- **CASL** (Canadian anti-spam law) if you email anyone in Canada. [CRTC overview →](#)
- **WCAG 2.1 AA** — the international standard for web accessibility, referenced by most of the laws above. [W3C WCAG overview →](#)

Dates, numbers, and currency formats: Local convention applies. 04/07/2026 means April 7 in the US and July 4 in France. Never assume.

SECTION 5

Launch & post-launch checks

Hreflang tested, not just installed: Ask your vendor to run at least five page pairs through Google Search Console's URL Inspection tool and show you the results. Installing hreflang and testing hreflang are not the same thing.

Structured data in both languages: Your pages carry *structured data* — small pieces of code that help Google understand what each page is (the most common types are `Article` and `FAQPage`). It must be present in both languages, not just the primary one. [Google's guide to structured data](#) →

Analytics split by language: Your dashboards default to showing the two languages side by side, not blended. Looking at a blended number hides which market is actually healthy and which one is dying quietly.

Core Web Vitals on mobile: The site loads fast on mobile in both languages — specifically, it passes Google's *Core Web Vitals*, a set of three speed and stability measurements Google uses as a ranking signal. French pages are often longer than English ones, so test both. [web.dev guide to Core Web Vitals](#) →

30-day post-launch content plan: A content plan exists for both languages for the first 30 days after launch — not just a launch sprint. The most common failure mode is a great launch followed by six months of silence on the secondary language.

6-month kill-or-grow review scheduled: A review of your secondary language is scheduled for six months post-launch, with a clear "keep investing or formally retire" decision. Leaving a half-alive second-language site public is worse than not having one at all.

How to use this sheet

If you're hiring an agency: send this checklist with your RFP. Ask them to mark every item they will own, and every item they expect you to own. Pay attention to how they handle the items they can't answer cleanly — that's where the project will actually break.

If you're auditing your current site: walk this from top to bottom with whoever looks after the site today. Every red item is a known risk. The section with the most red items is where to start.

If you're building it yourself: use this as your acceptance criteria. Don't call it done until every item is checked.

The Bilingual Site Checklist is part of [The Bilingual Website Playbook](#), published by Oui Digital — a bilingual web studio in San Diego. We give this sheet away because the trust move only works if it's frictionless. If it helps you hire someone else, that's a fair outcome. v1.0 — April 2026.