

The Bright Side of Freelance Translation

Success stories from the wordface





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Introduction

Health warning: the reading of these stories is liable to seriously inspire you.

This e-book is not about translators who are genetically predisposed to be happy or look only on the bright side of life, but rather those who realise that the solutions to the ups, downs, bounties and challenges of life as a freelance translator are in their hands, and their hands alone, who buckle down, refuse to whinge and get on with the job. It's sometimes a slow journey, full of twists and turns, and there are occasional setbacks as well as lucky breaks, but there is no going back, and certainly no looking for outside sources on which to blame all our woes.

The path towards transforming your business life starts with taking a look at yourself: your values and your needs, the way you present yourself both in person and online, the way you promote your services. It's also about the organisation and discipline you bring to your work and the way you value your own services and skills. Even when all that is in place, it's about not standing still, but continually growing, pushing yourself, broadening your horizons.

If you start to work on all these fronts, encouraged and motivated by some of the stories you are about to read, then there are simply no limits to the discoveries you might make. So sit back, make yourself a cup of your favourite beverage, and open up your mind to the possibilities that lie ahead.



“ I love my work and my clients. In my 30 years in business I have had very few bad experiences that were not largely my own doing! ”

Chapter I: Know yourself

A freelancer facing the world of translation immediately encounters a dizzying array of possibilities: texts on every subject under the sun, clients ranging from the most corporate multi-language vendor to the smallest boutique agency, and direct clients from the small start-up round the corner to a blue-chip financial company, city museum or airline. Your rates, and therefore income, can also vary hugely from barely getting by to enjoying a prosperous lifestyle. There are short creative texts and major projects requiring months of work, solo jobs and team efforts, urgent requests and novels which can drift over months.

How to cut a swathe through the jungle? As you progress, machete in hand, hot, bothered and occasionally lost, you'll notice that in every tree there is a wise animal giving you advice: chattering monkeys, colourful parrots, buzzing insects and hissing snakes. The thing is, while their brilliant ideas and tips provide useful standards against which to weigh up your judgement and experience, none of them is you. None of them has your unique profile, experience, family and financial situation, values, needs, goals or passions.

The only way you can ultimately achieve both success and happiness in your profession is by looking within and getting to know yourself, understanding what it is you want and need, and gradually tailoring your job until it fits your unique profile. But to do this, you have to do what the people in the following stories have done. That is to go beyond navel-gazing and examining yourself

and start to take action, try out new things and see what fits. Be prepared to take risks, rise to challenges and above all realise that the way your career shapes up and plays out before your eyes is up to no-one else but you.



“I was happy to see you calling out for good news stories from the translation industry. I don't just have one, I feel like I am one! I LOVE my work, and opportunities just keep getting better every day.”

How I managed to shape my job to my own needs over time

Andrew Morris, FR>EN Translator:

I stared at the word 'argillaceous' for quite some time. The online dictionary had done its job swiftly and located the English term. I now knew it had something to do with clay – or was it shale?

The thing is, deep down I couldn't really care less. I was 2,000 words into a 4,000-word text for a nuclear power company and I was hating every minute of it. This was May 2009 and I was wading through my first ever serious translation, entrusted to me by a kindly but rather undiscerning agency.

In those two and a half grinding days I seriously considered retraining as a trapeze artist, a refuse disposal operator or a forklift truck mechanic. Anything rather than have to spend any more time up to my neck in clay and slowly sinking.



Somewhere in the depths of my flailing mind, I knew there were texts out there which I would find fascinating, poetic and creative. I also knew, armed with some solid journalistic experience, that I could edit, and that I could write. But such an idyllic vision seemed a long way away that afternoon.

Fast forward a mere five years and today my desk is littered with texts on cathedrals, romantic train journeys and Impressionist paintings. I translate what I want, edit the excellent translations of a whole team of people and even get to write a blog, where I can burble away to my heart's content and on occasion people even come to read.

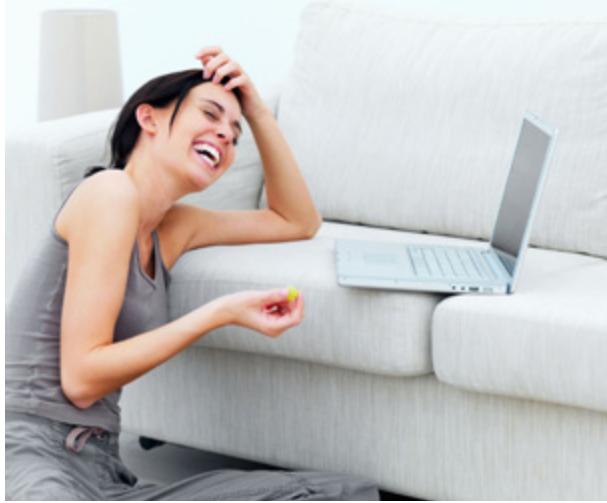
In that time, I have gradually carved, painted and sculpted my job, transforming it over half a decade until it resembles more or less a mirror image of who, what and why I am. And I love it just a little bit more every day.

That, to me, is what it means to be on the Bright Side.

Tess Whitty, EN>SV Translator:

I started with freelance translation when I was a stay-at-home mom with two toddlers. My children were the main reason I became a freelancer rather than an employee for some company. They are the reason why I do what I do and have always had priority over my work.

I started out slowly, with a project here and there, and worked while they were



napping or after they had gone to bed at night. When they started preschool, I had a few more hours during the day. Of course there have been days when my husband had to take over as soon as he got home, or when I had to turn on a movie for them so I could finish a project. There have also been many weekends when I have been working instead of playing. When my children started school I was able to take on more projects and create a more regular work schedule, and my business has grown gradually from there.

In the beginning, I was afraid of turning down work and tried to always be available for the few clients I had in order to get established. This was not an ideal situation for my family, and as my business grew, I had to start turning jobs down. To my relief, I realised that the clients did come back for more, even if I was not always available. I think that as long as I can provide high quality translations and good customer service, they will come back. Referring to a trusted colleague does not mean that I will lose them as a client, but that they appreciate me helping them out by providing another resource.

Now, having worked as a freelance translator for over 10 years, I set my own schedule. I avoid working over weekends and I can go on extended vacations. I have adapted my job to my own needs. I am afraid I am now unemployable, in the sense that I love my freelance lifestyle so much that I would not be able to tolerate a 'regular' job anymore.

Nora Torres, EN>ES and ES>EN Translator:

I took the bumpier road, and that has made all the difference

By the time I landed in the international arena, I had worked for about 20 years, first as an in-house translator, then as a freelancer. In point of fact, 'forced landing' would be the right way to put it. The local economy had gone belly up, and my client base (made up entirely of direct, local clients) had shrunk significantly.

One day in 2001, my best client (in terms of both volume of work and continuity) offered me a 9-to-5 position. To cut down on costs, they had made the decision to stop outsourcing translations and had created a corporate translation division, which I was being invited to join.

Needless to say, the offer was tempting: a decent salary and benefits, paid vacations, and the opportunity to work face-to-face with peers again. However, I had already tasted freedom, and – for better or worse – I had got used to setting my own hours, deciding



which jobs to take on, and charging my own rates, so I took my chances and opted to stay on the freelance side and go international instead. I could not imagine at the time how bumpy (and rewarding) the journey would be!

The doors to a whole new world opened up for me. Although I was a mature professional, with extensive education and experience, I suddenly found myself completely at a loss in lots of respects: reshaping my résumé and cover letter, contacting and getting work from translation agencies, setting the right rates, buying and learning how to use computer-aided translation software – all Greek to me! I even found out (to my dismay) that, in the light of international standards, I did not master my mother tongue as thoroughly as I thought I did. And I cannot leave the issue of international payments out of the equation, as it was not easy to make my way through the process of getting paid as a foreign service provider.

It was all worth it, though. Today, I work for several translation agencies in the US, UK, Spain and France. Having specialised in the field of clinical research, I am an expert

back-translator and a linguistic validation consultant. If you also enjoy freedom and are ready to make self-discipline a habit, freelancing may be your thing!

**Lukasz Gos-Furmarkiewicz,
EN>PL Translator:**

I've managed to keep a client base I'm on friendly and warm terms with, where I'm often their translator of choice just as long as they can afford the rates. In some cases they do it at cost or even attempt to take the loss (which I usually prevent them from doing in the end) just to make a client happy once or twice a year. I don't make the best bucks out of those relationships, but I really like how friendly we all are. It makes it hard to even look at all those excessively formal-sounding procurement-style job ads.

Bronwen Davies, De/FR>EN Translator:

I never expected I would become a freelance translator. When I graduated from university with a degree in modern languages back in 2003 I started off by pursuing other avenues related to my love of reading and words, but I couldn't dismiss my desire to use my language skills in some way.

Eventually, after a few years of unemployment and fruitless interviews, I decided to go back to the idea I had had in my last year of



university – to study for an MA in Translation. I was inspired to think about this again by a lady who was, at the time, interviewing me for a job at her translation and language training company (so all those interviews weren't entirely fruitless!).

I duly applied to my former university and got a place on a one-year MA course. It was a very intensive course, but it refreshed my language skills and prepared me for working independently.

After I had finished I was still aiming to work in house, and I did get a couple of interviews, but in the end I found that freelance work fit in well with my personal circumstances at the time – helping my parents care for elderly relatives.

Six years on and I can say that being a freelance translator isn't always easy, especially the business side of things. However, I have found that overall it suits me well. I generally don't mind spending hours

by myself working – it suits my quiet nature (although I can feel a bit isolated at times). I can also take my own time over assignments (obviously respecting deadlines) and only take on what I can handle, which, with my medical condition, is very important.

I feel very privileged to be able to use my language skills in my work – work that I enjoy. I have learnt such a lot since I started, even from the less positive occurrences. It's easy

“ While all the negativity among our colleagues doesn't affect me much personally because I've learned to shake bad experiences off and learn from them, I think many fellow translators are getting trapped in a downward spiral!

to feel defeated and overwhelmed at times and to feel you're not doing as well as other people seem to be doing. However, I read recently that we should stop comparing ourselves to others and feeling that they're doing better than we ourselves are. We should instead concentrate on beating our own records every day. I think this is something I need to remember and to rejoice in all I *have* achieved so far according to my gifts and abilities and what's best for me.

I feel immensely grateful to my family for their support in this venture and my faith has been a great help too. It's also wonderful that, in this freelance world, I can connect with other translators and we can offer each other mutual support and encouragement! Here's to us!



How I decided to stop taking work that was no longer inspiring me

Allison Klein, NL>EN Translator:

It took me nearly 12 years in the translation business to realise that I do not like proofreading or revising non-native speakers' texts. For a long time, I did this as a service to my customers (mostly agencies), and possibly unconsciously as a way of proving I was 'better' at English than their non-native speakers whom they ask to translate texts from Dutch to English. Slowly, as I started getting more and more texts to 'edit' from customers and fewer and fewer straight translations, I realised that this was their way of cutting costs (after all, most of these non-native translators charge much less than I do) and still turning out top-notch work, and that I was contributing to something I couldn't really stand behind.

When a couple of (agency) customers gave me an ultimatum, saying that the only work they had for me was proofreading and revising, I dropped them as customers. I started to do some soul-searching and ask myself if this was what I really wanted, as this type of work can be soul-destroying for me and was having a negative impact on my attitude towards all my work.

After several months of reading posts in fora and online groups, and seeing very valid reasons for not providing this service, I decided to stop doing this type of work entirely about a year ago. I will not revise or proofread a non-native speaker's work for agencies or direct clients especially when it is clearly done as a means to cut costs and



thus increase their margins. Though I am not idealistic enough to think this will stop the practice in the industry, at least it enables me to feel better about my work and myself if I am no longer involved. I will still do this work on occasion, but only if it involves proofreading a native speaker's texts as a means of quality control, or as a favour to a colleague.

The customers I still work for know this now, and don't seem to have a problem with it, thus proving my decision was the right one.

How I realised I was really good at something I'd never have thought of

Lucy Brooks, DE>EN Translator:

Finding I was good at something other than 'mere' translation, yet related to the profession

All my life I have worked hard and diligently at whatever job I do – and I have had careers in tourism, PR and IT. But I was surprised to discover, right at the time when for many retirement beckons, that I had a talent for organising online training events. From small beginnings in 2010, my training company (eCPD Webinars) has developed into a near full-time business for me. I love the thrill of exploring topics that translators want to learn, finding the speakers, helping them understand the process of online training, and then announcing a new course or training session through the translator networks and on our website.

Online training is perfect for busy translators who cannot take time out to travel long distances to attend face-to-face courses. I pride myself that our speakers are experts in their field, yet are practitioners themselves, so fully understand the life of a freelance translator.

“ Being a freelance translator really is one of the best jobs in the world! **”**

Ján Rendek, SK>EN Translator:

I didn't study to be a translator, I just slowly happened to become one. I read voraciously

as a kid, I learnt how to program in Basic back in the 80s (and I'm still an IT power user), I learnt English at grammar school back in the days when English was by far the most exciting subject to take, I studied economics at home and abroad, and I graduated in actuarial science and accounting. I was a businessman for few years and even worked as actuary for a brief period of time. After some freelancing during and after university, I was employed by one foreign law firm and then by another.

Translating for sophisticated law firms has its downsides – – everyone is bilingual and better read in law than you. Translations are made for various practical reasons, none of them being the noble act of decoding the meaning to someone who can't read the original text. Sometimes, especially after longer spells of working directly with more senior lawyers who would heavily correct and comment on my translations, my mood would darken. How come I'm still here? How did I end up in this job? Will they now finally realise their mistake and fire me? Or should I leave and start translating books?

But then my fellow students of law or external generalist translators would unwittingly come to my rescue. I would be instructed to proofread a translation done by one of them. Then the long hours in the office made some sense again: how come it took him so long and he still did not translate these accounting terms, skipped this paragraph and could not locate the tab key? I may have some edge after all!

How a confident moment led to a great result

Emily Plank, DE/FR/ES>EN Translator:

I like the idea of translating books rather than the actual process. It requires a lot of time and patience, often putting you 'out of the loop' with your other projects for several weeks, if not months. You have to be in the right space for it, and you need an understanding client. It seems the universe ticked both those boxes for me in the middle of last year, when I received a mass email from a German professor wanting his book on talent relationship management translated into English. Rather than hitting the delete key, something told me to investigate further, which involved translating a small test piece.

A few days later, I was advised that, out of 80 submissions, I had made the shortlist of eight. I then had to answer a few questions as to why I felt I was suitable for the job. Despite the fact that I had somewhat limited experience in the specific HR-related field, I had confidence in my language skills, and in my seven years as a freelance translator, which had included translating two volumes of a history book and numerous travel and lifestyle books. So I sent off my responses and waited. A week later, I was advised that I had been awarded the contract to translate the 64,000-word book. I was able to negotiate it on my terms, ensuring there was no deadline pressure, and that I could translate small daily quotas which would not impact on my other work.

The professor was the ideal client – – flexible, understanding, a quick responder, and, most importantly, extremely reliable with his prepayments. I spent five months working

on the project, without a day of 'translator's regret'. The subject matter was interesting, and there were none of the diabolical phrases which so often leave translators shaking their heads in despair. My aim was to have the book completed by the end of the year, and I sent off my last allotment just before Christmas. It is now in the final stages of editing, and will be published worldwide very soon. The professor is currently writing a second, bigger book, and has already told me he wants me to be his translator. While the experience and exposure this project has given me as a translator is hugely important, there is nothing more gratifying than ending up with a satisfied customer willing to offer repeat business. It makes the hard work worthwhile. Maybe ideas can become reality after all.



How I decided to stop complaining and start changing things

**Alexandra Maldwyn-Davies,
FR>EN Translator:**

It was 7 o'clock on a dismal Monday morning at Paris Gare du Nord, and once again the train drivers were threatening to strike. I was working on an on-site contract at Orly airport for a language service provider with a 'we do not particularly care about our employees' ethos, and consequently I had to make an attempt to reach my destination or settle for no pay. On a good day, this journey involved two trains and a bus and took two hours – on a bad day, it was anybody's guess.

However, the journey always had its high points. The other travellers proved to be an eclectic bunch, running the whole gamut from reasonably normal to spectacularly eccentric. Where else would I get the opportunity to regularly bump into a 30-stone transvestite who insisted on feeding me peanuts from her pocket, or to chance upon a woman who thrust a massive live koi carp in a carrier bag at me when she realised she wasn't allowed to board her plane with it in her hand luggage? (I named the carp Penelope and she now lives quite happily in her new home).

I loved my job, despite the poor working conditions, but gradually I became jaded and less stoical about the many strikes, disruptions and peanut feasts. I started complaining. I had been doing in-house translation for some time by then and realised that if I wanted a less frantic lifestyle, I had to just go for it. Within a couple of months, I was on my way to Finistère.

It wasn't all plain sailing at first. I complained about low rates, about agencies ignoring my applications, about proofreading poor work, about tight deadlines and about clients who didn't pay on time. But the compensations soon became apparent. I realised I could now choose my clients, work on projects I found inspiring, set my own rates, pursue my own professional studies (in my last job five hours of my annual training had to be spent in a workshop on how to use a photocopier), meet like-minded translators online, bake a cake in the middle of the day, enjoy a sense of pride when I knew I'd delivered a great text, or oversleep and jump out of bed to be at work five minutes later.

I still complain, but it tends to be about things I am prepared to live with, such as the cat confirming all the segments in Trados when I leave the room, the fact that I now get so much work I'm sky high on adrenalin for a good part of the day, or often losing a couple of hours chatting to fellow freelancers on Facebook.

Okay, so life is never perfect.

**Malgorzata Porzezynska, EN/
PL/AR>DE Translator:**

I began freelancing while finishing my translation degree and worked for the same client for a few years. The work was not well paid, but it was steady. It covered my bills and allowed me to move countries several times. My non-translator friends used to tell me how much they envied me for being able to work from anywhere in the world. Today, I cannot

believe that my answer to that was usually: 'Yes, but it's quite boring, always the same type of texts. And it's so competitive because; there will always be someone offering the same work for next to nothing.'

I was stuck in a spiral for years. Direction: downwards. I was an anonymous translator hiding behind the computer screen, The few applications I dared to send for jobs posted on translation job boards didn't even yield a reply. Why couldn't I land one of those exciting jobs everybody else seemed to be working on? I spent more time applying for in-house jobs with organisations outside the translation industry than raising my profile within the same. My confidence had hit rock bottom. 'You have to market yourself,' they say. Yes, I know. But I'm just not the natural-born marketer all the successful translators seem to be.

I finally realised that the spiral works exactly the same way upwards. Every little positive thought, piece of advice, conversation and effort into enhancing your skills lifts your spirit. Amazingly, after all this negativity, it only took me about four months to feel completely different about my business; a large part of that was due to learning about myself and my true skills.

What did it take? So far, an online course in business skills for translators, a few more on marketing and translation-related topics, attending a conference for translators and interpreters, defining my areas of specialisation more clearly, and working actively towards being more visible online.

It takes time, but doing it step by step, it actually IS as easy as they all make it sound.



Emeline Jamoul, EN/ES>FR Translator:

I have been a translator for four years now, but only launched my business seven months ago. The decision to become a freelance translator was not made lightly, as I had heard countless times that the current economy and state of the industry were not favourable. Add that to preposterously high taxes in Belgium and you might decide starting a freelance business isn't worth the hard work!

Being of a positive and proactive nature, I didn't want to join the ill-tempered professionals who seem to invade our industry. Yes, there are bottom-feeders in the translation profession, but don't they exist in other markets as well? Yes, deadlines are short, but what about other professionals who work under pressure on a daily basis? It is one thing to complain, another to take control over your career and decide how you want to work. I like to call that move 'putting the free in freelancer'. As I've previously written in my blog, that 'free' doesn't have anything to do with our rates – rather, it is reminiscent of the freedom we earn by having

no boss. We are free to choose how, when, where and with whom we want to work. Isn't that a powerful gift to have? Why not use it to our advantage then?

Probably like most translators, I started working for low-paying agencies, not really knowing any better. But as entrepreneurs, learning about our industry (both on a micro and a macro level) is mandatory. Working day and night quickly became tiring and not viable – it was not the job I had dreamed about. Change didn't happen overnight of course, but after a few months I decided to up my game by prospecting to better paying clients and demanding higher rates – after all, I hadn't studied for all these years for nothing and my expertise was worth more than those low rates. As I persevered, things started to change – more clients offered more jobs, which means that I now have the liberty to choose which interesting project I want to work on. Remember, positive change does not only affect you – as you'll be keener to work on a project, you'll deliver better work, which in turn will satisfy your client's needs. A win-win situation?

MINI INTERVIEW WITH JANE ELLIS:

'Freelance translation is ... freedom.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

Not so far. Maybe I am good at avoiding potential non-payers, or maybe I am just lucky.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

Big friend for me, as long as they focus on technical/scientific translation and not on being 'Jacks of all trades'. Avoid the ones that claim to translate every language under the sun – in one hour!

At this stage in my career, I have neither the time nor the inclination to seek out direct clients. I am happy for an agency to operate as a buffer between me and the client. I know some translators will be appalled by that statement, but it is honestly how I feel.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

I love my CAT tools – I have memoQ and Studio 2014, but obviously these equate to computer-assisted human translation. Machine translation does not threaten me at all. For example, in many scientific documents the same source language word will translate to different (sometimes subtly, sometimes radically) words in the target version, even within the same document. No computer brain can match the translator's brain for this reason (and many others).

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Absolutely! Providing you have the dedication and discipline to study and work by yourself, and of course an Internet connection, this is a great career – especially in a world where the 'job for life' is becoming a thing of the past.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

Saying no! No to poor rates, no to translating shoddy, fuzzy PDFs and thereby reserving your skills for the jobs and clients who are prepared to recompense you appropriately. I do regret saying 'yes' to fuzzy match rates for certain agencies, especially when I do a lot of painstaking research to make sure I am using the precise terminology for my specialist fields. I feel I should be adding extra for this research to make up for the fuzzy match loss. In fact, I think I will try doing exactly that in future.

MINI INTERVIEW WITH LIV BLISS:

'Freelance translation is ...,

for some, an obsession as much as it is a job or calling.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

Only once in more than three decades, for a little over \$150. I've usually had the good fortune to associate with good people.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

They are as we find them. If we translators and interpreters are adept at client management and alert to the telltale signs of a bad actor, agency and freelance professional will get along just fine. When agencies are good, they're very, very good, because they do the marketing, qualify and troubleshoot the jobs, answer the client's more rudimentary questions, and mediate between client and freelancer if problems emerge. In fact, I've found many agencies far more congenial to work with than individual or corporate direct clients, and actually less likely to try to nickel-and-dime me. That said, there are a lot of loose cannons out there, and I don't feel that my time is best spent attempting to educate the incompetent or the wilfully ignorant, whether agency or direct client. But those who hold that agencies are by definition the bane of our industry have simply been hanging out with the wrong agencies.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

Not in my cosy little niche of the translation market. I expect to have turned to dust long

before a machine translation system can translate fluidly, engagingly and authentically, the kind of texts I wrestle with every day. (Not that everything I produce is pure platinum – far from it.) But I'm not a Luddite. A tool is, after all, only as good as its user, and there are already a number of tools out there that have the potential to make the translator's life a whole lot easier if used in the right way.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

If I didn't, I wouldn't be talking to you right now.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

Especially for beginning translators, a major challenge is to resist anyone who tries to persuade us that our job is to walk behind the CAT/ MT/Cloud Source elephants with a shovel and a bucket.

Chapter 2: Present yourself

When you develop a keener sense of who you are and what you're about, and when your vision of the kind of translation work you'd ideally like starts to become clearer, free of obstacles, duties and impositions, it's time to present yourself: to express that outwardly, so that the world sits up and takes notice of you. As long as the vision remains locked up in your head, there's little chance anyone will either know or care.

The good news is that these days there are more ways than ever of communicating your message, in real time, to the entire planet. As the stories below amply prove, a carefully wrought professional profile, presented in the right way, can open doors all around you.



How I took a chance in my branding/specialisation and it paid off

Sarah Dillon, DE/FR/ES>EN Translator:

It was 2004. No-one had heard of blogging, Facebook was a side project in a Harvard dorm room, and Twitter wasn't even a twinkle in its founder's eye.

I had finally finished my masters degree in translation. I had spoken to hundreds of translators, freelance and in-house. I had learnt everything I could about the practice and business of this fine profession. I was ready to be a freelance translator. There was just one problem. No-one I spoke to had heard of a graduate in their 20s with an unimpressive work history going straight into a freelance career.

The standard route was to take a job in an agency, generally an administrative role, and convince your boss to send you some freelance work on the side. After many years of proving your worth, you could start to build a freelance practice – first agencies, and then, if you could stick it out, the holy grail: direct clients. This was where the real money and job satisfaction lay.

Except I couldn't afford to wait. I didn't want to wait. I had funded myself through six years of university, with no grants, no scholarships, no student loans. I had paid my dues. I had set myself a minimum level of income that I wanted to achieve. An in-house

position wasn't going to cut it. I needed to go freelance, and I needed to go in at the top. I would have to command the kind of rates that a colleague with 15 years' experience would have baulked at.

I admit I was spooked. None of the smart and supportive professionals I'd met had done it. No-one was talking about branding, let alone targeting premium clients. What made me think I was so special? Ever the pragmatist, I decided that I couldn't work in translation if I couldn't achieve a rate that was acceptable to me.

I took a job in a management consultancy firm. It was challenging, fun and well paid. I had an insider's view on established businesses and ambitious executives. What made them choose our firm with its sky-high fees over other firms who were undoubtedly as good, but lacked the premium price tag? It was a case study on branding in action.

Within a year I had left, surer than ever of what I needed to do. I drew up a new business and marketing plan, set my rates where I needed them to be, and started experimenting with the Internet as a means of finding clients. Three months later, I had a schedule full of direct clients and was in a position to turn work down.

The world has changed a lot since then. I still rely on my translation colleagues for guidance, advice and support. But I've learnt that sometimes, to get where you want to go, it's not enough just to stand on the shoulders of giants. You also have to take a risk.

“I have many positive client experiences to share!”

How my presence on a forum led to an amazing outcome

Sheila Cristine Gomes, EN>PT-BR Translator:

I heard about this job opportunity when still an in-house translator at a T&I company. My job was less than satisfying in terms of challenge and pay, and I still had to teach to supplement my income. I already moonlighted as a translator and after some time participating passively in fora, reading blogs and researching about the profession, I had a fairly good idea of how freelancing could be a better option. But I still felt unsure, because there was a family to support.

To one of those questions interviewers always asked I answered: 'In five years, I want to be recognised as a reference among my peers.' I did not get the job, but the phrase stuck in my mind. That was three and a half years ago.

I decided to be more active in fora. I started my own blog, offered help whenever possible and also attended events and meetups. People started to recognise me, especially for my geekiness, addiction to information and willingness to help.

I started making friends, and then was invited to be a co-moderator of the largest Facebook T&I group in Brazil. The group is very actively moderated, and we always do our best to keep collaboration as the underlying value of the discussions and make the general feeling uplifting.

After some time observing the exchanges in the group, I noticed beginners often lacked a clear view of what being a professional translator means. That made them very

insecure about making a career of T&I. I had an idea and shared it with some colleagues in the group, who promptly backed it: holding regular free webinars for group members, to allow people to get in direct contact with more experienced professionals. Two main effects came from this: the raising of (1) people's awareness about possible professional paths to be taken and (2) their self-esteem as professionals, because the ground was level with professionals who treated them as equals. The gratitude of people was remarkable, with this sharing of knowledge from seasoned translators reinforcing even further the collaborative character of the group.

It was also a great learning experience for myself and it has generated another one that might be just as rewarding, and also a means of diversifying in the profession: I am launching an educational site offering webinars and consulting services for Portuguese-speaking T&I-related people who need coaching and advice. I couldn't be happier with the direction my career has taken, all thanks to my involvement with professional fora and events.

“ I would be very happy to share the good experiences I've had during my first year of business as a FR>EN translator. My learning curve was very rapid, but almost 100 per cent positive! ”

How I decided to professionalise my profile and got results

Nicole Y. Adams, DE<>EN Translator:

For the first nine years of my freelance translation career, I did my own branding and designed my own websites. Although they naturally looked spectacular – or so I misguidedly thought at the time! – they were rather static and didn't exactly exude professionalism. I changed my branding every couple of years, and with it my website and email addresses. Talk about confusing your clients!

Once I had singled out marketing, PR and corporate communications as my areas of specialisation, I decided it was time to let the professionals have a go at my website design and branding. I stumbled across Websites for Translators and decided to give them a go. The result was a professional looking website that receives a lot of positive comments, and a logo that I could, of course, never have designed myself. The feedback has been fantastic, and I have recorded a marked increase in enquiries following the relaunch of my branding and website.

Consequently, I can only recommend spending a few bucks to let a team of professionals design your website, or at least get a professional consultation to give you some ideas and tips. Doing it yourself may save you a few dollars in the short term, but is sure to lose you some business in the long term, because as self-employed professionals we need to present ourselves as such in order to attract the right clientele. I sure wish someone had told me that 10 years ago!

Karen Stokes, FR>EN Translator:

I started translating in 2002. I can't say it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to launch myself into a new profession without some sense that I was up to the job, so I'd already taken and passed the Institute of Linguists' Diploma in Translation. It seemed to make sense, if I was going to be part of a profession, to be a member of a professional body, so I joined CIOL and ITI as an associate. It seemed obvious that I ought to aim for full membership, so MCIL and MITI followed. By now I was pretty well established, the business was growing strongly and I had successfully applied for Chartered Linguist status. It was time to step things up a gear – so off I went to City University London in 2008. Two years later I emerged with an MA in Legal Translation; three years after that I was elected to Fellowship of CIOL and, having been involved in various committees and working groups over the years, joined its council in 2012.

Was it all about collecting certificates and letters after my name? No, but those helped. Twelve years on I have a business that not only survived the 2008 crash but has flourished. Days when I don't have work booked are rare – and a luxury to be savoured. I have the professional self-confidence to negotiate decent terms and work with people I like, in areas I enjoy and find interesting. Has it been easy? No. I've worked hard, sometimes too hard, to get qualified, get experience and get known. Has it been worth it? Yes. Aside from the core business of translation it has opened doors, from speaking at seminars and university lecturing to developing and running training workshops, all of which give me a wider

perspective on the profession and keep me on my toes. Is that it? No, because you live your professionalism day in, day out, in how you behave with clients and colleagues, in how you present yourself in person and online, and in how you keep working towards doing it all that little bit better, year on year. The reward? When you deliver a job to a client and they write back and say, 'Thank you so much. It is so lovely to deal with someone who is such a professional.'



MINI INTERVIEW WITH ALLISON WRIGHT:

'Freelance translation is ...'

not for cissies. It requires enormous linguistic knowledge, translation skill, mastery of one's target language(s), precision, curiosity, constant application, versatility, flexibility, dedication, discipline, stamina and, arguably, a good deal of coffee and a host of other things besides. The beauty is that freelance translators decide for themselves when, and in what measure, these requirements should be fulfilled. For all the above reasons, this makes freelance translation an amazingly interesting and rewarding way to make a living, and live a life.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

a) One near non-payer. I took my mother to the factory's premises for moral support. I gave her strict instructions to look important but not to say a word! I did the talking, and when it became clear that I would not leave until I had a signed cash cheque in my hand, the manager arranged payment pretty quickly, but not before I made vague references to police intervention.

(b) I was never paid some US\$1,260.00 owed to me in February 2011 by someone who used fraudulent names and has since been banned from ProZ.com. This person seems to have vanished without a trace. I suffered badly as a result, but 'let it go'. It merely made me more determined to build up my client base – and more determined to succeed.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

Smaller agencies, carefully chosen, are

incredible opportunities to forge productive relationships with their owners or project managers. Open, honest communication at this level often results in my receiving work in my preferred subject fields, which is productive in itself.

Larger agencies, if well organised and prompt payers, can also be rewarding, as long as I feel a little of 'the personal touch' in our interactions. I do not work for agencies which project an impersonal attitude towards translators, or seem to view translators as a mere stepping stone to monetary gain, chiefly for themselves.

The few agencies I work with do a good job in finding me work. They deserve their cut of each translation job. All agencies I work with proofread my work, or have it proofread. This does not mean I produce unchecked work. It means that I have someone else on my side – in pursuit of excellence!

I think of the agencies I work with as 'my clients'. Anyone I translate for is 'my client'. They are all given value in my constellation.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

No. Human understanding is essential to the translation process.

I do wish it would become more acceptable for human translators to take greater advantage of machine translation in 'confidential' work. Used responsibly and thoughtfully by human translators, machine translation could lead to greater translator output. I do not think that machine translation should attract a lower rate if used

merely as one tool in the translation process by a human translator, though!

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Yes. There are provisos though, which include continued professional development, active networking, and engaging in translator and fora appropriate to the area of one's specialisations.

Many countries in Europe tax sole trader freelancers much too heavily in my view. This has a negative effect on the country's economy, ultimately, because high taxes severely limit the entrepreneurial and developmental potential of such freelancers, freelance translators included.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

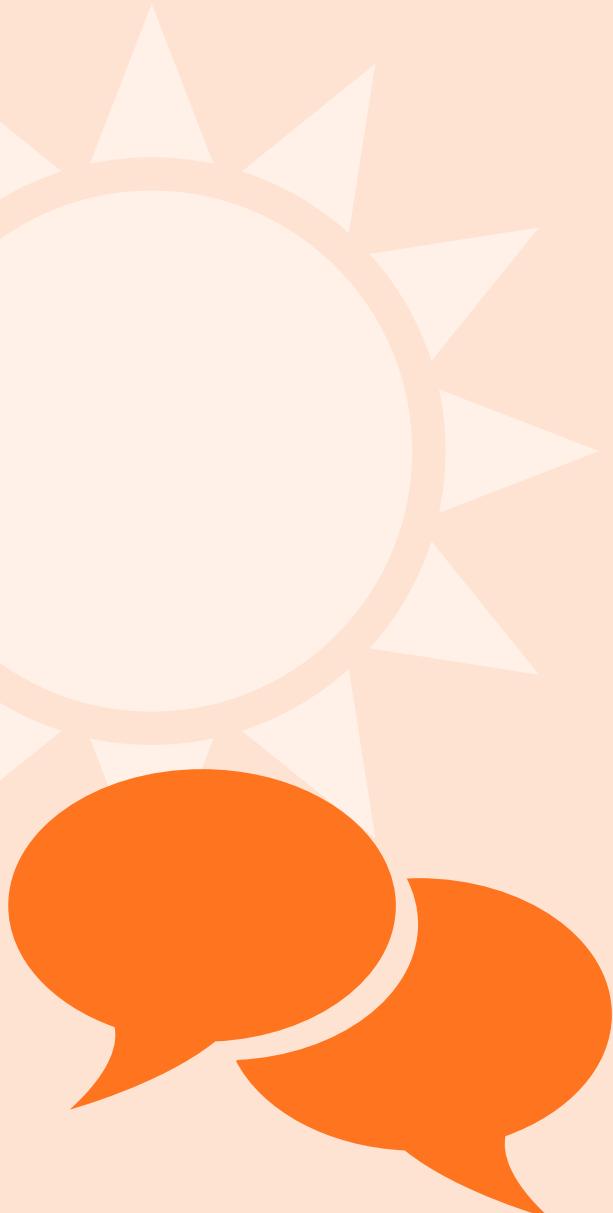
1) Visibility and competition

It is essential to maintain visibility, and proof of one's bona fides and translation ability. Blogging, social networking and Internet presence need to be taken seriously by translators as platforms for business opportunities and reputation building. This is where translators as individuals can make a difference in the lives of other translators by sharing knowledge, and can also derive benefit for themselves from a vast range of interactions. Disciplined and strategic management of one's time is essential, since most of our time should still be spent on translating!

Competition has to be based more on providing good quality translations and good, reliable service, and maintaining an updated

knowledge in one's selected subject fields, than on price and speed.

2) Keeping up-to-date with IT advances and computer software, including CAT tools. Investment in equipment is ongoing in the world of translation. Many of us do not – or cannot afford to – invest in this aspect often enough. Another reason to advocate and maintain higher, rather than lower, rates.



Chapter 3: Promote yourself

Once you've worked on honing your mental picture of the kind of translator you want to be and once you've begun to work on the way you communicate that to the outside world, you will soon come into contact with the experiences and people you need to take you forward. They may have been around you all the time – it's your clarity of vision and purpose that enables you to open your eyes to the opportunities around, and your confidence that enables you to make the most of them.

Once the opportunities arise, you need to keep working at them, never taking anything for granted. Remember that to down tools and say 'That's it... everything is in place' is professional suicide. Life is flow, movement and constant transformation, so fasten your seatbelt and get ready for a never-ending ride.



How I got an amazing break

Gill McKay, DE/FR>EN Translator:

Although I had a degree in German and had lived in Germany on and off for a few years, I had never worked as a translator. But in 2007, for a variety of reasons, this seemed like a good career move. I was teaching Business English at the time and didn't really know where to start – I knew nothing at all about the translation industry. I put out a few feelers among people I knew, which resulted in a couple of horrendous jobs translating accounting texts. Was this really something I wanted to do? Doubts were rapidly setting in.

Then I had an email from a friend who worked for a Swiss publishing house. They wanted a translation of a book on the Swiss artist Paul Klee and was I interested? If so, he would put in a good word for me with the powers-that-be. This resulted in a glossy, coffee-table-type book arriving in the post with the message that I should translate the first 20 pages for the author to check. And no, there was no digital version!

Girding my loins for the challenge, I roped in my husband Neil, who is also a language graduate. We drew up a plan on how best to tackle the project. I would translate the main text while he tackled the references and lengthy captions that described the paintings. Taking a deep breath, we dived in at the deep end, sent off the 20 pages – and the author was happy.

That was the start of our translating career. The book was published, our names stand proudly on the jacket, and it provided us with the perfect foundation for creating our first CV as translators. It gave us the confidence to gradually make the shift towards 100 per cent translation work, and it allowed us to follow our dream of moving to a village in the depths of the Bavarian Alps. Working as translators means we no longer need to be near our customers and gives us the flexibility to organise our work around our love of mountains and the outdoors. Of course we've had to work hard to build a business from scratch, gain a reputation and learn the trade. But it would have been much harder without a certain Paul Klee and one very lucky break.

Liv Bliss, RU>EN Translator:

At this stage of my translation adventure, word of mouth is increasingly my marketing ploy of choice. It sounds easy, not to say passive, but instead it involves a great deal of activity in volunteer roles within the translation community, a willingness to engage in helpful online exchanges, an eagerness to recommend colleagues for work that, whatever the reason, isn't the right fit for me, and just generally being a good citizen of translatordom. So it was that several years ago, a cherished colleague recommended me for a part in a worthwhile pro bono project that progressed into a few paid projects for that same client and, eventually, a novel.

The translation of fiction has never featured as prominently for me as I would have

wished. I have translated six other novels in my day (all but one of them published, and none by me), but this was without a doubt the most fun I've had without laughing, due to the unfailing support from the publisher, the friendly and highly informative sparring with the author, the wondrous encouragement of positive reviews (I've never read reviews, not even bad ones, of my own work before), the copious online collateral material, generated mostly by the publisher and a little by me, and the end product, beautifully laid out and complete with a map and playlist of characters. It came out four months ago, and I'm still in awe. I would die a happy woman if I never translated another word in my life. But I will.

Lucy Brooks, DE>EN Translator:

When I started as a freelance translator I was fortunate in that clients seemed to fall into



my lap. It was the 1990s and competition was less fierce than it is today. I marketed my services to agencies in the country of my source language (Germany). It seems that clients were desperate for native speakers residing in the target language country. Email communication was still in its infancy, but the Internet existed and the fax was still dominant for communications. I can honestly say I never lacked work from the day I began, and my only problem was when to give up my other part-time job, which I also happened to love doing. After that early marketing initiative, I don't think I ever needed to do such direct marketing again, contenting myself with entries on directories and my website, which I developed fairly early on in the 1990s.

The other factor that worked in my favour was my husband's contacts in industry. He was a journalist for trade magazines at the time and often became aware of international ventures by companies before anyone else. He was able to put me in touch with one or two companies in need of translation services, and I was able to land substantial assignments during my first months of freelance working. I spent 20 years making an excellent living from my translation work, and even operated for a while as a small agency working with British industrial clients.

Allison Wright, DE/FR/PT>EN Translator:

Accreditation

An illicit smoke break. I leaned against the side wall of the laundry where I worked to

give my aching body relief. I took a drag on my rolled cigarette and grunted at the sight of my hands, swollen from the bleach. The village on the side of the hill looked so sad and washed out on this inclement afternoon. I numbly tried to assemble my thoughts. 'I am a translator!' I said in defiance to the village. A recent immigrant to Portugal from inflation-ridden Zimbabwe who still could not speak Portuguese properly was a more fitting description. I berated myself for crying about it. My 10 minutes were up. Back to work.

I was counting on being paid my overtime at the end of 2009. It would have been just enough to pay my SATI (South African Translators' Institute) annual membership fees. Non-payment would mean I would lose my French-English and German-English accreditations acquired almost nine years earlier. It was near the end of March 2010, mere days before the payment deadline. The owner of the laundry could not afford to pay me my long overdue overtime for the previous year. That was that. An empty apology left my pockets empty.

That night, I wrote a letter to the executive director of SATI. I explained that since leaving Zimbabwe, life had been tough. Sporadic translation work was hard to do after a day of physically demanding labour. I had no option but to resign my membership. I thanked her for our years of correspondence and wished the institute well in its endeavours. What anguish and utter disorientation I felt once I had sent the email! I had wanted to be a translator since I was 15. I became one. I had been a qualified translator every day of my life for over 20 years. And now, I was no kind of translator at all. I felt as if I were dying.

The reply I received from SATI a day and a half later was incredible. Immediately upon receipt of my letter, the executive director had conferred with all members of the SATI Council. Their vote had been unanimous. My letter of resignation had not been accepted. Instead, it had been agreed that SATI would sponsor my membership for 2010, which would allow me to retain my accredited status, and give me some time to get back on my feet. The letter expressed the hope that I would not be offended, and urged me to accept this offer as a token of SATI's recognition of my participation in its affairs over the years, and my always generous donations to its bursary and development fund for less fortunate translators.

Within two and a half months, I had left the laundry and begun work as a full-time freelance translator. I love being a translator. I am grateful every day for this privilege. The next issue of SATI's newsletter referring to this matter was discretion itself. I think it is high time that SATI's generosity be made known. SATI saved a translator's life, after all!

My message: Give generously. Help your fellow translators whenever you can.

It makes us stronger.

Jacinta Kal, EN>NL Translator:

After I got my translation degree, I was faced with the problem every beginning freelance translator has: how do I get work without experience? After I had spent some time

thinking about this, my conclusion was that the best way to gain some real-life experience would be to do an internship. An internship hadn't been part of my degree, so I set out emailing around 12 agencies close to where I lived at the time.

I eventually received six offers of internships, and the agency I chose turned out to be a very good one. An internship means doing work for very little pay, but the experience I gained in how an agency works and the benefit of someone reviewing every text I translated and giving me feedback has been invaluable. On top of that, when I left after four months, the agency contacted me almost the next day with an offer of work, and I still get work from them weekly.

If I hadn't invested those four months in an internship, I would probably still be struggling to find clients and only get the odd offer of work every now and then. Instead, since I started I have had enough work pretty much all the time and did a lot better in my first year than I could ever have dreamed.

So if you're at the start of your freelance translation career and have the possibility of doing an internship, I can definitely recommend it.

“ Please send me details about being involved in your project to share the positive side of translation :) This is a much better approach to living and working, and has made me smile this morning.”

How a relationship with an agency grew into something excellent

Matthew Young, JA>EN Translator:

I didn't take the well-trodden path into translation. Shortly after gaining a university degree in environmental chemistry, I went to Japan for what I thought would be one year. To cut a long story short, one year became seven, and upon my return to the UK I spent six years working for a Japanese chemical company in London.

To cut a short but unpleasant story even shorter, I became a freelance translator on 1 December 2005. Before the month was out, I responded to a call for CVs on a Japanese translators' mailing list, from a company requiring translators to translate chemical patent-related documents from Japanese to English.

I completed a short test for the company in question, the feedback from which was that they could see that my chemical knowledge was clearly sound, but that my knowledge of patentese (a language all of its own) was almost completely lacking. At this point, most agencies would probably have said thanks, but no thanks. This company, however, decided to take me on, provide me with glossaries and style guides to help me with the language of intellectual property, and gradually increase the amount of work with which they entrusted me as my experience and competency grew.

Fast forward more than eight years, and the company in question is far and away my biggest and best client, and I have submitted

more than five million translated words to them. The income from this work has enabled my family to buy the house we've always wanted in a beautiful national park.

Confidentiality forbids me from naming the company, but they are the sort of client that every freelance translator needs. They still provide ample feedback, have only ever treated me with courtesy and respect, and have never once been late paying an invoice. I'm lucky to have them. Responding to that call has had a major effect not only on my career, but also my life as a whole.

Tess Whitty, EN>SV Translator:

All translation agencies are not the same. During my 10 years as a freelance translator I have learned that smaller 'boutique-style' agencies are easier and more rewarding to work for than larger international 'corporation-style' agencies. What do I mean by this?

About five years ago I was contacted by one of these smaller agencies, which had received my contact information from my membership in a local translation association. The local touch was per se a positive first impression for both of us. They needed a Swedish translator for a new project they had just been awarded. As I already had enough clients to fill my schedule, I quoted my top rate at that time, and they accepted.

This led to a very rewarding job, with monthly updates ever since. I am communicating

directly with the owner and we have worked out a system that suits both of us. She now trusts my opinion and has even switched proofreaders or translators for me. There has never been any downward price pressure from the top management, or from stakeholders, thanks to this being a small, personalised company. I have always been treated with respect and it is easy to provide good customer service and respect in return.

After a year or so, we met in person at a translation conference and have met each other annually ever since. We both appreciate each other's business; I because there are no complicated project management systems, no price pressure and the deadlines are flexible; they, because they can trust my translation quality, responsiveness and professionalism. I have received excellent recommendations and references from this company. The manager has turned into a mentor for my business and it is no surprise that I prioritise this client.

This client is a huge reason why I now prefer working with smaller agencies (apart from direct clients). Smaller companies can offer a personal touch, with flexibility and respect for you as a freelance translator. The project managers do not change very often and I can develop a personal relationship with the client.

**Łukasz Gos-Furmaniakiewicz,
EN>PL Translator:**

After two months and no jobs, I contacted

a certain translation agency that seemed to be recruiting on the fora I'd been haunting back then. I had no translation experience and was basically a young lawyer changing fields. They didn't send me away as some had done before, but just gave me a test. It was a page out of a pleading in some complicated insolvency case, which I actually recognised, and we had a good laugh about it. It was some sort of love at first sight. The special relationship continues to this day.

Some years later, there was that kind project manager – actually, not a project manager, but someone with a good old-fashioned traditional job title – who called me an angel for helping out their in-house translator who became so tired she couldn't do it anymore while the deadline kept ticking. That translator was very kind too. The whole company is. Too bad we can't work together more often.

Then there's that kindly lady who does almost exclusively energy translation projects. She always apologises for waking me up before 1pm. Thus, I never hold it against her.

Petra Junge, EN<>DE Translator:

About four years ago, I received an email from an agency that was looking for several translators working in different language pairs. They had won an ongoing project with a relatively big industry client and were now sending out recruitment emails to translators via different channels. After I had sent through my application with my CV and introductory email, I received an email back



from them requesting a phone interview. The interview went quite well and they believed that my skills, experience and personality would match the requirements of the project. There was another English to German translator in the final running, but in the end I was the one chosen for this project.

The collaboration with the agency started off well. The first batch of files included almost 30 files with a total word count of more than 15,000 words. The deadline was more than fair and the communication was open, friendly and professional. The next assignments came in waves. Whenever the end client launched or updated one or several products, the next batches would come through. Sometimes there was only one sentence to be translated per month, for which we had agreed on a sound minimum fee.

After we had been working together this way for about two years, I went on a three-week vacation travelling through the Australian outback (where there was poor phone and data reception). I was aware that another big batch of translations was supposed to be coming through from this client, but not before my return. However, when I was able to check my emails in the middle of the first week of my trip, I found a message with the next assignment. The due date fell in my vacation time. While the translators of the other language pairs had confirmed the date, I unfortunately had to decline, because there was no physical chance for me to deliver in time.

However, the agency explained the situation to the end client, who agreed to wait for the German translation until I was

able to deliver, which was about two weeks later than their original deadline. I was so pleased about that! I was used to agencies just contacting another person from their pool of translators to avoid any possible conflict with the end client. Unfortunately, for some clients, meeting a deadline is as important as – if not more important than – the translation quality itself. I believe that this example is excellent proof that it is possible to build a personal relationship with a client – based on trust, reliability and professionalism, even if is an agency!

Łukasz Gos-Furmarkiewicz, EN>PL Translator:

I have a direct client who claims to be in love with my translations and to read them for education or enjoyment. Some time into our collaboration he retained a friend to teach him the language (the friend was actually a friendly small agency owner who'd previously sent a lot of nice projects my way, at better rates than anybody else paid – and she claims I'm the best – she even saw me translate when I couldn't see straight and QA found nothing).



I've met some other very kind or otherwise memorable people. It comes down to people anyway.

Susanne Creak, DE<>EN Translator:

English and French translation studies were part of my tertiary training in business administration and foreign languages back in the 90s. I worked in project management roles first, and in marketing, in Australian and German corporate environments, and translated on an irregular basis as part of these roles. Only after 12 years, when I moved to Australia permanently, did I decide to make translating my main profession. I gained NAATI accreditation and started my own freelance business as a Professional Translator German < > English.

Right at the start of my new adventure, I joined AUSIT, the professional association for translators and interpreters in Australia. At an AUSIT networking event, I met Tea Dietterich, CEO of 2M Language Services with head office in Brisbane. I became one of 2M's preferred freelance translators for German and worked with Tea and the team regularly over a number of years. We enjoyed a very positive, cooperative and friendly agency-contractor working relationship.

I loved translating, had trained and worked as a subtitler, and was proud of how my business was running; but after approximately five years I started feeling a little dissatisfied with the somewhat lonely side of this profession. It did not

allow me to get out much and I had only limited face-to-face interaction with other people. When Tea at that time advertised a Business Development Manager role at 2M on LinkedIn, I jumped at the opportunity. Luckily, my previous corporate background, combined with the fact that I was a translator myself and I understood their work and the industry, was a perfect fit for them. What started as a part-time role turned full time after only a few weeks. Quite quickly I started getting more and more responsibility and as it became clear that I could do – – and was doing – – much more than just business development and project management, I was promoted to General Manager.

Today, my main responsibilities at 2M cover a range of marketing and business development activities. I am also involved in optimising business processes, do project management for key accounts, and look after most of our subtitling and voice-over projects. I am fortunate to be able to attend a range of conferences and networking events where I represent the company, and I love the added face-to-face contact with people. The range of clients is vast and we get to deal with many different personalities. Equally, I am thrilled about dealing with so many more languages and cultures, and learning more about them. As an added plus, I haven't lost touch with the actual task of translation, as I often proofread and occasionally still translate myself.

I couldn't imagine a better job for me right now. It has variety, combines everything that I loved about my previous roles, and more, and gives me opportunity to grow.

How I used a daring approach to win a client

Joanna Coryndon, FR>EN Translator:

A few days ago I had a lovely lunch with the owner of a small but thriving agency. We've been working together for a year now and he has given me some of the most interesting and rewarding jobs I've done to date. This lunch would never have happened if my initial approach hadn't been one that made me blush at my presumptuousness at the time, but has paid off a thousand fold since.

Maybe it was just that I was suddenly tired of sending more or less the same email to agencies, maybe it was something in the tone of the owner's advertisement, or maybe it was the weather. Who knows? But the result was an unusually straightforward and confident email from me saying words to the effect of 'You've no reason to pay more attention to this reply than to any other, but you would be making a mistake because I know I'm good at this, and it seems I'm not the only one who thinks so.' I followed these words with a bold copy and paste of a complimentary email I had received from another agency about the quality of my work. I pressed send, and promptly collapsed in





a heap of embarrassment and worry that I had used someone else's words without their permission. Within minutes, however, I'd received a reply: 'I know that PM, I'll send you a test.' In one fell swoop it appeared that I might have a new client, not to mention an embryonic network.

Over the past year, the former has turned into a rewarding relationship, while the latter has grown and brought new opportunities. Just sometimes, if not all the time, doing things in a way you wouldn't normally do them brings results. After all, you have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

As a mid-life career changer who has come to translation only relatively recently, I love my new career, couldn't have hoped for a better start for my little business, and feel very optimistic about my professional future!"

How an apparently insignificant job turned into something much bigger

Megan Onions, FR/DE>EN Translator:

Last summer, a colleague referred a German project to me, as she was unavailable for work that week. I was, of course, happy to take over and quite flattered to be recommended. The project was a small proofreading job (1,400-odd words) consisting of copy for a hotel. Simple, I thought. This kind of work is my bread and butter, and it was nice to have a comfortable deadline. I delivered a day early, providing explanations for any major changes and flagging up a few queries for discussion with the end client, and everything was rosy.

Until 10 days later. My client sent me a rather sheepish email to say that the end client was being 'rather difficult'. It was a case of that lovely phenomenon: the non-native who thinks he or she knows English better than a mother tongue writer. There was a lot of toing and froing and, in a situation where it can be tempting to get defensive, I tried to be as accommodating as possible. I suggested contacting a neutral, native third party to assess the quality of my work (which cleared me of the alleged 'unnatural English'), and made some of the least radical changes requested to appease the end client. My client was grateful for my flexibility and said that she hoped that it wouldn't put me off working with her again.

It certainly hasn't put her off working with me. Since this small, one-off project, that client has recommended me to three further clients, who have also referred my details on, resulting in a series of new contacts,



enquiries and projects taking me right up to this week. Not a bad result for putting in a small amount of effort to go the extra mile. I pride myself on being approachable, friendly and flexible, and it really pays off.

Karine Leroux, FR/ES>EN, EN/ES>FR Translator:

A web designer once contacted me in a bit of a panic: the translator who had agreed to translate the website of one of her clients suddenly gave birth (out of the blue, it seemed!) and realised that she couldn't manage both motherhood and work for the time being, leaving the web designer with a looming deadline and no translator to do the work. The good news was that I was available; the not-so-good news was that the previous quote was rather low. Luckily, I managed to negotiate a rate that, despite being lower than my normal one, was still substantially above the previous quote. The text proved to be one of the most stylistically demanding ones I have translated

to date. While it was not the best remunerated project, it was definitely an interesting and otherwise rewarding challenge.

Knowing from my website that psychology is one of my specialisms, the client soon contacted me again and asked whether I would be interested in translating a book that her mother, a psychotherapist, had recently written. Needless to say, the reply was an enthusiastic 'yes'. The work was fascinating – and remunerated at my normal rate this time. Since then, this lady has commissioned me to translate various updates for her website, including blog posts, testimonials and online articles, and has become one of my favourite clients.

The relative sacrifice I chose to make in terms of rate on the initial project unexpectedly paid off as it led to more and indeed very interesting work in one of my core specialisms!

Lukasz Gos-Furmarkiewicz, EN>PL Translator:

A few years ago, I did a large and difficult test, construction stuff with a lot of chemistry in it, though it was a legal/admin/business context. I didn't complain, I just did it. The resulting projects made half my income for that year, and it was autumn. So I always tell everybody, just do the samples or you don't know what you're missing.

Allison Wright, DE/FR/PT>EN Translator:

Das Vier-Augen-Prinzip¹

It was the late 1990s. I arrived just before the end of the day at the regional headquarters of a German NGO in Harare, Zimbabwe, to collect the cheque payment for my most recent translation. Since its inception several years before, I had done a lot of freelance translation work for this organisation.

The cheque had only one signature on it. It still required the second signature of the accountant, a woman by the name of Di Austin, an English-speaking Zimbabwean who knew no German and whom I had never met, but whose reputation for being intimidating preceded her. Much to the bookkeeper's relief, I suggested I take the cheque to the accountant for signature myself. I knocked on the open door, and saw a stressed-out looking woman who had just put down the telephone.

'Good evening,' I said. 'I am Allison Wright, the –'

'Yes, I know who you are. You are XYZ's translator – or, I should say, *the* XYZ translator.' She introduced herself and we shook hands. I sat down in one of two chairs in front of her desk while she busied herself making coffee for us. The sudden bestowal of this important-sounding title sent me reeling. She countersigned my cheque.

'Do you know,' she asked, 'that I have a copy of every single one of your translations here in this office?' She waved her hand expansively over some lever arch files on shelves covering an entire wall. 'Surely some

¹ The 'four eyes principle', a method of dual control aimed at ensuring transparent accounting procedures.

of those are accounting records?' I remarked. 'No, those are next door,' she said.

'I cannot tell you how many times your translations have saved me. The internal audit guys from head office (in Germany) were amazed at how everything works perfectly here. It's all because of your translations – especially that ruddy great procedures manual.' How could I forget it? It took more than a ream of paper to print out.

'Come, let me show you something.' She motioned for me to come around to her side of the desk. There on her computer screen, in all their glory, were her master control spreadsheets; headings and sub-headings in German with the English underneath, in worksheet after worksheet. I thought it was fantastic.

She saw me nodding my head vigorously. 'The translation has come alive,' I said. 'Yes!' she said.



MINI INTERVIEW WITH ANN SHERWIN:

'Freelance translation is ... fun.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

Yes: two agency debts long since written off, and one individual, still pending. Total loss in more than 30 years is less than \$1,000, including collection agency fees for others who finally did pay. (I work mostly for private individuals.)

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

Friend! They appreciate what I put into a job and do stuff introverts like me are not good at, such as marketing.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation? Why, or why not?

No. Machine translation has had no impact in my market niche; and if it did, I'd welcome it, because there is more work to be done than humans can handle at an affordable price. As for other technologies, I use anything that can shorten a task.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Yes.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

The Internet has made the whole world our marketplace. Competing in different economic milieux complicates pricing and makes quality all the more critical. While that's a good thing, it's also the biggest challenge, especially for the novice.

MINI INTERVIEW WITH MEGAN ONIONS:

'Freelance translation is ... immensely rewarding, inspiring and, of course, very hard work.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

Thankfully, no. I have come across a few late payers though.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

There are well-documented bad guys out there, but there are also brilliant little gems among the bargain-basement costume jewellery.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Certainly. As enjoyable as my work is, I'm not doing it solely for the love of it!



MINI INTERVIEW WITH EMILY PLANK:

'Freelance translation is ...

a vocation requiring creativity, self-discipline and resourcefulness.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

Yes, on a couple of occasions. One was an individual who went broke and ended up paying back most of the owed money a few years later after I sent several legal letters. One was a company which had been fine, then changed hands, suddenly stopped replying to emails and stopped paying. The other was a completely fake agency in the US. I contacted the sheriff responsible for its supposed location, who investigated it for me and advised the address given by the agency was actually that of a Holiday Inn hotel! It's annoying and disheartening, especially when these things happen early on in your career. But it is also part of business, and a useful learning experience.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

They tend to have a bad reputation amongst freelance translators, but I think it really depends on which agencies you work for. There are certainly some which pay well, send regular, interesting projects, and have friendly, responsible project managers. It's just a question of sorting the good from the bad. Checking their payment history on sites like the ProZ Blue Board is one option.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation? Why, or why not?

No. While they will play an increasing role in our profession in future, I do not believe a machine will ever be able to fully replace the human brain's capacity to translate subtle nuances and subjective materials such as marketing documents.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Certainly. I have been doing it for almost eight years, starting in my early 20s, with little knowledge of the industry at the time. If you can successfully demonstrate your quality, reliability and professionalism on a regular basis, the work will come.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

Being able to trust that a client will pay reliably within an average period of 30 days. There are a lot of people/organisations out there who take advantage of freelance translators, and we constantly have to keep on our toes to ensure we are duly remunerated for our work.

Chapter 4: Organise yourself



Opportunities flow towards those who are organised. Whether it's your desk, your time, your space, your address book or your non-translating time, chaos attracts chaos and order attracts order, as the stories in this section suggest time and again. Not everyone has to adopt the same methods; we're all different. But to have no method at all is to shoot yourself in the foot. Organisation is yet another way in which you can wrest back the power over your life and say 'I'm in charge here, and I call the shots.'

“I want to be part of the bright side!”

How I made good use of a time when there was no work coming in

Jane Ellis, FR>EN Translator:

I am so busy during quiet times in my freelancing career. Here are some of the things that keep me furiously busy in my 'downtime': updating my Translations with Chemistry website, honing my CV/résumé, catching up with some CPD – I always seem to have at least one Coursera course on the go, and find it hard to resist signing up for new webinars on topics such as terminology and technical writing skills. I study my languages and specialist subject areas and update my terminology and term bases. I also take the time to review relevant agencies in my field

and send off new applications. There is never any reason to sit around twiddling my thumbs waiting for work to come in.

**Daria Bontch-Osmolovskaia,
RU>EN Translator:**

At the end of any calendar year, my work stops dead on 24 December, and usually doesn't pick up again until late January. This is normal in my market segment. I specialise in engineering translations and most manufacturing and engineering companies close down over the Christmas/New Year/school holidays. In any case, it gives me a couple of weeks to enjoy myself, relax and dream of new plans for the coming year.

This particular year closed on a sour note. One of my best clients finished their overseas projects which required my services, and that was that. Thirty per cent of my income was gone overnight. In mid-December, too, which meant my income for the holiday period was going to be very sad indeed.

I sulked and moped for a week or so. Woe was me. Nobody was starting new projects, the agencies weren't calling and the world was a dark and miserable place. Even chucking it all in and finding a waitressing job seemed like a good option. At least the income would be regular, thought I.

That was when I decided that it was time to change my attitude. This was ridiculous. I was in an industry I loved; I was doing a job that fascinated and engaged me on a daily basis;

and I was getting paid better than a waitress. All I needed was more clients, to make up for the 30 per cent deficit.

So that was it. The gauntlet was thrown down and the challenge accepted. I spent two weeks re-writing my website and profiles on ProZ and LinkedIn, re-creating my image and re-thinking my 'brand'. I researched companies that could be interested in my services. I compiled a list of 'maybes' and 'potentials' in a spreadsheet and read up on every project they were running.

All through the festive season and January I read books, websites and blogs on self-promotion, marketing skills, pitching clients, writing and translating. I talked to self-employed people in various industries, walked my dog in the park (to avoid staring at the empty email inbox) and dared to dream big. Halfway through the month, my afterburners kicked in and I couldn't wait for the new work year to start. This was exciting stuff!

As work started to pick up in late January and people came back to their offices, I picked up the phone and started calling – in alphabetical order, from the top. The first call was terrifying, the second one a little easier, and the third easier still. The fourth listened to me noncommittally, but two days later there was an email from the business development manager of that company in my inbox, asking me out to a business lunch. I had to have a little lie-down after that.

This all took place a couple of years ago. By the middle of that year, the 30 per cent hole in my income was securely plugged, and by the middle of the next year, my entire income stream had almost doubled. Now I always

make use of the quiet time during the festive season to read, research new potentials and plan the coming year. It's a good little tradition.

Rita Menezes, EN/FR>PT Translator:

Oh, the despair, the solitude, those constantly negative thoughts: 'Am I not good enough?' 'Where did I go wrong?' STOP! There is nothing wrong and you are really good.

It's easy to say, I know. But let me tell you something: it is really true! I just had to learn how to cope with the challenges I face in my daily work as a freelancer: work comes in waves, it might be unstable, there's no fixed income, and what is true one day may not be true the next – but it makes you feel free! Above all, I had to believe in me: I have skills, I am efficient, I always stick to what's agreed with the client. This is the profession I chose, with all the ups and downs, and I love it – we all love it, let's be honest!

Having said this, nothing is perfect. However, dealing with the imperfections is what makes this life beautiful. Time is crucial when we think about the world we live in. It can lead us to insanity too: sometimes there is not enough, sometimes there is too much. The more we live and learn, the more we are able to find the balance we need to meet our needs and purposes.

Here are some things I usually do when I have no professional projects in hands:

- sleep
- watch a nice movie
- clean up my desk (well, at least, decide what needs to be tidied up)
- attend short webinars or courses
- write
- update my professional page on social media
- send emails to clients and fellow translators catching up on things (never forget your network)
- research (we never know when something will come in handy and when we have no time pressures we can explore whatever we want)
- rediscover the pleasure of reading a book without feeling guilty because it has nothing to do with the project in hand
- spend some quality time with the ones I love (family, friends),
- go for a walk in a place that makes me feel good
- play music.

My motto: it is great when we have a lot of things to do, but it is wonderful when we have nothing to do!



How I decided to bring some organisation into my work, and the result

Caroline Sanders, EN>FR Translator:

Closing doors and keeping a neat desk help me stay focused on my work

Working from home: I love it, and I find it difficult. I'm quite organised, but as soon as I leave my office, I get distracted by all these things-to-do competing for my attention. My environment shouts family life, home, etc.

Recently I tried something different. During my working day, I now close all the bedroom doors and the laundry door, and I take a different route to the kitchen. This simple change has kept me focused on my job because my 'work environment' does look different to my home environment and strangely enough, I even walk differently in my 'work environment'. A few weeks down the track, I'm still amazed that a simple change has had such an impact on my focus.

I then took it a step further. I read years ago that it's better to only keep on your desk what you're working on at any one time. I did notice recently that, while working, my eyes were attracted to piles of books on my desk (related to a project) and to some documents waiting to be dealt with. It became obvious that every time my eyes fell on these, I lost my concentration. I have since cleared my desk of everything except what I'm working on at any one time; I have re-arranged some shelves in my office to dedicate some room to project work, so it doesn't have to sit on my desk but is still easily reachable when needed.

It's working for me, and my neat desk brings me peace. I can then concentrate on the task at hand more efficiently.

Sarah Silva, DE>EN Translator:

Returning to work after maternity leave I needed to make some changes. I could no longer be as flexible at work if I wanted to spend time with my children. After a particularly harrowing month, when both sons caught chicken pox and I had to work nights to complete a large project I'd already committed to, I decided to take action!

To start with, I set myself strict working hours and refused work with tight deadlines or negotiated a later delivery date. I was surprised at how many customers agreed to a slightly later deadline so that I could complete the translation for them, which definitely made me feel valued.

Knowing that time is limited certainly sharpens the mind and I believe that in itself has made me more productive and less likely to waste time during office hours. I check emails on my BlackBerry outside of these hours so customers are not waiting for a response, and I activate my out of office message if I am not able to reply.

I make sure that the projects I take on pay well and focus on maximising my time – which means translating. Outsourcing my book-keeping, general admin and invoicing tasks for a couple of hours a week is a massive boon. It gives me a fresh perspective on my

The Bright Side of Freelance Translation

business and keeps me highly organised. Need to put my hand on a receipt from last month? Easy when it's filed instead of being in the middle of a huge pile of paperwork!

FreeAgent, a cloud accounting package, enables me to keep everything in one place, and check at a glance if any invoices are outstanding and how my cash flow is looking. It saves me and my admin assistant time so that she can also help with other non-translation projects I may have on my to-do list.

Reassessing the way I work has paid dividends for me. I focus on what I'm best at – translation – and I earn more than I used to, in fewer hours. Organisation and focus have also given me added confidence. I know that I am valued by my customers for my translation skills and responsiveness, which makes for great business relationships and a happy translator.

Caroline Sanders, EN>FR Translator:

Building renewal breaks into my day

Reading *The way we are working is not working* by Tony Schwartz, I decided to experiment with building (as he puts it) 'a better balance between energy expenditure and energy renewal' into my days. I intentionally create renewal breaks throughout the day, the emphasis being on 'renewal', so no staying at my desk and no Internet.

For example, I will work in a very concentrated way for 45 to 90 minutes, then I will stop and do a couple of yoga poses. The next break

could be a drink or lunch in the garden (I used to take with me something work-related to read, but not anymore). Another one could be to sit for 10 minutes with a magazine (shocking, I know; I started doing it for the sake of the experiment and the results make the idea not so shocking anymore!).

What I have noticed is that I am less stressed out, which for me is a huge bonus. Not only is it more pleasant, I am also more productive. When my working day is finished, I pick up my daughter from school and start my second day – it does help to have some energy in store then! I am still tweaking and experimenting with the rhythm of my whole day and considering skipping and gardening as ideas for breaks, 10 minutes at a time. I am also going to try to go to bed earlier. I'm still in the middle of reading this book, so there will probably be more ideas in store to experiment with!

Marta Stelmaszak, PL>EN Translator:

A few years back, at the beginning of my freelance career, I used to have a dramatically different vision of what work and business should look like. In fact, I used to have no vision at all.

My working life was characterised by a high degree of randomness, chaos or even mayhem closer to important deadlines. I have to admit that being a public service interpreter working for courts and the police you can't really avoid that and you can't really plan for every day. Even if I tried very

hard, the remnants of my routine would be shattered at around 3am if I had to get up, grab my bag and travel to a crime scene.

This largely disorganised pattern of work had a great impact on other areas of my life, leaving me often deprived of sleep, malnourished and on the verge of social exclusion (by my exasperated friends who knew I'd never make it to a party or to the cinema). It was partly due to the type of work, but even later when I started moving towards translation, I started to replicate these patterns.

Of course, this wasn't taking me anywhere in terms of my personal and professional development. Some people thrive surrounded by the creative energy of pure chaos. I don't. Stuck in a downward spiral, I finally decided I had to stop it. I took a week off and travelled back to my home village where, in a bucolic setting, I made the first attempt at organising my work life.

The rules were simple: have set rules. Bringing organisation to your life starts with little steps. For example, no matter what, always get up at 7am or have lunch at the same time every day. Then you slowly start building your working day around these 'anchors of organisation' and you see how easily you adapt to patterns.

Once I had organised my time, now managed carefully in Google Calendar, I became much more productive because I knew what I was supposed to do in each slot of my day. As basic as it sounds, my mind got used to a certain rhythm and learned that I have to work hard between 8am and 1pm, but I can ease off after 6pm.



Then came the time of spatial organisation. I really believe that it's important to organise your time before you organise your space. Following my daily pattern, I designed separate areas in my home office for hardcore work, reading, or even creative thinking. The way space is organised reflects my work routine, reinforcing the effect of organisation.

You can call me an organisational freak (I'll take it as a compliment!), but good organisation can make you happier, reduce stress and uncertainty, and help you think clearly and get more work done in the same time.

Caroline Sanders, EN>FR Translator:

Monday vision, Friday reflection

A few months ago, I came across the concept of a 'Monday vision' followed by a 'Friday reflection'. The principle is to set three key results to achieve that week on Monday and to reflect on them on Friday.



What I like about it is treating each week as a blank slate. Whatever happened last week is past and I can make new, better (or rather more informed) decisions every week. On Monday I sit down for 10 minutes and select the three results that I think will have the biggest impact on my goals. I write them down and display them in my office so I am reminded every morning (and throughout the day) of where I want to go.

On Friday, I take stock. I list three things that went well (pat on the back), three things that need to be improved, and anything that I can change in the way I work (using a timer when going on the Internet to keep myself in check, for example) and how I'm going to implement them the following week (for example, setting the timer before starting an Internet session).

Writing my Monday vision helps me stay focused on what I want to achieve during the week. Friday reflection brings accountability,

which I feel I especially need as a freelancer. Am I heading in the right direction, or do I need to correct my course? Doing it in a constructive way gives me the opportunity to reflect peacefully on what happened, to decide where to go from there and how to carry forward what I have learnt (both what works – reinforcement – and what needs improvement – correct course) and to move forward.

I have a natural tendency to forget what went well during the week (it's done and dusted, and forgotten) and dwell on what didn't. Acknowledging what went well gives me a foundation to build upon, acknowledging what didn't, and thinking of what I can change gives me the opportunity to correct course instead of feeling discouraged and disheartened. For me, that's a huge bonus. It also gives me the opportunity to try new ways of doing things, because I'm going to reflect on them on Friday and choose to adopt them, tweak them or let them go.

The weeks I do both my Monday vision and my Friday reflection are the weeks when I really make progress towards my goals, and also when I'm the most at peace with what happens in the week.

“I’m happy to participate. Am so tired of all the moaners. I love my job.”

¹ See here, day 2 and day 6: <http://sourcesofinsight.com/30-days-of-getting-results/>

MINI INTERVIEW WITH LUCY BROOKS:

'Freelance translation is ...'

freedom to be my own boss and freedom from the daily commute. It is also an awesome responsibility! No supervision, no clocking on or off. Time management is essential.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

A few. I used the small claims court twice and had to write off a couple of bad debts. Better research at the time would have helped me, but the facilities we have today via the Internet were not really around at the time.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

Working with an agency should be a team venture, so my answer is definitely friend – ideally. Unfortunately some agencies impose terrible conditions on their translators, including poor rates and rigid administrative systems. But there are still lots of good guys out there who work with their translators to produce a better product.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

Not really. There is work around for good translators. No machine can write brochure copy, or press releases, or magazine articles. And machine translation has its place. For example, governments use it to scan reams of what could be totally useless documents and flag up keywords and phrases. Real translators are then called in to translate the important bits.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Yes. It has been for me. But you have to work at it to be sure of keeping earnings sufficiently high.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

Learning how to run a business, getting to grips with legislation, learning the technology required, isolation. All these can be countered in various ways with training, information outlets such as webinars, and translators' fora.

MINI INTERVIEW WITH GILL MCKAY:

**'Freelance translation is ...
a path to freedom!'**

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

A couple of late payers, but posting about them on ProZ.com and Translators Cafe embarrassed them into paying. I no longer work for either of them.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

Generally as a friend, though I try to only work with agencies that I feel comfortable with. I prefer agencies that have a more personal touch and where there is a feeling of teamwork, rather than being treated as just a 'resource'.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

I think it will increasingly eat into the translation market, but I personally don't feel threatened as I work in the more creative area of marketing/journalism/tourism. I don't believe a machine will ever be able to turn out the kind of language that is needed in these areas.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Yes, but like any career it takes effort to learn the skills needed, understand the industry, keep up to date, build a client base and develop a reputation.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

Educating clients to appreciate why it is worth paying for quality translation and to understand the complexities involved in producing said translation. Personally, I find it challenging to understand and keep up with the constant changes and advances in technology.



Chapter 5: Value yourself

You can have the clearest vision, the neatest logo, the most stunning website, the most enterprising attitude and the most organised office in the world, but there is one more element you need to incorporate into your attitudes if you really want others to sit up and take note, to be drawn towards you and to want to involve you in their projects. And that is to value yourself.

It's easy to say, but it takes courage and determination in the face of what may be frequent doubts. Whether in terms of your rates, your acceptance or rejection of certain jobs, or your determination to stick to your vision of what it is you want for yourself, it all begins with feeling, as the advert goes, that you're worth it. Face it: if you don't believe that, nobody else will. And it's something that has to begin with you – no-one else can do it for you.



How I decided to move upwards from poorly paying agencies

Moira Monney, FR/EN>DE Translator:

When I first started out in the translation industry, my rates with some agencies were very low – sometimes because I had set them that way, not daring to charge more, and sometimes because I just agreed to the 'standard fixed rates' proposed by those agencies. Whenever I worked on a project for one of those poorly paying agencies, I felt frustrated and somehow 'used' afterwards.

One day, I decided that this was not what I had envisioned for me and my business; it was not how I wanted to feel. American columnist and author Maureen Dowd said, 'The minute you settle for less than you deserve, you get even less than what you settled for.' I found that to be too true for my own good. So I asked myself: 'What do I deserve? How much value does my work provide to my clients? How much would I actually like to earn?'

I realised that my work was worth much more than those agencies were paying. That's when I decided to increase my rates and no longer work with certain agency clients. After all, translations enable their clients, the end clients, to do business internationally; they provide access to new markets and the opportunity for them to increase their revenues. Once I really understood that, it became easy to say no to low rates.



Today, I work with many agencies which pay rates I am very happy with, and I have added several higher-paying direct clients to my portfolio. I love the fact that once I realised what my work was worth, my clients were convinced of its value too, and therefore happily paid the rates I asked for.

It has to be said that charging what I am worth makes me produce my best work – I am more motivated and productive, and my working day has become so much more rewarding! I hope that a little of this positive spark is passed on to everyone who comes into personal contact with me.

“The bright side is a much needed, much neglected one. Keep up the good work!”

Angie Taylor, FR/PL/ES>EN Translator:

Although I had originally trained as a translator, I had never worked as a ‘proper’ freelancer until around 10 years ago. I sent my CV to lots of agencies, mainly in France, and was pleased to get a response from two fairly big agencies in Paris. The first is still a good client to this day, but the second one paid the lowest rates I had seen. As they sent me regular work, I wasn’t too bothered, but as I got more clients it started to become more noticeable. In addition, they started asking me to do them small ‘favours’, such as translating a few words or a few sentences for free, or doing free tests of up to 300 words, promising me all the work if they won the contract. I have nothing against doing the odd favour for good clients, but this was becoming too regular.

Added to this was the fact that all their project managers seemed to be either on short-term contracts or French/foreign students

on university placements. These foreign students proofread the English translations and came back to me with some preposterous questions, querying perfectly good English, sometimes replacing it with appalling English, all because they were not native speakers and had relatively poor English.

As I got more freelance experience and better-paying and more professional clients, I realised how unacceptable this state of affairs was, so decided that this agency really had to go. I asked (my mistake!) if they would increase their rates. When they said no, I started turning down more of their projects. I was managing to raise my rates with all my other clients except this one. Then I TOLD them I was putting my rates up, and have had much less work from them since! The final straw came recently when they asked me if I would be interested in regular (daily) work, but because they had offered their client a discount, they could only pay €0.04. Not surprisingly, I turned it down, and made it clear that I could no longer work with this agency.

At around the same time as I moved on from this agency, a couple of other, much more professional, much better-paying agencies started sending me more regular work. Pure coincidence? Who knows!

Luis Arri, EN>ES Translator:

(First published as a comment on the GTS Translation Services blog; edited and republished with the permission of the author)

Recently an agency informed me that they had been able to find an outstanding EN>ES translator holding a PhD who would work for a rate of 6 cents per word. He or she would need to translate between 1.5 and 1.7 million words to get my current translation income. I have translated around 750,000 words per year over the last five years, at my rates. My gross income from translation between 2009 and 2012 ranged from US\$76,000 to US\$101,000.

In the 'crisis' years, my billing rate for agencies went from 10-12 cents per word to 12-15 cents. For direct clients, my rates today are between 18 and 25 cents. My next business objective is to expand my list of direct clients. I am back in Houston, where I have worked in the past as a lawyer for a major law firm. It is a state rich in oil and gas and this also fits with my experience, as I worked for a major oil



company for 10 years in Oklahoma. Making six figures per year is not an impossible dream for any translator in the US who does not focus on low paying agencies.

I was born in Argentina, and I have many contacts with Argentine translators. I know the situation of translators in Argentina, and know personally many of the top translators there. A couple of years ago I was invited to participate in round tables in Rosario and Buenos Aires sponsored by IAPTI about the translation business in the US. Obviously, the questions I got were how much do I charge, how much should they charge, and how to contact that market.

My answer was that I could not tell them how much to charge, although I could tell them what I charge. They should decide themselves how much money they wanted to leave on the table for agencies to take. How to approach the US market? Form teams to win either direct clients or specialised agencies that do not compete only on price.



How I learned to say no, how I learned to say yes

Andrew Bell, NO/DA//NL/IS>EN Translator:

We can thank Anthony Hopkins for bringing 'quid pro quo' back into vogue, but this truly is a case of good business sense bringing a good outcome. I'd been discussing with a colleague (not a million miles away, social network-wise) how I was getting a little frustrated with the sine wave nature of my work, and that my niche area of medical translation (much as I love it) wasn't sufficient to ring all my bells.

My colleague suggested that the answer was staring me in the face: – my passion for cycling, and all things bike related. A light bulb moment! So, when a leading manufacturer of racing bicycles contacted me out of the blue, via a very pleasant project manager, this seemed like a golden opportunity. The project manager (let's call her Jane) was looking for a translator to work into Norwegian from English (one of my pairs, but I work in the opposite direction). I explained that I didn't work in that direction, but if she could bear with me, I'd see what I could do.

The next step was a casting call on a social network I run (Nordic Translators), but instead of getting the responders to contact Jane directly, I held the reins and asked them to contact me, including their CV and antecedent information. I sifted the applicants, discarded most, and finally found a credible translator – a passionate cyclist, also familiar with Trados Studio (a prerequisite). I passed his details on to the project manager, who said she'd take it further. In closing, I mentioned that I was

Nicole Y. Adams, DE>EN Translator:

When I started my freelance translation career, like most freelance translators, I was keen to gain experience as quickly as possible and took on almost every assignment that was offered to me. I struggled through subjects I didn't enjoy, and it didn't even occur to me at the time that I had the freedom to decline assignments!

At the time, I was concerned that clients would turn elsewhere if I turned them down too often. Over time, however, I worked out what genres and types of text I liked best, and which ones I disliked strongly. I realised that, given my interests, background and experience, I much preferred marketing and PR texts and decided to specialise in this field, and this field only. I started declining enquiries that were not related to marketing or PR – – hesitantly at first, and more confidently over time.



very interested in collaboration, particularly in respect to localisation from one English variant into another (usually US into Australian or British English), should they have a need.

I completed an application form, and two months later, having signed a non-disclosure agreement, I have localised over 300,000 words, and have projects booked up to the end of May. The moral here is, try to find something you're passionate about, explore the notion of bringing that into your work, and always try to give a potential client something other than a 'No, I can't help, sorry.' You never know where it will take you.

As time went on, I noticed a significant increase in job satisfaction and productivity. If you work only on texts you like and that you're familiar with, you'll naturally have more fun and earn more, as you can charge higher rates and work faster than in unfamiliar areas. Over time, I narrowed down my specialisations more and more, and today I decline around six out of ten enquiries (or I pass them on to suitable colleagues) if they don't match my specifications and preferences to a T.

Learning how to say no has definitely paid off for me, and I can only recommend you have the courage to follow your preferences as early on in your career as possible.

Caroline Alberoni, EN/IT>PT-BR:

When I started out as a translator, I was paid an extremely low rate (which was perfect for me at the time), worked very long hours (I used to sleep about four hours a night at most – *when* I slept – and I didn't eat properly) and didn't have weekends or holidays off. I had only one client and would accept anything they sent me (dreadful non-editable files, for instance). After all, I was just starting out and felt quite lucky to be working the way I had always dreamed of. After some time, I started reading more and exchanging experiences with other more experienced translators and realised that wasn't a normal reality. So I slowly but steadily started raising my rates, defining my specialisations (which chose me, not the other way around), looking for other clients and establishing a normal work routine. I realised there were clients willing to pay more for a professional service, so I decided I wouldn't settle for less.

I have learned to say no to:

- rates which are lower than the minimum I have established
- working on weekends/holidays (and some occasional random days)
- working after 10pm – except, of course, if I haven't been able to finish a job earlier
- jobs I'm not familiar with.

“I generally have a good feeling about our job and my clients!”

I have learned to say yes to:

- great opportunities which fit with my personal policies
- networking and exchanging experiences
- sometimes working on weekends/holidays/non-business hours for that great client that values my work.

We learn from experience. And each one of us will have different experiences, therefore may learn faster than others and/or learn different things.

The bottom line is we should never lose heart. If we are courageous, fearless, curious and willing to work really hard in the beginning; if we learn from our mistakes, learn with others, take advice and **learn to say no**, there's no way we won't succeed. Take my word for it. Always look on the bright side!



How I decided to put my rates up and with what results

**Lukasz Gos-Furmarkiewicz,
EN>PL Translator:**

It was my first paid translation job that wasn't billed as legal services by a firm. I was new, didn't even know what to quote. They (a direct client) didn't argue the [high] price, and it took me years to get paid that kind of rate again.

Mario Chávez, EN>ES Translator:

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I remember the conversation a current premium client of mine and I had before I began working on projects for him. Initially, he did not find me in the online directory of The American Translators Association (ATA) because he didn't know what ATA was, let alone that there was an online directory of translators.

He sought a Spanish technical translator only after being unable to find the translator who had done the job five years previously. He called local universities and contacted his peers in the business and came up with nothing.

Finally someone mentioned ATA and its website and that's how he found me. Did I charge him per word or did we hassle over low rates? Nope. I prepared a project budget that included a series of services (such as

translation, InDesign typesetting, AutoCAD file manipulation and Illustrator PDF conversion) and he accepted my initial quote over that of an out-of-state translation agency that offered to do everything for \$0.15/word. By the way, he's the vice president of his company, a mover and shaker.

How's that for a different story?

Petra Junge, EN<>DE Translator:

When I started out as a freelancer in 2009, I had no practical experience and only a vague idea of what it meant to run your own business. Thus, I started off slowly, setting up a few profiles on some networking sites for translators and applying for the first translation jobs in my area of expertise. As with any other job applications, you need optimism, patience and perseverance, but after a while you will reap the first fruits of your labour. I was very uncertain and confused in terms of rates. Different sources tell you different things and so I sold myself fairly cheaply at the beginning.

I noticed that the agencies with the lowest prices also expected the maximum amount of service (very strict deadlines, high formatting requirements, and unpaid extra work in terms of glossaries, style guides, and translation memories, for example).

Once I had become more familiar with the market and met other translators online and in person, I realised that I was not running my business in a sustainable manner and

that I was getting more and more frustrated about the small compensation for all the hard work I was doing. Thus, one day I decided to raise my rates categorically. I informed my clients as new assignments were received. The reactions were mixed. Some tried to put pressure on me by saying that they would not be able to keep me as their main German translator; others did not reply at all and others said something like 'Sorry, but in this case we cannot afford you anymore.' Then there were the ones who accepted the new rates, but gave me less work. Another client accepted and commented: 'We were already wondering why you weren't charging more.'

At a later point in time, when I increased my rates again, one agency replied in a friendly way that they were unable to accept my raise, because the rate they were paying me was already the upper limit of what they were able to pay. However, a few days later I received their next assignment, stating my new rate without any further comment, and they have been paying it ever since.

Although it can be hard at times, being aware of your own value and the value you bring to your clients is essential if you want to be confident and satisfied with what you do.

**Łukasz Gos-Furmarkiewicz,
EN>PL Translator:**

Remember the client who never forgets to say how much he appreciates my translations? I met him when I was invited to a meeting of lawyers by a pal from the PhD

programme at a law faculty. I was the only translator in a room full of internationally practising lawyers; how cool is that? I didn't have a single business card on me (which is a big no-no, one should always carry some, even when going to the pub*), but that wasn't too much of a problem, as everybody soon took to noting down my name and number. Only one has called so far, but even though he started modestly, a while later he brought in a huge chunk of my annual income when I needed it the most, for a job that was very nice to do, to boot. Furthermore, he made his client pay me in advance; I probably got the transfer before I even set to work.

When that lawyer got that first modest job back from me, he proposed to up my rate to 25 per cent more than what I was charging him. I insisted on declining, and I'm probably going to keep him on a lower rate for a while yet, but everybody else is in for a rise in my rates.

(* My local pub has my business cards at the counter.)



Andrew Morris, FR>EN Translator:

It took me quite a long time to realise a simple fact about rates. You don't ask a client for a rise: you tell them. By all means clothe it in polite and light-hearted language, but never end your email with the financial part and certainly not with a weak-kneed 'Is that okay?' or 'I hope that won't be a problem.'

Wait until you're feeling very upbeat (crucial). Then send off a letter saying 'I really enjoy working with you, but have so much on that I can't possibly take on work at x any more. My rate will now be y. But of course, in return you'll have the usual fast replies, the quality, the coruscating wit and the friendly attitude. I really hope we can continue working together.'

If you write with confidence, and if you believe in what you're saying (and assuming you have the quality as a translator to underpin that belief) then you'll find, paradoxically, that rather than shutting you out, most clients will *want* to be part of the energy you project and the feeling of success. In the subtlest of ways, you turn the tables. Now it's you who are in charge.



How I educated a client with positive results

**Alexandra Maldwyn-Davies,
FR>EN Translator:**

One of the less obvious qualities in a freelance translator is tact.

After translating a video game for young children, I received a furious email from the client explaining that she wanted to speak to me on the phone as soon as I had an available moment. Why? Aaarrggghh! What could it be? I quickly checked the file. I couldn't see anything.

I phoned, my heart pounding...

It turned out I'd translated 'BEEUUUURRK!!' (an exclamation in French to express disgust) into 'EWWWWWWW!' (an exclamation in US English to express disgust).

My client had never seen this expression and decided to Google it. I wouldn't recommend this. Depending on how many Ws you add to the end of the word, you will find a varying range of sexually graphic content. This is what my client had done (and what many of you are probably going to go and do now; please wait until the end of my story). She sent one of the links to what she'd found as she continued to scream down the phone at me. Tact was definitely needed here.

Somebody once suggested I smile whenever I speak on the phone, that it somehow conveys a feeling of warmth and empathy even though the other person can't see you. So, I smiled as I explained that it was a perfectly valid translation and I smiled some



more when she told me that I had no idea what language was appropriate to use with children, and – you've guessed it – I smiled again as I sent her several links containing uses of the word 'EWWWWWWWW!' (with varying numbers of Ws) that were thankfully absent of pornographic pictures.

I was then able to convey, with courtesy and poise, that copying and pasting into Google didn't always yield the best results. Soon after our conversation ended, I sent her a list of sites I find particularly useful when researching. She wrote back within 20 minutes thanking me for the new resources. Within a month, we'd agreed to raise my rates. After six months, she even managed to laugh about it.

I'd like to tell her that I dine out on the story these days, but if she didn't understand and started Googling again (which she wouldn't of course, now she's got my list) she might find the more commonly used equivalent to that particular phrasal verb and then I'd be in even more trouble...

***Łukasz Gos-Furmarkiewicz,
EN>PL Translator:***

I had a pizza and some wine with a friend who is a business and marketing trainer for translators. When it came to paying, my debit card reported 'English translator' after my name. She congratulated me on my clever device, but I had to explain that wasn't intentional! My bank had (rather unexpectedly) paraphrased the legal name (!) of my translation business. A while later the waitress asked me to translate an inspiring thought, which I ended up doing on the waiter's pad with a borrowed pen.

I went and told the bank. The clerk decided she needed to take some language lessons and asked me for a recommendation. So I recommended the same friendly agency owner I mentioned above because my appreciative lawyer client is also taking lessons from her now (it is not as if she needs to teach, she does it because she likes it and can afford to charge less than she would make translating).

MINI INTERVIEW WITH KAREN TKACZYK:

'Freelance translation is ...'

a stimulating, worthwhile way for me to use my intellect to produce a good income for my family yet retain the flexibility I want so that I can make them the priority whenever I need to.'

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

I don't see it as black and white. I enjoy working with agencies that add value. When I created my freelance translation practice I was juggling three small children. I wanted to be able to work with professionals who knew exactly what they wanted, when they needed it and how the process worked. I needed predictability. Many agencies like that exist and my hourly gross income for those I still work with is high. The need to handle and invest time in direct clients would not have suited me then. Nowadays I also have direct clients. I suspect I will always enjoy a mixture.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

I don't feel threatened by new technologies. I believe that only freelancers who use both their brains and new tools and technologies will thrive. The translation market is segmented so greatly that we will be able to ignore specific tools we dislike for long periods if we position ourselves appropriately, but we must all adopt tools of some kind in order to be effective and productive.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

The biggest challenge may be standing out in

a globalised world. We must overcome many small challenges to succeed: for instance, we must use new tools efficiently, manage an online presence and set goals for growth. But it seems to me that when we surmount the larger challenge of creating a name for ourselves and standing out among our peers, we can achieve an entirely different level of success in the market. How we stand out varies widely, of course. For some it might be as simple as a reputation that spreads among peers about the amazing work they produce on a daily basis. For others it might be volunteer work in a professional association, an unusual specialisation, insightful blog posts or inspiring keynote speeches. I would recommend that freelance translators prioritise as a goal whatever it is that can make them stand out.

MINI INTERVIEW WITH MALGORZATA PORZEZYNSKA:

'Freelance translation is ...

what you make of it.'

**Have you ever come across a non-payer
during your freelance translation career?**

No.

**What's your take on translation
agencies – friend or foe?**

There are obviously black sheep among translation agencies, but also among freelance translators. However, we have many resources and networks at hand that we can consult to avoid falling for non-payers, etc. Despite the relatively low payment, I have always had good relationships with the agencies I have worked with. It can be difficult to find trustworthy agencies who pay acceptable rates, but once you do, working with them is a good option when it comes to delivering multi-language projects.

**Do you feel threatened by new
technologies such as machine translation?**

Why, or why not?

Not really. Technology offers great assistance in translating certain types of texts, but is still far from understanding linguistic nuances, which is why Post-Editing of Machine Translation (PEMT) exists. The threat lies more in the fact that translators agree to do post-editing where a translation from scratch would be more suitable. Or as they say: guns don't kill people, people do.



Chapter 6: Push yourself

After you've worked hard to identify your goals and work on your image and communicate it to all who want to hear, and once you've got your act together and learned to value the unique contribution that you and no-one else on earth can make to the world of translation, you can allow yourself five minutes of self-congratulation.

But just five.

Because as we have seen, as life rushes forward, the person who stands still is soon left behind in a changing world. Remember above all that quality lies at the heart of your work, and that the process of improving that quality is one you can never abandon. You'll take some knocks, but you can do so in the confidence that your momentum is forward, and that quality, across all ages and cultures, is the only thing that endures.

“ As a mid-life career changer who has come to translation only relatively recently, I love my new career, couldn't have hoped for a better start for my little business, and feel very optimistic about my professional future! ”

How my work took a huge leap forward based on some advice or a chance remark

Jayne Fox, DE>EN Translator:

I've been a busy German-to-English translator for many years, happily working away on my trusty laptop, tinkering with my professional website and blogging in my spare time. While things have always gone well, until recently I hadn't found much time to step back and evaluate what I'm doing and where my work is going. That changed this year – and suddenly I've found myself overflowing with ideas and almost bursting with excitement about my plans. At the same time, a steady stream of highly interesting projects has been keeping my mind buzzing. What has caused all this? Well, some healthy habits, some CPD, and something that popped up on my computer screen while I was taking a break from translating one day.

Over the past year I've been making sure I look after my health, as I've found that I can only be a successful translator if I take care of myself. This means eating well (proper food and no junk!), exercising regularly and getting enough sleep. I know this all sounds a bit dull, but a year of these habits have made a huge difference to my work, focus and thought processes, giving me much more energy.

CPD has been another big source of inspiration for me recently. I've been doing some online courses (Massive Open Online Courses – MOOCs) in my specialist fields and

getting really excited about learning. I've also been listening to Tess Whitty's excellent series of podcasts on marketing for translators, which have been a great source of ideas.

And the advice that popped up on my computer screen? It was a passing remark by Eva Hussain in Australia on the Watercooler Facebook group. Her words were: 'My point is that people don't buy translations. They buy a brochure in another language, a certificate to be able to get married, or a book they want to read.' Yes! That's it! That's what people want, and we provide the service to make it happen. This quick comment started a whole series of light bulbs flashing in my head. Now I know what changes I should make in how I market myself and what direction I should take. I have exciting plans that are still in the early stages, but I hope they will lead to new opportunities in future. And while I'm developing my ideas, I'm drawing on the excitement and inspiration that come with a new project, and using this enthusiasm to provide the best service that I possibly can for my customers. Being a freelance translator really is one of the best jobs in the world!

Allison Wright, DE/FR/PT>EN Translator:

Table for two

The African Insurance Organisation held a week-long conference in the new Harare Sheraton in 1998. Translators were few and far between in Zimbabwe. I had a full-time job as secretary and translator at a credit

insurance company. My services as a French-English translator were summarily offered on my behalf for the duration of the conference.

Thus it was that one Monday morning I found my youthful self, with a badge on my jacket, in a small room jam-packed with semi-computerised typewriters and three other women. Two were not translators and had no experience in insurance, but had been teaching French for years. This will be fun, I thought. The third was the group's supervisor, Nati Collin, a professional woman in her forties. She was a picture of European elegance, with a sense of chic seldom seen in Africa. I liked her immediately.

My next surprise was a 20-page delegate's speech for urgent translation into French. I said that usually I only translated into English, my mother tongue. Nati told me the into-French translator could not make it; I was the next best thing. I got to work. It passed muster with Nati, and the deadline was met. The flurry of other French to English documents served to make this hectic experience even more intense.

I was tired, but not undaunted, by 9pm on Wednesday. Nati said it was time we had dinner; work could wait and it was her treat. During our three-course gourmet meal, she remarked that she had been watching me closely – as if I had not noticed! – and thought I had what it took to become a good translator one day. She said that one should always use one's own name in one's company name. She suggested I increase my rates because it was unethical to do otherwise; charge what you are worth – no less. She spoke of the passion involved in translation. She was confident, dignified and experienced – precisely the

kind of person I needed to meet. After the conference ended, I never saw her again.

Some 23 years later, I sat in the Great Hall of the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon, at the launch of a large book I had translated. In his speech, the author referred to me as a passionate translator. I thought of Nati Collin. She would have been quite at home in this august assembly. I wished she were there with me. In a sense, she was.

**Łukasz Gos-Furmarkiewicz, EN>PL
Translator:**

When talking to another lawyer client of mine, amidst the 'hi, what's up?' etc., I mentioned that a client was lagging behind on payment, because they didn't like something in the formalities or in my work – I don't remember the reasons or excuses. 'Wonder how they'd like a final demand,' came the reply in an instant.

I also experienced a lot of very kind help – you could probably call it patronage – on the business side (as it didn't involve the linguistic side of the work), from two established translators who had, or had made, a free slot on their team and recommended me to a number of their clients.



How I used negative feedback to positive ends

Ann Sherwin, DE>EN Translator:

Derailed averted

Was I headed for derailment? I'll never know. But I'm grateful to a client for awakening me to the fact that I was on the wrong track.

Feedback had always been constructive. The client would send me proposed editorial changes, which I could accept or reject. I accepted most and everyone benefited. Of course, few clients sent detailed feedback. Most just acknowledged my submissions with thanks, an eventual cheque and more work.

My first negative feedback came from one in the former category who had been sending me work for several years, and since he had a degree in the field in question and knew both languages, I never quibbled with his edits. He had even paid me a high compliment early on. All the greater my shock when I began reading his four pages of feedback on a job which I thought I had done well. It seemed to scream 'How could anyone claim knowledge of this field and be such a dodo?'

After a brief period of inner turmoil, fuelled mostly by embarrassment and shame, I faced the fact that this was my least enjoyable subject area, and that my constant need to verify terminology and phraseology was lowering my productivity.

Since my degrees and work experience were in language only, I had avoided naming 'specialties' in promoting my services and referred instead to fields in which I had experience. I was at best a 'limited

practitioner' in the field in question, one I had chosen to focus on because there was a demand for it that I thought I could learn to fill rather than because it interested me. So now I had to ask myself: did I want to do what it would take to really learn this field? Did I want to continue struggling as I had been?

Suddenly I knew the answer and couldn't wait to take action. After apologising to my client, I removed the field from the services I offered in my résumé and online. The result was a huge sense of relief, soon followed by one of satisfaction, even power, as I began to refer inquirers with projects in this field to trusted colleagues.

In a business planning workshop, I had already identified the fields in which I was happiest and most confident working. It was a few years before I could pull it off, but I eventually invested in a professionally designed website focusing on those fields exclusively, which are now true specialties.

Negative feedback may have saved me from derailment, but it certainly triggered my switch to a better track – and I'm loving the scenery!

Valeria Aliperta, EN>IT Translator:

In life I've always seen the glass half full. Still, after several years in a profession, you're bound to have some when-everything-goes-wrong moments. Some may be related to the fact you cannot be liked by everyone, or always do the right thing or deliver the greatest talk or the most accurate job. I

realised that it's not worth taking everything so personally. Why? Simply because people are naturally critical. I used to feel down and bad about myself. But then I saw that it was not worth my while unless I made some use of what I learnt.

My approach is:

- Take note.
- Get info on why and how someone is unhappy or critical about you, your talk, your words or your attitude. You need to know to understand what happened.
- Think about how this could have been done better. If there's even one way to do it more smoothly and you can think of it, you can improve.
- Say thank you. Sometimes you are not able to find out who gave you the feedback, but if you know this person, let them know you are doing something about it and show appreciation. This is disarming for people. And it's gracious.

Ultimately, you are only growing if you know your limits and try to push them, in all you do.

“ Becoming a freelance translator is the best decision I have made in the past years.

How I significantly improved my own quality

Karen M. Tkaczyk, FR>EN Translator:

I invested in myself, and it paid off. Fancy that.

In 2005 I came into this industry with subject-matter expertise and decent technical writing skills, but I had to learn the craft of translation. For the first few years I focused on that. Later, once I felt I was past the apprentice stage and considered myself a solid journeyman, I began to look for other ways to grow. That led to my professional development aim for 2009 being to improve my writing.

Taking training courses was an obvious method to achieve this goal, so I sought out opportunities. I was already a member of the American Chemical Society. I took their 'Effective Technical Writing' course. It was prescriptive and somewhat basic, but a great start in helping me to develop a structured way of thinking about how I write when I translate. I attended an ITI (Institute of Translation and Interpreting) workshop called 'Style Matters', led by Chris Durban and Ros Schwartz. There was no dramatic breakthrough moment, but the many tidbits I picked up and my consistent focus meant that I was developing new habits. By the end of the year I had seen the texts I produced improve dramatically, and received client praise to prove it: "You've done a wonderful job on these files. Your English is so clear that I can actually understand the technical language!"

Later, because by this time I found the improvements addictive, I joined the Society

for Technical Writing, devoured their reference materials, attended their annual conference, and took one of their web-based courses. It was called 'Technical Editing Fundamentals'. That taught me how to think about the logic and structure of the texts we translate, as well as teaching me practical methods for producing effective translations.

So few translators are ready to invest in themselves, yet we alone make our businesses succeed or fail. We need to feed our brains and bodies with rest, stimulation, new material and new ideas. Let's invest in ourselves. Be it time or money, or both, with determination it will deliver.



MINI INTERVIEW WITH TESS WHITTY:

'Freelance translation is ...'

a creative and rewarding job where we can be word nerds and entrepreneurs at the same time, and be our own bosses.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

One, and that company had gone bankrupt. I have also experienced a few late payers that needed several reminders and even a phone call before paying. But most customers pay on time.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

Definitely friends. They can take care of a lot of project management and marketing tasks so we can focus on doing our craft. But there are of course both good and bad translation agencies and we have to do our research and watch out for our interests in order to create good relationships with them.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

Not really, it is just another tool we can use in our arsenal, and the amount of material that needs translation keeps growing exponentially. There is room for both machine translation and professional translation performed by humans.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Definitely. I make more money and I am happier now than in my previous 9-5 job.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

Finding their niche and their voice, acquiring business skills in order to create profitable relationships with ideal clients.

MINI INTERVIEW WITH SARAH DILLON:

'Freelance translation is...

enabling me to build the kind of life I want: challenging, satisfying and rewarding in many ways.'

Have you ever come across a non-payer during your freelance translation career?

Nope, not once.

What's your take on translation agencies – friend or foe?

They're just another business model in the ecosystem in which I operate. None of us operate in a vacuum, and I've learnt a lot about translation by observing other businesses in action.

Do you feel threatened by new technologies such as machine translation?

Why, or why not?

Technology isn't a threat. It's a neutral thing. What makes it a threat or an opportunity is our reaction to it. It really is as simple as that.

Translation wouldn't exist as a freelance career if it weren't for new technologies. So to accept change with open arms when it makes our lives easier, but then begrudge it when it requires a little more work to understand and to adjust to, is hypocritical and ill informed.

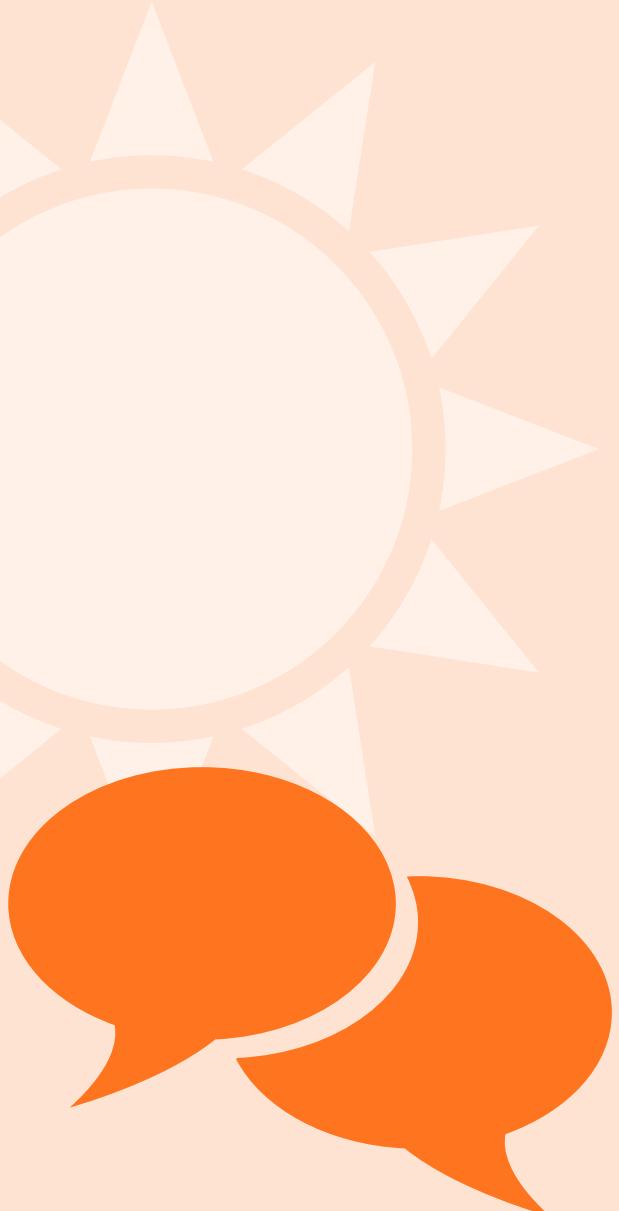
New technologies have enabled me to establish and build my career, be location independent and well remunerated, and provide satisfying services to excellent high-end clients all over the world.

Do you consider freelance translation a viable career?

Of course! I'm operating a business, not a charity :)

What do you see as the biggest challenge for freelance translators today?

The expectation that someone is just going to hand it to you on a plate.



Chapter 7: Expand yourself

We are surrounded more than ever before by opportunities – forums, contacts, webinars, courses, books, websites. The array of learning opportunities is as bewildering as was the jungle into which we stepped at the beginning of our career. So once again, tune in, work out what it is YOU want to develop, and then take the plunge. The wiser and more intuitive your choices, the more natural it will be to advance and grow.



“ I think I'd enjoy being part of your project: the world needs more smiles, fewer frowns.”

How I underwent a significant learning experience via a book/course/webinar

Stefano Lodola, JA/KO/ZH >IT Translator:

Translation is business

I got into freelance translation one year ago intrigued by an easy and very well-paid job offered to me less than two months after I had registered for free on Proz.com. In the following months, I discovered that was an exception and I felt that my rates were clients' only criterion for choosing another anonymous translator over me. This was particularly frustrating because I was confident in my language skills and expertise. What was I doing wrong? After all, I was imitating other translators who were more experienced, established and thus successful.

Then I realised that I should market as any other business does, not as those translators did. The breakthrough came from an industry-specific business course called 'Business School for Translators' run by Marta Stelmaszak, a translator and business coach. This series consists of five online group lessons to acquire practical business knowledge and skills needed in our profession. Through a well-structured path of interactive classes and homework, participants are inspired and motivated by the coach to deliver results that help their business. The one-to-one tuition in the end is also valuable.

I've keenly attended more than 50 hours of webinars to make up for my lack of training in

the industry – my majors are in engineering and business administration, not translation. I'm still getting established but I can boast a few agencies who are happy with my service even after paying a decent price, and more often than not it was they who approached me and not the other way round. I have also learned to turn down jobs rather than working for peanuts.

Marta helped me to connect the dots and apply the corporate strategy and the engineering processes I learnt at school to create my own niche as a translator. In order to 'return the favour' to the community, I now share my results in a webinar called 'Online Presence for Freelance Translators' to support fellow translators in defining their business concept and building a professional website. In the first lesson, I never forget to encourage participants to enrol in Marta's course.

Caroline Sanders, EN>FR Translator:

Translation is my second career, a career I started in a country I had never worked in before. Following my Australian husband to Australia was a well-considered personal choice; on the professional level, it gave me the opportunity to have a go at translation as a profession, one I had been attracted to ever since I studied applied languages at university and which I had practised on and off as an executive assistant in France.

On top of getting accredited, there was a lot to learn. Specialising was not on my radar then, as I came to terms with the translation

market, CAT tools, and the business side of freelancing, not to mention finding clients and actually delivering translations. I learnt a lot (and still do). At some stage it became obvious that specialising was important. However, I would never have considered legal translation then, due to a lack of adequate courses in Adelaide where I live, and a lack of time and energy (balancing a business and raising a family was already a challenge); it would have felt out of reach and too complicated.

I must have been subconsciously attracted to it though, because one day I followed a link in a tweet leading to a legal translation conference (in Europe, of course) and I ended up on the website of a French company¹ offering distance training in translation, including legal translation, in fact English to French translation. I then spotted the names of two well-known teachers in French translation. It was ticking a few boxes already and felt too good to pass up; I had to dig a bit deeper.

Fast forward two years and I'm in the middle of the course, learning a lot, practising legal translation, getting feedback and feeling good about it. Three years ago, I would never have imagined taking the challenge on. Now I have expanded my comfort zone, and I keep expanding it with every new unit. I can't say it has been easy; it's still a challenge, but I have learnt that with focus, organisation, and taking it one step at a time, I can achieve much more than I had thought possible.

¹ CI3M www.ci3m.fr

Jane Ellis, FR>EN Translator:

Here I would have to mention Marta Stelmaszak's Business School for Translators' online training course. Marta's course gave me the confidence to tackle issues that I was previously unsure about, such as invoicing and presenting a rates schedule in a professional manner. Marta also encouraged me to use my extensive pharmaceutical industry experience to position myself as a specialist. The BST course gave me the belief that I could become a successful freelance translator and the business skills to go with this confidence.

Nicole Y. Adams, DE<>EN Translator:

The one thing that I'd say changed my freelance life was reading *The Wealthy Freelancer* by Steve Slaunwhite, Pete Savage and Ed Gandia. It may surprise you, but the first thing I did right after I put the book down was fire three major clients, two of them longstanding ones. Why? Because *The Wealthy Freelancer* advocates cultivating the right type of clients – ones who pay well and, above all, who you enjoy working with. I carried out a brief analysis of my client base and came to the conclusion that if I want to experience 100 per cent job satisfaction, I need to only work with clients who are a pleasure to work with and disregard everyone else, irrespective of how much they're paying or how well known they are. Admittedly, my husband – – at the time a stay-at-home dad to our children with me being the sole breadwinner for a family of four – – was a

little nervous when I announced I was about to dump three clients, including two of my best-paying ones, because I didn't really enjoy working with them for a number of different reasons. But I assured him that I knew what I was doing (and perhaps I reassured myself a little too!) and went ahead.

It didn't take long for new, quality clients to come on board who are easy to work with. Today, my entire client base is smaller than five years ago but consists entirely of great clients who are a pleasure to work with and consider me an integral part of their team. So I can honestly say, reading *The Wealthy Freelancer* has changed my (freelance) life.



“ Of course I want to be part of any project that is an antidote to all the whingeing and gloom and doom! So count me in, I have lots of positive experiences to relate.”

How I took on a challenge I wouldn't have taken on a year previously

Nikki Graham, ES>EN Translator:

A year ago I would have told you that there was no room in my already over-busy schedule for anything extra. But then I attended my first ever translation conference, became inspired and decided to expand my online presence with a view to raising my profile and ultimately improving business.

First came the blog. After registering it in 2011 (probably because we are all so often encouraged to get blogging) and a couple of years of inaction, I suddenly found that I did have the urge to say something, starting with my experience at the IAPTI event in London. Since then, as I'm still pressed for time most weeks, finding gaps to polish the many posts I have drafted has proved more problematic than coming up with ideas of what to write.

The second idea was also a consequence of the conference. I have never really been much into business or any of its trappings, but Valeria Aliperta's session on branding must have struck a chord. Having started a blog with Tranix Translations' splash all over it, I wanted to find a way of getting the name out there. So, perhaps rather bizarrely, I decided to start the Nix Tran Stories on Twitter, posting one humorous tweet every day. The reaction has been extremely positive on the whole, apart from when some followers have taken the tweets a little too seriously. However, given that no one has actually made the association between Tranix and Nix Tran yet, and I've been anonymous so far except to a few, my original plan may have slightly backfired.

Both the blog and the Nix Tran Stories have had surprising results. Blogging is actually making me think more about my writing, and I'm enjoying saying things I've probably bottled up for too long. And what started out as a way to promote myself has instead taken on a life of its own and become a means to interact with people. But the most important thing I've learned is that there are many colleagues happily beavering away out there, getting on with their careers, who have as much if not more to say than the more vociferous among us who steal the limelight.

Percy Balemans, EN/DE>NL Translator:

In your career you sometimes have to take risks to make progress. There is only so much preparing (reading, learning, practising) you can do; there comes a moment when you have to take the plunge and show the world what you can do.

My main area of expertise is transcreation, in other words translating advertising material. At one point, one of my regular transcreation clients asked me if I wanted to do a job for a high street fashion brand. I accepted the job, the client was happy with my work and I liked doing it. One job turned into multiple jobs and now this is a recurring job. I discovered that I liked the subject of fashion so much that I wanted to know more. I started reading about it, taking courses and visiting museums. I turned it into a new specialisation.

One day I was alerted to a job posted by a museum looking for a translator with



experience in texts on fashion. Even though I didn't know exactly what the job was for, I contacted the museum and offered my services. As it turned out, it involved translating all the texts for a major fashion exhibition, something I had never done before. Based on my experience so far, I got the job. It turned out to be challenging, but I learned a lot and it only encouraged me to continue with my specialisation in fashion and to broaden my knowledge even further.

This job gave me the confidence to take on a new challenge: to visit a one-day conference on fashion. It was scary to go to an event where all the other attendees were experts on fashion, but as it turned out, I knew exactly what everyone was talking about. A great confidence boost!

The lesson I learned from these experiences is that sometimes the only way to build real confidence is to take the plunge and test your skills and knowledge in real life. Choose your challenges though: make sure you have a solid base of skills and knowledge, and don't go for something you are not ready for. And take small bite-sized steps so you can slowly but surely

build your confidence. Because confident translators tend to be better translators.

Urška Madžarac, DE/ES/EN>SL and SL/ES/EN>DE Translator:

A year ago I graduated from college as a conference interpreter and translator with native Slovenian. As a student the main goal for my future career was to work for the EU. I was so occupied with studying for the finals and writing my thesis that I didn't even take the time to sit down and really think about how I wanted to make a living once I finished university. I started applying for jobs at translation agencies and other companies, because I thought I had to get a 'real' job first, and very soon I got three pretty interesting job offers. Well... I rejected all three of them! I realised soon enough that being employed wasn't really what I wanted. The thought of being 'trapped' in one company and one city didn't make me happy and I just couldn't commit to it. Somehow the EU dream didn't seem that appealing anymore either.

“Of course I want to be part of any project that is an antidote to all the whingeing and gloom and doom! So count me in, I have lots of positive experiences to relate.”



At the time I was following a lot of freelance translators and interpreters on Twitter and their way of thinking inspired me, so I realised that the right way for me might be to start something on my own. In September I applied for the Business School for Translators with Marta Stelmaszak and it's safe to say that this was the final push I needed in order to start my own company and dedicate myself to projects I choose to work on. Now, a few months later, I'm enjoying it more every day.

I love that I can work from wherever I want to, as long as I have my laptop, my smartphone and a decent Internet connection. As a freelancer I can afford to only work with people I like, on projects I believe in and with topics that really interest me. In my opinion, if you do something that makes you happy, you are much more likely to be successful. A year ago I really didn't imagine that I would be on the challenging path I'm on right now. It can be a bit overwhelming when you first

start out, because you lack knowledge in many areas and there's no possible way to know everything at the beginning. It's a huge challenge! But you know what? I find it so exciting to be constantly learning and making progress. My plans for this year include spending a few months in Germany and then in Mexico – my wonderful job allows me to do so. Not bad, right?

“I’m definitely IN! I consider myself a positive person and don’t like it when people spend their time complaining about the current situation. It’s such a waste of time...”

Conclusion



And with these inspirational stories, our journey ends. Or begins. As you have seen, it's not always plain sailing. There are challenges and pitfalls, setbacks and reverses, but what all these stories and insights have in common is that the tellers have refused to relinquish their own ability to reflect, to decide and to act upon the world.

Freelance translation is not a place where you should throw up your hands and decry

the way things are. It's one where you can look around, make wise decisions and carve out your own path. Above all it's one in which you yourself create the way things are. Your decisions, your energies, your reactions and your attitudes are your greatest weapons.

So start using them. Today.



“(Some) translators need to spend less time being outraged and more time going out and winning good clients by doing excellent work.

About the creators



Nicole Y. Adams

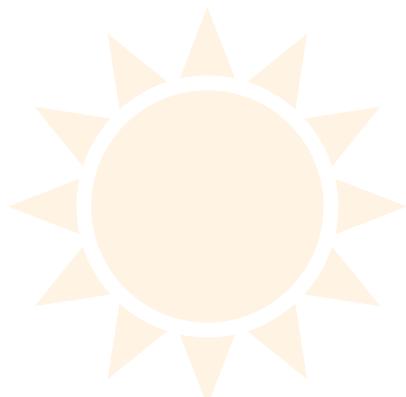
NYA Communications

Nicole Y. Adams is a certified and publicly appointed German/English marketing, communications and public relations translator with over 10 years of experience in translating, editing, and project and quality management. She holds a masters degree in linguistics from the University of Reading, UK, and is also a certified public relations consultant.

Prior to settling in Australia in 2010, Nicole lived, worked and studied in the US, Germany and the UK. She has worked as a freelance translator since 2003 and, as a qualified member of the Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs, also offers [translator consulting services](#) to help and inspire new freelance translators to grow their businesses.

In 2013, Nicole was proud to be nominated for an AUSIT Excellence Award for 'Outstanding Contribution to the Translation & Interpreting Industry'. She is a member of the ATA, CIOL, BDÜ, DVÜD and AUSIT, where she has served on several committees.

Nicole is the author of [Diversification in the Language Industry – Success beyond translation](#) and [The Little Books for Translators](#) series, and her articles are regularly published in language industry publications such as *The ATA Chronicle*, BDÜ's *MDÜ* and AUSIT's *InTouch*. She lives with her family in beautiful Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.



About the creators



Andrew Morris

Morristraduction

Andrew Morris has always been captivated by languages and the mysterious secret worlds they open up. This led him initially to a degree in modern languages at Oxford followed by a long career in language teaching and teacher training. But when in 2009 a series of chance(?) life events dictated it was time for a major change, a light bulb flashed in his head... 'Why not translation?'

It was a leap of faith. Apart from a fascinating correspondence course for translators, his CV as a translator on the first day of his new life was a totally blank sheet. But with lots of hard work, some luck, a dollop of inspiration, a drop or two of perspiration and a hitherto undiscovered entrepreneurial spirit, things slowly began to fall into place. Now, just five years later, he heads Morristraduction, a thriving translation studio, working both with other agencies and major direct clients with a primary focus on the arts, culture and travel, and outsourcing to a regular team of 20 hand-picked colleagues. Business has grown hugely in that time and the future looks, well...bright.

The last year has seen him become more active on social media fora for translators, resulting in his own [Standing Out](#) page on Facebook, and this has already given rise to some interesting initiatives, including webinars and a book-writing project. Watch this space.

