THE DTP COST CHECKLIST

Six questions. Ninety seconds. Before the estimate leaves your office.

From the ATC Technology Showcase, 30 September 2026

1 Do you have the native source?

A PDF is a photograph of a document. Somewhere there is an InDesign file, a Word file, a FrameMaker book that made it.

> Ask for it before you quote, not after you win. For InDesign you need the package — the INDD, the linked images and the fonts.

2 Is the text really text?

Highlighting proves nothing. Font encoding, outlined headings and mixed-origin pages all look fine and extract as nonsense.

> The 15-second test: copy a paragraph and paste it into a plain-text editor. If what comes back isn't what was on the page, you're doing OCR whether you quoted for it or not.

3 What is trapped inside the pictures?

Word count tells you about text your tools can see. Machine translation cannot translate what it cannot see — it returns a beautifully translated document with the diagram still in English.

> Scroll the document and count the figures. Then ask whether the editable source graphics exist.

4 Where does it expand, and is there room?

German, Finnish, Russian run 20–35% longer. In a flowing Word report that costs nothing. In a fixed three-column brochure every page needs a decision.

> RTL isn't expansion at all — Arabic, Hebrew and Urdu are a mirrored rebuild. Pricing Arabic as a language rather than a rebuild is a reliable way to lose money.

5 Will it round-trip?

Your CAT tool will import almost anything. That is not the same as giving it back intact. Watch FrameMaker books, Flare, PowerPoint autofit, Word fields, Excel formulas, and anything out of Canva or Figma.

> And agree the do-not-translate list: part numbers, codes, units, brand names. A helpfully translated part number is a data error, and in regulated work it gets the deliverable rejected.

6 What are you actually contracted to deliver?

"Translated" is not a specification. Print-ready PDF, editable working file, files for the client's own DTP team, or an accessible PDF to PDF/UA, WCAG and the EAA.

> Accessibility is the most under-quoted line in this industry right now.

Then count how many came back as a problem

NONE
quote from your standard rate card.

ONE OR TWO
quote it, but with the assumption named in writing in the quote.

THREE OR MORE
don't quote a fixed price. Quote hourly, quote a paid assessment, or ask for a sample.

What a rebuild actually costs

Our own estimating-desk figures. What moves the number is the layout, not the language or the word count.

Native editable source	minimal preparation. It is already a document.
Clean digital PDF	**6 to 8 pages an hour.**
Scanned PDF	**3 to 5 pages an hour.**
Scanned, with tables, in a non-Latin script	**2 to 4 pages an hour.**

Multiply by your own hourly cost, and compare it to what the native file would have cost you: nothing.

Three clauses for your quote template

The third one is the quiet killer.

01

Scope assumes the native editable source. If only a PDF is supplied, file preparation is quoted separately on inspection.

02

Text inside images, charts and embedded objects is outside the word count and quoted as graphics rework per item.

03

In-country review is a production cycle. Each round of client changes after delivery is quoted separately.

Send this to your client's design studios

Five things that break an InDesign file, and what to ask for instead. Every one is free to fix before the file exists.

WHAT BREAKS IT	ASK FOR THIS INSTEAD
✕ **No room left for expansion**	→ ask for the layout to allow the text to grow by a third.
✕ **No paragraph styles**	→ ask for every line on a named style.
✕ **Line breaks forced by hand**	→ ask for text wrap, never shift-enter.
✕ **Text converted to outlines**	→ ask for live text, and the fonts with it.
✕ **Layers mixed up**	→ ask for one named layer holding all the text.

Layout QA you can do without reading the language

Most layout defects are language-independent. Whoever did the layout can catch them.

- ☐ Paragraph and segment count parity — a mismatch means something merged, split or vanished.
- ☐ Figure, table and caption numbering — sequential, complete, matching the source count.
- ☐ Do-not-translate items byte-identical. Numbers and dates unchanged, separators localised.
- ☐ Page count, allowing for expansion. 40 English pages back as 38 German has lost something.
- ☐ Cross-references resolve. Hyperlinks live, and pointing where the source points.
- ☐ No overset, no overflow, no autofit shrink.

Send us the one worst file you received this year.

We'll run these six questions on it and send back a written assessment of what it would actually cost you.

No charge, no pitch.

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