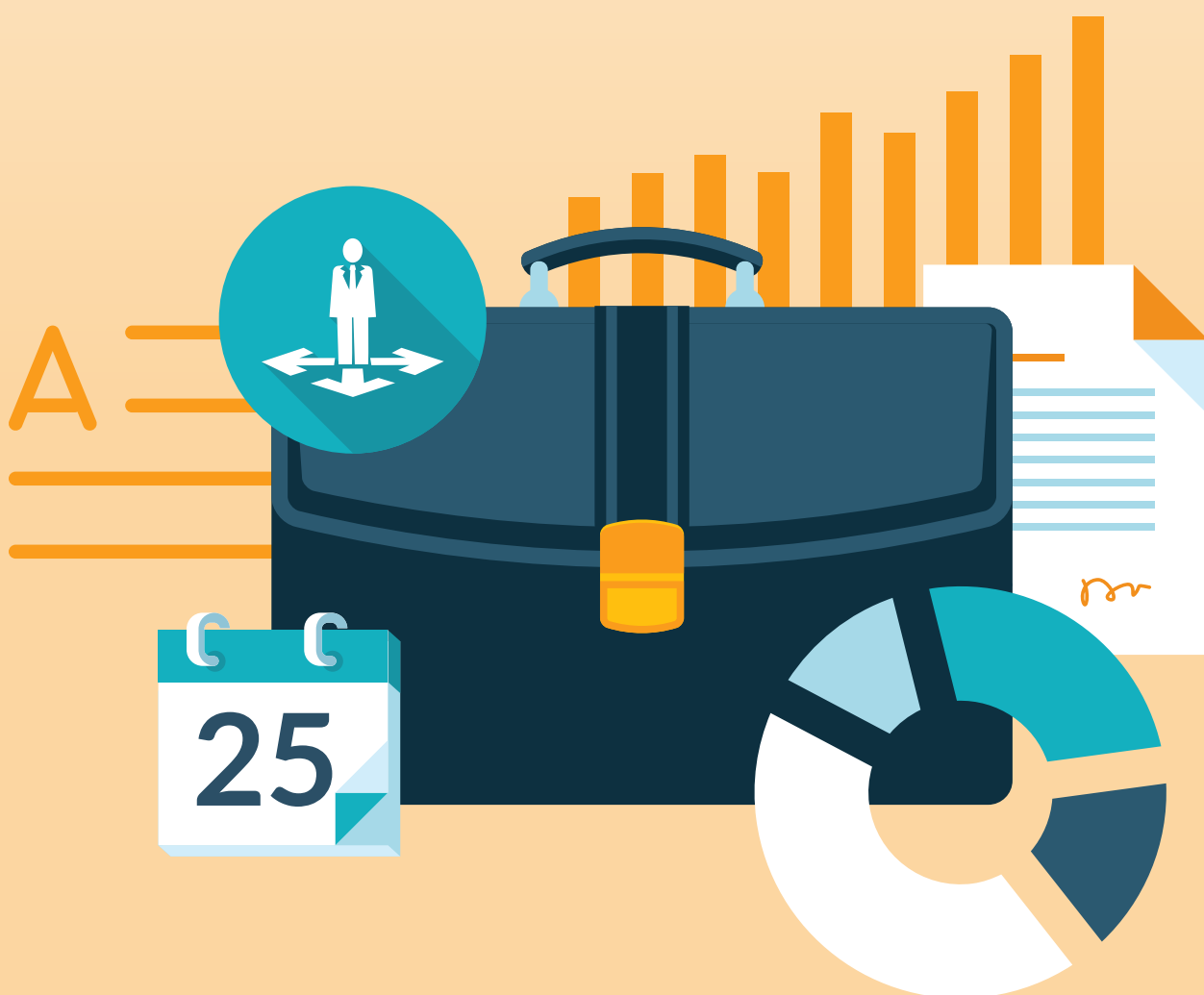


# WORKING WITH AGENCIES DEMYSTIFIED



A guide for freelance translators



**Copyright © Nicole Y. Adams, NYA Communications 2014**

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, translated, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, scanning, or any other means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

#### **Disclaimer**

All material contained in this book is provided for educational and informational purposes only. The author takes no responsibility for any results or outcomes resulting from the use of this material.

While every attempt has been made to provide information that is both accurate and effective at the time of publication, the author does not assume any responsibility for the accuracy and/or use or misuse of this information. Further, the author does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for third-party websites or their content.

Author: Nicole Y. Adams

Publisher: NYA Communications

Editor: Adele Anderson

First edition: October 2014

ISBN: 978-0-9874777-6-7

# CONTENTS

Types of agency	4
Due diligence	6
Set the tone	7
Negotiate	8
Become a preferred supplier	8
Avoid scammers	11
Test translations	12
CAT tools and match discounts	12
Over to you	13

# WORKING WITH AGENCIES DEMYSTIFIED

**A**s self-employed translation professionals, we are free to work with whatever clients and in whatever area of specialisation we choose. Some translators decide to work only for agencies, some work with a mix of select agencies and direct clients, and some prefer to work only with direct clients. Each business model is legitimate.

When starting out, most freelancers will initially target translation agencies rather than direct clients, and this is perfectly acceptable. Even some established freelance translators prefer to work for (high-end) agencies rather than direct clients, as they enjoy the constant workflow without having to take care of administrative tasks, sales and client acquisition. Let's take a look at what to bear in mind and how to go about generating paid work through agencies, as well as the potential pitfalls.

## Types of agency

As you will no doubt have heard, there are several different types of agency. There are the high-end, quality-driven small to medium-size agencies who are usually willing to pay top dollar for a great service, and there are the run-of-the-mill, large, faceless agencies who live on margins and try to drive translator rates down to make more profit, as well as all kinds of agencies in between. In general, you won't be able to make a living working for the low-rate type



of company. Having said that, as a beginner, getting those first few texts under your belt and obtaining referrals is crucial. Many translators therefore find themselves taking on a few less than ideal assignments in their first few months to build their portfolio and get positive feedback that they can then publish on their websites or profiles.

**“THERE ARE THE HIGH-END, QUALITY-DRIVEN SMALL TO MEDIUM-SIZE AGENCIES WHO ARE USUALLY WILLING TO PAY TOP DOLLAR FOR A GREAT SERVICE, AND THERE ARE THE RUN-OF-THE-MILL, LARGE, FACELESS AGENCIES WHO LIVE ON MARGINS AND TRY TO DRIVE TRANSLATOR RATES DOWN TO MAKE MORE PROFIT.”**

If you go down that road, make sure you realise this is only a stepping stone to the better-paying market segment and do not get stuck at this end of the market! As soon as you have a couple of glowing references and a handful of projects under your belt, start looking for better agencies and quote correspondingly high rates. You can feel confident and have something to show off (positive feedback and a growing portfolio!).

While it's okay to start out as a generalist to gain experience and really get to know the tricks of the trade before becoming a specialist in one or two areas, it pays to have a clear idea of what rates you find acceptable and never go below your minimum amount, even as a complete beginner.

Once you have some experience and positive feedback (I can't stress the importance of this enough!), and the confidence this will naturally bring with it, you can start to identify and approach higher-end agencies. A good starting point is to look at the [ProZ.com BlueBoard](#) and search for agencies with 5-star ratings. Check what feedback other translators have posted and see if they are good payers. (See 'Due diligence' below.) Make a shortlist of agencies and start to compose your tailored cover letters.



When quoting a rate, there is no place for false modesty. It is normal to quote a higher rate and then negotiate with the agency; you will usually end up agreeing on a price somewhere in the middle. Of course, the obvious way to go is to quote at least a couple of cents higher than your ideal rate so you'll achieve your target rate even if you negotiate a couple of cents down.



**“ WHEN QUOTING A RATE, THERE IS NO PLACE FOR FALSE MODESTY. IT IS NORMAL TO QUOTE A HIGHER RATE AND THEN NEGOTIATE WITH THE AGENCY; YOU WILL USUALLY END UP AGREEING ON A PRICE SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE.”**

## Due diligence

When you receive an enquiry from a new client, it is important to make sure it is a serious, solvent company before blindly rushing into accepting the assignment. There are a number of steps you can take to ensure due diligence:

1. Did the client email you from the company's official corporate email address or a free webmail address? A freemail address can be a red flag when the client claims to represent a large corporation. Ask them to contact you via their official company email address, or contact the company to double-check the person is really employed there and authorised to order translations.
2. Research the company on the Internet. Take a look at the company's website to check their registered address. Verify that they are solvent and have a good credit history by visiting business information websites such as [Companies House](#) in the UK.
3. Consult the numerous payment practices forums and groups available to freelance translators. (See Links below for details.) This is an excellent way of gathering information on a company's payment practices first-hand from colleagues who have already worked for them.
4. If you are a member of a professional association, search their forums or mailing lists to see if the company in question has already been discussed. If not, post on the list or in the forum to ask colleagues who may have already worked for your potential new client for information or feedback.
5. Before proceeding, it is advisable to request an official purchase order (PO) from your new client.
6. If in doubt, ask for pre-payment. A couple of times I was contacted by companies with a poor track record on the ProZ.com BlueBoard. I requested pre-payment, and in both cases, I was paid instantly by PayPal before starting the translation. As the service provider, you are free to ask for pre-payment to minimise your risk. A lot of the time, the client will agree; if they don't, it probably wasn't worth the risk of working with them anyway.
7. Trust your gut feeling! If an assignment looks too good to be true, it usually is! If you are not comfortable, walk away.





### Websites and groups discussing translation agency payment practices:

[Zahlungspraxis](#) (German Yahoo group)

[Payment Practices](#)

[WorldPaymentPracticesFree](#) (Yahoo group)

[Speaking Dolphins](#) (Facebook group)

[Translation Agencies Business Practices](#)  
(LinkedIn group)

[ProZ.com BlueBoard](#)

[Translation Agency Payment](#) (Yahoo group)

### Set the tone

When you decide to work with an agency, you are an equal business partner. As a freelance translator, an employee mindset needs to be abandoned as quickly as possible. When

you communicate, adopt a professional, courteous tone and don't see yourself as a servant. You are providing a service which your client, the agency, is purchasing. In other words, you are a professional whose skills are hired for the duration of a project.

You decide on your rates, and the agency can accept them or, if you are too expensive, find another translator who is within their budget. You decide whether the agency's proposed deadline fits in with your schedule or not. It's important to bear in mind that it's not the agency's place to dictate prices or deadlines. You, as the professional being hired, stipulate these conditions. The same goes for payment terms. Decide for yourself what payment terms and methods are acceptable to you, and stick to them. Don't accept anything you consider inappropriate (such as 60 days from the end of the month of invoice receipt).

As a beginner, in particular, this can be intimidating and it is very tempting to accept any offer of a job, just so you can get work, but try to adopt a professional approach early on in your career to save





yourself a lot of hassle. It's important to realise that you, as the freelancer, are in a powerful position. You can exist without agencies, but agencies cannot exist without translators. Know your worth, and you will attract the right types of agency!

### Negotiate

New freelance translators often have little or no experience in business, and negotiating with companies may seem a bit daunting at first, but it's important that you don't shy away from or worry about negotiating. Good agencies expect to negotiate.

Never accept the first rate an agency counteroffers you for fear of being rejected. This will rarely happen. The usual procedure is for you to quote, say, \$0.16. Then the agency will get back to you stating that this is way over budget and they can only afford to pay \$0.12. At this point, don't make the

mistake of hastily accepting their offer. You should respond with a final counteroffer of \$0.14, which the agency will expect and likely accept. Negotiating can be nerve-wracking at the start, but you'll quickly get used to it and feel more at ease.

### Become a preferred supplier

Reputable agencies and end clients typically have a select pool of translators they use time and time again and contact about new projects before everyone else – their preferred suppliers. It can be very profitable to become a preferred supplier for a handful of businesses.

What does being a preferred supplier entail?

- **Appropriate rates** – Your clients want to work with you over other freelance translators, so they will agree to pay your rates just to secure your services, even if it means spending a bit more.
- **First right of refusal** – One of the best perks of being a preferred supplier! You are your client's top choice, so you will always be contacted first about any new translation projects. Only if you refuse, because you are busy or otherwise not available, will the client contact other freelancers on their books.
- **Regular, timely payments** – If you enter into a long-term relationship with a company as a preferred supplier, you will have made sure that





you are comfortable working with the client, and that they are reliable payers. That means that once you've established a trusted relationship, you won't have to worry about late payments or the risk of non-payment, because your select clients will pay you on a regular basis as agreed.

How can you become a preferred supplier?

- **Be courteous and professional at all times.** – Other companies are also staffed by humans, and people need to like you in order to want to do business with you.
- **Reply promptly.** – Clients will often want answers as soon as possible and may get annoyed if they don't hear

from you for two days. So make an effort to always reply to client enquiries as soon as you can. This applies especially to requests for quotes (which could lead to new projects) and queries about ongoing projects.

- **Be 100% reliable.** – Never let the client down! If you run into

“ONCE YOU'VE ESTABLISHED A TRUSTED RELATIONSHIP, YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT LATE PAYMENTS OR THE RISK OF NON-PAYMENT, BECAUSE YOUR SELECT CLIENTS WILL PAY YOU ON A REGULAR BASIS AS AGREED.”

unforeseen problems, let the client know immediately; don't wait until five minutes before the deadline. If you raise issues early on, the client or project manager will have enough time to adapt their schedule or plan accordingly on their side. They will also appreciate your professional approach and excellent communication. If you can't deliver on time, let them know why and offer an alternative delivery date and time.

- **Ask questions.** – Is something unclear in the source text? Does the author use an ambiguous term that cannot be translated without more context? Ask your client while you are working on the translation rather than after delivery. Don't hide behind translator's notes; be proactive instead!
- **Point out errors.** – Did you spot a glaring typo or obvious error in the source document? Make a note and let your client know. They will appreciate the effort.
- **Offer small freebies.** – For regular, long-term clients, why not offer to translate short sentences or micro projects consisting of just a few words or even lines free of charge every once in a while? Very often it would cost you more to set up the job in your system, log all the details and issue an invoice than just do a few words free of charge as a token of good will. If you complete a 5000-word project, for example, and the client asks you to translate an extra sentence for the same project a couple of days later, do you really want to apply your minimum charge?
- **Go the extra mile.** – While this shouldn't become a regular occurrence, it will very likely pay off in the long term if you help your client out in emergencies. If need be, stay up until midnight or switch on your PC on a Sunday to help him complete his urgent project. Remember that you are working with fellow human beings, and they will certainly remember your flexibility if you help them out of a dire situation.
- **Offer extra services.** – Your client may order a translation and not be aware of other closely related services. Do you think the client's brand name or slogan won't work in the target market? Try selling him consulting services where you can provide cultural and linguistic advice. Do you usually compile a glossary for your projects? Try selling the client a dedicated glossary with his specialist terminology. Very often, clients don't





think about glossaries and will jump at the chance to purchase one. Just see what works in your language combination and area of expertise, and make a shortlist of potential extras you could offer.

## Avoid scammers

Sadly, the translation industry has attracted more than its fair share of scammers in recent years, and this trend continues unabated. There are several types of scams specifically targeted at translators and/or agencies. Let's take a look at the two most common scams related to clients (Source: ProZ.com's comprehensive [Translator Scam Alert Center](#) database).

### Ghost client scam

The scammers will contact you asking for

your professional services just like any other client would do, but they have no plans to pay you and will provide fake contact information to deceive you and to prevent prosecution. Your main line of defence against this kind of scam is a solid risk management procedure (see 'Due diligence').

### Impersonated client scam

The scammers will contact you asking for your professional services impersonating a legitimate outsourcer. The first line of risk management (evaluation of the outsourcer) will give you the wrong information if you fail to notice that the request comes from a cheat disguised as the legitimate client. The main challenge in this case is to make sure that the person contacting you on behalf of an outsourcer is entitled to represent them.



**SADLY, THE TRANSLATION INDUSTRY HAS ATTRACTED MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF SCAMMERS IN RECENT YEARS, AND THIS TREND CONTINUES UNABATED. THERE ARE SEVERAL TYPES OF SCAMS SPECIFICALLY TARGETED AT TRANSLATORS."**

Checking email addresses and their IP addresses is a valuable source of information. An alleged project manager of a London-based firm sending an email from Nigeria is a bad sign. A project manager from a corporate agency (for instance, big\_agency) using a free email (big\_agency@gmail.com) should also activate a lot of red lights. More difficult to detect are email addresses where just a small change has been made to the address (for instance @big-agency instead of @big\_agency). Calling the company asking for confirmation is a good precaution.

The worst situation is when a translator's email address has been compromised or stolen by a scammer, who will then be able to ask you for a job from the legitimate address of a colleague without the email owner being aware of the scam. When in doubt, it is always a good idea to seek confirmation using a different channel (text message, phone call, Skype, for example).

A different version of the stolen identity scam has the scammer allegedly acting on behalf of a known colleague to help him/her after an incapacitating blow such as a stroke or an accident. Be especially alert in such cases and don't forget to validate the situation through an independent channel.

In-depth information on scams targeted at translator is available in the [Translator Scammer Directory](#).

### Test translations

Translation agencies often ask translators to complete test translations. This in itself

is nothing unusual. End clients often want to choose their preferred translator, so agencies will send a short test out to several translators on their books, and the client chooses their favourite translation. The translator will then become the client's preferred translator and the agency will allocate all assignments for that client to this translator. Some agencies pay for test translations, while most will expect you to complete them free of charge, with the prospect of gaining repeat business if your translation is chosen as the best by the client. It is also possible to come to an arrangement whereby you are paid for the test translation, but you agree to deduct the amount from your first proper invoice for this account if you are chosen as the preferred supplier.

It is up to you whether or not to accept free test translations, but if you do, the test should be of an acceptable length, normally no more than 500 words. Personally, I'd cap it at 300-350 words.

### CAT tools and match discounts

Most agencies use CAT tools, and many will ask their translators for discounts for repetitions or matches in the text. Some translators argue that purchasing a CAT tool and spending time familiarising themselves with it is a major investment so they should not be expected to offer clients a discount for working with a tool that has cost them a lot. Others are happy to accept discounts for repetitions but not for any other matches. If you agree not to charge for 100% matches using a translation memory supplied by the client (i.e. previously translated by someone





else), make sure you stress that you will not check them and take no responsibility for their content.

As with all business decisions, it is up to you to do the maths and decide whether or not you are prepared to offer discounts for matches when using a CAT tool. Just bear in mind that you do not have to accept any

proposed match matrix agencies put to you. You are always free to negotiate a different matrix or decline any sort of discount outright. The good agencies will accept your decision if they want to work with you.

## Over to you

Remember that as a self-employed translation professional, you are free to work with whatever clients and in whatever area of specialisation you choose. If you choose to work with agency clients, make sure this choice suits yourself and your circumstances. Bear in mind your role in your partnerships with agencies, and be an equal business partner. Working with high-end agencies can be very rewarding – if you adopt the right approach from the outset!



**“REMEMBER THAT AS A SELF-EMPLOYED TRANSLATION PROFESSIONAL, YOU ARE FREE TO WORK WITH WHATEVER CLIENTS AND IN WHATEVER AREA OF SPECIALISATION YOU CHOOSE.”**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nicole Y. Adams is a certified and publicly appointed German/English marketing, corporate communications and public relations translator with over 11 years of experience in translating, editing, and project and quality management. She holds a Masters in Contemporary English Language and Linguistics from the University of Reading, UK, and is the author of [Diversification in the Language Industry](#) and [The A to Z of Freelance Translation](#) online course. Nicole is an AUSIT Senior Practitioner and a member of ATA, BDÜ, CIOL and DVÜD. She lives with her family in sunny Brisbane, Australia. Website: [www.nyacommunications.com](http://www.nyacommunications.com)



More e-books and free resources for translators, including *Working with High End Clients Demystified*, *The Bright Side of Freelance Translation* and the *Little Books for Translators* series:

<http://www.nyacommunications.com/en/freebies/>

Everything you need to know for your first year as a freelance translator and beyond: [The A to Z of Freelance Translation](#) online course (<https://ruzuku.com/courses/3876/about>)