



## **Client Education: Ensuring a Positive Experience**

Choosing the right individual or company to handle the needs of your international clients or foreign-language documentation can mean the difference between winning and losing in the global marketplace. As a consumer, it is a good idea to arm yourself with as much knowledge as possible about the translation and interpretation industry so that you can choose the individual or company that best fits your needs. Just as with any other field of business, the elements of trust, reliability, and performance are of major importance. By establishing a relationship with proven individuals or companies, rather than trying to find the cheapest company every time you need work done, you can look forward to a successful long-term partnership. This information is presented to help educate prospective clients about the translation and interpretation industry and to smooth the way to a satisfying experience for all involved parties.

### **Translator or interpreter?**

The terms translator and interpreter are commonly confused, but the distinction between the two is quite simple. Translators work with written material and interpreters render spoken communication. Both are language specialists and should be knowledgeable in the subject matter at hand. Good writing and research skills are vital for translators, just as good analytical skills and speaking ability are crucial for interpreters.

Translators can produce idiomatically correct, accurate work more quickly and easily when translating into their native language. Some translators have lived in another country so long that they have achieved a high level of competence in the new language, and prefer to work into it. This language becomes their dominant language. Note that a person cannot have more than one dominant language, any more than s/he can have more than one native language. Some translators claim to be bilingual, to have grown up with two equally developed languages. It is well to be skeptical of such statements until they are proven.

Interpreters working in one-on-one or small group situations must alternate between interpreting into and out of their native language. This style of interpreting is most often referred to as consecutive interpreting and is applicable for most medical, legal and general business settings. For conference situations when the speaker is delivering a paper or conducting business to a large group of people in a different language than that of the audience, conference or “simultaneous” interpreters should be used. This type of interpreting involves the rental of a specialized audio system with headsets for the audience and a soundproof booth for the team of interpreters. Because of the high stress of their work, conference interpreters prefer to work from the foreign language into their native language, and should work in teams of two switching off frequently.

### **Individual or Company?**

The client has the choice of working with an individual or a company for their foreign-language needs. An individual, or freelance translator or interpreter works directly with clients. Individuals also frequently contract their services to translation and/or interpretation companies. A translation and/or interpretation

company either has a staff of in-house translators and interpreters, or contracts with a wide variety of freelance individuals to work on a client's project. There are strong arguments for both and the ultimate decision may well depend upon the specific needs of the client.

Working with an individual may be more economical and the client has the added flexibility of dealing directly with the person performing the work. In a long-term working relationship, the individual is able to focus on the client's business, adapt to certain style and formatting specifications and learn company-specific terminology.

Translation and/or interpretation companies, on the other hand, offer the consumer the convenience of a wide variety of languages and subject specialties. In addition to managing multilingual projects and offering editing, proofreading and desktop publishing, these companies often provide a wide array of services such as software and Web site localization, software testing, glossary management, and simultaneous interpreting equipment rental.

## **Qualifications**

It is a good idea to check references of all individuals and translation and/or interpretation companies before contracting with them. In addition to asking some previous clients about the caliber of work performed, find out if it was delivered on time, if the prospective provider was able to follow detailed instructions and if those involved were courteous and easy to work with.

Examinations for court interpreting are available at the federal level, and in some areas at the state level, for certain languages. The Office of the Administrator for the Courts of the State of Washington offers a court interpreter certification program for interpreters working in Cambodian, Cantonese, Korean, Laotian, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Unlike some foreign countries, the United States has no examinations for certified or sworn translators. Since there is no licensing examination on the federal, state or local level for translators, professional experience, formal education in translation, and certification from organizations such as the American Translators Association are good indications of a serious translator. This information is provided in the individual and translation and/or interpretation company profiles contained in the NOTIS Directory for your convenience.

Clients often request a "certified translation" for immigration documentation, legal papers or sensitive material. As with the misnomer "certified translators," there is no such thing as a "certified translation" in the United States. A separate statement with the translator's or the translation and/or interpretation company's notarized signature fulfills this requirement for official purposes.

## **The Client's Role**

Clients can play an important role in the success of their own project. For interpretation and translation projects alike, lead-time is very important. Contact your prospective individual or translation and/or interpretation company as far ahead of time as possible. This costs you nothing, and does not obligate you. Interpreters need to know the dates and times when their services will be needed so they can plan their schedules accordingly. Translators need to have deadlines, even if only tentative, so they can assign priorities. Do not expect work to be done overnight or even within a few days. The longer and more technical the text the longer the time required for a good translation. It is not a good idea to request a "rough" translation that requires almost as much work as a final copy, but may contain errors or ambiguities. A surcharge may be levied for a rush job.

Most individuals can handle general material with minimal difficulty. However, if your translation or interpretation assignment involves specialized terminology and industry knowledge, you will do well to seek out someone whose background and qualifications match your needs. If your prospective provider is uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the subject matter, s/he should refuse the assignment, but may be able to refer you to a specialist.

For translation projects, it is helpful to provide as much information as possible about the documents and the intended audience. Be prepared to field questions regarding industry jargon, highly specialized terminology or text that is not clear in the source document. If your company has glossaries or previously translated materials, make them available to the translator—it will ensure terminology consistency and improve the final product.

Specify clearly your timeline, any special formatting or desktop publishing expectations and how you would like the final translation to be delivered. With the advent of email, a large portion of translation work today is conveniently assigned and delivered electronically.

For interpreting assignments, be prepared to provide background information and reference material regarding the subject matter and nature of the assignment. The sooner the interpreter receives this information, the better prepared he or she will be at the time of the appointment. Whether he or she will be interpreting for two individuals or in a conference setting with a large audience, it is helpful for the interpreter to know how many and what type of people will be participating.

When the project is complete, don't be afraid to provide constructive feedback. As a specialist in your own field, you can offer valuable tips, terminology or reference materials to which the translator or interpreter may not have access. Sharing your viewpoint will serve only to improve future work.

## **Payment**

Rates vary depending upon the type of service offered. Interpreters charge by the hour or sometimes by the day and will often have a minimum charge to account for the possibility of a short or cancelled appointment. Rates are usually higher for the more specialized conference and simultaneous interpreting. Reimbursement of travel, parking and other expenses is often negotiable and should be confirmed in writing.

Text length and complexity are the determining factors for translation charges. Translators usually charge by the word, line, page or total text. Services such as extensive formatting, desktop publishing or editing may incur additional charges. Individuals and translation and/or interpretation companies alike are usually willing to provide free estimates. Some translators base their fees on the length of the final translated or “target” text, while others prefer quoting a price based on the “source” text. For an accurate comparison, request a total dollar estimate, since many languages expand considerably in translation.

Once you have decided whose services you will engage, you should be prepared to sign some type of a contract. Whether it be a formally prepared contract, a company purchase order or a letter of commitment, it should set out the terms of your agreement including such things as services agreed upon, delivery date, delivery mode and price. Clear communication should pave the way to a positive professional relationship.

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